



Interview on NPR With Juan Williams

Secretary Colin L. Powell

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MR. WILLIAMS: Mr. Secretary, thanks for giving us this time.

SECRETARY POWELL: My pleasure, Juan.

MR. WILLIAMS: Mr. Secretary, Iraq will hold elections on January 30th. Are you giving any consideration, is the Administration giving any consideration to a delay of those elections, given the ongoing violence, the threats against voters, as well as the military saying they can't assure that there will be adequate security in 4 of the 17 provinces in Iraq?

SECRETARY POWELL: No, and the reason is because the Iraqi Interim Government and the Iraqi Election Commission wants to move forward with these elections and all the polling that we have seen and that we have been able to do makes it clear that the Iraqi people want to have an election. And we can't delay the election because there are terrorists and murderers and former regime elements who are trying to keep that election from happening; to delay it, it means they win.

Now, there are security problems and we've been in almost nonstop meetings for the last couple of days reviewing those problems, and the coalition forces are adjusting their tactics and strategy and deployments to try to deal with these security problems, as are Iraqi forces. And we hope that the Iraqi people will come out in resounding strength, not only in the 14 provinces that are secure, but in the others as well, to make a clear demonstration to the murderers that they will not succeed.

We faced the same situation in Afghanistan a few months ago, where people said, it's too insecure. Folks will not come out. And they did. They came out, and they faced danger, and they had a successful election. Fourteen million Iraqis are now registered.

MR. WILLIAMS: Now, once the elections take place is that enough for the U.S. then to begin considering the pullout of military forces?

SECRETARY POWELL: The U.S. deployment there is related to the security environment and our deployment will start to drawdown as the security environment improves, and we hope that with the continuing buildup of Iraqi forces they can take on a greater proportion of the burden, and thereby, we can start pulling back.

But also, if there is an elected government that really reflects the will of the Iraqi people and it is not a government that's been put in place by the coalition or by UN resolution, that should serve to also improve the security situation because the Iraqi people know it's their government that's being assaulted not an appointed government, appointed by either the U.S. coalition or the United Nations. And so, our size and our deployment will be a function of the security situation, and as I say, that will be a function of how quickly we improve the capability and grow the size of the Iraqi forces.

MR. WILLIAMS: Are there concrete benchmarks that you have in mind, in terms of the progress of that Iraqi government, that will signal when the U.S. can begin to pull down its level of troops, as well as its level of involvement in Iraq?

SECRETARY POWELL: Well, I would like to see our troops come out as quickly as possible. The Iraqis would like to see our troops come out as quickly as possible. But it's not possible right now to say that by the end of 2005, we'll be down to such and such a number. It really is dependent upon the situation. But with the money we're putting into the growth of the new Iraqi army and national guard and police force, I believe that during 2005 they will be able to assume a greater burden and with the assumption of that greater burden, the burden on our troops should go down and we should start to see our numbers going in the other direction. But I cannot give you a timeline as to when they'll all be home.

MR. WILLIAMS: Do you have any concern about troop levels, at this point, to achieve a secure environment?

SECRETARY POWELL: Well, our troop level is fixed by our commanders. They are satisfied with the troop level as it is now. The issue now is not more American troops or coalition troops for the long haul, but more Iraqi troops for the long haul, and that's where all of our resources and energy are now going.

MR. WILLIAMS: You've just returned from looking over the disaster caused by the tsunami. You have a piece in *Foreign Policy* magazine on long-term foreign aid, and economic development is key now to U.S. foreign policy. Is the tsunami a part of that story, and is it sure to continue given that you won't be here shortly?

SECRETARY POWELL: Yeah. The President over the past four years, and I'm pleased to have been the Secretary of State, to be his agent, to make this happen, has doubled development assistance to the developing world. You tell that to people and they can't believe it. They think, well, you guys are not doing what you should be doing in the developing world. We are. We have doubled the amount of development money going. We have created a new program called Millennium Challenge Account. You know, it started off with a billion dollars a year, and it's going to be growing in the years ahead, focusing on developing countries that are committed to democracy and human rights and the rule of law and economic freedom.

