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Press Briefing by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice

Crawford Middle School
Crawford, Texas

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SECRETARY RICE: Good morning. I'll take a few questions.

Q Secretary Rice, who or what are you counting on to bring Hezbollah on board, to get them to agree with this resolution?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, first of all, let me say that it's important that we vote the resolution in the Security Council, and we expect that to happen in the next day or two. And at that point, the international community will have put forward its views of how this war can abate, and then we'll see who is for peace and who isn't. The world is really watching now to see. Everyone has been talking about a cease-fire, an immediate cease-fire. I think even Hezbollah has from time to time talked about an immediate cease-fire.

This is a basis on which a cease-fire will take place, cessation of hostilities will take place so that there can't be a return to the status quo ante, which is extremely important to all the parties, because we don't want to create a situation in which we get out of this, and then you create the conditions in which Hezbollah, a state-within-a-state, goes across the line again, abducts soldiers, and we get another war.

And so we will ask everyone who has any influence with all the parties to talk to them about the importance of taking this opportunity. I just want to note that these things take a while to wind down. It is certainly not the case that probably all violence is going to stop, but the kind of large-scale violence that is really so hard on the Lebanese and Israeli people, the rocketing into Israel, the major offensive military operations, it's important to get those stopped, but it's a first step. We've then got to get to the second resolution, and the formation of an international force that can help the Lebanese government extend its authority throughout the country. So this is a first step.

Q Can I just follow up, something you said on the morning talk shows. How could it possibly be that the Lebanese government didn't know that thousands and thousands of rockets came into their territory? You gave the indication that they were oblivious to this.

SECRETARY RICE: No, I said that they did not know about the attack across the Blue Line for the abduction of Israeli soldiers. They have said that, and I believe them on that. The military wing of Hezbollah did this apparently without any authorization of the Lebanese government, which had an obligation to respect the Blue Line.

The real situation in Lebanon is that the south has had a vacuum in which Hezbollah has been operating. And the solution to this over the next several months is going to be to flow the authority of the Lebanese government and Lebanese forces with the help of international forces into the south, so that

you don't have that vacuum.

Steve.

Q (Inaudible.)

SECRETARY RICE: Well, I would hope that you would see, very early on, an end to the kind of large-scale violence, large-scale military operations, firing of rockets, that we've been seeing. That needs to stop so that the situation can clear for the next phase, and the bringing in of international forces to help.

But I can't say that you should rule out that there could be skirmishes of some kind for some time to come. This isn't meant to be a permanent condition, it's meant to create conditions on which a more permanent, enduring cease-fire can be built.

Q Prime Minister Siniora says that the U.N. resolution, as in the draft, is inadequate, that they're looking for Israeli troops to withdraw from Lebanese territory immediately. Have you spoken with him, and what is the administration willing to offer in the first resolution? Are you willing to make some changes in that to include that in that resolution?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, again, we need to keep this in face. Yes, I've spoken to Prime Minister Siniora a couple of times, as a matter of fact, yesterday. I'm also speaking with the Israelis, as are others. The United States has been very much, with France, in the lead on this, but there are a number of countries that are talking to all the parties.

The way to think about this is that you need to have, in effect, forces stop in place, so that you don't have the large-scale military operations that really are so devastating to the country and so devastating to the people. There will have to be a phase of the flowing of Lebanese security forces into the south. Everybody wants to have that happen as quickly as possible, but they need international assistance to do it. No one wants to see Israel permanently in Lebanon, nobody wants that. The Israelis don't want it, the Lebanese don't want it.

And so I think there's a basis here for moving forward. We are not in a position to stop after the first resolution, people are absolutely right about that. That would not be a stable equilibrium. So we need to get the first resolution, get the large-scale violence stopped, get the Lebanese forces ready to flow in, get security -- international forces to help them, and do that really rather quickly. So I want to emphasize this is a first step, not the only step.

Q Can you tell us about what the President has had to say about this, and what interactions you've had with him since you've been here?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, I've been, obviously -- and before we left Washington -- in constant contact with the President; came back from the meetings that I'd had in the Middle East and came directly to talk to him. Obviously, yesterday we've been in fairly intensive conversation about this, as we've been moving forward toward the resolution.

