

RELEASE IN PART B6

From: Abedin, Huma <AbedinH@state.gov>
Sent: Friday, December 7, 2012 4:05 AM
To: H
Subject: Fw: WP - In the Loop - Susan Rice and musical chairs

From: Nuland, Victoria J
Sent: Friday, December 07, 2012 02:42 AM
To: Reines, Philippe I; Sullivan, Jacob J; Abedin, Huma; Gordon, Philip H
Subject: Fw: WP - In the Loop - Susan Rice and musical chairs

From: PA Clips [mailto:paclips@state.gov]
Sent: Thursday, December 06, 2012 09:46 PM
To: PA-Monitoring-Group-DL; Balenger, De'Ara N; (U) Masonis, Melinda J (PACE); NEA-Press-DL; DS PA Media; Shore, Rhonda H; Atchison, Mark C; Moe, Grace T
Subject: WP - In the Loop - Susan Rice and musical chairs

Susan Rice and musical chairs
 Washington Post – In the Loop
 Updated: Thursday, December 6, 8:59 PM EST
 By Al Kamen

White House observers note an interesting game of musical chairs underway — or maybe dominoes is more appropriate — with U.N. Ambassador Susan Rice at the center.

Here's what we're hearing is the state of play amongst some very interested parties.

While it's well known that Obama senior adviser Valerie Jarrett is (after President Obama himself) Rice's biggest supporter to be nominated as secretary of state, self-interest has created a coalition of strange bedfellows who are also backing her, despite the deepening opposition from Republicans in Congress.

(Warning: This may require a scorecard.)

Now here's the lineup: Tom Donilon, the current national security adviser, is said to want to keep his job for two more years.

If Rice gets the nod for SecState and Obama rolls the GOP opposition, the feeling is that Donilon is safe. If she doesn't get the nomination, she would be a logical choice to replace Donilon as national security adviser.

Now, if Donilon stays in his job, the word is that his current deputy, Denis McDonough, has been promised the top spot in two years when Donilon would leave.

But if Rice becomes national security adviser, McDonough is stuck. (Unless McDonough becomes chief of staff, a job that we're hearing is going to be open because incumbent Jack Lew is leaving, either to be Treasury secretary or, if not, then likely to return to New York to be with his family.)

Samantha Power, a special assistant to the president, is said to be looking to get Rice's current job as U.N. ambassador, so she has thrown her support behind the Rice nomination. This, despite Power having written an article in Atlantic Monthly in 2001 that claimed Rice had tried to stop Clinton administration officials from describing events in Rwanda as a "genocide." (At the time, Rice was on the National Security Council.)

Meanwhile, there is some movement among White House insiders to walk away from the Rice nomination. The argument is that Obama would have to spend too much political capital defending Rice and might come up empty on the "fiscal cliff."

This argument, while not carrying the day at this point, has gained currency as opposition to Rice has deepened in the Republican caucus.

This is the sort of game that could only be played in Washington — or in the Kremlin in the good old days.

Non-denial denials

Look for the word "no," in this dispatch from our colleague Anne Gearan when folks in Ireland asked Secretary of State Hillary Clinton about her plans and whether she will run for president.

"I'm right now too focused on what I'm doing to complete all the work we have ahead of us before I do step down," Clinton said. "I am frankly looking forward to returning to living a life that enjoys a lot of simple pleasures and gives me time for family and friends and other pursuits."

Did you see the word "no"? (Probably wise, given her latest poll numbers.)

There also were questions about a notion — first floated last week by gossip columnist Michael Sneed in the Chicago Sun-Times, that former president Bill Clinton, who boasts Irish ancestry, might be named ambassador to the Emerald Isle.

"It's a perfect venue for Bill's blarney and blather; it's a great place to bring a hoped-for grandchild," Sneed mused, and a "tranquil place" for Hillary "to wind down before running . . . in 2016 and he has a grateful President Obama who would do almost anything for him."

The Irish press naturally picked up on the suggestion. While a president-to-ambassador move would be unusual, former vice president Walter Mondale was named ambassador to Japan, John Quincy Adams ran for Congress and William Howard Taft went to the Supreme Court.

It appears Clinton actually took the question seriously — or at least graciously:

"I cannot comment on what President Obama might do in the second term," she said. "Obviously it's his decision, but I would think that my husband will be here many times in the future and doing the work that he's been doing without having to have the title of ambassador."

Hmm. Didn't see the word "no" there either.

A Pentagon departure

Jeh Johnson, the Defense Department's top lawyer, will resign at the end of the year and return to private practice, the military announced Thursday.

Johnson, who has been the general counsel at the Defense Department since 2009 and was the Air Force's general counsel under President Clinton, had a tenure marked by controversy. He has defended increased use of drone strikes,

oversaw a reform of military commission trials for terrorism suspects, and co-authored the Pentagon's landmark 2010 report concluding that ending the military's "don't ask, don't tell" policy would not harm military readiness.

In a recent speech at the Oxford Union, Johnson also made headlines when he indicated that the military's fight against al-Qaeda wasn't open ended. Our colleague Peter Finn reports that Johnson contemplated the day when the terrorist network is so degraded the U.S. fight against the organization will no longer be considered an armed conflict and terrorism will become — again — a law enforcement matter.

"On the present course, there will come a tipping point . . . at which so many of the leaders and operatives of al-Qaeda and its affiliates have been killed or captured, and the group is no longer able to attempt or launch a strategic attack against the United States, such that al-Qaeda as we know it, the organization that our Congress authorized the military to pursue in 2001, has been effectively destroyed," Johnson said.

Johnson is expected to return to the law firm of Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison, where he was a partner.

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B6