

## Interview on Fox News Sunday with Chris Wallace

**Secretary Colin L. Powell**

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**MR. WALLACE:** Mr. Secretary, I want to discuss your trip to the region. But, first, the prison abuse scandal continues to go on in Washington, so let's start there.

*The New Yorker* magazine is reporting today that Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld approved a secret operation allowing aggressive interrogation, including physical coercion and sexual humiliation. What do you know about that, sir?

**SECRETARY POWELL:** I don't know anything about it, Chris. I haven't had a chance to read the Sy Hersh article, just a summary of it; but I understand that the Pentagon spokesman has already dismissed the allegation. And I'll have to let my Pentagon colleagues deal with any other details of the story.

**MR. WALLACE:** Could an operation like that have gone on without the Secretary of State knowing about it?

**SECRETARY POWELL:** Chris, I'm not acknowledging that such an operation did go on, and therefore I can't comment on the Sy Hersh story because I haven't read it, don't know anything about it, and the Pentagon is saying that it is not an accurate story. So there is no point in me speculating about something that we don't know took place.

**MR. WALLACE:** Mr. Secretary, as former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, do you have any problems with the interrogation techniques that we know were approved at Abu Ghraib with commander approval? I'm talking specifically about putting a hood over a prisoner for several days, stripping them naked, threatening them with muzzled guard dogs. Do you have any problems with that?

**SECRETARY POWELL:** The kind of activities that I saw on the pictures that are now famous, of course, are totally unacceptable. They're deplorable. And I am not completely familiar with all of the instructions that may have been given or not given to the guards, and I think I will let that remain with the Pentagon to explain the basis upon which they had certain instructions or not. I have always been a strong believer in the need to treat

those who we now have custody of as an act of war and they're now our responsibility with respect and accordance with international obligations that we have under the Geneva Convention and other international laws.

And even if the Geneva Convention does not directly apply in terms of individuals being illegal combatants and not prisoners of war, we still have an obligation to treat them humanely, consistent with international standards. And that's been my position because that's the way we want our troops to be treated if they are captured.

**MR. WALLACE:** The International Red Cross says that it reported abuses at Abu Ghraib last fall, including prisoners stripped naked for days, sexual humiliation. Were you made aware last year of those alleged abuses?

**SECRETARY POWELL:** We knew that the ICRC had concerns, and in accordance with the manner in which the ICRC does its work, it presented those concerns directly to the command in Baghdad. And I know that some corrective action was taken with respect to those concerns, but I don't have the details of it.

The first time that I had a conversation with Mr. Kellenberger after that was on January 15 of this year, when he said to me in my office in the State Department that he continued to have concerns and would be issuing a report. We discussed that within the Principals Committees, within the Administration. We were concerned, and we know that in early February the ICRC presented their formal report to the command in Baghdad, both to Ambassador Bremer and to General Sanchez, and then subsequently, a few weeks later, the reports became available to us in Washington from the ICRC.

By then, however, the information with respect to Abu Ghraib and what the soldiers had been doing there was made known to the command by one of the soldiers themselves. So by the time we got the report, either in Baghdad or in Washington, an investigation had already been launched. Just about the time Dr. Kellenberger was meeting with me, the command over there under General Sanchez had already launched an investigation in response to information given to General Sanchez by one of the soldiers, and the General Taguba report was already underway and being prepared during the time that we were receiving the ICRC report in February and early March.

**MR. WALLACE:** Mr. Secretary, just to make sure that I have the timeline right, though. Last year I'm talking about, not this February, did you ever discuss Red Cross concerns about alleged abuses at Abu Ghraib with either Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld or the President?

**SECRETARY POWELL:** All of the reports we were receiving from ICRC having to do with the situation in Guantanamo, the situation in Afghanistan, or the situation in Iraq was a subject of discussion within the Administration, at our Principals Committee meetings and at our NSC meetings. We were aware of them, and we knew that those concerns were being presented to our command in Baghdad, and we were expecting our command in Baghdad to make the necessary responses.

As Mr. Kellenberger has said to me -- Dr. Kellenberger has said to me, corrective action was taken on a number of the abuses that were pointed out to our command. I cannot give you a complete rollout, though, of what all of the concerns were that were raised and which ones were dealt with by the command in Baghdad. I will have to refer to the Pentagon to give you that listing of concerns raised, concerns dealt with, concerns outstanding.

**MR. WALLACE:** Mr. Secretary, let's turn now to your travels. Over the last few days, you've met with European foreign ministers and now with Arab leaders. How much damage has the prisoner abuse scandal done to U.S. standing? How much of a backlash is there?

**SECRETARY POWELL:** It has been damaging, there is no doubt about it. People are disappointed in the United States. This is not consistent with our value system. What I've been telling all of my audiences --- both the G-8 ministers, as well as my audiences here at the World Economic Forum at the Dead Sea -- is that this will be dealt with, justice will be done. The individuals responsible for this will be punished, will be brought to justice.

But keep in mind, tens upon tens of thousands of wonderful young American soldiers are doing great work for the Iraqi people. They are helping to rebuild schools and hospitals, and putting in sewage facilities, and acting the way you would expect American soldiers to act, the way we have acted during the course of our history, and so our value system is intact.

