



Briefing En Route to London, England

Secretary Condoleezza Rice

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October 15, 2005

SECRETARY RICE: Hello. Eight down and one to go, or is it nine down and one to go? I've just completed very good discussions with Foreign Minister Lavrov and also with President Putin. The discussions really focused on three areas in some depth and then a fourth area. We talked about Central Asia. President Putin asked -- I talked to him about what I had seen in Central Asia, about the messages I delivered in Central Asia.

We had a chance to recollect that in 2001 there had been an understanding between the United States and Russia that it was important for us to be able to fight the war on terrorism and that that meant that we had to be able to support operations in Afghanistan from Central Asia, and that that was the point that I'd made to the Central Asian leaders about our military and coalition military activities there.

We talked about the need to integrate Afghanistan economically into the region. I mentioned that the importance of Uzbekistan receiving a clear message that the international community expects behavior different than that behavior in which Uzbekistan is currently engaged was a message that was coming from the entire international community and I would hope that the Russians would encourage Uzbekistan to engage differently with the international community but also to engage differently with its neighbors because we heard a good deal in the region about Uzbekistan as well.

We talked about Iran. We talked about the time between now and the next Board of Governors meetings with the IAEA. And I want to be very clear. The Russians, when they abstained on the resolution, were very clear that they believed that this could still be resolved within the IAEA framework and that there was time for and a prospect for negotiations with the Iranians in order to do that.

The time between now and then is a time in which we, too, support efforts that the Russians might make, the Europeans might make and others might make to bring this to a negotiated solution, or at least to a fruitful path for negotiations so that it can be solved within the context of the IAEA. But as the French Foreign Minister and I noted yesterday, should it not be possible to do this through negotiations, the resolutions leave open the prospect of referral of Iran to the Security Council and that's the sequence.

Now, from our point of view, it has always been preferable to find a negotiated solution to the problem of the Iranian nuclear program. That's why we've supported the EU negotiations and we think there is plenty of room for Iran to accept a solution that would be acceptable to those who are concerned about Iranian activities in the past and what Iranian activities might lead to in the future. But so far, the Iranians have shown no interest in such solutions. We'll see if they do over the next several weeks.

We had a quite extended discussion of the calendar ahead concerning Lebanon, the coming of the Mehlis report, the coming of the report of Terje Larsen on compliance with 1559, some preliminary discussions about the fact that this will undoubtedly be discussed in the Security Council. Nobody wants to prejudge what these reports will say, but depending on what these reports say, the Council is going to have to be prepared to act in a way that encourages compliance with 1559 and encourages support for the Mehlis commission and -- the Mehlis inquiry -- and allows the chips to fall wherever they may out of the Mehlis inquiry. That's the discussions that we had and I want to be clear. We had a long discussion on Iran but we had an equally long discussion on Lebanon and Syria.

I'm going on to Great Britain to discuss the same sorts of issues. We did -- Lavrov and I had some discussions also of the Palestinian-Israeli situation. I think we believe that the post-Gaza period has been one in which the Israelis and the Palestinians are continuing to work together, and what we need to do is to help Abu Mazen create an atmosphere in which calm can be maintained, in which the Palestinians can build the democratic institutions in which they can begin to establish law and order and, as he puts it, one authority, one gun, and the need for our support for that.

So that was the range of discussions with Foreign Minister Lavrov and with President Putin.

QUESTION: Madame Secretary, did the Russians, I mean, give any sense of what would trigger a change in their view about the Security Council and Iran? Did they say -- I mean, I was surprised to hear Lavrov say that the Iranians had a right to enrich as well. So is there no red line for them that would change their position?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, Barbara, I think that the question of rights that one might have under the NPT is really not the question that's on the table. We've long known that the NPT established the right to civil nuclear power. The NPT is silent on how one gets to civil nuclear power. But this is not a question of rights. What we and the Russians and the Europeans and the IAEA are concerned about is that Iran has lost the confidence of the international community because of past behavior that they can be trusted with the fuel cycle. Look, there's a reason that the Russians have structured Bushehr the way they've structured it. And so I think that it is, frankly, not an issue at this point in time whether somebody has the right to do something or not; this is a question of should they exercise their right.

