



Remarks En Route to the Middle East

Secretary Condoleezza Rice

En Route Shannon, Ireland

July 23, 2006

SECRETARY RICE: Good afternoon. We are headed first to the Middle East, to Israel. The purpose of this trip is obviously to address the ongoing situation in Lebanon and the separate situation that is going on in Gaza. So I will meet not just with the Israelis concerning the situation in Lebanon, but of course I will go and see Abu Mazen in Ramallah as well.

I think there are a couple of points that I would like to make and then I will just take questions. The first is that we've been working really hard with the Israelis, with the Lebanese, with others on the humanitarian situation, on trying to establish corridors in and out of Lebanon, as well as corridors within Lebanon that might make it possible to get humanitarian assistance to the Lebanese people. And that work is going to continue while I'm here.

We obviously have been in very close contact as well with those who are trying to deliver humanitarian assistance including I've had a couple of conversations with Kofi Annan about efforts that the U.N. wants to make. And we are looking at what the United States can do in terms of bilateral humanitarian assistance. And I will be talking to the Lebanese about that.

We will see them in Rome, where we will have this conference and the Lebanese will be represented at that conference and so we can talk about the humanitarian situation. We can also talk about the – what the international community can further do to help them. I've also been talking to Prime Minister Siniora, I talked to him this morning as a matter of fact, about what their humanitarian needs are. So one very major part of this is to try and help establish some efforts on the humanitarian side.

Secondly, as I said to you when I came out on Friday to announce the trip, it's very important to establish conditions under which a cease-fire can take place. We urgently – we believe that a cease-fire is urgent. It is, however, important to have conditions that will make it also sustainable. And I was reading the newspaper earlier – I won't mention which paper – and there was a quote from a Lebanese man saying that every two or three years there seems to be war and it would be good to have an end to this so that the people could live in dignity.

Resolution 1559 and the Taif Agreement give us a basis for a sustainable Lebanon that would be democratic, that would be free of foreign forces, that would have control over all of its territory and could therefore exercise its sovereignty. And so we have to make certain that anything that we do is pointing in the direction of the fulfillment of Taif and the fulfillment of Resolution 1559.

So I will go to Israel, we'll go to Rome, and I'll go to Kuala Lumpur for the Asia Regional Forum. I have a little work to do there on North Korea. And I'm fully prepared to return to the region if that would be necessary or helpful. But I'm going to leave David Welch and Elliott Abrams in the region to continue to work on the humanitarian situation as well as the underlying conditions for a cease-fire.

QUESTION: Thank you. Can you talk, Madame Secretary, a little bit about how you see Syria in this? You've described Syria as sort of part of the problem. Is there any way you can make them part of the solution? And are there any incentives the United States can sort of give to them to change?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, I think Syria knows its obligations under Resolution 1559 and under Taif. It had special obligations under Taif. I was just talking with the Saudis about Taif and the importance of implementing it. The need for Syria to stop supporting terrorism, including supply to terrorist forces is obvious. And it is clear that Syria needs to uphold its obligations under 1559, not to meddle in the affairs of Lebanon. There are plenty of people carrying that message.

And I just want to also correct one perception that seems to be out there. We do actually have a mission in Syria. We have a chargé there. And that can be a channel of communication at any time. So I just want to note that, you know, we do actually have both diplomatic relations and a channel for dealing with Syria.

QUESTION: Madame Secretary, the Saudis and the Egyptians and some others have said publicly they think the need for an immediate cease-fire is more compelling than the American position of getting something that is sustainable. And at this stage, does this create problems with you and our – administration allies in the region, in that wouldn't it have been better to have this meeting not in Rome but let's say in Egypt? And did you get pushback from the Egyptians on that?

SECRETARY RICE: Gee, Andrea, I thought it was more important what came out of a meeting than where you had it. And so I think the most important thing is to go to the region, to talk to those who are involved in this situation. We will be in Rome with an enlarged group, somewhat larger than the core group, which is fine. And to get international support for elements that can contribute to a sustainable cease-fire.

But as much as everybody urgently wants to end the fighting – and we all want to urgently end the fighting – we have absolutely the same goal. If we end the fighting only to have it restart in three weeks or three months, then this will not have been – then all of the carnage that Hezbollah launched by its illegal activities, abducting the soldiers and then launching rocket attacks, we will have gotten nothing from that, we will have learned nothing from it. So it's just very important that we work urgently, but that we also work in a way that is going to push this forward, not backward.

QUESTION: Madame Secretary, can you give us a readout of your meeting with the Saudis this afternoon? And also whether or not – just what they asked the U.S. to do?

SECRETARY RICE: Sure. We met first with Prince Saud, Prince Bandar and other members of their delegation, Steve Hadley and I did. We then had time with the President. And we talked about what elements might contribute to creating the conditions for ending the violence. And we had very good discussions of that.

Look, I'm not going to go into details. I think that's better left to the diplomacy. But we and the Saudis have the same goals. The Saudis talked a great deal about the importance of Taif and getting a solution that indeed does lead to the fulfillment of the obligations that that were taken already in the signed agreement in 1989 by the various parties. And so a lot of the conversation was about how to move toward the implementation of Taif as a part of this effort.

QUESTION: Madame Secretary, you said that a cease-fire was a very urgent priority. What kind of conditions would you foresee being attached to a cease-fire? How do you foresee it?

SECRETARY RICE: We all agree that it is urgent. But it is also important that it be a cease-fire that is going to last, a cessation of hostilities that's going to last. And the framework is clearly to do this in a way that contributes to the Lebanese government's ability to exercise sovereignty over all of its territory, not to have extremist groups, unauthorized armed groups that are able to use the territory of Lebanon to launch illegal activities and then plunge Lebanon and the region into war. So that's the framework.

