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## Interview by Ted Koppel of ABC's Nightline

### Secretary Colin L. Powell

Washington, DC  
January 7, 2004

**MR. KOPPEL:** A lot of important things to talk to you about -- your health, dangerous -- dangerous trends in the world -- but let's begin by talking about the one issue that everyone here in Washington, from the White House to the State Department, I assume, is most concerned about today: Joe Gibbs coming back to the Redskins.

**SECRETARY POWELL:** This is an interesting and exciting prospect. I don't know if it's true, but it would surely liven the football scene in Washington. He has quite a record.

**MR. KOPPEL:** Well, he does indeed, and I just wanted to -- just wanted to hear from an old sports fanatic what you thought about that.

**SECRETARY POWELL:** Oh, I'm sure we would -- we would find Joe to be an exciting personality to have back, but since I deal with foreign affairs I think I'll stay out of Mr. Snyder's business for the day.

**MR. KOPPEL:** Well, let's talk about one more domestic affair before we get to foreign, your own health. Intimations of mortality when you first heard about that? I mean, that must be a shocker.

**SECRETARY POWELL:** Well, I knew months ago that I had prostate cancer, and I have great doctors up at Walter Reed Army Medical Center who have a lot of experience in this matter. And I knew that I'd have to deal with it, and surgery was the way I elected to deal with it.

The surgery went very well. I'm well into the recovery period. And it just reminds all of us that prostate cancer is a serious matter and especially for black men.

Now, the reason I discovered it was because I had been monitoring it for years. Elevated PSA, you know the tests you take for that.

**MR. KOPPEL:** Right, right.

**SECRETARY POWELL:** And I've had biopsies over the years looking for the cancer, and we finally found it this past August.

So I would just say that I've had the operation; that problem is gone. It does suggest mortality at age 66, even for me. And I encourage all men to watch their health and especially with respect to the potential for prostate cancer.

**MR. KOPPEL:** In terms of just getting back into it again, I mean, you've always been an extraordinarily active man.

**SECRETARY POWELL:** Yes. Well --

**MR. KOPPEL:** Spent most of your life in the military.

**SECRETARY POWELL:** Yes. It's three and a half weeks, and my energy is returning. We won't go all into the various details of the procedures and what comes in the immediate aftermath of the surgery.

**MR. KOPPEL:** Right.

**SECRETARY POWELL:** But my energy's returning and I'm pulling a full day at the office again.

**MR. KOPPEL:** A full day being? You can go in when, you leave when?

**SECRETARY POWELL:** Oh, I was here this morning at, a little bit later than usual, about 7. I usually get here about 6:30 and I usually leave 6 -- I get here about 6:30 to quarter to 7 in the morning. And I usually leave anywhere between 7 to 8 at night.

**MR. KOPPEL:** And so, just to welcome you back, the Wall Street Journal has an op-ed piece this morning, Richard Perle, one of his colleagues, co-author, "The Soft Policy, Soft-Line Ideologue," that's you. You're supposed to be the leader of the soft-line ideologues. Did you read it?

**SECRETARY POWELL:** Yes.

**MR. KOPPEL:** What did you think?

**SECRETARY POWELL:** Interesting way of looking at things. What I'm trying to do for the President and what I'm trying to do for the American people is to help the President conduct a foreign policy that is consistent with our values and consistent with the need for us to have partners and friends around the world. Not every problem lends itself to a hard-edged solution.

Diplomacy works, and the President understands that. That's why he takes the case that he wants to make on a particular issue to the United Nations, or to the international community. That's why we've seen progress with respect to Libya. That's why we have seen progress with respect to the Sudan. That's why we have seen progress with respect to India and Pakistan. And that is through diplomacy, working with friends and allies.

Does that mean that we should not use a hard edge or force? Of course not. And that's what we did in Iraq when diplomacy had run its course and it was clear that the only solution possible at that point, in our judgment, was a military solution.

