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Interview With European Newspaper Journalists

Secretary Colin L. Powell

Washington, DC
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(3:00 p.m. EST)

QUESTION: You're going to Maastricht, as we say in Holland. Is it a regular visit or is it also mending fences with the part of Europe that needs fences to be mended?

SECRETARY POWELL: No, it's a regular visit -- regular meeting of the OSCE -- and it will give me a chance to congratulate my Dutch colleague, Jaap, for the manner in which he has served as chairman and chief, as they say -- I guess it is -- of OSCE. And the last time I will see him in this capacity before -- well, one more time perhaps, and then he will go off to become NATO Secretary General.

But OSCE is a very important organization and I think we will have some issues, serious issues, to discuss with respect to what's happened in Georgia recently and what we might do to help the new leadership in Georgia get ready for new elections, which will be held in just 42 days' time. And I'm sure that will be a subject of discussion.

We'll also have discussion, I am confident, about the recent Russian proposal, Russian-sponsored proposal on Moldova. And I'm sure that will be a subject of discussion, and the other areas responsibility of the OSCE. So I'm looking forward to it. I wasn't able to get to last year's meeting.

QUESTION: It's a different Europe, or a different U.S.-European relationship, compared to the year and a half ago when we met and you said, basically, it's all in the family, here and there a little problem, but we share the same values.

SECRETARY POWELL: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: Would you still repeat that?

SECRETARY POWELL: Mm-hmm. I sure would. In fact --

QUESTION: With any amendments?

SECRETARY POWELL: Yeah, we've had one heck of a row over Iraq earlier this year. I never shrink from that. It was a major disagreement within Europe, and between some parts of Europe and the United States. It wasn't all of Europe against the United States. In fact, if you take in a count of the nations of Europe and do your scorecard, you would find, I think, more leaders were supporting the United States in its efforts than were opposing the United States in its efforts.

But as I said when I went to my first NATO meeting after the invasion early in the year, we had a big disagreement about whether or not we should go to war. We went to war. We now must come together and help build the peace. And that's what we are doing. It's the message I gave at NATO in the spring. It's the message I gave to my EU colleagues last week when I met them in Brussels. And it's the message I will give to my OSCE colleagues on

Tuesday, and then again to my NATO colleagues next Friday.

And it's the message that I think the President took to the United Kingdom last week, and it was the message that, in his speech at Whitehall, he gave to all of Europe: That America believes in partnerships; we believe in the great alliances that we are a part of; we do not do what we do for the purpose of seeking to offend anyone, but because we have strong principles we believe in, and we will defend those principles and we will defend our interests. We prefer doing it in the context of international organizations and our great partnerships, but it is not always possible to do it that way. But we will defend our interests.

I think that the President made it clear in his "Three Pillars," that pillar number one was the important role of international organizations; pillar number two is that it's sometimes necessary to use force. The Europeans, more than anyone else, it seems to me, should understand that sometimes it is necessary to use force in the interests of peace and freedom. And then the third pillar, of course, has to do with democracy and how to promote democracy throughout the world, even in places where people say it won't take root.

So I think that message of the President, and what I do on my trips, and what Secretary Rumsfeld will do when he goes to his NAC-D meeting next week, shows that the United States is engaging with our partners.

Now, we have a different kind of problem in Europe and in other parts of the world in that public sentiment is more negatively inclined toward the United States than I would like to see it, and more negatively inclined than the leaders of those publics -- Prime Minister Blair and Mr. Berlusconi and Mr. Aznar and so many others. But I also believe that that is something that can be turned around. Public opinion changes as issues come and go and as time passes.

QUESTION: Are you going to implement some policies to try to improve this public sentiment in Europe?

SECRETARY POWELL: Yeah, we are, I think, trying to communicate a message of partnership, a message of working with our friends and allies. The President did that last week. I do it when I go to Europe, and I will continue to do it as I go to Europe. I met with my Belgian colleagues in addition to my European Union colleagues last week. I spend an enormous amount of time on the phone with my European colleagues. I have to also, now, work more assiduously now that these kinds of issues are sort of, in context, to take the message in a public way to European audiences -- one reason you four are sitting here.

QUESTION: During the visit to Britain, the British public were looking at -- for some concrete gain, some give from the point of view of Washington, particularly over the issue of Guantanamo Bay, and he mentioned that from several European countries.

SECRETARY POWELL: Yeah.

