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Remarks with High Representative for Common Foreign Security Policy and Secretary General of the Council of the European Union Javier Solana After Their Meeting

Secretary Colin L. Powell

C Street Entrance
Washington, DC
April 20, 2004

(9:30 a.m. EDT)

SECRETARY POWELL: Good morning. I just had a good conversation with High Representative Solana of the European Union. We discussed a variety of issues. We are both looking forward to a Quartet meeting in the not too distant future, as soon as we get all of our schedules arranged, to go over the situation in the Middle East and to have an opportunity to discuss recent actions.

I reaffirmed to the High Representative that the President's position on the Middle East peace process is unchanged; he's committed to the roadmap; he's committed to a Palestinian state being brought into being that lives in peace with its neighbor, Israel; he is committed to the proposition that all final settlement issues have to be resolved between the two parties, mutually agreed upon between the two parties, taking into account the realities that exist in the area.

And I look forward to continuing my consultations with the High Representative and the other members of the Quartet.

We also had a good discussion about the situation in Cyprus and the upcoming referenda that will be held at the end of the week. This is a historic moment for Cyprus, and I hope that the Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots, as they review the details of the plan that has been put before them in the form of a referenda -- of referenda, will understand that this is a moment not to be lost.

This is the time for them to vote yes, yes to reconciliation, yes to the prospect of a brighter future for both Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots, yes for the island to come into the European Union as one entity, yes to the end of 30, 40 years of division and isolation between families.



And so in all of my conversations with my foreign minister colleagues for the last several days, I have been pressing all of them to speak out for a "yes" vote in the referenda this upcoming weekend.

Mr. High Representative, always a pleasure to have you here with us, and I ask you to say a word.

HIGH REPRESENTATIVE SOLANA: Thank you very much, Colin. Let me start by the last topic that Secretary Powell touched upon, which is Cyprus. I would like to say, as he has said, that all of us in the European Union, we think there is a splendid opportunity to solve the problem that has been with us for too many years.

The plan that has been presented by the Secretary General of the UN is a good plan, and if at this moment we all don't make the effort and we let this opportunity go by, probably the train may not return.

And therefore, we have the obligation -- everybody -- to do the utmost to get a yes in the referendum. And that would allow Cyprus, the island, the whole island, to incorporate it into the European Union and become a prosperous and a stable place in the Mediterranean and obtaining all the benefits of being part of the European Union.

This is the aim of all the members of the European Union, and I want to thank also the effort that the Secretary of State has put on helping all of us and cooperating together in getting this referendum in the right direction.

So, please, the last appeal, or one more appeal, to the people in the north and the south part of the island to understand what is at stake and to behave with a responsible manner to the leaders and to the people.

Let me also say that we discussed the Middle East peace process, the latest meetings of President Bush and Prime Minister Sharon, the consequences of that, how do we see the withdrawal from Gaza, and looking forward to the meeting of the Quartet, which is going to take place, as the Secretary said, at the beginning of May, in which we would like very much to give an impulse and to take advantage of this meeting to continue creating the conditions for a situation better in the Middle East.

And we would like to get from the European Union engaged in the withdrawal of Gaza and the future stability of Gaza.

We have talked about these, the most important things we have spoken, but I want to thank the Secretary for a wonderful discussion this morning. In the coming days and the coming weeks, we are going to be together on several occasions, so, as always, thank you very much, Colin.

SECRETARY POWELL: I just might add a word on Cyprus. As you also have heard, we are working with the UN Security Council on a resolution that we would like to see acted upon this week, and that resolution should give encouragement to the Cypriots, both the north and south, that the UN will be putting its weight behind this agreement, will be putting its weight behind the Secretary General's plan, and in the resolution we will make sure that we call upon all parties to meet up -- meet their obligations, rather, meet their commitments in the plan.

And I hope this gives some encouragement to the Greek and Turkish Cypriots to show that the international community is behind this effort fully in the form of a Security Council resolution.

Okay?

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, on Cyprus --

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary --

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary --

SECRETARY POWELL: Hold on, hold on, hold on, hold on. We'll be there in a minute.

QUESTION: This is for both the Secretary and Mr. Solana. With the Jordanian King postponing his visit, a very strong statement yesterday from Jordan, Nabil Shaath also canceling his visit, how are you going to get over the perception in the region that the U.S. is completely siding with Israel on a final settlement? Now Israel just announced that it will be investing and expanding in the settlements, further emphasizing that perception.

Thank you.

SECRETARY POWELL: I spoke to King Abdallah twice yesterday and he has postponed his visit, but we look forward to welcoming him back in early May, and the date's being worked out now. So it is a postponement. He wanted to go back and consult with members of his government, but we value his friendship and we look forward to his return.

And the concerns that he has, I'm sure that we can address. The concerns that others have expressed, I think we can address. The fact of the matter is the President is absolutely committed to his June 24th, 2002, speech: the creation of a Palestinian state. That is our commitment. We have not stepped away from that.

