

World Knowledge Forum 2012

October 9, 2012, Condoleezza Rice - *Creating Breakthrough – What The U.S. Should Do?*

On October 9th, 2012, former U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice addressed the 2012 World Knowledge Forum on some of the greatest contemporary challenges to international governance. In her speech, entitled *Creating Breakthrough – What The U.S. Should Do?* she pointed to three great shocks in the last decade as the source of these challenges, and described how the world community, in particular the U.S. and China, could work together towards addressing them.

Dr. Rice first discussed how the September 11th terrorist attacks on the U.S. had changed the world's thoughts on security. She described how the international community started worrying more about ungoverned and lawless places, rather than strong states. Dr. Rice described how the 2008 collapse of the financial sector "challenged our conceptions of economic prosperity throughout the world, causing instability. [Governments] found themselves having made promises to their populations that they cannot keep."

She continued by addressing recent political and social upheaval in the Arab world, which had expanded personal liberties but had not solved the region's leadership problems. "The third governance challenge is that freedom and democracy are not the same thing. We see people seizing their freedom, but they don't have the democratic institutions," she said.

Dr. Rice then focused her discussion on how these problems affected Asia in particular, and how the U.S. could expect to contribute to leadership in this arena. She said, "Whenever you have this kind of upheaval, there's always one country that is willing to set the agenda and try to create rules for the international system, then be strong enough to have an impact."

She described the strong U.S. military infrastructure in Asia, "which has kept the peace for years, and which remains capable of dealing with any threat one can imagine." However, she added that thinking of the basic ways of promoting peace and stability mainly through military mechanisms would be a mistake. Dr. Rice focused on America's increasing economic connections in the region, pointing to South Korea, ASEAN countries, and Australia.

The great challenge in this arena, she argues, is whether or not it is possible to channel China's rising influence to build a prosperous Asia. Fortunately, Dr. Rice contends, the relationship does not have the strictly adversarial tenor of U.S.-Soviet interactions during the Cold War. She argued that it is affected by conflictual elements. From territorial conflicts with other East Asian countries and North Korean containment, to sharing a disparate but mutually supportive economic system, the U.S.-China relationship is complex.

Dr. Rice emphasized, however, that the two countries should focus on cooperative elements, which should include the joint dedication to maintaining security and deterring terrorism in the region. She also pointed to the fact that China is more actively participating in free trade agreements, with 18 signed in the last four years. She urged the U.S., which has only signed three in the same time span, to follow suit, as part of an effort to lead "from our economic strength, not military."

On the issue of whether China's rising prominence would pose a challenge to the U.S.' overall global preeminence, Dr. Rice was confident: "It's not that there aren't other states that are important powers, but the U.S. is the only country of that kind with a global reach."

Despite claims to the contrary, China, she argued, would not be able to execute a singularly upward rise, either in economic or political power. She pointed to the rise of personal technology and social media in

China, in spite of the government's efforts to limit such access. "People rightfully focus on the technological side, but these are all accelerants of underlying conditions," she said. In fact, she generalized that citizens in authoritarian regimes around the world would increasingly use these tools to assert greater personal rights.

She urged leaders of authoritarian regimes to stay in front of these kinds of problems and allow for democratic reforms. Addressing a population equipped with social media is uncharted territory for these types of regimes. Dr. Rice emphasized that this would involve making mistakes, and that admitting to those mistakes was an integral part of competent leadership. "But," she continued, "you can't dwell on them because you will then not move forward and you will become fearful of taking bold action. I would really rather take bold action and make a mistake than be so cautious that the moment passes by and you don't address the problem."