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Interview With Michele Kelemen of National Public Radio

Secretary Colin L. Powell

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(2:00 p.m. EST)

MS. KELEMEN: -- Secretary Burns to the region. Should we be reading this as a sign that the U.S. is preparing for more vigorous diplomatic activity right now?

SECRETARY POWELL: Well, we have never stepped back from having vigorous diplomatic activity. We have been at something of a standstill for the last several months with the resignation of Abu Mazen as Prime Minister of the Palestinian Authority. But now that we have a new Prime Minister, Abu Alaa, we are hoping that he will meet soon with the Israeli side -- Prime Minister Sharon, and the two sides are talking to one another. And we are prepared to engage more fully at that time when that meeting has been held and we have a way forward with the roadmap.

The roadmap that the President and the other leaders put forward at the Aqaba meeting in Jordan earlier this year remains our strong policy, and we are hoping that conditions will be created in the next several weeks so we can begin work again on that roadmap.

MS. KELEMEN: What about this new initiative of the Geneva Accord that some Israeli doves and Palestinians have been promoting?

SECRETARY POWELL: I think it's useful to have different ideas out there percolating for people to take a look at. And we welcomed these two initiatives, but they are just ideas. They don't represent anyone's position, other than the authors'. But I think this is a challenging moment for the Middle East and to the extent that there are people who are thinking about these issues and offering ideas, I think they should be welcomed.

MS. KELEMEN: The Europeans who are part of the roadmap process had been complaining about what they call, "the contamination policy" with Arafat -- that if they meet with Yasser Arafat, Israelis won't meet with them. How have you managed to change that sort of dynamic? How do you work with the Palestinians without Yasser Arafat?

SECRETARY POWELL: Well, we have worked with the Palestinians. I speak to my counterpart in the Palestinian Authority, Foreign Minister Nabil Shaath, all the time. But we won't deal with Chairman Arafat. We won't speak to Chairman Arafat on an official level for the simple reason that we don't believe he is a responsible partner for peace.

We think that he undercut Prime Minister Abu Mazen and we hope he does not undercut Prime Minister Abu Alaa or else we will be right back where we started.

And my European colleagues, some of them do deal with Chairman Arafat, and it makes it more difficult for them to deal with the Israelis. But that's a matter between them and the Israel Government, not me.

MS. KELEMEN: It's not getting in the way of the process of the peace -- the roadmap process?

SECRETARY POWELL: Well, I think Chairman Arafat is an obstacle on the way to the accomplishment of the roadmap objectives, and we've said so. The President made it clear in his June 24th speech last year that the Palestinian Authority

needed to reform itself, needed to come up with new leaders, and we made it clear that we thought Yasser Arafat -- recognizing that he is a leader that Palestinian people look to -- he is a failed leader. He has not brought them one day closer to their dream of a Palestine state, and he has not cracked down on those terrorist organizations within the Palestine community that kill innocent Israelis, and also deny the Palestine people their dream for their own state.

And so we will continue to work with Palestinian prime ministers as long as those prime ministers commit themselves to reforming the Palestinian Authority, ending corruption, making sure that money that goes to the Authority is used well, and cracking down on terrorism.

The Palestinian leadership must crack down on terrorism or else we will not be able to achieve their dream of a Palestinian state living side by side in peace with the Jewish state of Israel.

MS. KELEMEN: There are those who argue that the security barrier, the fence, is not going to make a two state solution possible. How much do you think that reducing the loans is really going to signal to Israel U.S. concern about it?

SECRETARY POWELL: Well, it's certainly a signal. It's not an insignificant amount of money, and the President has said on a number of occasions that the fence is a problem. And he said it most clearly when he spoke in London last week and talked about settlement activity and the fence.

The fence -- if it continues to move in the Palestinian regions and parts of the West Bank where Palestinians have their towns and villages, and starts to create a *fait accompli* with respect to what a future border might look like, that's the problem that the President has identified, and that's, you know, when the loan guarantee affects settlements -- and -- settlement activity and the fence.

