

# US secretary of state offers Europe a “partnership”

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“*The lady doth protest too much, methinks.*” This line from Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* comes to mind when one studies the speech given by the US secretary of state, Condoleezza Rice, February 8 in Paris. Her appearance in the venerable auditorium of the elite Institute of Political Sciences (known in France as “Sciences Po”) before 500 politicians, intellectuals and a handful of students, came as the climax of her one-week tour of seven European capitals, in addition to stops in Tel Aviv and the occupied territories.

Rice called for the opening up of “a new chapter” in transatlantic relations. She declared that the history of the United States and that of France were “intertwined.... Our history is one of shared values, of shared sacrifice and of shared successes,” she said. “We witnessed the power of truth” in 1989, when the Berlin Wall was brought down, she went on.

“This is a time of unprecedented opportunity for the transatlantic alliance,” she intoned, and demanded that the “pursuit of global freedom” become the “organising principle of the 21st century.” That is the way to achieve historical “global advances for justice and prosperity,” as well as for “liberty and for peace,” etc.

From a superficial point of view there appeared to be no connection between the woman making her speech in Paris last week and the US national security adviser who sharply criticised the French and German governments in 2003 because of their opposition to the invasion of Iraq, going so far as to formulate the slogan—“punish France, ignore Germany and forgive Russia.” This time around she used her entire diplomatic vocabulary to woo over her former critics.

In terms of content, however, she made no concessions. Issues in dispute remained either unmentioned or Rice merely reiterated her previous

positions. Thus many commentators noted her failure to address a single word to the issue of the growing US conflict with Iran. While Washington is using the Iranian nuclear program as a pretext for bringing about regime change in Tehran, Paris, Berlin and also London are working toward a diplomatic solution.

The influential French daily newspaper *Le Monde* commented: “Not on a single occasion in her speech did Ms. Rice include the Iranian nuclear affair among the tasks which Americans and Europeans have to tackle together in the Middle East.... Simply forgotten? Or an expression of scepticism with regard to the diplomatic efforts of the Europeans?”

Other disputed questions which Rice avoided in her speech included the use of NATO troops in Iraq (up till now Paris and Berlin have strictly refused to send their own soldiers); the planned elimination by the European Union of the existing weapons embargo against China (a move strongly rejected by the US); the refusal of the US to sign the Kyoto climate protocol and recognize the International Criminal Court; the British-French proposal for debt relief to developing countries, which Washington objects to; and many other issues.

Above all, however, Rice did not offer the slightest self-criticism of past American foreign policy and US operations against Iraq. The “preventive war” doctrine, according to which Washington assumes the right to attack other countries arbitrarily in contravention of international law, remains in force. Indeed it has even been expanded. In Paris, Rice repeated word for word the formulations used by Bush in his inauguration speech whereby the “fight against tyranny and for liberty” has replaced the “fight against the terror.”

The *World Socialist Web Site* commented on this paradigm shift at that time: “As a matter of practical policy, the morphing of the struggle against terror into

the struggle against tyranny has immediate and profound consequences: it both lowers the threshold for American military action and vastly expands the range of its targets.

“The redefinition of the Bush Doctrine of preventive war no longer requires that the United States be endangered because one or another state has, and plans to use at some point in the future, a weapon of mass destruction or some other form of terror against the US. Rather, it is enough for the United States to identify whatever country it chooses as a ‘tyranny’ where violence is, in various unseen and mysterious ways, gathering and multiplying.” [“The logic of the irrational: Bush’s inaugural address and the global strategy of American imperialism”]

Rice’s demand that the Europeans help bring “freedom and liberty” to the Arab world must be understood in this sense. In the context of the so-called broader Middle East initiative the entire region from Morocco to Afghanistan is to be remodelled in line with the demands and desires of the US government. The “status quo” in this region, Rice stressed on three occasions, must be changed. She refrained from open threats against Iran in Paris, preferring to set her sights on Syria. Lebanon, dominated by Syria, must attain its “full sovereignty,” as quickly as possible, she demanded, and warned Damascus against seeking to influence the “free democratic election” in Lebanon planned for this spring.

Essentially Rice’s offer of partnership boils down to Europe assuming the role of junior partner in the enterprises undertaken by American imperialism. To this end, she made a few concessions that do nothing, however, to alter the substance of US foreign policy. Thus she praised the UN in the strongest terms and promised to take up once again the so-called “road map” agreement between Israel and the Palestinians.

In Europe, however, the truce that Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon agreed upon immediately after Rice’s brief visit was met with scepticism. A similar agreement was reached during the preparatory phase of the Iraq war, which then came to nothing. As long as Israel continues building illegal settlements in the West Bank and Abbas has nothing to offer the Palestinians aside from oppression, the prevailing opinion in Europe is that no peace will be possible.

Washington is seeking closer relations with Europe for a number of reasons.

On the one hand, the Iraq war has become a debacle with no end in sight and the Bush regime is trying to shift a part of the financial and military burden onto its European “partners.”

On the other hand, the focus of American foreign policy has begun to shift. After the success of “regime change” in Kiev, brought about with substantial US support, Russian President Vladimir Putin is now increasingly coming under pressure from America. In addition, China is considered by many US strategists to be the most important threat to American hegemony in the medium- and long-term. In order to prevent the Europeans from developing closer links with Russia and China as part of their conflict with the US, Washington is now seeking closer cooperation with Europe.

The US initiative has met with a positive response from some sections of the European ruling elite. Deep differences of opinion over the relationship to the US are apparent in nearly all European countries, and are expressed in parties and lobbies from across the political spectrum. Above all, those politicians who are fixated with law-and-order policies and the “defence of the Christian West” favour a close cooperation between European and American imperialisms in light of the growing power of new and threatening rivals. Such political forces, however, are opposed by those who openly recognise the conflict in the fight for markets and raw materials between American interests, on the one side, and European, on the other.



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