So the President has a full range of tools in his foreign policy toolbox, and it is my job and the job of Don Rumsfeld and Condi Rice and Vice President Cheney and the other members of the team, George Tenet included, to suggest to the President the proper combination of tools: soft tools, hard tools. And I serve the President and try to give him the best advice I can as to how to use those tools.

**MR. KOPPEL:** When you speak in general terms of how you go about shaping your foreign policy, I can't imagine that any one of the colleagues that you have just enumerated there would find -- would take any issue with what you said. I mean, everyone understands sometimes you have to use diplomacy, sometimes you have to be a lot tougher.

Why do you think it is that, month after month after month, really since you first came in, there has been this perception, as there frequently is in this town, but about as hard as I've ever seen it over 30 years here, that there is you and your softies here at the State Department, perhaps assisted occasionally by some of those fuzzy-minded thinkers at the CIA, and then there are all the clear-eyed realists at the Pentagon and the White House, and that there is just a sharp division between you?

**SECRETARY POWELL:** Well, you know, it's a phenomenon that goes back prior to this Administration and this Secretary.

**MR. KOPPEL:** In 30 years I've seen it many times.

**SECRETARY POWELL:** The State Department -- good heavens, they're diplomats over there. Good heavens, they

reach out and talk to people. Good heavens, they try to prevent wars. Yes, guilty. We do all that.

But what we really do is serve the President. And yes, there are occasionally very sharp differences within our team, and more often than not there is agreement within our team. But the one thing everybody in our team understands is that we're doing this for the President. It's his foreign policy. He decides what we're going to do, and he does it in the name of the people who elected him to the office.

And as we enter 2004, I think we've got quite a few things that we can point to where our foreign policy has been successful, whether it's helping the Indians and the Pakistanis get out of a crisis that was almost on the verge of nuclear war -- you remember how scared everybody was about that just 18 months ago. We've worked closely with them and we saw success. Sudan -- we are very close to a comprehensive agreement to end a war that's been going on for 20 years. Working with the British, we had success in Libya. Working with our friends in Asia, to include Russia, we have a six-party negotiation discussion going on that I hope will find us with a diplomatic solution with respect to North Korea. And so, in so many areas, the President has reached out and used diplomacy.

So I have been around this town for many years, Ted, and I have been up, I have been down, I have been criticized, I have been blessed and praised, and this all goes with the territory. And the only thing I worry about: Am I serving the President? Am I serving the American people? And I will let my critics judge me against those two standards.

**MR. KOPPEL:** Mr. Secretary, we're going to take a short break. You won't be surprised to learn that when we come back I'll focus on a few of those other areas where things are not moving along quite as swimmingly.

**SECRETARY POWELL:** I'm sure you are.

**MR. KOPPEL:** Back with Secretary Powell in just a moment.

(Commercial break.)

**MR. KOPPEL:** And we're back once again in the State Department television studio with the Secretary of State, Colin Powell. I do want to start on one of the areas you were referencing a moment ago, where things seem to be moving slightly better. And the suggestion in today's newspapers was that you are deliberating making as much as you possibly can of it to encourage the North Koreans to move along with negotiations.

Has there really been a major step forward? The North Koreans are intimating that they might be willing to give up their nuclear energy program, which has always been sort of the front for their nuclear weapons program, we have believed. Do you think that is a major step, or are you just making the most of what there is?

**SECRETARY POWELL:** I didn't describe it as a major step or as a breakthrough. I called it a positive step. And any time the North Koreans take a step which suggests that they are moving in the direction that we think is the correct direction with respect to solving this problem, then I take note of it. And when they do something that is not helpful, I'll take note of that as well.

But was I also conveying to our friends in the six-party team that we should take note of this positive step? Sure.