MS. KELEMEN: Turning to Iraq, the Iraqi Governing Council this week wrote a letter to the UN. They're talking about getting another United Nations resolution. What would the U.S. -- what would the U.S. hope to get from a new resolution? I mean are you looking for a stamp of legitimacy for this changing pace of transferring authority back to Iraq?

SECRETARY POWELL: Well, we are not proposing a UN resolution at this time. We believe that for the time being, the authorities contained in the last UN Resolution, 1511, are enough for us to do what we are doing.

But as the process moves forward, as the Governing Council completes the work that was laid out in their letter to the President of the Security Council, and as they put in place fundamental law, and as they -- from that fundamental law -- create a transitional assembly, and from that transitional assembly create a transition government, then there may be a role for a new resolution at that time or somewhere along that road. But we don't think there's a need for a UN resolution right today. And in the letter that the Governing Council sent to the President of the Security Council, it makes reference to a resolution in the last sentence of the letter. But it doesn't mean that it needs it right now. It suggests, and we agree with the suggestion, that a resolution may be appropriate at some time.

MS. KELEMEN: Do you need to get the UN more involved? I mean, you've been talking to Kofi Annan about this. He's worried about security in Iraq.

SECRETARY POWELL: He is worried about security, as we are. And we are going to be working with Kofi Annan and his security people to see if we can't create conditions that will cause the Secretary General, Mr. Annan, to send a senior representative back into the country.

This is a time when we want to see greater UN involvement: as the Iraqis set about the writing of the fundamental law; they set about creating a transitional assembly, and getting ready for elections in due course. And so I know that the Secretary General wants to play a more active role.

The role might be played by people going back into Baghdad or by elements of the UN working from nearby countries in order to do their job.

MS. KELEMEN: We've heard Germany talk about the need, now, to reschedule the debt for Iraq. Germany has also offered to train Iraqi police. The French had that offer on the table to train Iraqi police. It seems the U.S. isn't in such a rush to take up all of these offers, or --

SECRETARY POWELL: We are spending a lot of time talking to our German and French colleagues. We have had a

number of conversations recently on debt relief. I spoke to Foreign Minister de Villepin of France about it yesterday and our Treasury Secretary spoke to his French colleague Minister Mer a few days ago. So we're following up on these suggestions.

We have a good plan to train more Iraqi police at a facility in Jordan. And that's what we're concentrating on right now, but we are appreciative of the offers that have been made by Germany and others to support that police training effort. And in due course, we'll see whether the offer they have made is consistent with the training plan that's being put together by the CPA.

MS. KELEMAN: Do you think that -- you've been credited with getting a consensus on the UN votes recently on Iraq. Do you think that consensus has played out on the ground in Iraq?

SECRETARY POWELL: It will, over time. I mean, we have now, since the controversy of the war, we have been able to get unanimous consent on three postwar resolutions, all dealing with the activities of the CPA, all dealing with reconstruction activities.

And so the international community is coming together again. We had a major disagreement in the spring over whether or not a war should be fought, but that war was fought and that war succeeded in getting rid of one of the worst dictators on the face of the earth, one of the most evil regimes that we have ever seen -- a regime that filled mass graves, that did develop weapons of mass destruction, a regime that threatened its neighbors and imprisoned its own people.

And that regime is now gone. The difficult work lies ahead: helping a people that have never really known democracy how to build a democracy, and doing it in the face of some regime leftovers who are causing us the security problems. They don't want to see us there. But guess what? They also don't want to see a democracy there. They don't want the Iraqi people to have a better life. They want to take them back to the past, to the regime, to a regime that resembles a regime that we got rid of. That isn't going to happen. The President has made it clear that we will prevail; and working with our coalition partners on the ground and working with the international community, I am confident we will prevail.

MS. KELEMAN: We've heard President Bush, Secretary Rumsfeld talk about how we're fighting this war on terrorism in Iraq so that we don't have to fight them in the streets of the U.S. But I wonder where the logic is in that, since we have seen so many other terrorist attacks against Western interests -- in Turkey recently, in Saudi Arabia. Has this war made the world safer?