But his view is very strong on this, and it's not unlike what he stated at the very beginning of this crisis, when we were in, I think, Germany, when this really started, which is that this is really now an opportunity to extend the authority of the Lebanese government throughout its own territory. That really has to be the goal. Everybody is focused on the international forces, but the international forces are there to assist in the important work of getting the Lebanese to fill the vacuum that has developed in the south. That's, in large part, why you have a kind of state-within-a-state operating there. The Lebanese have also been very clear -- Prime Minister Siniora, for instance, when he was in Rome, that the Lebanese understand their responsibilities under the Taif Accords, which were signed in 1989, and under resolution 1559, which says that there should be no armed groups outside the authority of the Lebanese government.

The very fact that that Taif Accord was signed in 1989 lets you know how longstanding this problem is in Lebanon, and it goes well back before that. It took some almost 10 years to get to the Taif Accords. So you have to understand that we're trying to deal with a problem that has been festering and brewing in Lebanon now for years and years and years.

And so it's not going to be solved by one resolution in the Security Council. This is one step to stop the large-scale violence so that we can begin to then address these underlying problems. But what this resolution has in it that would not have been there if we had done this a couple weeks ago is a kind of political basis for creating those conditions in which the parties -- in which Lebanon can flow its authority south.

Q Are you expecting a unanimous vote in the U.N., and what can you tell us about any work that's being done on the second resolution?

SECRETARY RICE: I would, obviously, always hope for a unanimous vote.

Q (Inaudible.)

SECRETARY RICE: All that I know is that both the French permanent representative, Jean-Marc de La Sabliere and John Bolton, our permanent representative, represented the conversations in the Security Council yesterday as positive. We will see -- there will be further discussions today. I would urge, and I think we are urging all states of the Security Council now to back this resolution as a first step toward not just an end to the crisis, but as a first step to moving to a more stable set of solutions. So that's -- the mood in the Council has been very good, and I think you will see support for the resolution.

Yes.

Q What about the second resolution?

SECRETARY RICE: Oh, the second resolution. This resolution anticipates a second resolution. I think work will begin on that very, very quickly. People have, obviously, ideas, and have been talking about it. There's been some work done, but it's not been done in a setting with the United States and other parties.

Q Madam Secretary, Hezbollah has indicated that it will not cease its attacks until every last Israeli soldier is out of Lebanon, not to be prepared -- but out of Lebanon. Is that a necessary, in your mind, first step at ending the immediate violence, is for a complete Israeli withdrawal?

SECRETARY RICE: The resolution does not anticipate and does not expect a complete Israeli withdrawal in the first phase, no, because this is a resolution that ceases hostilities with forces in place, but requires that the major military operations, offensive military operations, the firing of rockets -- the kind of violence that really is so hard on civilian populations -- that that's got to stop.

Now I know Hezbollah has said all kinds of things. I've heard, "we should have an immediate cease-fire," I've heard, "we'll keep fighting," I've heard all of those things. What we need to focus on, when this Security Council resolution is passed, we're going to know who really did want to stop violence and who didn't. We've had an awful lot of calls over the last couple of weeks for an immediate cessation of hostilities, an immediate cessation of hostilities. The United States has been very clear that we did have to have some political basis to make clear that that cessation of hostilities was not going to countenance a return to the status quo ante. This resolution does that. And now we're going to see who is for peace and who isn't.

Q Who should rebuild Lebanon after the violence has ceased? Is it the U.S. role?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, the U.S. will certainly play a role in the rebuilding of Lebanon. We have committed to that. The Rome declaration commits to an international effort to rebuild Lebanon -- not just a U.S. effort, not just a French effort, a complete international effort. And let's remember, too, that the Saudis have already made known that they're going to make a very large donation to the rebuilding of Lebanon. So I think the rebuilding of Lebanon will be well underway when the violence stops and when the political constituents are there.