*We're also putting \$15 million into HIV/AIDS, the greatest weapon of mass destruction. Now, why do I link these two together, development aid and HIV/AIDS? Because it all relates to poverty alleviation. It all relates to helping these developing countries create functioning economies and a healthy population so that this healthy population can be educated using this development assistance and they can create conditions within the country that will then attract trade and allow them to participate in an open trading system.

All of this is designed to break countries out of the pattern of just receiving aid and never really improving the lives of the citizens of that country. Along comes something like the tsunami, an unprecedented natural disaster that affected roughly, you know, about 12 countries, over thousands of miles and a couple of continents, and development is immediately set back, especially in a place like Banda Aceh. Conflict is underway there and Banda Aceh and northern Sumatra and Indonesia looks like a small atomic bomb went off, scraped clean homes, mosques, bridges, cars, people, just gone; the same thing in Phuket, a resort area in Thailand, or in parts of Sri Lanka, and that sets them back economically and development-wise.

So that's why it's so important that this massive outpouring of aid we have seen from the international community be used to reestablish these communities, rebuild the infrastructure so that they can get about the business of economic development and helping their people to a better life.

MR. WILLIAMS: Now, when I asked the question, I was thinking in terms of economic development, foreign aid, as part of a way of dealing with anti

American sentiment and making sure that there isn't a ground that would hold anti-American sentiment. Do you think in those terms?

SECRETARY POWELL: Yeah, I certainly do. If, such as we have seen in the last couple of days, Americans are seen as people who come in time of need to help a people in need, and we are seen as compassionate, and we are compassionate, we are seen as generous, and we have always been generous, then I think that not only goes a long way toward helping these people out of the difficulties they find themselves in, but also in creating a better impression about the United States Government.

I've made it clear in all of the speeches I have given recently that what we are doing in South Asia is not being done because there are Muslims in need, but because there are humans in need, most of them, many of them happen to be Muslims, not all of them, some are Buddhists. And that's what America is all about. That's what our value system is about.

Sometimes our value system is mistaken and not looked upon properly by people around the world. They think that all we're interested in is preemption; all we're interested in is counterterrorism. But if you look at what we have done over the past four years, we have been interested in poverty alleviation, economic development, the rule of law, democracy, HIV/AIDS, measles, going after these root causes of distress throughout the world that keep people down, in order to deal with these root causes and allow people to rise up. And I think that is as much an impression of America as any of the negative impressions that are out there.

MR. WILLIAMS: Well, do you worry with your departure that this emphasis on aid and the message it sends to the world will be in decline and that instead other centers of power operating in the U.S. Government will instead focus solely on anti-terrorists measures?

SECRETARY POWELL: No, because everything that we have done in the areas that I've just discussed were done at the initiative of the President. This was the President's foreign policy not Colin Powell's foreign -- Colin Powell doesn't have a foreign policy. The Secretary of State or Secretary of Defense, they do not have foreign policies. It's the President's foreign policy which he creates and formulates and executes in the name of the American people, and this President with, I must say, with a little modesty, [inaudible] he has been in the forefront of these kinds of issues because he believes in these issues. So it was not a hard sell with President Bush. And Dr. Rice, who is replacing me, has a commitment to these kinds of issues as well, so I'm not concerned about that.

MR. WILLIAMS: Palestinian elections, Mr. Secretary, what is the U.S. role in advancing talks now between Israel and the Palestinians in the aftermath of Mr. Abbas' election?

SECRETARY POWELL: We're very pleased at the outcome of the election. A couple of reasons: One, there was an election and it went well and went peacefully and it was fair. That was a major accomplishment. We know Mr. Abbas quite well. He was the prime minister last year and we invested in him at that time, and it didn't work out the way we would have liked because of Mr. Arafat's barriers that he put up by his presence, and now that he is gone Mr. Abbas is President of the Authority and he has already reached out to the Israelis. The Israelis have reached out to him, and so they now can be partners for peace.