QUESTION: And the question of steel tariffs and also the question of contracts when it came to reconstruction. There didn't seem to be any give when the President was there. What were the prospects?

SECRETARY POWELL: Just a matter of timing. We released some 20 detainees, as you know, in the last couple of days -- not the British detainees, but detainees from Guantanamo. Although there is still a supply of them in Afghanistan who are flowing through the Guantanamo process, the specific cases of two detainees that are before our military tribunal, the British detainees, those particular two, is a difficult one. There are some very complex legal issues that our lawyers are still working out. But the President is anxious to do what he can to resolve that one. And we're trying to be very sensitive to the needs of Tony Blair's government, Prime Minister Blair's government.

And on steel, the President is waiting for some more information and reports. And I think as he said when he was in London -- he expects to make a decision on that in the near future as well. So it isn't a matter of ignoring the concerns expressed by our friends, it's a matter of timing before those decisions are ready.

QUESTION: Talking about international organizations now, if a new UN resolution on Iraq is to be proposed, what is the role of the UN going to be, given the fact that the security environment is insecure, that the UN cannot provide security at this point and it hardly can even provide reconstruction help in that security. So what is your assessment as to what that role is going to be?

SECRETARY POWELL: Well, we haven't asked for a new resolution. It may well be that a new resolution is appropriate at some point, but it's premature right now, it seems to me, to talk about a new UN resolution on a plan that has just arrived. I had good conversations with Secretary General Annan over the weekend. We had a long lunch and I encouraged him to quickly appoint a new special representative, either on an interim basis or some other, you know, more permanent basis -- whatever he thinks is appropriate -- because we're really in a transitional period until we get to the interim government next spring and the CPA ends. So he's looking at how best to cover that.

But he also, as I do, has to be concerned about the security of anybody you put in there, any team you put in there. So he's looking at different ways to perform the UN mission: Performance from neighboring countries; performing offsite at more distant locations and people going in and out; and also putting a presence in Baghdad. And Ambassador Bremer will be working with the UN security people to see whether or not we can create conditions that will permit the Secretary General to put the presence back in, as he has to meet his own standards. They're still going through the trauma of what happened to Sergio de Mello, and I hope there will be a UN representative soon.

I have made it clear, and I hope you've noticed in the statements I've been making for the last couple of weeks, since we announced this revised plan, that I want the UN to play an active role. We want the UN to play an active role. Certainly the President wants the UN to play an active role. And we'll structure that role in accordance, initially, with UN Resolution 1511, but we have to have a representative appointed so that we can work with somebody.

QUESTION: What is the political role going to be?

SECRETARY POWELL: It's laid out in 1511. And if more authority is needed, then we can look at another resolution. I would like to see the UN special -- Secretary General's special representative in the country now working with the Governing Council, working with Ambassador Bremer, as they put together the fundamental law that they have said they would have ready by February, and as they prepare for elections to select a transitional assembly and, from that, a transitional government.

I think this is a period over the next six months where the UN can play a role. They bring skill and they bring a capability to these kinds of efforts. It was a role, really, that I always thought they would play at an appropriate time, and I think Sergio de Mello was moving rapidly in that direction, and he had just about reached the point where we were going to need another resolution to expand his range of authority.

Since his untimely and tragic death, we have passed 1511. And 1500, I can't remember if it came before or after Sergio died, but 1511 certainly. And we're open to more resolutions, additional resolution or resolutions as appropriate. But I don't think we need one right now until we have had a chance to watch the Governing Council do some more work.

QUESTION: The President has said -- has reiterated democracy as sort of as the threshold for a success in Iraq, though some people contend that, given that goal, the handover of power is too fast. Iraqis aren't ready. The Americans are ceding control over the process of democratization.

SECRETARY POWELL: Some people also contend that we're not ceding it over fast enough, and we have had to make an informed judgment on that matter. Some of my European colleagues say, "You don't understand. Just turn it over and leave." Well, we will not turn it over and just create a situation of total chaos.

What we will do, though, is turn it over to a group of leaders who bear some legitimacy. One way of gaining legitimacy is with a full constitution and full elections of the kind we'd all like to see. But in the interest of time and moving this process along, we elected to work with the Governing Council and come up with a transitional arrangement. But what makes this transitional arrangement different than just ceding authority is that there will be some elective base to it. The transitional assembly will be elected -- not in a full referendum fashion -- but in the manner that the Governing Council and Ambassador Bremer worked out last week.

