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Interview by Ted Koppel of ABC'S Nightline

Secretary Colin L. Powell

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MR. KOPPEL: Mr. Secretary, noon, today the gunslingers up on Capitol Hill said, "Pass over all those, all those documents. Set all the appointments for the people to talk about intelligence: what you knew, what you didn't know before the war." Did you meet the deadline?

SECRETARY POWELL: All but one document that we still have to get cleared, but there is no problem, we intend to cooperate fully with the Senate in this case. And so we think we have been very responsive and we're going to give them everything they asked for; and we're going to make available to them anyone they wish to speak to.

MR. KOPPEL: Because they were kind of grouching this morning. I mean, some of my sources up on the Hill were saying you people at the State Department were the problem. Everybody else has been good about it.

SECRETARY POWELL: Well, no, no, no. I think they were grouching about a number of agencies. We've been rather forthcoming, and it's simply an administrative matter of getting the information in, making sure we've got all the documents they've asked for and then sending them up. But I have no desire to do anything but cooperate with the Senate.

They want to get to the bottom of this. They want to find out, and they will report to the Senate, they will report to the American people, and we want to help them.

MR. KOPPEL: Why should the American public believe that things are going as well as this Administration has been suggesting, when the UN, Doctors Without Borders, the International Red Cross -- they're all pulling their international staff out of Iraq?

SECRETARY POWELL: They are essentially pulling their staff from out of Baghdad where the security situation is quite tense. But when you step back and don't look at the incident of the day, but look at the overall situation; one, that terrible regime of Saddam Hussein is gone, and notwithstanding press reports to the contrary, I see no evidence that he is pulling any strings -- they're gone.

MR. KOPPEL: Let me, Let me stop you on that?

SECRETARY POWELL: Yeah.

MR. KOPPEL: You're obviously talking about the story that was on the front page of the *New York Times* this morning. Three of your colleagues I take it --

SECRETARY POWELL: I don't know any of this.

MR. KOPPEL: I take if you're bad-mouthing it, you weren't one of the senior officials --

SECRETARY POWELL: No.

MR. KOPPEL: -- who was saying that Saddam Hussein was running a lot of what's going on over there. You don't believe that?

SECRETARY POWELL: I speak on the record, and I don't know what these sources or who they were were saying, but when I saw the story and came in and pulled up all the intelligence I could from my people as well as talking to the people at the agency, I don't know the basis of those stories.

Now, I can't say that he is no longer among the living. I don't know where he is or what he's doing, but we really don't have the evidence to put together a claim that he is pulling all the strings among these remnants in Baghdad and other parts of the country that are causing us the difficulty.

Or, earlier in the week, there was another story that this man by the name of al-Douri was doing it. But I see no evidence to support that. There is somebody or some individuals there who are coordinating these attacks, that's quite certain.

MR. KOPPEL: Why not Saddam?

SECRETARY POWELL: Well, because I didn't say why not, I said there is no evidence to support that assertion.

MR. KOPPEL: I understand. But, you know, some months ago, people -- it may have been you -- were saying he's much too busy being on the run. Actually, I know Condi Rice was saying it a while ago -- he was much too busy hiding, much too busy running to be able to do anything. Do you still feel that confident -- that all his efforts have to be taken up in running and hiding, that he is not able?

SECRETARY POWELL: Well, I don't know what he is doing, but I'm quite sure he is spending a lot of his time and energy hiding, if not running; and running and hiding at the same time. He knows he could not show his face because we would certainly capture him and I'm not sure the Iraqi people would greet him very warmly if he showed his face right now.

The Iraqi people are in a new place in life. They're free. They have a free press. They are busy arguing with each other. They are starting down the road of writing a constitution and putting in place a representative government. They are seeing their infrastructure come back up. They see the international community coming to help them, as evidenced by the \$20 billion that our Congress appropriated for reconstruction, the additional \$13 billion -- billion in loans and grants that will be coming from the international community --

MR. KOPPEL: Over a period of three years.

SECRETARY POWELL: A period of years. Well, they can't -- they couldn't absorb it all in one, anyway.

MR. KOPPEL: Right.

SECRETARY POWELL: But over a period of three years, between now and 2007, that money will be coming in. And this is going to help them build a new society -- a society that's based on law, that's based on their desires and not the desires of a dictator. And so

--

MR. KOPPEL: Let me take you back to Saddam just for one moment --

SECRETARY POWELL: Well, I haven't left him yet.

MR. KOPPEL: Good.

SECRETARY POWELL: We don't know where he is. I don't know if he's dead or alive, but it is not appropriate to say that intelligence has told us that he is pulling the strings and he is coordinating these attacks that we have been seeing in recent days. We do not have intelligence to support that.