The United States is a member of the group called the Quartet, which developed this roadmap for both sides to follow, stands ready to engage fully. President Bush has spoken to Mr. Abu Mazen and he invited him to come to the United States when he's ready to come to the United States, and we are going to do everything we can to help both sides reach out to each other and to get into the roadmap. The roadmap is the path to peace. It's the way to reach that goal that we have all, and that's a Palestinian state for the Palestinian people, a state that is living side by side in peace with Israel.

MR. WILLIAMS: Given the elections in Afghanistan, Iraq, now Palestine, do you see democracy as moving apace in the Middle East and is the route to Middle Eastern peace?

SECRETARY POWELL: It's a very complicated question but it's interesting that U.S. presence in Afghanistan has produced a democratic election and the U.S. presence in Iraq is going to help the Iraqi people do the same thing at the end of January. So there are these elements of democracy in terms of open, free, fair elections, and the same thing in the Palestinian part of the Middle East and people are being able for the first -- are able for the first time to choose their own leadership.

This is a new feature in the Middle East, and I think it's a good feature, but there are a lot of other things going on in the Middle East and we have been supporting it. We were one of the co-chairs of something called the Forum for the Future, which deals about reform in each of the Middle East countries. Now, what we have to be careful in discussing this is not to say America knows a right way for each of these Middle East countries to reform and you all just listen to us.

No. America has experience, America has resources, so do the other nations of the industrialized world, and we want to help the nations of the Greater Middle East and North Africa decide how to move forward with their reform. But they have to decide it. We'll help them. We'll give them guidance. We'll give them counsel. We'll give them support. But each one of these nations is so unique with its own history, culture, background and desires and aspirations that we have to help them as they decide how they wish to reform, and my experience with them over the last four years is every one of these nations know that they must reform. They have young people who want jobs and there are not enough jobs.

The greatest crisis in the Middle East today is not just the crisis between Israel and the Palestinians, the greatest crisis is unemployment, and the only way you solve unemployment is with economic development. In a 21st century globalizing world, the only way you get economic development is if you have a reformed society, resting on the rule of law, and if you have educated young people and you are creating jobs for these educated young people, and all that means is you have -- all that means you have to reform your societies to keep up with the rest of the world.

And this is not something the Americans came upon. The Arab Development Report says this. Arab experts analyzed their situation and said, we must reform, and now the United States and its partners in the industrialized world want to help the nations of the Greater Middle East and North Africa region reform.

MR. WILLIAMS: Speaking of Africa, you just came back from signing a treaty in Africa, in Sudan, but the conflict and what we have heard you refer to as genocide in Darfur continue. What is the prospect there?

SECRETARY POWELL: Well, let me start with the agreement you made reference to. I was one of the witnesses of the agreement. It was a comprehensive peace agreement signed between the Government in Khartoum, Sudanese Government, and the SPLM, the southern movement led by Dr. John Garang, bringing to an end 20 years of conflict between the north and the south. This is very good and we should celebrate this. But it doesn't deal with the conflict out in the west in Darfur, which is causing such distress. But at least this conflict is on its way to resolution, and therefore we can now focus our attention on the problem in Darfur.

I am deeply concerned about Darfur. I did characterize it as genocide last September, when I made that determination. It seemed to us to meet the qualifications or the criteria for genocide and we so called it. Now, we're waiting to see if the UN agrees with that judgment. They sent a commission in, based on the United States' determination.

But whether you call it genocide or not is not the issue. People are suffering. People are still being forced off their lands, out of their villages into these camps, and we have to work to get the Sudanese Government to stop what they are doing in supporting the Jingawit militia and we also have to get the rebels on the other side to stop what they are doing so that we don't have, you know, a response and a counter response and then a counter response.

And so, we're working with the UN and our partners in the Security Council to put additional pressure and even the threat of sanctions against the Sudanese Government to stop what they are doing and using a political process that is being sponsored by the African Union and the UN to get political reconciliation between the rebels and the Government in Khartoum.

MR. WILLIAMS: Two last questions, Mr. Secretary: One, do you have three bits of advice for your successor, Dr. Condoleezza Rice?

SECRETARY POWELL: Oh, yeah, more than three, but because they are bits of advice, I think I'll wait and give them to her privately.