And so we will transition it to some executive and assembly that rests on the basis of elect legitimacy, as opposed to just a group of individuals who are self-appointed or appointed by the CPA. I don't think it would have the kind of legitimacy that people are looking for.

QUESTION: Could we also follow up on Guantanamo Bay? You said that apart from those two Brits, they were special cases that need some looking at. Will the fates of the rest of the other seven Brits wait on the resolution of those two?

SECRETARY POWELL: No, they're on a -- they're in a separate track. These two are identified for potential trial before a tribunal, a military tribunal. And the British Government was interested in the due process associated with that. The other seven are in a different track and they have not yet gone through the entire intelligence and interrogation process that exists in Guantanamo to determine whether or not they have done something wrong and therefore should be subject to some judicial process, or whether they should be released, and what danger they present. And so they are in a separate track.

QUESTION: May I quickly come back to the --

MR. BOUCHER: We're going to have to finish up.

SECRETARY POWELL: Go ahead.

QUESTION: You said that the European publics, alas, do not all of them agree that the United States was right in pursuing the course.

SECRETARY POWELL: Some do, some don't. But, I mean, there is --

QUESTION: I want to --

SECRETARY POWELL: There is -- I don't want to -- there is a higher level of anti-American feeling in Europe than I would like to see, but I also --

QUESTION: Would you be able to name a symbol that might mend fences in that respect? For instance, would the United States tend to soften its ICC policy, as borne out by the six countries that were sort of let off the hook recently?

SECRETARY POWELL: No. We're not going to yield on our ICC policy. We believe in certain things and we have taken what, to us, are principled positions.

When I was Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, I didn't approve of the initial work moving toward what became the Rome statute and the ICC. It is simply inconsistent with our own constitutional way of dealing with misdeeds or for offenses that might have been committed by our people in uniform. We will take care of that, and they will not be subject to an ICC. So we will not yield on that, and that's why we made it clear that we would not be any longer bound by any of the terms of the ICC, even though President Clinton signed it just before he left office, knowing at the time he signed it, it would never go to our Senate for ratification. So, no, we're not going to change our position.

And, in fact, what we have been doing is talking to our friends around the world and say, "Look, you believe in the ICC, you have signed onto the Rome statute and you are in the process of ratifying it. Fine, that's your position. That's good." We choose not to do that, and in order for us to have the ability to have our troops work in your country or other diplomats serve without any risk in your country, we invite you to enter into Article 98 agreements. Article 98 agreements are provided for by the Rome statute, and we have entered into some 72 such agreements in the last year or so.

And so we are not telling anybody else that they should abandon the Rome statute, but we, ourselves, are not going to become a party to the Rome statute and we're finding ways to protect our people so that we can continue with our partnership activities. And, as you know, we have waived some of the Servicemen Protection Act restrictions on six countries.

QUESTION: Okay. Regarding the peace process in the Middle East, first, do you think it's possible to revive the roadmap, especially during an electoral year?

SECRETARY POWELL: Yeah, yeah.

QUESTION: And, second, what do you with this unofficial Geneva plan prepared by Yossi Beilin and Yasser --

MR. BOUCHER: Yeah, Rabbo.

SECRETARY POWELL: We -- I have written to them, to both groups, and welcomed the contribution they have made

with these plans. The roadmap, however, is still alive and well and there. It's waiting there. What it requires is the performance on the part of the Palestinians and on the part of the Israelis.

On the part of the Palestinians, we now have a new prime minister with a new cabinet. And as I have said to the prime minister, 'What we need to see now is performance -- action taken against terrorist elements that are within the Palestinian community. They are killing innocent people and they are killing your dreams for a Palestinian state. And before we can get the roadmap moving again and place demands on Israel for it to meet its obligations -- and it's met some of its obligations, but there are many more things for Israel to do -- we have to make sure that we are taking action against terrorists.'

Now, a lot has been happening in recent weeks: a new Palestinian Prime Minister, a new cabinet, two ideas that have surfaced: Yossi Beilin and the other one. And statements are being made by various former officials in Israel and some current officials in Israel that suggest we have to see some movement here. We can't stay where we are. Prime Minister Sharon has said some interesting things this week about what he might be willing to do.