**MR. KOPPEL:** And where do you think it's going to go? Is there a meeting scheduled now?

**SECRETARY POWELL:** I think there is -- we don't have a meeting scheduled yet of the six parties. But as I was saying to a group recently, just because a meeting isn't scheduled and we're not sitting in a room somewhere, it doesn't mean that there aren't discussions taking place. We are in intense discussions with our Japanese colleagues, our Chinese colleagues, our Russian colleagues and our South Korean colleagues.

**MR. KOPPEL:** Is it possible --

**SECRETARY POWELL:** And they're in touch with the North Koreans. So there is a serious discussion going on. What we don't want is another six-party meeting that just turns into auditory exchanges of view. We want to see progress in this next meeting -- all of us do -- so we want to make sure that next meeting is prepared well and we have a pretty good idea of the outcome, and it will be an outcome that moves the process forward and not just an

exchange of views.

**MR. KOPPEL:** You've got an American team over there right now, not an official team, but the Stanford academics and people who have experience in nuclear affairs are over there. Rather pointedly, in public, the suggestion has been, well, they're not over there doing anything for us.

Are you going to let yourself at least be briefed by these folks when they come back? They could have something useful to say.

**SECRETARY POWELL:** Yes. They are not there as representatives of the United States Government. They're there on private trips -- two groups, two senate staffers, and the group that you made reference to with some nuclear expertise and experience.

And we knew they were going out and they don't represent any of our positions, but such visits can be useful when they talk to the North Koreans. And we will be more than delighted to speak to them when they return, and they will be checking in with our embassies as they come back.

This is not unusual or extraordinary, but they do not represent the United States Government. And the reason we focus on that is we don't want to confuse anyone that these are emissaries or envoys or a delegation representing the Administration.

**MR. KOPPEL:** But you'll pay attention to what they have to say when they come back?

**SECRETARY POWELL:** We will listen.

**MR. KOPPEL:** A huge piece in The Washington Post today on the WMD program in Iraq. And the conclusion of the reporter, who seems to have spent a very long time talking to a great many people over there, is that, if anything, the program was in greater disarray than anyone might have believed possible before the war.

How could we have been so misinformed?

**SECRETARY POWELL:** Well, I'm not sure that I would buy into the conclusion that the reporter has come to, if he came to that conclusion. We still have a great deal of work going on under Dr. Kay's leadership and the survey group.

**MR. KOPPEL:** Is he leaving, incidentally?

**SECRETARY POWELL:** I've seen press reports of that. I'm not aware of him leaving. I had a nice exchange of Christmas greetings with him and he didn't indicate anything to me, but I'll let Director Tenet worry about that part of it.

For years, there was no doubt in anyone's mind that Saddam Hussein and the members of his regime had every intention of developing weapons of mass destruction. That's incontrovertible. Nobody would disagree with that. Even the article this morning suggests that.

It is also incontrovertible that they have used weapons of mass destruction. They gassed their Iranian enemies. They gassed their own people.

**MR. KOPPEL:** Back in the late '80s.

**SECRETARY POWELL:** Back in the late '80s. But should that not be counted for anything, then?

**MR. KOPPEL:** No, no they are nasty people, Mr. Secretary --

**SECRETARY POWELL:** So everything we have seen over those years since they actually used these weapons in 1988 led us to the conclusion, led the intelligence community to the conclusion, that they still had intent, they still had capability and they were not going to give up that capability. What they actually had in the way of inventory was

something we had to try to analyze, and we put the best people on it. And the intelligence community presented all the information they had in national intelligence estimates and information they provided to the Congress. It was also consistent with information that UN inspectors had come up with over the years and foreign intelligence agencies had come up with over the years.

When I went before the world last February 5th at the United Nations Security Council, with Director Tenet there with me, I was presenting, in the most balanced way that I could, but in a way to make the case, the considered view of the U.S. intelligence community, which was shared by most of the intelligence community cells throughout the world in different countries.