QUESTION: If I can just follow. But did the Russians indicate to you a red line? I mean, is there something that would make them change their position? Is there any time frame? Do the Iranians have only a few weeks or is this an open-ended thing?

SECRETARY RICE: The Russians prefer to allow the negotiations and discussions with the Iranians to proceed in this period of time and they want them to proceed, I think, without implying that there is a specific time table. If you will remember, we've said that the question of referral is a question for diplomacy and that the real issue is are they making progress toward where the Iranians might (inaudible).

Now, let's review where we were. A couple of weeks ago, the Iranians were walking away from everything. They were going to start enriching again. Then they were going to walk out of the additional protocol. Maybe they were going to walk out of the NPT. You know, none of that has happened. So the Iranians, too, seem to have reconsidered their options and have now declared that they want to go on a course of negotiation rather than on a course of confrontation. We will see. But we are prepared to let that course proceed. At the same time, I think we have to prepare for the possibility that that course might not lead to fruitful negotiations, at which point, as the Foreign Minister and I (inaudible) yesterday in France, we have the option of referral to the Security Council.

But this is moving step by step. We moved another step last time at the IAEA Board of Governors when the resolution included not just a finding of noncompliance but also a specific reference to referral and a decision to defer that until diplomacy could run its course.

QUESTION: Madame Secretary, did the Russians say how or if they would try to persuade the Iranians to come back to the negotiations in the interim before the next vote?

SECRETARY RICE: (Inaudible.)

QUESTION: Yeah.

SECRETARY RICE: The Russians want the Iranians back at the table as quickly as possible because I do -- they are, I think, trying to persuade the Iranians to do exactly that. The Russians have on a number of occasions talked to the Iranians about how they might pursue civil nuclear power in a way that would be confidence building with the international community rather than continuing to add to the lack of confidence and concern that people have about the Iranian nuclear program. And I fully expect that the Russians are going to continue to pursue those ideas with the Iranians. We've talked to them about their ideas. We know what the Bushehr arrangements look like -- looks like. And you know, I'm very pleased that they're going to pursue some of these ideas with the Iranians.

But as we've said before, the issue here is not about rights; it's about rights and obligations. It's also -- and here the Russians said this to me -- the Iranians do not currently have the confidence of the international system in what they are doing. You heard Lavrov say there are questions that remain to be answered about what activities are going on in Iran. And while the Iranians don't have the confidence of the international system, I think it's a problem for people to countenance a full fuel cycle in Iran.

QUESTION: Madame Secretary, on Syria, I know you don't want to prejudge the Mehlis report, but there is a lot of evidence that he's been very aggressive and he's got phone records and he's been interviewing officials in Damascus. Do you have a sense that the Russians are willing to take tough steps in the event that becomes necessary after the Mehlis report comes out?

SECRETARY RICE: The Russians have said they're going to let the chips fall where they may on the Mehlis report, that they are full participants as Security Council members in the support and backing for the Mehlis report. As far as I know, they have given any cooperation to Mehlis that he has requested. I don't know that he has requested anything specific from Russia, but they have been backing the investigation. And every indication from the Russians is that they will react to the Mehlis report in accordance with what the Mehlis report says.

QUESTION: Madame Secretary, did you come to any common understandings on what noncompliance would mean specifically -- the technicalities -- or -- and/or did you come to any agreement on if eventually you find the Iranians in noncompliance, what the Security Council might address?

SECRETARY RICE: Robin, the question of the technicalities of noncompliance did not come up. I had two hours with the Foreign Minister and a lot to discuss and so we didn't sit there and try to come to a discussion about, you know, a common understanding of noncompliance.

This is a diplomatic process and I am confident of several things. I am confident that we and the Russians do not want to see the Iranians with the capability to build a nuclear weapon.

Secondly, I am confident that we agree that there are significant concerns. We may have one view of those concerns, they may have another view of those concerns, but we share the view that there are significant concerns about what Iranian activities have been and continue to be.