I've been talking about elements with the U.N. team, I've been talking about elements with the Israelis, I've been talking about elements with the Lebanese. And I think that part of what we'll try to do here is to put together a picture of how this might move forward. But I think the just – I'd just underline that the really important thing here is that whatever we do has to contribute to Lebanon's regaining sovereignty over all of its territory.

QUESTION: Who would you anticipate being part of the cease-fire? Who would you anticipate as being part of the cease-fire? Who would be included in a document outlining that?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, if there's a cessation of hostilities, the government of Lebanon is going to have to be the party.

The government of Lebanon is the government of Lebanon. Let's treat the government of Lebanon as the sovereign government that it is, that Resolution 1559 talked about, that the Taif agreement talked about. The last time that I looked, Hezbollah had even run for office as a part of the government of Lebanon.

And so we intend to treat the government of Lebanon with the respect that it deserves and also with the great desire to see it strengthened and to see it able to extend its sovereignty over its territory.

QUESTION: Madame Secretary, you mentioned the chargé in Damascus. Can you tell us what that person is doing right now and what other efforts you are to reach out to the Syrians?

SECRETARY RICE: I said that there was a channel that we could use. And we'll use it if necessary.

Let's remember, we talked to the Syrians over and over and over again. Colin Powell talked to the Syrians. Rich Armitage talked to the Syrians. David Welch talked to the Syrians. Bill Burns talked to the Syrians. The problem isn't that people haven't talked to the Syrians; it's that the Syrians haven't acted. And so I think this is simply just a kind of false hobbyhorse that somehow it's because we don't talk to the Syrians. The Syrians have known for quite a long time what they need to do. And we do have – my only point was that, you know, it's not as if we don't have diplomatic relations; we do.

QUESTION: Madame Secretary, are you trying to get the – how would you hope to get the Hezbollahis to move behind the Litani River, to move out of the south? Is there some kind of idea on the table?

Secondly, *Haaretz* reported today that the United States is basically giving another week to Israel. Is there any truth to that report?

And, third, are we going to Beirut as our first stop?

SECRETARY RICE: The schedule is as the schedule is, and if there are any changes to it, I'll let you know. But we're going out there, we're going to talk to the Israelis. We'll see the Lebanese in Rome.

As to Hezbollah's responsibilities and what they might or might not have to do, I'm not going to get into details here. But obviously the south can't be a kind of haven for them to launch the attacks that they're launching against Israel.

QUESTION: (Inaudible.)

SECRETARY RICE: Robin, I'm not going to get ahead of myself in the diplomacy. I know – Robin would like to print the entire – everything that I'm going to say on the front page of *The Washington Post*, but it's not going to happen, Robin. So I'll talk to the parties first.

You asked one other question, though? *Haaretz*. No truth to it.

QUESTION: As you mentioned, a lot of people have been sending messages to the Syrians. Have you seen any sign after 10 days of fighting that the Syrians or, for that matter, the Iranians, may be beginning to have misgivings about their support for Hezbollah?

SECRETARY RICE: I really can't read the minds of the Syrians or the Iranians. I would hope that the clear indications that everybody understands who started this will cause those who supported them to think twice about supporting these kinds of activities. Because it is quite obvious that it is Hezbollah and those who support them that have plunged Lebanon into the circumstances in which it finds itself, and that have threatened stability in the region.

I would hope that that would make the Syrians think twice because, after all, I think they want good relations with their neighbors. But I'm not going to try to guess. I would think if they want good relations, they might start by ending their support in those ways.

QUESTION: Dr. Rice, thank you. Can you give us a little bit of – let me back up. You have said all along that you won't put any sort of deadline on the Israelis to cease their actions. Will you ask Olmert how long they plan on continuing their strikes? Or just generally, can you preview for us what your message for him will be?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, my message to the Israelis has been the same in public as it's been in private. And that is that we fully understand the need of Israel to defend itself. We also understand that part of its – the means of its defense will be to have a strong and sovereign Lebanese government on its border that is democratic and friendly to Israel in the long run. And so both to use restraint and to be concerned about civilian populations, innocent civilians and civilian infrastructure, but also to be concerned about the effects on the Siniora government of certain kinds of activities.

The – most of my conversation with the Israelis in recent – the most recent hours – I won't say days, because it's really been the most recent hours – has been about the humanitarian situation and what we can do in terms of providing the means to get humanitarian assistance in, to be quite concerned about displaced populations. And when I'm there, then we can talk more about the circumstances that need to be attained in order for a sustainable cease-fire to take place. We have conversations along the lines that I just outlined.

QUESTION: Madame Secretary, the Saudis and the other Sunni Arab leaders gave the administration some pretty important support early on in this crisis with the strong statements that they came out with. Will part of your message to the Israelis now be that maintaining at least the tone and level of that support is getting very difficult at this point, following your meeting with the Saudis today? And will the Saudis be in Rome? Will they join us in Rome? In Rome, are they going to be in Rome?

SECRETARY RICE: I don't know if the Saudis are going to be in Rome. I know that the Egyptians are going to be in Rome and a number of others are going to be in Rome. But I myself have not been doing the guest list; I've got a few other things to do. I do think that it's very important that there be regional actors there, which is why people have been asked to come.

Look what the Saudis did do and the Egyptians and others. They did exactly the right thing. They pointed at the extremists who are the cause. And, of course, we think it's important to keep that support, because it is that support that is most likely to have the greatest impact, particularly on Syria, which I think does not want to be isolated from the rest of the Arabs in their neighborhood.

So yes, it's a factor when we talk to the Israelis about the region as a whole and keeping regional support, of course.

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