Now, how much is actually there, we'll find out when Dr. Kay finishes his work. One of the problems is we didn't really know how much was there. That's why we gave Saddam Hussein a chance to tell us what was there, give us an honest declaration of what you've been doing. And he didn't do that.

**MR. KOPPEL:** But you were specifying. You spoke about anywhere between 100 and 500 metric tons.

**SECRETARY POWELL:** Yes, that we didn't know what happened to.

**MR. KOPPEL:** Right.

**SECRETARY POWELL:** Right. And he didn't tell us what happened to it.

**MR. KOPPEL:** But the implication was it was still there.

**SECRETARY POWELL:** No, the implication was that they had this kind of material and they have not accounted for it, and to this day they have not accounted for it. And with this kind of lack of accounting for on the part of a regime of this nature, that has used this material to kill human beings, what is the prudent course of action? To move against such a regime, or to just assume, well, you know, we can't prove the case today, therefore let it go?

**MR. KOPPEL:** Mr. Secretary --

**SECRETARY POWELL:** And the intelligence community, to this day, stands behind the judgments that were made and that were presented to the world, presented to the Congress and presented to the American people through the national intelligence estimate, and that I presented before the Security Council.

**MR. KOPPEL:** I want to pick up on that theme in just a moment. We have to take another short break. Back with Secretary Powell in a moment.

(Commercial break.)

**MR. KOPPEL:** And back once again with Secretary Powell.

Is there any doubt in your mind that if you and the President and the Vice President and the Secretary of Defense had come forward and had spoken as equivocally as you just did before the break about the nature of weapons, if the President had spoken about the possibility of weapons programs, even if there aren't any real weapons, the fact that yes, there had been weapons but that was 20 years ago plus when they were used against Iraq's enemies and against its own people, that the American people would have, or that the U.S. Congress, for that matter, would have as enthusiastically supported going to war against Iraq as they did?

**SECRETARY POWELL:** The U.S. Congress had the benefit of not just the President's exhortations or mine or Dick Cheney's or Don Rumsfeld's. The U.S. Congress was kept regularly informed by the intelligence community, by Director Tenet. They were given information upon which to base their own judgment as to whether they should pass the resolution last year.

And, you know, my background is not diplomacy, it's infantry; and you take an intent and the capability and it produces something that could kill you. The Iraqis had the intent. They had the capability. We could not get inside all of Iraq to determine what weapons might actually be there, but there was a sufficient body of intelligence information

that suggested to us that there were weapons programs -- chemical, biological, nuclear; I don't think we overstated that. If you look again at what I said to the Security Council, I think it was a balanced presentation, recognizing some of the unknowns.

And so I think the President had a powerful case. He made it to the American people. And I think the American people, in light of what has happened, are supportive of the President's effort. And we now know that the real challenge ahead of us is to put in place a democratic system of government for the Iraqi people and turn sovereignty back over to them as quickly as possible. In the meantime, our soldiers and sailors and airmen and marines and other wonderful young GIs will be there putting their lives at risk to help the Iraqis achieve that sovereignty.

**MR. KOPPEL:** We still don't know what's happened to those weapons. I mean, they could have been -- they could have been shipped out of the country. They could be in the hands of terrorist units.

**SECRETARY POWELL:** I don't know. I can't tell you, nor could I have told you last February, how many there were. But we knew what the differences were between what they could have had and might have had, and they wouldn't answer the question.

**MR. KOPPEL:** It seems to me there are only three options: they either didn't exist, in other words, they had been destroyed beforehand; they were destroyed before we came in; or they were disseminated to points unknown and people unknown.

**SECRETARY POWELL:** I have no strong -- I have no evidence to suggest that there were huge inventories that were shipped out of the country. It's not impossible, but I don't have information.

But the real question is, when you have information that suggests they do have these things, how do you use that information? And I think the President used it correctly. It was a danger to the region.