Third, we have a common understanding that the world has the right to insist that the Iranians, if they pursued civil nuclear power, do it in a way that builds confidence in the international community and doesn't leave these unanswered questions and these capabilities in the hands of the Iranians.

And I would say look at what the Russians have done. When they structured Bushehr, which was their opportunity to structure how civil nuclear power would be acquired in Iran, they structured it with very strict measures, including a fuel take-back and no access to the technologies. That, to me, speaks volumes about what the Russians think the real issue is here. And I think they've been cooperative partners with the EU-3.

Now, we and the EU-3 -- the Russians abstained on the last resolution and so I'm not trying to push them beyond where -- in this discussion I'm not trying to push them beyond where they are on the record. But while we and the EU-3 and several others believe that the Security Council route had to be made real, which is the way I think that Mr. Douste-Blazy put it yesterday. There is no doubt in anybody's mind that it would be better if the Iranians were prepared to go to a negotiated solution that gave them access to civil nuclear power but did not give them access to the fuel cycle.

That's what this is all about. And we'll see if we can get there. If we can get there, all the better.

QUESTION: (Inaudible.)

SECRETARY RICE: No, I think the Russians are doing what is -- look, the fact that the Russians abstained on this resolution sent a very important message to the Iranians: Don't take us for granted; negotiate seriously. Everybody understands that there are concerns about what the Iranians are doing. Everybody understands that those concerns have to be satisfied. And by the way, as I said, look at the way they structured Bushehr and I think you'll get a sense of what they want this outcome to be.

QUESTION: (Inaudible.)

SECRETARY RICE: Our position at this point in time is let's give it time to see if we can get negotiations. The Russians haven't changed their position from where they were at the time of the vote. At the time of the vote, their position was, if you consider an abstention to be let's wait and see, then it was let's wait and see. The Iranians expected it to be no. So let's be very clear on who's got what hand here. The Iranians fully expected that they were going to get a no-vote protection, if you will, from the Russians, Chinese and maybe others. They didn't get that. What they got was from us, from the EU-3 and from others, all right, it's time to refer because you're not negotiating seriously, and what they got from others was let's give you another chance to negotiate seriously. But this was wait and see.

QUESTION: I know you don't like getting into time scales but you're freely indicating that next month's IAEA meeting is very crucial. Is that when you would expect Russia to make a decision by?

SECRETARY RICE: I think that next week's -- or next month's meeting is very crucial because every step in this Iranian program is important. But what I expect is that we will know by that time whether or not the Iranians are prepared to enter into negotiations that might lead to an acceptable outcome.

I want to remind you that the immediate Iranian reaction to the vote was we're leaving, we're not negotiating, we're walking out, we're throwing people out, we're getting out of the additional protocols. They had about five sudden blasts about all the things they were going to do. They haven't done any of them. Instead, they've said, well, we'd like to go back to the course of negotiations. All right, so let's see what happens if they go back to the course of negotiations.

QUESTION: Madame Secretary, did you ask Foreign Minister Lavrov straight up to support referral to the Security Council if the negotiating process did not get off the ground by the 24th, and what did he say?

And secondly, when President Putin -- when you talked to President Putin about the need for bases because of the war on terror, did he reassert, as they said in July, that they want the U.S. to set a time line for pulling out?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, first of all, let's remember it's not a matter of bases. We are operating out of one base at Manas.

QUESTION: Presence.

SECRETARY RICE: No, not presence. Access. Because with Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan and others, it's overflight and a number of other issues.

President Putin said he supports what we're doing in Afghanistan and fighting the war on terrorism, that as he did in 2001 he therefore supports our access in Central Asia. The issue of a time line, which apparently came up in Shanghai, did not come up with me.

Secondly, when it comes to the question -- he did not ask me for a timeline. The second question of did I ask Sergey Lavrov will you dismiss on November 24th, no. What we talked about was the time between now and then whether or not it was conceivable that the Iranians were going to sign on to a negotiating path that would make it unnecessary to have referral and what some of the elements of that negotiating path might look like. That we did talk about.