And so I think, I think that we should not say the roadmap is dead. It's there. We just had a pause. We had to stop when Abu Mazen resigned. And now I hope that Prime Minister Qureia and the Palestinian cabinet will take action against terrorists. And if they do that -- I'm not saying go start a civil war within the Palestinian community, but there are things they can do, I believe. If they do that, they will find the United States, President Bush and the Quartet members and many other people standing by waiting to help them.

And I sense on the Israeli side certain movement based on what Prime Minister Sharon has said, based on what General Ayalon has said, and with the statements of the four Shin Bet leaders over the last 20 years, as well as the two peace proposals that you mentioned. There is some movement here, and hopefully we can take advantage of this movement and get going on the roadmap.

QUESTION: Thank you, Mr. Secretary.

QUESTION: One last personal sort of question. What claim --

SECRETARY POWELL: Personal? (Laughter.) Okay.

QUESTION: It's not really personal. What claim in your February 5th declaration in front of the UN Security -- at the UN Assembly do you regret to have made?

SECRETARY POWELL: None. What I presented on the 5th of February was not something that I made up here in the State Department. And it was not something that was given to me by people who are not competent to provide such information. It represented the best work of our intelligence community, and I spent several days -- I think from Thursday through Monday -- with the Director of Central Intelligence, with the Deputy Director of Central Intelligence, well into the night -- almost midnight every night -- and all of the analysts who have responsibility, the senior analysts, and we went over every single item that I spoke about and presented.

And it represented not guesses, but their best judgment based on the information they had, their holdings. And it also reflected a body of intelligence that had been concurred in by a number of nations over the years -- the same body of intelligence upon which President Clinton acted to go after weapons of mass destruction facilities in 1998 in Operation Desert Fox, and the same broad body of intelligence that the United Nations relied upon for many years to pass resolutions condemning Iraq for its behavior. And so that's what I presented on the 5th of February. It wasn't -- it wasn't --

QUESTION: So why was the best -- why was the best information not good enough? And what consequences does that have for a strategy of preemption?

SECRETARY POWELL: But you don't know if it was good enough or not good enough. It was good enough, in my judgment, to form a basis for political and policy decisions to be taken.

Now, in the seven months or six months since the war, there are certain things that are clear to me. One, we have not found huge warehouses of this material. Was that an incorrect judgment, or we just haven't found it yet remains to be seen.

Item two: There is no doubt in my mind whatsoever that Saddam Hussein had programs for weapons of mass

destruction. We can't tell you what inventories he had, but anybody who thinks that this guy was not going to develop nuclear weapons or he wouldn't restart and bring all of his commercial, chemical apparatus and chemical facilities back into the production of chemical weapons, and he was not going to develop biological weapons once freed from UN inspectors, that would be the height of naiveté. This is a man who's used this stuff before. He isn't an unknown quantity. He was a known quantity.

And so how much he actually had, we'll let Dr. Kay work that out in the way of actual weapons or programs, or programs waiting to be restarted. But the intention was never lost, the infrastructure was never lost, the people who knew how to do it were never shipped out of the country --

QUESTION: But the imminence wasn't there.

SECRETARY POWELL: Well, look at my 5 February statement.

QUESTION: You didn't say it was imminent.

SECRETARY POWELL: You were asking me about my 5 February statement.

QUESTION: Okay.

SECRETARY POWELL: But is imminence the judge? I mean, is imminence the trigger? I don't think so. I think the real trigger was the fact that we were dealing with a dangerous individual who had no reservations about having such weapons or using such weapons, and who had used them in the past. And I've been to Halabja where he killed 5,000 people on a Friday morning in 1988 in March. And so I have no doubt about whether or not this, this gentleman would not use or would develop such weapons.

And so whether the imminence is to one's satisfaction or not, the fact that that capability was there, there is no doubt in my mind, and it was no doubt in the mind of those who voted for those resolutions for a bunch of years. And it could have been resolved very easily if Saddam Hussein had said, "Okay, fine. I'm showing you everything. I'm telling you everything. I'm giving you a full, honest declaration, and I'm not hiding and I'm going to give you everybody you want to talk to. And you will find that there's nothing there." He didn't do that. He had a chance to do that. We worked. We went to the United Nations on September 12th, 2002 to give him a chance to do that. He chose not to do it and he suffered the consequences as a result.

Okay? Was this 30?

QUESTION: Okay.

SECRETARY POWELL: It was 30.

QUESTION: Thanks a lot, Mr. Secretary.

SECRETARY POWELL: Good to see you again. Happy Thanksgiving.

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[End]

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