MR. WILLIAMS: Do you have any concerns about her coming into this job? And people have questioned whether or not she is simply loyal to the President and doesn't have the sufficiently large [inaudible] worldview.

SECRETARY POWELL: Well, she is very loyal to the President and I've been very loyal to the President. It's one of the preconditions for being a cabinet officer. You're expected to be loyal to the President.

But I've known Dr. Rice for many, many years. She is a gifted foreign policy expert. She speaks Russian. She has great experience in European affairs. And over the last four years, as National Security Advisor, she has had -- she has gained great experience in all parts of the international portfolio. And so, I'm confident that she will be a terrific Secretary of State, and we have worked very closely over the last month and a half in the transition. And I will look forward to her arrival. And I will step offstage at that time.

MR. WILLIAMS: Do you think she's sufficiently respected in councils of the highest levels of American Government to act as a counterweight to ideas that may come from Defense, from other elements, where you were considered a man who had different ideas and were able to counter some of those [inaudible].

SECRETARY POWELL: Condi Rice has been National Security Advisor to the President of the United States sort of coordinating all of us within the National Security community for the last four years. So the answer to the question is: Yes, she's very well known in the capitals of the world and she certainly brings the toughness and experience necessary to deal with strong and different points of view. But now her challenge is not to just deal with strong and different points of view and coordinate them, she is now one of them.

MR. WILLIAMS: Really. Now, finally, you have spent your entire career in public service and many people wonder what's next. Will you continue to perform some kind of public service?

SECRETARY POWELL: Well, I'm still figuring that out. I have served in government for 40 years; 35 years as a soldier, more than 35 years now, 4 years as Secretary of State. I have also served in the Department of Energy. I have served in the Office of Management and Budget. I have served in lots of places in government, and I think public service in some capacity will always be a part of my life, whether I'm in government or not.

I think the volunteer work that I have done in the past, and I may be involved in the future, is a form of public service. As long as you're making a living and also using your time and talent to make that living, but also give something back to your community and the society that you're a part of, then you are performing public service. And I will always perform public service in some manner.

MR. WILLIAMS: When you look back now over that public service, you think back to other administrations that you served in-- you were even a White House Fellow, I believe.

SECRETARY POWELL: I have been in federal government at a senior level in every administration since Richard Nixon.

MR. WILLIAMS: When you look back -- I was thinking about --

SECRETARY POWELL: It's pretty scary, Juan, I know. That's a long time.

MR. WILLIAMS: (Laughter.) Well, you look back and you think of the relationship, I was thinking, between George Schultz, Casper Weinberger, and then the people who say, oh, well, look at the relationship between Secretary of State Colin Powell, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, are there any parallels there in the tensions and disputes?

SECRETARY POWELL: A President is well-served when he has cabinet officers who have different points of view and who are secure enough in who they are, and who are secure enough in their relationship with the President that you can argue out these points of view. A President is not well served when he has people in his cabinet who have points of view but are not prepared to argue those points of view forcefully for fear that it might leak or it looks like members of the cabinet are squabbling. [Inaudible].

It's the way our founding fathers designed the system. What makes it work is that the founding fathers also told us who was in charge. And that was the individual who was elected by the United States citizenry to be the President of the United States. And all that we do and all of the disagreements we have -- and we are mostly in agreement rather than disagreement -- but you and your colleagues never find anything interesting to write about our agreements. But notwithstanding the disagreements we may have, there is a judge. There is a referee. He's called the President. And it's his foreign policy that we're formulating, not ours.

MR. WILLIAMS: Is there one legacy that you would like people to identify as your legacy as Secretary of State?

SECRETARY POWELL: You guys are the ones who deal with legacy formulation. I just hope that as you do it, you'll say this is a guy who really loved his country and worked hard for it.

MR. WILLIAMS: Mr. Secretary, thank you for your time. You're very gracious. Thank you, sir.

SECRETARY POWELL: Thank you, Juan.

MR. WILLIAMS: Good luck to you.

SECRETARY POWELL: Take care.

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* We're also putting \$15 billion into HIV/AIDS, the greatest weapon of mass destruction.

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