MR. KOPPEL: It does seem, given the accuracy of what you have said about the terrible regime that he ran, it does seem kind of strange that these people who have now been freed -- that there is none among them who would say, "The s.o.b. is hiding over there?"

SECRETARY POWELL: Well, I don't know how many of them would actually know where the s.o.b. is hiding. He was quite good for a period of 30 years of hiding himself behind layer after layer after layer of security --

MR. KOPPEL: That's when he controlled it all. Now he controls nothing, theoretically.

SECRETARY POWELL: He certainly had survival instincts that probably made it possible for him to put in place some refuge or some place where he could hide if he is still alive.

MR. KOPPEL: And we, we have no idea?

SECRETARY POWELL: I have no idea and I don't think --

MR. KOPPEL: Don't know whether he's alive or dead?

SECRETARY POWELL: Don't know if he's alive or dead and don't know where's he's hiding. I know he is not in any of his palaces in Baghdad and a new government is being put in place that will be fully representative of the Iraqi people.

MR. KOPPEL: We're going to take a short break, Mr. Secretary. Back with Secretary Powell in just a moment.

(Break.)

MR. KOPPEL: And we are back once again with the Secretary of State, Colin Powell. Mr. Secretary, let's go back and talk about the money -- the close to \$20 billion that presumably the Senate will approve. The House has already approved it.

What I don't quite understand, I must tell you, is that six months ago, just before the war, Secretary Rumsfeld, Deputy Secretary of Defense Wolfowitz were saying the American taxpayers won't have to bear the burden of reconstructing Iraq. They have plenty of money. They have plenty of oil. They are going to be able to sustain themselves.

We have now found that not to be the case. But given that we can expect, a few years down the road, they will be able to, why not lend it to them over a period of ten years, 15 years? I mean generous, long-term loans, just as everybody else in the world is doing?

SECRETARY POWELL: Because not everybody else in the world -- some nations in the world are providing grants of --

MR. KOPPEL: Very small, very few.

SECRETARY POWELL: Well, it's a considerable sum. It's not anywhere near as large as our sum, but some of those who are contributing can only provide loans. They're the World Bank, the IMF -- they're banks, they're lending institutions and they can't provide grants.

The reason we believe grants are important is we want to get this country up and running --and you are quite right -- it is going to take much more money than we had anticipated earlier in the year. The infrastructure had been

destroyed far more than we realized under his leadership, over the 30 years that he was in charge of the country -- not as a result of our war, and we're seeing some --

MR. KOPPEL: Under the sanctions, too.

SECRETARY POWELL: Yes, under the sanctions, as well. But during that period it really wasn't the sanctions that destroyed the infrastructure. There was a lot of money coming into that country during that period. It was money that was misused.

It was misused to buy palaces. It was misused to buy weapons. It was misused to enrich the elite of the regime. It was not used to restore the infrastructure, to keep the infrastructure up. And all that now has to be fixed. And in due course -- in due course --

MR. KOPPEL: But we knew that before, Mr. Secretary.

SECRETARY POWELL: Well, I don't think we really had a clear understanding of how bad it was until we actually got in there. And --

MR. KOPPEL: There was a -- there was a Defense Department study that was commissioned and completed last year at this time, in other words a full six months before the war began, which said that there isn't anywhere near as much money available from oil revenue as we had believed beforehand. Why didn't anybody believe that?

SECRETARY POWELL: It's not that we didn't believe it. It's we have a pretty good idea of what the oil revenue is going to be and was at that time. For most of the period of sanctions, the oil revenue ran about \$18 billion a year in the oil-for-food program. And then there was another \$2 billion of smuggling that was going out through Syria and elsewhere.

So this is a country that has a potential of having \$20 billion a year of working revenue. Once we had got in there and saw the actual damage -- and now we're trying to repair that damage; and part of the petroleum system has to be brought down in order to be repaired -- we estimate that the revenues coming in for the next year or two will be much lower than that, in the range of \$12 to \$14 billion. After that, it'll start to rise if we invest now. And that's why we want to invest now in security forces so that we can bring our forces out and home, and in rebuilding of the oil and other elements of the infrastructure so that we can get their revenues up to the point where they can not only pay their own operating expenses, but that they can rebuild the rest of their infrastructure using their own revenues.

Now, if we encumber all that with loans, say to the tune of the \$20 billion that was in our appropriation in addition to what will have to be loans from other international financial institutions, we wouldn't be serving the Iraqi people well, plus when you consider the debts of the past --

MR. KOPPEL: So we were just -- we were just "flat ass" wrong in terms of what was being, what was being projected by the Secretary of Defense, by the Assistant Secretary of Defense. You notice I'm not quoting you. I don't have any quotes readily available. But they, they appeared to have been wrong.

