



## Special Briefing on Travel to the Middle East and Europe

**Secretary Condoleezza Rice**

Washington, DC  
July 21, 2006



1:34 p.m. EDT

**SECRETARY RICE:** Good afternoon. This Sunday, I will travel to Israel and the Palestinian territories where I will meet with Prime Minister Olmert and his leadership and with President Abbas and his team. I will also travel to Rome where I will meet with the Lebanon Core Group. The countries of the Lebanon Core Group form a key Contact Group that can help the Lebanese Government to address the political, economic and security challenges that it faces.



Today I want to speak briefly about what I seek to accomplish on this trip and then I'd be happy to take your questions, of course. It is important to remember that the cause of the current violence with Hezbollah's illegal attack from Lebanese territory. It is unacceptable to have a situation where the decision of a terrorist group can drag an entire country, even an entire region, into violence.

In response to Hezbollah's outrageous provocation in an already tense region, the United States joined with the G-8 countries in an important declaration in St. Petersburg. Arab nations, led by Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Jordan have been critical of this provocation as well. The United Nations and the European Union have, of course, sent missions to the region. Today the United States renews its call for the immediate release of the abducted Israeli soldiers. And as Israel exercises the right of any sovereign nation to defend itself, we urge Israel's leaders to do so with the greatest possible care to avoid harming innocent civilians and with care to protect civilian infrastructure.

We are working tirelessly to help ease the plight of all innocent people who are suffering from violence: Lebanese, Israeli and Palestinian. I was pleased to hear that the Israeli Government has responded positively to the proposal of the United States and other countries to open humanitarian corridors into Lebanon which will allow the international community to deliver much needed assistance to the Lebanese people.

At next week's meeting of the Core Group and in the weeks that follow, we will continue working with our partners to provide immediate humanitarian relief to the people of Lebanon that will be a focus of our efforts and the United States plans to contribute direct humanitarian assistance to Lebanon. We do seek an end to the current violence and we seek it urgently. More than that, we also seek to address the root causes of that violence so that a real and enduring peace can be established.

A ceasefire would be a false promise if it simply returns us to the status quo, allowing terrorists to launch attacks at the time and terms of their choosing and to threaten innocent people, Arab and Israeli, throughout the region. That would be a guarantee of future violence. Instead we must be more effective and more ambitious than that. We must work urgently to create the conditions for stability and lasting peace.

I have just come from New York where I met with Kofi Annan and received an assessment from the UN team that has just returned from the Middle East. The G-8 statement of July 16 and the UN Security Council Resolutions 425, 1559 and 1680 represent an international consensus that guides our diplomatic efforts to help Lebanon's young democracy make progress along three tracks: political, economic and security. The broad framework includes, of course, the deployment of the Lebanese armed forces to all parts of country and full international support for the efforts of the Lebanese Government to exhort its sovereign authority over all of its territory.

Lebanon will have a delegation, we expect, at the Core Group meeting and I am in constant consultations with Prime Minister Siniora about how best the international community can support his government. The goal of my trip is to work with our partners to help create conditions that can lead to a lasting and sustainable end to the violence. Yet as I prepare to depart for the Middle East, I know that there are no answers that are easy, nor are there any quick fixes. I fully expect that the diplomatic work for peace will be difficult, but President Bush and I are committed to that work.

Before I take your questions, let me say one more thing. I would like to thank and commend the personnel of the State Department, the Defense Department and other U.S. Government agencies who are helping to lead the successful and ongoing departure of our citizens from Lebanon. Despite the difficulty of moving people by sea and despite the need to take extensive security preparations, we have mounted in one week the largest operation of any one country. By tomorrow we expect to have helped more than 10,000 Americans to reach safety. This is one of the largest and most complex operations of its kind since World War II. Of course, more work remains to be done. But I am confident that the men and women of the U.S. Government are more than equal to that challenge. And now I'll take your questions.

Anne.

**QUESTION:** Madame Secretary, you said the United States and the world need to be more effective and ambitious than to seek a quick ceasefire. Can you be effective and ambitious in helping to guide a solution here if you're not talking to either Syria or Hezbollah?