SECRETARY POWELL: I think what it's done is shown that these terrorists are everywhere and they are determined to strike civilized nations. And I don't think that our efforts have made them any worse or created them; they were there all along, waiting. I mean, the Saudis have now discovered that they have terrorist cells throughout the Kingdom. Just in the last 24 hours they uncovered another one with huge quantities of munitions, waiting. And it wasn't our effort that started this effort on their part. They have always intended to go after the Saudi regime. They have always intended to try to destabilize places such as Turkey.

And so this is a global war that we're involved in. The President made that very clear when he first spoke to the nation after 9/11. It just wasn't what happened on 9/11. It was the terrorism that has been going on before 9/11 and would continue to afflict the world, and now we all have to join together in a fight against terrorism, and the President is leading that fight and leading it in a very, very effective way.

Now, Secretary Rumsfeld, myself, the President -- all of us -- have said that terrorists are trying to get into Iraq to see if they can cause more trouble. Some of the bombings we've seen there have the fingerprints of terrorist organizations. So we're dealing with the remnants of the old regime. That's the major threat that we're dealing with in Iraq. But we also know that terrorists have come to make trouble, and they will be dealt with, too.

MS. KELEMAN: When you talk about spreading democracy, I wonder -- this week, the Iraqi Governing Council banned an Arab television station from operating in Iraq. It seems that it's going against the fundamental idea of spreading democracy in this region.

SECRETARY POWELL: I don't think so. If you take note, at the same time that some 150 to 180 newspapers have started up operation in Iraq since the liberation, and I don't think anybody would say there is a shortage of coverage of what's happening in Baghdad and in other parts of Iraq. It fills our television screen and our newspaper every day. So there's no lack of coverage of what's going on.

In the case of these stations that the Governing Council took action against, they were doing more than just covering the news; they were part of the news. They managed to conveniently show up before an incident would take place. They kind of positioned themselves so they could see when a rocket or an improvised explosive device was going to go off under an American vehicle.

This goes beyond normal news coverage. This is complicity in the act of terrorism.

MS. KELEMAN: And the U.S. has evidence of that?

SECRETARY POWELL: That is what I understand. I don't have the evidence in my hand today, but Mr. Rumsfeld spoke to that yesterday.

MS. KELEMAN: May I ask one question on Iran quickly? On Iran, are you willing to let the Europeans take the lead now in this, what they call this "constructive engagement" to deal with Iran's nuclear program, or is the Bush Administration going to insist on more of a confrontational approach?

SECRETARY POWELL: We haven't -- why would you even suggest we're looking for a confrontational approach? We have worked within the international community, with the International Atomic Energy Agency. We have worked with our European Union friends, and especially, as they're called, the EU 3 -- France, Germany and the United Kingdom -- to come up with a good resolution.

And so, lo and behold, the Administration worked in a multilateral way to come up with a resolution that was agreed by voice vote in Vienna the other day. I think this shows that when we can work together toward a common purpose, then the United States can be as multilateral as anyone. And what has happened over the last couple of years with respect to Iran, it was the United States who kept telling our European Union friends and our Russian friends and other friends around the world: Iran is developing nuclear weapons.

And people kind of looked away, said, nah, they're just creating nuclear power plants. Well, this is a country loaded with oil. Why does it need a nuclear power plant? And we kept insisting that we had good information, and everybody thought that the United States was just playing that "axis of evil" card.

Well, guess what? Finally, the world saw the evidence. The evidence came forward. And the International Atomic Energy Agency, under Dr. ElBaradei, showed that Iran has been failing in its obligations to the Nonproliferation Treaty and the other obligations they have, and they have been working on programs that could lead to the development of a nuclear weapon, and now they have been called to account.

And in this resolution, they have also been told you have, one, been in breach of your obligations; and, two, we put a specific reference in the resolution, at U.S. insistence, that said if they have not stopped and we find further violations, that will be a matter that will have to be taken up immediately, in accordance with appropriate documents and statutes, which means it will be referred to the United Nations.

MS. KELEMAN: Mr. Secretary, thank you very much.

SECRETARY POWELL: Thank you very much.

MS. KELEMAN: And what are your holiday plans? What's the Powell family --

SECRETARY POWELL: Enjoy a family Thanksgiving. And I wish a Happy Thanksgiving to all your listeners.

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