The United States is a moral nation. The world will now see how we bring people to justice for their misbehavior. And as Secretary Rumsfeld and the President have both said, we will follow this up the chain of command to see what failings may have existed within the chain of command.

**MR. WALLACE:** Here is one of many good reasons why I am not Secretary of State, sir, but do you ever mention to Arab leaders when they're discussing this the systematic torture of prisoners in their countries?

**SECRETARY POWELL:** Yes, I've made it clear that this kind of behavior is unacceptable in any society. When you are outraged at what happened at the prison, you should be equally, doubly outraged at what happened to Mr. Berg, a man who was picked up, who was not a combatant, who was doing nothing but trying to find work in Iraq. To have him murdered on camera so that his parents could see it, with his throat being slit by one of the worst terrorists on the face of the Earth, that is equal to any other act you've seen with respect to the need to condemn it, and to condemn it outright, and to condemn it publicly.

And we need that same level of outrage and condemnation coming from the Arab world, just as it's coming from us. All of this kind of behavior is unacceptable to the modern world.

**MR. WALLACE:** How do you explain, both from the Arab leaders and the Arab street, that you don't see the same outrage over the brutal execution of Nick Berg, and also, as I say, the systematic torture of prisoners in Arab prisons?

**SECRETARY POWELL:** Torture of any kind is unacceptable. Arab leaders need to look at what's happening in their own societies; they need to reform their societies, one of the issues we've been talking about. What I have found, both here and in my meetings earlier this week with the G-8 foreign ministers is that there is a convergence between the Arab nations and the industrialized world, that all of us have to move forward down a path of reform.

But torture is torture is torture. It is unacceptable. It is not the way you deal with human beings who are entrusted to your care -- by right of conquest or the fact that you have captured them -- and you are totally responsible for their welfare. We have international standards that have to be maintained, and those standards don't just apply to the United States of America; they apply to all civilized countries, or countries claiming to be civilized.

**MR. WALLACE:** Mr. Secretary, you caused a bit of a stir this week when you said, although you made it basically a theoretical point, that the Iraqi government after June 30 would have the power to ask the U.S. to leave. As I say, you don't believe it's going to happen. I know that some of the European countries, especially France and Russia, are pressing for more, and I want to ask you about that. Will the interim government have control over Iraqi soldiers and police, and will they have the right to refuse U.S. military orders?

**SECRETARY POWELL:** We expect that the Iraqi Ministry of Defense and the Minister of Defense and the generals working within the Ministry of Defense will have command and control over their troops.

But we also expect that for unity of command and to make sure there is no confusion as to what we're doing with respect to security, they will put those troops under the direction of the multinational force commander, who will be an American. You have to have unity of command on a battlefield, and we hope that we will be able to work out arrangements with the Iraqi interim government to bring this to pass. It is not a complicated issue. It is not something that we have not done elsewhere in other countries.

But the question came up: Is this a government that is going to have sovereignty? Is it going to have authority over its land? And the answer is yes, because the Coalition Provisional Authority is going away. Ambassador Bremer will be returning home. Ambassador Negroponte does not replace him; the interim government replaces Ambassador Bremer. So the only authority really is that interim government.

And the theoretical question that was put to us, the hypothetical was, if they actually asked us to leave, would we? And the answer is yes. But we don't expect that to be the case. They know and we know that it will be a period of time -- and some considerable period of time -- before we can see conditions of security that can be placed totally into

the hands of Iraqi security forces.

There will be a need for American troops and coalition troops, and we're confident that the Iraqi interim government will understand this.

And so it's a hypothetical question that we answered because we didn't want there to be any confusion about the nature of sovereignty that's being turned over, but I don't think it's a problem that we're really going to have to face in a practical way.

**MR. WALLACE:** Mr. Secretary, will the multinational force be given a timetable to leave, as the French and Russians want? And generally, how do you think -- what do you think are the prospects that you'll get a U.N. resolution before June 30 backing the interim Iraqi government and perhaps creating a greater multinational force?

**SECRETARY POWELL:** The prospects of a resolution I think are good. We've had good conversations with our colleagues on the Security Council, and the issues that have been raised I think are issues that we can work out in the weeks ahead.

The French and Russians and some others have suggested that there ought to be some time dimensions to the presence of a multinational force, but there is no specific date, they say, it has to be out. What they're suggesting -- and it's a suggestion that we fully understand -- is that after the National Assembly has been created by a free vote next year, then the government that flows from that National Assembly, what we will call the transitional government, certainly should be given the opportunity to review the security arrangements it has made with the multinational force. Since it is sovereign, we would pay attention to what they say and listen to what they say.

The United States is not anxious to keep our troops there any longer than we have to. This isn't something we're trying to hang on to. We want to finish our job, turn full sovereignty over to the Iraqi people, see them elect a government that is fully representative of the people, see them raise up an army, a civil defense corps, police -- police troops, police officers that are able to control the country, and let us come back home as fast as we possibly can. We're not hanging on to this for any longer than we have to; but we're also not going to leave while the Iraqi people still need us, and while the interim government or the transitional government still sees a need for our presence.

**MR. WALLACE:** Mr. Secretary, thank you so much for talking with us today. Safe travels back to the U.S.