



Interview on NBC's Today Show with Katie Couric

Secretary Colin L. Powell

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MS. COURIC: Mr. Secretary, good morning. Thanks so much for joining us.

SECRETARY POWELL: Thank you. Good morning, Katie.

MS. COURIC: So, Hamas and Islamic Jihad have announced a three-month ceasefire agreement. Fatah, Yasser Arafat's mainstream faction, has announced a six-month ceasefire. What do you think, Secretary Powell, is their motivation for doing this at this point in time?

SECRETARY POWELL: I think they realize that the policies they were following were not getting them anywhere, and I think they realize that the entire international community had come together on the roadmap put forward by President Bush and the Quartet. They also realized that the Palestinian leaders, the new leaders, Prime Minister Abbas and his cabinet, wanted to move forward.

What brought the situation to a positive point in Gaza was really not the ceasefire, as much as it was the Israelis and Palestinians talking to one another and agreeing that the Israeli Army Defense Forces would leave Gaza, turn it over to the Palestinian Authority under Prime Minister Abbas, and allow the people of Gaza to have free access in Gaza. And then when you match that up with the ceasefires that were announced, this is a positive development.

But the ceasefires alone won't be enough. We ultimately have to reach a point where the capability for terrorism that exists in these organizations is removed. You can't have people with guns, armed militias, inside of a state. So if we are going to have a Palestinian state, all the weapons, all the force within that state, has to be under the government and these terrorist organizations have to be dismantled.

MS. COURIC: Do you think that the Israelis will do, Secretary Powell, everything they need to do to keep this process moving forward?

SECRETARY POWELL: I hope they will and I expect that they will. At the Aqaba summit a couple of weeks ago, both leaders, Prime Minister Sharon and Prime Minister Abbas, stood there, committed themselves to the roadmap and what the roadmap required. Prime Minister Sharon has started to remove the unauthorized outposts and he has started to release prisoners, and he will take other steps to make life easier for the Palestinian people.

And he entered into this security arrangement which allowed Gaza to go back to the Palestinian Authority. The Palestinian Authority has said it is ready to take over Gaza and has made commitments with respect to making sure no more terror comes from that region. And hopefully, this will now shift to Bethlehem and we can see a transfer of authority in Bethlehem, and as confidence and trust are developed, hopefully the other cities and towns in the West Bank.

MS. COURIC: Could the United States, in your view, Secretary Powell, do even more? For example, could the CIA play a larger role in dismantling some of these terrorist organizations? And can you ever envision a time when U.S. forces might actually be deployed to be used as peacekeepers?

SECRETARY POWELL: The CIA is doing a great deal, as are other agencies of the United States Government. The Treasury Department, Commerce Department -- everybody is involved in this comprehensive approach to the problem. We have put in place a small monitoring group under Ambassador John Wolf to help the two sides talk to one another and to break down some of the barriers to trust and confidence that have existed.

I don't anticipate, though, United States Armed Forces actually going in as some sort of peacekeeping force. Monitors, yes. And they're not necessarily military personnel. But we can help the two sides. We can be facilitators, monitors, evaluators of what's going on, but I don't see a role for United States Armed Forces in the region.

MS. COURIC: Let's talk about Iraq for a moment, if we could, Secretary Powell. As you know, since the war ended, or since the military action ended, 64 U.S. soldiers have been killed. President Bush has said dangerous pockets of Saddam's old regime are still in place. Knowing what the United States knows now, were enough -- were adequate plans made for a post-Saddam Iraq and some of the security issues that have come up?

SECRETARY POWELL: I think there were good plans in place, and we do have a large force in the region. I mean, it is not as if we are without troops in the region. We have quite a significant force there.

We are, perhaps, seeing more disorder and looting and criminal activity and activities of remnant elements of the regime than might have been expected, but it is not something that is out of control. We can get on top of it. Ambassador Bremer and the military commanders there are quite confident of that.

We are not seeing a nationwide, coherent, organized resistance. We are seeing pockets of resistance -- criminals, looters, former members of the Baath Party, former members of the Hussein regime -- but I don't yet see, nor do any of my colleagues see this as some nationwide, organized resistance.

MS. COURIC: But wouldn't it have been --

SECRETARY POWELL: I think as the situation improves and as people see that the economy is starting and as the political process picks up and Iraqis start to take responsibility for their own future, I think this will come under control.

MS. COURIC: You, of course, know very well, Secretary Powell that you went to the United Nations to make the case about

weapons of mass destruction. If no weapons of mass destruction are found in Iraq, how damaging will that be to your credibility and the credibility of the United States?

SECRETARY POWELL: I reviewed that presentation that I made on the 5th of February a number of times, as you might imagine, over recent weeks, and it holds up very well. It was the solid, coordinated judgment of the intelligence community. Some of the things that I talked about that day we have now seen in reality. We have found the mobile biological weapons labs that I could only show cartoons of that day. We now have them.

I also talked about the nuclear weapons program and how they were retaining the infrastructure of such a program, and one of their scientists came forward recently and acknowledged that and provided documentation and components of centrifuges that the Iraqis had retained in order to start up the program again when they had the opportunity to do so, which was also part of my presentation.

And as our experts continue to work in Iraq under Mr. Kay and under General Dayton, I think more such evidence will come forward that will make the case. Keep in mind --

MS. COURIC: So you don't --

SECRETARY POWELL: Keep in mind, Katie, it wasn't just my presentation. The fact that Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction and such programs to develop more was the considered judgment of UN inspectors who had been in there previous, was the considered judgment of the entire international community. When Resolution 1441 was passed last November, all 15 nations voted yes in the knowledge and in the certain knowledge that Saddam Hussein had such programs that had to be dealt with.

MS. COURIC: So real quickly, you don't feel like intelligence was skewed or manipulated to come to that conclusion?

SECRETARY POWELL: No. And my presentation was very carefully done. It was vetted entirely. All the analysts -- not just the senior people within the international community -- I had the analysts in a room with me for almost four straight days preparing that, and they could make sure that I knew exactly what they knew. And they are still behind what I presented and we were not putting any pressure on them. I wanted the best out of them. That's what we got. That's what I presented on the 5th of February.

MS. COURIC: Secretary of State Colin Powell. As always, Secretary Powell, thanks so much for your time.

SECRETARY POWELL: Thank you, Katie.

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