**SECRETARY RICE:** First of all, Syria knows what it needs to do and Hezbollah is the source of the problem. The issue here is that in Resolution 1559 and ever since, the world has spoken to the need of Lebanon to be able to function as a sovereign government without the interference of foreign powers -- that's why Syrian forces were told to leave Lebanon -- the resolutions have insisted that Lebanon needs to be able -- the Government of Lebanon needs to be able to extend its authority over all of its territory. And you can't have a situation in which the south of Lebanon is a haven for unauthorized, armed groups that sit and fire rockets into Israel, plunging the entire country into chaos, when the Lebanese Government did not even know that this was going to be done.

Now the Lebanese Government has disavowed what happened. The Government of Siniora is a good and young democratic government, but the extremists of Hezbollah have put that government at risk and have brought misery to the region. Any ceasefire cannot allow that condition to remain, because I can guarantee you, if you simply look for a ceasefire that acknowledges and freezes the status quo ante, we will be back here in six months again or in five months or in nine months or in a year, trying to get another ceasefire because Hezbollah will have decided yet again to try and to use southern Lebanon as a sanctuary to fire against Israel.

So when I say that we really must have this time a commitment to what was understood in 1559 to be a need to get Lebanese forces south, to get control of that territory that -- so it couldn't be used in this way, that is, I think, the core of a political framework that would permit a sustainable ceasefire.

Yes.

**QUESTION:** Madame Secretary, are you concerned that it looks like Israel is going to be launching a ground invasion, a larger, perhaps, ground operation than we might have expected?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Well, I'm clearly not going to speculate on something that is just speculation. The Israelis have said that they have no desire to widen this conflict and I take them at their word that they have no desire to widen this conflict. There is a political framework and a political solution that could both stop the violence and leave Lebanon and the region in a much better place so that this doesn't happen again. And I think that's what we have to pursue.

And let me just say, when I say that an immediate ceasefire without political conditions does not make sense, I don't mean that this isn't urgent. It is indeed urgent.

Yes, Elise.

**QUESTION:** When you talk about supporting the Lebanese Government but also eliminating the threat posed by Hezbollah, Hezbollah is not only a security threat in the region. It's also a political party and it has ministers in the cabinet, members of parliament. How do you suppose that the political track will be worked out? Is this the end of Hezbollah in the country or do you see a future political role for Hezbollah when this is all worked out on the security front?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Clearly, Hezbollah in its political role did not act very responsibly. If indeed Hezbollah went without the authority of the Lebanese Government, violated every conceivable international law not to mention a number of international UN Security Council resolutions and didn't bother to tell the members of the Lebanese Government. So obviously they didn't act in a responsible way in their political cloak and I think that has to be said and it points to the problem that 1559 anticipated of having groups within the political process that have one foot in terror and one foot in politics. It's not sustainable over the long run. But I think the immediate problem is to get back into a political framework that can allow Lebanon to start to reassert its sovereignty.

Yes, John.

**QUESTION:** Madame Secretary, you've heard the voices saying you should have -- the last several days saying you should go to the region and why you chose now to announce this trip and to go? And secondly, would the United States be willing to contribute troops, that is, boots on the ground to an international peacekeeping force on the Lebanese border?

**SECRETARY RICE:** We are looking at what kind of international assistance force makes sense, but I do not think that it is anticipated that U.S. ground forces are expected for that force.

As to the timing of this, John, after all I could have gotten on a plane and rushed over and started shuttling and it wouldn't have been clear what I was shuttling to do. We have now had a series of discussions with our -- first at the G-8. I've been in constant contact with others, including with the Egyptians here a couple of days ago. We have been in contact with the Siniora Government. Of course I have been in constant contact with the Israeli Government and then I was just at the UN. I think we are beginning to see the outlines of a political framework that might allow the cessation of violence in a more sustainable way tied to 1559, tied to -- what is there in the G-8 statement. The elements are becoming quite clear. But I have no interest in diplomacy for the sake of returning Lebanon and Israel to the status quo ante. I think it would be a mistake.

