

**MEDIA AVAILABILITY WITH SECRETARY OF STATE CONDOLEEZZA RICE AND JAMES WOLFENSOHN,  
SPECIAL ENVOY FOR GAZA DISENGAGEMENT FOLLOWING THEIR MEETING  
THE TREATY ROOM, THE STATE DEPARTMENT, WASHINGTON, D.C.  
4:05 P.M. EDT, MONDAY, MAY 1, 2006**

SEC. RICE: Good afternoon. I'm here with my colleague and good friend, Jim Wolfensohn, who has served as the special envoy for the Quartet on matters initially of Gaza disengagement in the Middle East. When Jim had really not even yet stepped down as the president of the World Bank, we asked him to take on a new task rather than going to play the cello immediately, and that new task was to assist the Palestinians and the Israelis in a coordinated withdrawal of Israeli military forces and settlers from Gaza. That has taken place and taken place successfully, despite all of the difficulty that was associated with it. And in fact, the Israelis do not any longer occupy Gaza; it is Palestinian territory. And that is in no small part thanks to the tireless efforts of Jim Wolfensohn, who worked day and night to make certain that that could happen.

Jim had initially intended to step down in December, but we thought that the work was not yet done, and asked him to continue for a few months until there could be elections in the Palestinian territories and in Israel, so that we had a fuller picture of where this was all going. Jim was very active in supporting the need for financial assistance to the interim government, the government between the elections and the installation of a new Palestinian government, and was able to help secure funding for that Palestinian interim government. And that was very greatly appreciated.

Jim then decided that this was the right time for him to step down as envoy. But as I've said to him, I hope he will keep his uniform not very far from the door, because while conditions currently are very complicated in the Palestinian-Israeli issue, we all hope, and all look forward to, and are going to continue to work for movement toward the road map, and hopefully a return to the road map. And should conditions warrant, I really do hope that we can call on Jim again in an active role, because he has done a very fine job and I know would do a very fine job again.

In the meantime, however, I expect to be able to take advantage of his advice and counsel, as will other members of the Quartet.

And, Jim, I just want to thank you for the service that you've done, but to note that I fully expect that you will do further service in the future. So thank you very much.

MR. WOLFENSOHN: Well, thank you very much, Madame Secretary. It's been a wonderful more than 12 months now since I took on this job. And I'm grateful to you and to the president for the honor that you showed me by asking me to participate.

As all of you know, it's been a fairly difficult period, but one in which I think we have made quite a lot of progress. But in the recent two, three months, the political events are such that I think the issues are above my pay grade. These are issues between the Israelis and the United States -- the principals, if you like. And with the government of Hamas having taken over with the Palestinians, it's a very difficult moment to be able to try and negotiate any independent type of arrangement that would affect the future of Gaza and the West Bank because of the emphasis that Hamas puts on the destruction of the state of Israel, and the less than communicative relationship with that state.

So it seemed to me that this was a good moment to offer my resignation to the secretary and to the Quartet, but with the caveat that if they think at any stage that I can be of help, and conditions change, and they would want me to do it, then I would be honored and delighted to do it.

So Madame Secretary, let me thank you and the president, and so it's been an experience and I greatly appreciate it.

SEC. RICE: Thank you.

Q Madame Secretary -- (off mike). On another humanitarian situation, Bob Zoellick is on his way. From your assessment, do you think an agreement is within reach?

SEC. RICE: Well, an agreement is always within reach if the parties prepared to take the steps to overcome their differences, and it is really urgent and necessary that the parties take those steps. That's why Deputy Secretary Zoellick decided to go personally to Abuja to try and see what differences need to be bridged. I don't want to try to make a prediction, Barry, about whether not we can get to an agreement. I think it was a good thing that they African Union agreed to extend the talks. As long as the parties are talking, there's always a chance for an agreement, and the president feels very strongly and very passionately about the need to get an agreement, about the need to get a robust security force, a blue-hatted force in to be able to protect the innocent people of Darfur. We feel very strongly that it is time to move that process forward, and understanding that an accord in Abuja would certainly help to move that process forward.

It is incumbent on us to do everything that we can to try and see if we can't help the parties bridge their differences and help the very fine negotiator, Mr. Salim Salim, to do his work. He asked Bob if he would come, and so Bob is shortly to be on an airplane on his way to Abuja.

Q Mr. Wolfensohn, do you think that you have economic pressure on Hamas -- or do you think U.S. economic pressure will either weaken or strengthen Hamas? And maybe, Madame Secretary, if you could respond to that as well. And why is there no replacement for you? And secondly, what will General Dayton's role be -- or thirdly?

SEC. RICE: Let me just say on General Dayton we are assessing that situation. There obviously continue to be security concerns on the ground as well. If we believe that conditions were such that a special envoy could really do his work at this particular time, we wouldn't be seeking a replacement. Jim Wolfensohn, I hope, would be staying. And so that's why there isn't a replacement.

