



Interview With Raghida Dergham of Al Hayat

Secretary Condoleezza Rice

Waldorf-Astoria Hotel
New York
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QUESTION: Lavrov yesterday at the Council of Foreign Relations said that – basically implied that you agreed that there will be no action on sanctions against Iran.

SECRETARY RICE: No, we agreed that there would not be a meeting here. And what we have agreed also is that there will be a continuation of both tracks in an effort to move negotiations forward. But of course, the Iranians are not cooperating with the IAEA. They're not moving forward on negotiation. And so we're going to continue to work to see what we should do along the sanctions track.

QUESTION: He says – as you know, you differ – tactics are different. You're not going to let go on open-ended. Is there anything you can do about it, in effect, doing a suspension, practical suspension of sanctions – collective through the Security Council?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, first of all, there are sanctions that are enforced, and those are not suspended. And it is also the case that the United States and Europe have placed additional measures against Iran which are having an effect on Iran. And so one way or another, we will continue those.

But when Foreign Minister Lavrov and I spoke, we agreed that our political directors will continue to work on what measures might be taken next, and we will agree as to timing later on. But I do not think that the Iranians are doing anything to give confidence that they're prepared to negotiate.

QUESTION: Do you expect any increased sanctions by the Security Council or, actually, do you expect them outside the Security Council? Because it seems that the Russians are not going to give in and increase sanctions during your Administration.

SECRETARY RICE: Well, you know, we have this discussion every time and we end up with Security Council resolutions.

QUESTION: Will you push forward with it now?

SECRETARY RICE: We've had three and we will look to a fourth at an appropriate time and with the appropriate consultation. But for now, I think, of course, there are going to continue to be designations by the United States, there are going to continue to be efforts by the Europeans, and I believe that companies and financial institutions are going to continue to leave Iran.

QUESTION: There is – people are saying that you lost Iran because there is no great option and that you also lost Lebanon because, practically, it's – you know, Hezbollah won, they have the military power, it's practically a base for the Iranians in Lebanon. Do you want to refute that?

SECRETARY RICE: Of course.

QUESTION: (Inaudible.)

SECRETARY RICE: I just spent time with the elected president of Lebanon, President Sleiman, who talked about the fact that the United States has helped to – helped him to build a better Lebanese army. And let's remember, prior to 2006, the Lebanese army was not in the south of that country. They're now in the south of that country. Let us remember that the Lebanese army has been able to act against camps, which they have never done. Let's remember that Syrian forces are out of Lebanon, which they were there for decades.

And let's remember that you have a democratically elected government with Prime Minister Siniora functioning as its prime minister. That is actually now functioning. Lebanon is a different place and a better place than when this Administration came to power.

QUESTION: Even with Hezbollah keeping its arms and being a very, you know, determined and a very big power in the country?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, let's remember –

QUESTION: With its arms –

SECRETARY RICE: – Hezbollah has been there for a while. This is a not a phenomenon of 2008. But the President has emphasized – President Sleiman has emphasized within the national dialogue the arms have to belong to the state. And so they are in a process to make certain that arms belong to the state.

QUESTION: Why did you subcontract the relationship to – with Syria to President Sarkozy of France?

SECRETARY RICE: We haven't subcontracted anything. We've been in very close contact with the French. And look, the Syrians – we and the Syrians do have contact. We have a Chargé in Damascus who continues the contacts. We have diplomatic relations with Syria. I've met with Foreign Minister Muallem before.

QUESTION: Recently?

SECRETARY RICE: No, no, no, during the neighbors conference when we were in Sharm el-Sheikh. Look, the relationship with Syria very much turns on how things are going. We're not –

QUESTION: Where?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, it is true that foreign fighters are down. The number of foreign fighters crossing into Iraq is down. Now, I think that is really because it's not really all that fruitful to be a foreign fighter in Iraq any longer, because through coalition efforts and the efforts of the Iraqis themselves, the security situation in Iraq has stabilized. It's fragile, but it's stabilized. It is true that Syria and Israel are in – in direct discussions, something that we've supported. We were the ones who invited Syria to the Annapolis conference. So France should have discussions with Syria. We have them when they are appropriate.

QUESTION: When is that? When –

MR. MCCORMACK: Raghida, this is going to have to be the last question.

QUESTION: Okay, two last questions (inaudible).

SECRETARY RICE: Well, go ahead and do them real quickly.

QUESTION: Okay, Iraq, Iraq (inaudible).

SECRETARY RICE: Yes.

QUESTION: Understanding – my understanding is that there will be no signature for the bilateral – and you – and that there's preparations for the MNF –

SECRETARY RICE: No, no. We are discussing this agreement with the Iraqis. It's not an easy thing to do. SOFAs are never easy. But we have very good discussions ongoing with the Iraqis, and so that, I believe, we will – we will achieve.

As to the – how Iraq is going, they passed an elections law yesterday. That's very, very good news and it means that their politics is improving and proceeding.

QUESTION: And another one because I promised to ask that. And if Condoleezza Rice has the idea right now to launch the initiative about women in the Middle East, an initiative that has not been launched, that is necessary for that – for women in that region, as a pioneer yourself in many different places, what is that initiative?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, we actually did launch an initiative last year, 18 months ago, on women and peace in the Middle East. But the initiative that I'm most interested in – and this women's network is terrific at launching various initiatives – but it's for women's empowerment, girls' education, making certain that women have equal rights. And they – in many countries, they don't. They don't have access to justice as equals. And that's true whether you're in the Middle East or in other parts of the world, but I just think that there should be no culture, no place, that women don't have equal rights.

We've seen women get the vote in Kuwait; that's terrific. We see that in the Palestinian territories, women are really quite active in civil society. We see a woman in Israel working to form a coalition as Prime Minister. And so there's a lot going on in the Middle East, so we're going to continue to work. I had many women from the Middle East at this meeting today, and it's very exciting that women are starting to take their place.

QUESTION: Thank you very much.

SECRETARY RICE: Thank you.

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 [BACK TO TOP](#)

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