



Remarks With Russian Federation Foreign Minister Lavrov on the Meeting With President Bush and President Putin

Secretary Condoleezza Rice

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MINISTER LAVROV: Good evening. I would like to say that at the talks that have just taken place between the U.S. and the Russian Presidents, they discussed bilateral and international issues. As far as the international issues are concerned, the focus was on the situation in the Middle East, with regard to which we have very close positions. We expect a lot from the Quartet ministerial meeting that will take place tomorrow.

They also discussed the situation around Iran, the DPRK, Afghanistan and Iraq. And they reaffirmed the willingness to prevent the jeopardizing of the WMD non-proliferation regime. They also emphasized their determination to fight terrorism and they reaffirmed that you cannot flirt with terrorism.

They also discussed the ascension of Russia to the World Trade Organization. They registered the progress that has been made, and also they reaffirmed the task that was set in Bratislava to reach an agreement by the end of the year. They also discussed the reform of the United Nations, including the reform of the Security Council, and the State Secretary and I have been instructed to stay in close contact with regard to this issue.

This meeting has demonstrated once again that for the two Presidents there are no forbidden topics. They have shown the readiness, and they are actually discussing everything in an open, friendly and partner-like manner.

SECRETARY RICE: I have very little to add to what the Minister has said. The two Presidents did talk in a very open way about the many issues around the world. I would just underscore that we spent a good deal of time on the Middle East, and I think that we have some guidance for our Quartet meeting tomorrow. We focused a lot on the upcoming withdrawal of the Israelis from the Gaza, and the need to fully support Mahmoud Abbas and the Palestinian Authority as they prepare for that withdrawal.

And on terrorism, I think to underscore that they talked about the need -- that one cannot flirt with terrorism or with terrorists, I think was really the essential issue here, because they are very concerned about the Palestinian situation and other situations in which terrorism could undermine the chances for peace. And we promised to consult on the needs of the Palestinian security forces for training and equipping.

And, finally, the President talked to President Putin about his recent speech and the comments that he had made about internal reform in Russia. And I think it simply, again, underscores that there is -- these two men have developed a relationship in which they can talk about any subject, and talk about it in a constructive and friendly manner.

QUESTION: My question is to Mr. Lavrov. Vike-Friberg said that President Bush did not discuss during his visit to Latvia the issues relating to ethnic minorities in Latvia. Can you comment on that?

MINISTER LAVROV: We actually read the transcript of President Bush's speech in Riga, and actually, in that speech, a lot was said about the fact that democracy means not only elections, but a whole range of commitments and obligations that include the obligation to protect the rights of national minorities.

When I heard the statement by the President of Latvia that you mentioned, I thought that maybe that speech had actually not been made. So I double-checked with the Secretary of State, and she reaffirmed that that speech had been made.

QUESTION: Secretary Rice, you talked about open and constructive talk, that they can talk about most subjects. And I attempted to ask the President earlier about whether he can trust President Putin now, if the atmosphere is one of total trust. How do you see it? Do you think there's any doubt?

SECRETARY RICE: First of all, this is an excellent relationship between these two men, at a personal level and also as Presidents of these two great countries. I believe they believe -- they feel that they can discuss anything. And I would characterize the relationship as absolutely straightforward. They say what they think, they say what they mean, and then they act on that.

MINISTER LAVROV: Thank you.

SECRETARY RICE: We want to go and have dinner. Thank you.

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