Q Madam Secretary, two questions. The first, a couple of weeks ago, when there were calls for an immediate cessation of violence, you said you wanted to provide a permanent solution. Why shouldn't we see this two-state solution as precisely what you were arguing against then? And second, how is that you came up with agreement that didn't have fundamentals that the Lebanese wanted, like an immediate cessation of violence, a withdrawal of the Israeli troops and a return of displaced civilians?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, there's a very simple answer to the second: there are things the Israelis wanted and things the Lebanese wanted, and everybody wasn't going to get everything that they wanted. This is the international community's effort to bring about an equitable, reasonable basis for a cessation of hostilities of the kind that are so devastating to civilian populations. And so I would expect that there is going to be a lot of discussion on how to move forward. But I would hope that the parties are all going to take the opportunity before them to stop the kind of terrible violence that we've been seeing against Israeli populations, against Lebanese populations.

On the first point, we do insist that there is -- that when there is a cease-fire, that it's going to have to be on an enduring basis, which is why bringing forces in to support Lebanon's flow of its own forces to the south and to support conditions where there can't be a return to the status quo ante is so important.

But what we wanted to do was to not have an unconditional cease-fire with no political principles, no view of what the south is going to look like when this is finally resolved. It took some time -- the G8 statement was the first step. It then took some time going out to the region, talking to the Lebanese, talking to the Israelis. Let me remind that at the Rome conference, Prime Minister Siniora did a lot of work in his council of ministers to get backing, including of the two Hezbollah ministers in his cabinet, of a set of a principles that could move this forward. Now, Lebanon isn't going to have all of the principles there, or the full principles there that they would like; Israel, I'm sure, is not going to have all of them there that they would like.

But this is a first step. It's a good basis for ending large-scale violence, it's a good basis for creating conditions in which there can't be a return to the status quo ante, and it's a good basis for beginning to flow the authority of the Lebanese government into the south so that this can't happen again.

Last question.

Q Madam Secretary, what role have China and Russia played in this latest negotiations. Did we (inaudible.)

SECRETARY RICE: Well, yes. I know that there have been conversations with the Russians, including conversations with the Russian leadership about this. And we have talked with the Russians, as well as have others, and so far we've gotten positive soundings from Russia, but I don't want to speak for them. This is an important meeting today, to take account. Yesterday the meeting was simply to have Jean-Marc de La Sabliere and John Bolton go through the resolution with the other permanent representatives, let them know what was in it, the thinking behind each of those steps. I'm sure that overnight instructions were then passed to delegations. They then will have discussion today.

We will see where we are at the end of the day, but the urgency now is on this basis, which we and the French think is a very good basis, and which we heard very favorable remarks about yesterday, to try to vote this resolution in the next day or two days, and then to allow a stop to the large-scale violence, so that we can move to the next step, which is starting to flow the authority of the Lebanese government and the Lebanese forces into its own territory.

I'm sorry, last question. Yes.

Q Same region, different problem. Israel has arrested the speaker of the Palestinian parliament overnight. Was that a helpful step?

SECRETARY RICE: You mean, in the Palestinian Territories. We've expressed concerns about what may be going on in the Palestinian Territories, too, as you know. I went there and saw Abu Mazen. It would be a very good step if, as they have been told to do by everybody in the region, if the military wing of Hamas would release that abducted Israeli soldier. That needs to be done.

It's probably not surprising that this took place by the military wing of Hamas at the time that Abu Mazen was moving towards some understandings with the political -- the people who were elected from Hamas about how they might move toward Quartet principles. It's also, perhaps, not surprising that it took place at a time when there was anticipation that there might be a meeting between Prime Minister Olmert and President Abbas.

There is a method to what these terrorists and extremist groups are doing -- they are trying to destroy the foundation for democratic and moderate states in Lebanon, in Iraq, in the Palestinian Territories. That's what they're trying to do. And so it's not surprising that people who have no future in a moderate and democratic Middle East would try to destroy it. So that's really the way forward. We're continuing to work with both the Israelis and the Palestinians, as well, even as the situation in Lebanon unfolds.

Q Are you -- go to New York?

SECRETARY RICE: I will go to New York when and if necessary. My understanding is that we really believe that we can, as I said last week, we really now -- were within days. I think we said that when I came back from the Middle East. I think we're still within a couple of days. And I would expect that there will be a meeting in New York very shortly, probably within the next couple of days.

All right. Thanks. Thank you very much.

END 8:18 A.M. CDT

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