What we're seeing here, in a sense, is the growing -- the birth pangs of a new Middle East and whatever we do we have to be certain that we're pushing forward to the new Middle East not going back to the old one.

James.

**QUESTION:** Madame Secretary, as you mentioned, a key element of Resolution 1559 calls for the dismantling of terrorist militia groups inside Lebanon by the sovereign authority of that government. What have you heard from your discussions with the Lebanese that would explain why they have made so little progress on that up to now and what do you think would change in the next week or two in the political framework that would suddenly allow them to make progress on that?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Well, clearly this is a young government that is -- that does not have the capacity to do everything that was anticipated in 1559; it's just the case. What we have to do is to help create a framework in which, first of all, the end to the violence would push forward the sovereignty of the Lebanese Government and the deployment of Lebanese forces southward with some kind of international assistance, perhaps significant international assistance. And then we have to continue to work with this government on the political front.

But what I said, James, is that -- in answer to Elise's question -- is that it is now clear why 1559 anticipates a circumstance in which you cannot have people with one foot in politics and one foot in terror, because that Hezbollah sitting within the Lebanese Government, as ministers within the Lebanese Government, would launch an attack without the knowledge of the Lebanese Government, that then plunged the Lebanese people into the circumstances that they are, unfortunately, now in, says why 1559 has wisdom. But we will work on a political framework to help the Lebanese to fulfill those terms.

Charlie.

**QUESTION:** Can you just characterize your discussions with the Lebanese, similar to the way you've done, say, with the Iraqis when you say this is a determined government that knows what it needs to do? Can you speak to what the Lebanese feel their mission is here vis-à-vis Hezbollah?

**SECRETARY RICE:** I believe that this is a very good government. This is a fine prime minister and he is in circumstances that are enormously difficult right now and he's showing great leadership of his people and great courage in leading his people in these very difficult times. It is a complicated political situation in Lebanon; that will surprise no one. And I'm not going to characterize my conversations with the prime minister about how we get out of these complex situations. I think he has a very strong interest in the humanitarian situation. We've been talking about that and indeed, we've been working with the Israelis to first get air and sea corridors opened, now to talk about further humanitarian corridors that might be open to get assistance to the Lebanese people and to begin to discuss a political framework that would allow the fulfillment of Resolution 1559. But I'm not going to characterize those discussions.

Yes, Charles -- Charlie.

**QUESTION:** Madame Secretary, can you talk about -- since you don't talk to Hezbollah or Syria, can you talk about any of your allies that you have been talking with and either have already met with or will meet with? Have there been any direct contacts with Hezbollah? Is there any indication to believe there's any diplomatic daylight there?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Well, first of all, with Syria, there have been all kinds of contacts. Obviously, any number of governments have been talking to the Syrians for quite a long time. The Syrians have to make a choice. Do they really wish to be associated with the circumstances that help extremism to grow in the region or are they going to be a part of what is clearly a consensus of the major Arab states in the region, that extremism is one of the problems here?

In this sense, I would just ask you to look back on what is being said by some of these Arab states. Everybody wants the violence to stop. There is no difference there. But this is different than times in the past, when there has been a reflexive response from the Arab states. This time, I think you're getting a very clear indication of where people think the problem is and Syria has to determine whether it's going to be a part of that consensus or not.

As to Hezbollah, as I said, Hezbollah is the source of the problem and this should be an arrangement between the Lebanese Government and the international community and Israel, because it is the Lebanese Government that is sovereign, not Hezbollah. This is not an arrangement -- and I want to just underscore that. 1559 is an obligation of the Lebanese Government, the international community, and its neighbors. Hezbollah, in this form, is a terrorist organization and I don't think we're talking about an arrangement between Hezbollah and the international community.

Robin.

**QUESTION:** The United States has deployed a force -- or there was an international force separating the Palestinians and the Israelis in 1982.