But we have to face the realities on the ground, and what we have to take a look at is not just the disappointment of the moment, but the fact that, for the first time in decades, that which has been asked for is going to happen: the removal of settlements, the removal of settlements from Gaza, some from the West Bank. And that is the beginning of a process.

And the President has stated repeatedly that as the process goes forward, it has to be consistent with the roadmap and all final settlement issues have to be mutually agreed upon by the parties.

But, you know, for years we have been trying to move forward while ignoring the realities on the ground. And what the President did last week in an exchange of letters with Prime Minister Sharon, we are going to move forward in a way consistent with the roadmap, removing settlements finally, but consistent with the current realities on the ground. And we decided it was time to explicitly talk about these current realities on the ground and use that as a way to go forward, not a way to go backwards.

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary --

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary --

SECRETARY POWELL: I'm sorry. I'm sorry.

HIGH REPRESENTATIVE SOLANA: Yes, thank you. Very briefly, I would like to say three things.

First, it's fundamental that we continue saying that the final arrangements correspond to the negotiation of the parties. The final status negotiation belongs to them, and it's very important that we keep on saying that.

Second, it's very important that the Quartet meets, and as it's going to take place, and analyze the situation and then give a push in that direction.

And thirdly, it's very important that we get the withdrawal of Gaza rightly done, and we are ready, from the European Union point of view, to cooperate on that.

But I think if we put the three things together -- the insistence on the final status negotiations, on the roadmap and the Quartet meeting, and also the withdrawal of Gaza -- we may get the momentum which is needed to move the process forward.

QUESTION: Secretary Powell --

SECRETARY POWELL: Yes.

QUESTION: I mean, how could you say that the U.S. position has not changed when you, the President, this Administration, are publicly taking the Israeli position on settlements? We're not talking about Gaza. Nobody is disagreeing with Gaza. The problem is the West Bank and East Jerusalem. There are four major settlements that house over 100,000 Israeli settlers, and the U.S. position is pro-Israel on that and the right of refugees.

How can you say that this will not jeopardize or influence the final status solution? I mean, you're publicly endorsing the Israeli position.

SECRETARY POWELL: The President said nothing about what settlements should remain. The President said that we are taking note of the fact that the settlements are coming out of Gaza, four are coming out of the West Bank in the north. It's the beginning of a process.

Every previous negotiation recognized that, as a result of population changes and other changes on the ground, adjustments would be appropriate and necessary in due course to find a solution. And the parties have to mutually agree to these adjustments. It all rests on the agreement of the two parties, and that's what the President has said.

But he says to the parties we must recognize that these adjustments will be required because of the changes that have taken place, and he has not endorsed any particular outcome at this point because the outcome has to be mutually agreed upon by the parties.

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary --

SECRETARY POWELL: Yeah, let me --

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary --

SECRETARY POWELL: Yeah, right there. This lady.

QUESTION: On Cyprus, still there are four days to go, and don't you think they are right for the Turkish Cypriots to know what to expect if a no comes from the north?

SECRETARY POWELL: Our concentration right now is doing everything we can to get a yes. I think it is possible to get a yes. I think that as both Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots examine the terms of the plan that the Secretary General has put forth, they will come to the realization that it is in the interest of both parties to vote yes. And that's what we're focusing on, not any consequences of a "no" vote or a split vote of any kind.

HIGH REPRESENTATIVE SOLANA: Can I say something to that part of the question? I mean, I would like to talk on behalf of the European Union.

If, at the end of the day, there is a yes in the northern part and it's no in the southern part, life will not be the same. And that, everybody has to know it.

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary --

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary --

QUESTION: What does that mean, sir? What does that mean?

HIGH REPRESENTATIVE SOLANA: I don't want to elaborate on this point more. It's for intelligent people to learn.

SECRETARY POWELL: All right.

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, in the last few days, Spain and Honduras have announced that they're withdrawing troops from Iraq. Does the trend stop here, or are you concerned that other countries could withdraw their troops?

SECRETARY POWELL: I have talked to the foreign minister or head of government of almost every other country in the coalition in the last 24 hours. Almost all. I've got a few more still to do. And I'm getting solid support for our efforts, commitments to remain and finish the job that they came to do.

I regret that Spain and Honduras have seen fit to make these choices and decisions, but those are sovereign nations who have to, you know, review the situation in accordance with their own political needs and domestic feelings.

And so we thank them for what they have done, regret that they find it necessary to leave at this point, and we look forward to working with Spain and Honduras in other areas. The Spanish have indicated they might be able to contribute in other areas that we are working in, such as Afghanistan or elsewhere, but that is a choice for the Spanish Government to make. And I'll look forward to discussing this with Foreign Minister Moratinos when he comes to visit me later this week.

Thank you. I'll be back in an hour. (Laughter.)

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