But I know that you want me to set red lines and time lines and on that date it's drop dead. I'm not going to do it. That's not how diplomacy works. We're making progress on this issue because the international community continues to tell the Iranians they've got to find a negotiated solution to this. Nobody has said to the Iranians that the negotiated solution that they have been suggesting is acceptable, and that includes the Russians.

And so the Iranians, who expected the IAEA Board of Governors meeting to go a particular way, when it didn't, their initial reaction was, well, we're walking away from all of this. Confronted with the possibility of isolation if they walked away from all of this, they've said they want to go back to the negotiating track. Let's give it a chance.

At the same time as, you know, as we said with the French yesterday, we're going to continue to keep the options, the prospects, the path to referral at any time that the -- at a time of our choosing -- let me put it that way -- at a time of our choosing to keep that path available.

And you know, this is, again, not a struggle between Iran and the United States. The Iranians have a problem with the entire international community in terms of their past behavior. They have a real problem with the EU-3 having walked out of negotiations with them. And I just refer to you again -- you heard the French Foreign Minister. So you know, this is not the United States and the Iranians; this is the Iranians and the rest of the world. The Iranians need to come to terms.

QUESTION: When you say you'll keep the referral option open at a time of your choosing, are you saying that perhaps if things do not develop the way you want on November 24th you may not go forward with this?

SECRETARY RICE: At a time of our choosing. The question is not whether, if the Iranians fail somehow to find a negotiated solution there will be a referral to the Security Council. There will be a referral to the Security Council. We've always said that the timing, the diplomacy, is a matter of how well the negotiating process is going, how well the prospects for negotiations are going. You know, you know our view about the Security Council, that that's really the option that makes sense if there's no other prospect. And what we're trying to do is to allow it to play out as to whether or not there's any other prospects. But the 24th is an important date because that's the next time that the Board of Governors is going to gather.

QUESTION: Madame Secretary, you say that the point is not whether they have the right to the fuel cycle or not, but in September in New York the speech of President Ahmadi-Nejad precisely reaffirmed Iranians' right to the fuel cycle and that speech which infuriated the EU-3 and U.S. So the fact that the Russia today says that they have these things, they have these rights, seems quite significant.

SECRETARY RICE: I see nothing significant about quoting the NPT. Nothing significant. What is significant is that the Russians have clearly never in their structuring of a deal allowed the Iranians to exercise that "right." What they've done instead is to structure a deal where the fuel cycle is outside of Iran.

Again, countries can have rights. They also have obligations. And they certainly, when they lose the confidence of the international system that they can exercise their "rights" safely, then the international system has a right to say that it would be a problem for them to have a fuel cycle or to continue. And that's where we are. That's why the EU-3 deal is structured the way it is. That's why Bushehr is structured the way that it is.

Maybe I'm -- you know, you're -- maybe we're missing something here, but focusing on the language of the NPT is not the issue. The issue is what does the international community believe can -- what course does the international community believe the Iranians can safely take on their road to civil nuclear power. That's the question. And given the past, I don't see anyone saying that that path should include the fuel cycle.

Now, the Iranians have but one thing to do, which, you know, we don't think they need civil nuclear power, so we have long said, you know, they've got plenty of energy, why are they going to do this. But the Iranians have one thing to do, which is to take a deal that would be acceptable to the EU-3 and to the Russians and to others. They've got an opportunity to do that now and we'll see if they're prepared to do it.

QUESTION: Sorry to take two questions, but is one of the ideas that the Russians are maybe taking to the Iranians to have some kind of facility outside of Iran built in Russia for a part of the enrichment process that would give more control over the fuel cycle?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, I'm not going to get into what the Russians might tell the Iranians. The Russians can either tell the Iranians or they can tell you, if you can get them to tell you. But I would just say look at the way they've structured Bushehr.

QUESTION: Does the U.S. believe that under the NPT Iran would have the right to enrich uranium?