**SECRETARY RICE:** Lebanese .

**QUESTION:** No, the Palestinians were --

**SECRETARY RICE:** Oh, you mean the Palestinian camps in Lebanon?

**QUESTION:** Yes, yes.

**SECRETARY RICE:** I just wanted to make sure we were talking about Lebanon.

**QUESTION:** I was there then.

**SECRETARY RICE:** Yes.

**QUESTION:** Can you describe how the stabilization force might be different from what it was before. Would it have more muscle? There's talk about a Kosovo model. Can you give us any more meat on the bones of what's being discussed?

**SECRETARY RICE:** I discussed some of this in New York with Secretary General Annan. We are in discussions with our allies as well. Look, I think everybody understands that it has to be a force robust enough to do the job, to make sure that the conditions are -- in Southern Lebanon are such that the reason for the violence has been dealt with and that is that southern Lebanon is used as a platform by Hezbollah to attack Israel. That's going to take a robust force.

The questions about what kind of force it is, what its command structure is, is it a UN force, is it an international assistance force, those are the discussions that are going on and I think are going to go on over the next few days.

**QUESTION:** Can I just follow up?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Yeah.

**QUESTION:** Is there -- will Hezbollah have to be disarmed before the force is in place or will it have a mandate that includes disarming Hezbollah?

**SECRETARY RICE:** I think we have to discuss the mandate, first and foremost, with the Lebanese and with the Israelis, who have most stake here, and then with the international community. I'm not going to try to prejudge what the mandate's going to look like, but it's got to be robust and it's got to be capable of helping the Lebanese forces make certain that southern Lebanon is not a haven for these kinds of attacks.

Yeah, Sylvie.

**QUESTION:** Madame Secretary, aren't you concerned that the delay in halting the fighting and the loss of many civilian lives in Lebanon will hamper your efforts to win the heart and minds of the Arab world?

**SECRETARY RICE:** I'm concerned about civilian casualties because I'm concerned about civilian casualties. Nobody wants to see innocent civilians caught up in this kind of fighting. And it's why we are very determined to do more about the humanitarian situation. It's why we have talked so determinedly and so frequently with the Israelis about restraint in their operations. It's why we've worked to get the humanitarian corridors opened. This is a terrible thing for the Lebanese people. The unfortunate fact is that if we don't do this right, if we don't create political conditions that allow an end to the violence to also deal with the root cause, deal with the circumstances that produced this violence, then we're going to be back here in several months more.

Because what is different now than when Robin was there in 1982 is that you have a circumstance in which a young, democratic government, free now of Syrian forces, is trying to assert its authority over Lebanese territory and trying to be there for a good neighbor and a good contributor to international peace and stability. And those extremists want to strangle it in its crib. They are frightened by the prospect of a Lebanon that is no longer a source of instability, no longer so weak that people use its territory in this way, much as these extremists want to strangle other new governments, new democratic governments in the region.

So this is a different Middle East and it's a new Middle East and it's hard and we're going through a very violent time. I want the violence against civilians to stop because the violence against civilians needs to stop, but I know that unless the circumstances are dealt with, it's not going to last, any end to the violence isn't going to last.

You've got the last question.

**QUESTION:** Madame Secretary, can you tell us why you're not actually visiting any Arab countries? And is it true, as some of us have been told, that some of the Arab states didn't want to host you while the Israeli offensive was going on?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Look, I am going to go to a place where we can all meet and talk about what needs to move forward. What I won't do is go someplace and try to get a ceasefire that I know isn't going to last. We're just in a different circumstance and I think, frankly, people in the region understand that as well as people in Lebanon. Everybody is concerned about the toll on civilians and everybody is concerned about the toll on the young Lebanese Government. There is no doubt about that.

But everybody also needs to unite. Everybody -- people need to stand strong now, because the time has come not to just take a temporary solution that is going to fall apart within -- I can't tell you whether it will be hours or days or weeks or months of its having come into place. And so when I arranged my travel and arranged the decision to go now, I felt it was important to have done a lot of the consultations, I felt it was important to have the right group of people together. But I also felt that it was important to have come to a meeting of the minds of some of the elements that might actually provide a political framework for a stable peace.

Thank you very much. See you on the plane. Thank you.

(The briefing was concluded at 1:58 p.m.)

**2006/705**

Released on July 21, 2006

 [BACK TO TOP](#)

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