And what we need to do is to try over the next period of time to get the political conditions right so that we can move forward. Nobody wants to be in a situation in which the prospects for the two- state solution to which we are all devoted do not seem immediately before us. And so we're going to work very hard on trying to get the political conditions right. We just have a new -- we'll just have a new Israeli government at the end of this week. We would hope to have discussions with them. We continue to hope that Hamas will take the will of the international community seriously and set the minimum conditions for engagement with a party -- with a partner that the Quartet has laid out.

And if those political conditions can come into place, then perhaps we can move forward. But it is really right now the absence of appropriate political conditions.

But let me be very clear, we will continue to work President Abbas, who is, after all, the elected president of the Palestinian Authority, and to see what we can do to support him and to help -- to see what he can do to help create those conditions as well.

Finally, we are accelerating our efforts to get humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian people because we do not want the Palestinian people to suffer. They have needs, and we're going to try to meet them.

MR. WOLFENSOHN: Well, I would simply like to say that I think this last statement by the secretary is really crucial, because it would surprise me if one could win by getting all the kids out of school or starving the Palestinians. And I don't think anyone in the Quartet believes that to be the policy, although sometimes it is made to appear that that's what it is. I think that's a losing gambit.

But I do think that Palestinians need to understand that it is not business as usual. Here you have a Palestinian group which has said that it wants to destroy its neighbor. And I guess if Canada did that to the United States, or New Zealand did it to Australia, the reaction would not be very positive in terms of the other state. That's what you're finding here. I think the Palestinians need to understand and to accept that the future has to be one where the issues, however difficult, need to be resolved, but that you don't start by telling the other side that you're going to shoot them. (Chuckling) I find that quite understandable. And I think the situation that we're now in is to try and find our way through that situation to a point where there can be a negotiated solution that is acceptable to both sides.

Q Madame Secretary, just on another aspect on Sudan. While the peace talks progressed in Abuja, there's other areas where there doesn't seem to be any progress at all on Darfur in terms of trying to get an expanded U.N. force in there, in trying to get NATO to agree on exactly what sort of expanded proposal it could do, even though President Bush said he wanted to take the lead. The United States has been very forthright on this issue. But do you think that the international community is being a bit slow to respond in these two areas?

SEC. RICE: The international community has got to respond. None of us want to see this situation in Darfur continue and/or worsen. And I was just at NATO. I would say that I think there is a very favorable disposition within NATO to respond to the AU and U.N. entreaties, when they come, for what NATO might do to support. Nobody is talking about NATO forces, combat forces on the ground. Everybody understands that this will be largely an African Union mission, with perhaps some other countries involved in the mission. But we need to get the planning done for that mission so that when -- it takes time. It takes time to generate forces. It takes time to put together the logistical support. I have heard Kofi Annan be extremely strong in saying that he wants to see a more robust force.

But frankly, we need to shake the trees a little bit, shake the bureaucracy a little bit and say to people it's not acceptable to wait any longer for at least the planning for a robust security force. Conditions are only as good as they are because of the tireless work of humanitarian aid workers, who face a lot of dangers themselves from the violence in the area.

So we need to work on all these fronts. We need to get -- work on the humanitarian side. I am going to talk to Jim Morris of the World Food Program. I understand that there are some problems with support to the World Food Program. I would call on everybody to really support that. The United States is, I think, in the high 80s, 80 percent of the support. We need to get support for the humanitarian effort. We need to get the effort moving on the planning for the force. And we need an AU response to NATO about what is needed. And so yes, the movement is too slow, and we'll press very hard to get it quicker.

STAFF: All right, thank you.

Q (Off mike) -- Palestinian territories -- (off mike) -- you talked about it reaching a crisis point. (It is ?) reaching a crisis point. And Madame Secretary, aren't you worried about a humanitarian crisis if salaries aren't paid and if Israel's closure policy -- (off mike)?

SEC. RICE: Well, I'm first concerned that we find ourselves in a situation in which the world is united on the need for a negotiated solution and on a two-state solution and where one of the presumed parties will not accept the existence -- even the existence of or the right to exist -- of the other party. We've simply got to get through that. It can't be business as usual. We are looking to see what we can do to continue to help the Palestinian people, to continue to help Mahmoud Abbas, because he is the elected president.

But the goal right now has to be for everyone to send as strong a message as possible to Hamas that -- and by the way, it's not the United States, it is the international community that's sending this message -- that the best interests of the Palestinian people are served by a peace process and by constructive engagement with their Israeli neighbor.

After all, there are important links between these economies, between these territories, that cannot be severed. And the interests of the Palestinian people are best served that way. And you can't have that kind of relationship if you don't believe in the right of the other party to exist.

Thank you.

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