You're giving me that wonderful little smile that says, "You don't think I'm going for that one -- "

SECRETARY POWELL: No. I was giving you a wonderful little smile because as Secretary of State I'm not permitted, really, to speak in the same rather graphic terms that you are describing things.

MR. KOPPEL: Gotcha.

SECRETARY POWELL: But I will say in all candor that we underestimated the level of damage that had occurred to the infrastructure as a result of the period of sanctions, but more importantly, as a result of the manner in which he ran that country in such a brutal, dictatorial way for almost 30 years.

MR. KOPPEL: Let me just, because your time, I know, is very limited, bring you back to the issue of the UN, the IR -- the International Red Cross, the others. You were quoted as having called Secretary General Kofi Annan several times and said, "Please don't do this. It's just going to look bad," and indeed, you were quoted as saying, "If, indeed,

you guys pull out, it's going to look as though the terrorists will win."

You are obviously concerned about it. I realize it's incumbent upon you now to put the best possible spin on it. But why should the American public not believe -- to come back to my first question -- that conditions in certainly Baghdad, are bad enough now that things did not go as well as we had expected at all?

SECRETARY POWELL: Because you have to look at the whole country, not Baghdad.

MR. KOPPEL: I said Baghdad.

SECRETARY POWELL: Well, let's look at the whole country. When you say things are not going as well as expected, if you look throughout the country, things are going quite well in north and things are going quite well in the south. Baghdad is thriving, believe it or not, with the economy rebounding, with people out in the streets, they want the curfew lifted so they can stay out longer, they're filling restaurants. There's commerce going on.

MR. KOPPEL: What did Kofi Annan say?

SECRETARY POWELL: There's commerce going on.

MR. KOPPEL: Why did the Secretary General refuse?

SECRETARY POWELL: I'm coming to that. I spoke to Kofi a number of times. And most recently I spoke to Jakob Kellenberger, the head of the International Committee for the Red Cross. And the point I made to them is that, the service you provide is important, but you have a responsibility for the security of your people. Only you can make that judgment. But just know that if you completely withdraw, then the terrorists have won.

They felt that in light of recent events, they had to draw down in Baghdad. They have presence elsewhere in the country, but they had to significantly draw down in Baghdad. But they also are standing by, ready to go back in as the security situation improves.

MR. KOPPEL: Do you think they'll be going in soon?

SECRETARY POWELL: I'm confident that the security situation will improve over time and these organizations will come back in.

MR. KOPPEL: When you say, "over time --"

SECRETARY POWELL: You focused, you focused on ICRC and the United Nations and Doctors Without Frontiers, but there are many other NGOs and charitable organizations that have remained for the most part in Baghdad as well as outside of Baghdad. So it isn't as if everybody has left. But I don't want to downplay this. It is a dangerous situation and we know that our principal goal in the near future is to get the security situation under control in the Sunni triangle -- Baghdad, Faluja, and that whole triangle area. And once that is done then you will see a lot of criticism about whether we and our road to success will not go away.

MR. KOPPEL: One last very quick question. In retrospect, demobilizing a 400,000-man Iraqi army -- a mistake?

SECRETARY POWELL: Well, to some extent it just disappeared. I mean, these were units that --

MR. KOPPEL: We dropped leaflets on them Mr. Secretary, in effect saying, "Go back to your barracks. Don't fight us and we'll treat you well."

SECRETARY POWELL: Right, and we --

MR. KOPPEL: So they did what we ask them to.

SECRETARY POWELL: Well, yes, and now we have to rebuild it. Whether it was a mistake or not, I don't know. Did

you want those kinds of units around that were essentially led by Baath leaders and representing the old regime? Are you prepared to say that we should have placed confidence in these kinds of leaders? So a judgment was made by our colleagues both in the CPA and military, and the Pentagon that it was best to demobilize these units and start fresh.

Now, in the period of rebuilding the forces, we know that some of these leaders who have competence, but are now committed a new Iraq and not an old Iraq, may well be coming back into the force, but we will screen them more carefully.

And so the decisions that have been made this week involve accelerating the buildup of local paramilitary militia-type forces, police forces, border patrol forces and the national army. And we'll build them up as fast as we can. And when they come back this time, they will be representative of the people and not of Saddam Hussein.

MR. KOPPEL: Secretary Powell, thank you very much.

SECRETARY POWELL: Thank you, Ted.

[End]

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