SECRETARY RICE: Let me remind you of the President's speech at NDU where he talked about the fact that this capability of enriching and reprocessing as a path to exercise the right to civil nuclear energy in the NPT, if you are in good standing in the NPT, has left the international community vulnerable on the issue of the secrecy that can attend enrichment and reprocessing.

So from the point of view of the United States, the question on the table is how do we deal with an NPT that, as I think the President has said and by the way as Mohamed ElBaradei has said, has a loophole. Okay? And so the NPT -- first of all, you have to be in good standing. Secondly, I think there is a question of confidence of the international system in what you're prepared and able to do. But we have long worried about this loophole and we think that the ability to close this loophole, the ability to have some other mechanism -- whether it's assured fuel supply along the lines that ElBaradei has been talking about of offshore fuel supply -- is essential to making the NPT work.

QUESTION: I needed to ask you that but -- because Sergey Lavrov, as you heard today, said that the Russians believe that they have this right. So explain to us, because it sounds as if the U.S. and the Europeans are one side and the Russians are on the other. Are we missing something that Sergey Lavrov told you that he didn't say today?

SECRETARY RICE: The question is should they exercise that right. Should Iran exercise that right. Even if you believe they have a right, even if you believe they have a right, should they exercise that right. Because you didn't ask him that. Barbara asked him did they have a right.

Now, the way that they have structured Bushehr is so that the fuel cycle is not involved. And the question of confidence, the thing that the Russians have said and did say today and affirmed in all meetings, is that yes, Iran has a problem with the international system in terms of the international system's confidence in Iran being able to safely pursue civil nuclear power and the Iranians have to deal with that.

QUESTION: Two things. I don't want to let this opportunity pass before asking you for your impressions on the Iraq voting so far. And also, did you discuss with the Russians or do you have your own opinions at this point about what they are most likely to do at the IAEA meeting if there is no change in the Iranian position before then

SECRETARY RICE: As I said, the Russians want to allow the course here of negotiations to unfold and so we will see. We know that their vote -- what an abstention is is a wait and see. That's what an abstention is and that's how they voted. I believe that what they are doing is that they are using all their efforts to try to get the Iranians back into a negotiating posture that will be acceptable, that finds that's what they can do at this point and I hope that they can succeed. I think by the way, the EU-3 will try to do the same and I think others will try to do the same, too. It's quite obvious, if it doesn't work, then at a time of our choosing we're going to -- the Iranians are going to have to be referred to the Security Council.

In terms of the Iraqi voting, I've just -- all that I've seen is pictures on the television so far which looks as if the Iraqis are exercising their right. They are doing so in a peaceful manner. They are doing so enthusiastically. That's been our principal concern, that the Iraqis have this opportunity to go and voice their views of this constitution. That's the way this was set up in the TAL. That's what they're doing and we'll see where we are. But I think that the last changes to the mechanism for amending the constitution were a real sign that the Sunni -- the Shia and the Kurds wanted to reach out to the Iraqis -- to the Sunni Iraqis and I think that's a good thing.

Okay? All right. Thank you.

QUESTION: I was going to add something about Iran but I won't. Could I just ask you a brief question about whether the Adamov case came up and was kind of reassuring? Could you address that?

SECRETARY RICE: We've raised this case on numerous occasions. Bill Burns has raised it very recently. I did not bring it up today.

QUESTION: (Inaudible.)

SECRETARY RICE: The Russians explained what was going on there. I personally don't have enough independent information to judge one way or another, but they believe that the situation was coming under control.

(Inaudible) trip I'm going to take with Jack Straw to Alabama so I am really looking forward to it. I want to take other foreign ministers to other parts of the United States from time to time. No better person to start with than Jack Straw, who is a friend and colleague. And he's very interested in seeing some other parts of the United States. He himself has an interest in the civil rights period and in issues of minority rights, coming from a district himself which is, I think, 25 percent minority. And so we're going to go to Birmingham and Tuscaloosa for the weekend and so Jim will brief you on the details of that. Okay? I'm going to give a speech on democracy and how it moves forward.

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 [BACK TO TOP](#)

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