And what Saddam Hussein was trying to do was to get out of sanctions. He wanted to be free of the UN. He wanted to be free of pressure. And he was hoping he would tie us up in knots and just keep kicking the ball and get out of the pressure that he was under.

And there is no doubt in my mind that if he had succeeded, if he had succeeded in removing that pressure and sort of having the whole thing just fall apart last spring, and the Americans and the Brits do not do what we did, it is my judgment that he would be doing much more right now, if he were still in power, to develop even more than he might have developed at that point with respect to weapons of mass destruction, because he saw the utility of such weapons and he's used them in the past.

So why should we bet on that kind of outcome, particularly when he told us at the beginning that he was not going to give us an honest declaration of what he had or did not have.

**MR. KOPPEL:** He's gone. His sons are gone. We occupy Iraq. The danger to the United States, in terms of the terrorist threat, doesn't seem diminished. I mean, we are reading this morning again in the newspaper now that over the past few weeks -- and you would know much more about this than I do -- nuclear scientists have been disseminated around the United States, to at least five or six major cities, for fear that a dirty bomb will be exploded here.

How serious a danger is that? And if, after everything that's happened in Iraq and everything that we have done to al-Qaida, the danger still seems to be that great, how do we ever win this war?

**SECRETARY POWELL:** I think we will win it. Will we ever remove every al-Qaida operative in the world? I don't think that's likely.

**MR. KOPPEL:** How great is this danger right now?

**SECRETARY POWELL:** We have elevated the level of the risk and we're constantly looking at that to see if it's the right level. But, you know, even the smallest risk, if you can do something about it, then you ought to try to do something about it. I don't how likely it is that there is a radiological weapon somewhere in the country, but if we know

how to guard against that by disseminating around the country nuclear scientists who have the wherewithal to monitor and measure, then that's a prudent step to take.

The President made it very clear at the very outset of this campaign against terrorism, right after 9/11, that we were in for a long struggle and that we would not flag in the struggle, that we would stay at it. And we had to be patient and we had to use all the tools at our disposal -- law enforcement, financial controls, the military from time to time -- and we're going to be at it for a long time.

The American people are brave people. We are not going to be cowed into hiding under our desks, the way we did in the early '50s. And you are old enough to remember that.

**MR. KOPPEL:** When we were not brave people?

**SECRETARY POWELL:** Well, we were brave people, but nevertheless we really were even more afraid of the potential dangers that were out there then. And what I say to people is let's protect ourselves, let's secure our homeland, let's make sure we know who's coming in our country, let's make sure we know who's leaving our country, and let's do prudent things, working with our friends and allies. But let's remain an open America, let's welcome people to this country -- and the President will be making a speech about that today -- and at the same time, let's go about our business, let's go to our resorts, let's go to our entertainment activities.

I'm pleased that on New Year's Eve, even though there was an elevated level of threat, Americans went out like they always do. They went to Times Square. They were all out celebrating the new year, a new year that I hope will bring more peace to troubled parts of the world -- and we're already seeing that -- a new year that will show that America is standing strong and tall for its principles and its values.

**MR. KOPPEL:** One more question on your health that has to do with an issue that is repeatedly raised, and that is whether Colin Powell will be around for a second term. Your health would certainly give you the opportunity to say, "Look, I did what I had to do, but I need to take care of my own personal matters right now."

**SECRETARY POWELL:** Ted, the only answer to the question I ever give is I serve at the pleasure of the President. And that's the answer. And I just do my job to the best of my ability and I serve my President.

**MR. KOPPEL:** And the appropriate follow-up to that is, if the President asks you to stay, will you stay?

**SECRETARY POWELL:** And the appropriate answer to that is I serve at the pleasure of the President and I don't answer hypothetical questions.

(Laughter.)

**MR. KOPPEL:** It's always a pleasure seeing you. I'm glad to see you doing so well.

**SECRETARY POWELL:** My pleasure. Have a good trip.

**MR. KOPPEL:** Thank you very much.

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