

## Interview with Hafiz Mirazi of Al-Jazeera Television

**Secretary Colin L. Powell**

Washington, DC

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(1:40 p.m. EDT)

**MR. MIRAZI:** Mr. Secretary, let me start first with the reports coming out of the conclusion of the 9/11 congressional investigative commission that they concluded that there is no evidence or credible evidence, whatsoever, of any link between al-Qaida and the regime of Saddam Hussein, or that Saddam Hussein did help al-Qaida in targeting the U.S. And the reports are saying this is in contradiction with the Bush Administration. What would be your comment?

**SECRETARY POWELL:** I have seen some press reports that suggest things like that, but I haven't seen the 9/11 report yet. So until they actually do issue the report, it will be premature for me to comment on such a speculation. I think it's better we all wait and see the report and see what it says.

**MR. MIRAZI:** But as far as the Administration is concern, for the record now, it is still the U.S. position of the Administration that the regime of Saddam Hussein did help al-Qaida in targeting the U.S.?

**SECRETARY POWELL:** I think we have said, and it is clear, that there is a connection, and we have seen these connections between al-Qaida and the regime of Saddam Hussein and we stick with that. We have not said it was related to 9/11. So, you know, this is the commission that was looking into 9/11. But we have indicated that we have seen terrorist links with Saddam Hussein and his regime and some linkages with Saddam Hussein and al-Qaida.

**MR. MIRAZI:** There has been a lot of controversy after some people in the Congress found a discrepancy in the State Department annual report on international pattern of terrorism or pattern of international terrorism. I believe many people are questioning the motivation behind that the Administration or the State Department give much less numbers for terrorist incidents than what happened, and they are saying that this is politically motivated to show that the Administration did succeed in the war against terrorism.

**SECRETARY POWELL:** No, there was no political motivation because I never knew about the errors until they were pointed out to me. And once those errors were pointed out, we got all of the analysts together. As you know, the information comes to the State

Department from the Terrorist Threat Information Center\* that reports to the CIA. Well, they are all now working with my staff to get the right numbers, and we will be making a report in the next few days back to the Congress and to the public, as to what the correct numbers are.

We've eliminated the errors. There were some errors in the report. I don't know that it will change the report significantly, but there will be some adjustment in the numbers. But there was no political motivation. This was administrative and clerical problems.

**MR. MIRAZI:** But wouldn't that be a source of concern for you that the whole State Department, with all respect to all the talent here, could not figure out something like that and some one or two Congress people could?

**SECRETARY POWELL:** Well, they got some analysts to look at it. And I am disappointed that we didn't catch the errors. But we didn't.

I think the more important point is, if you look at the narratives that goes along with the numbers, you will see that we spoke very clearly about the risk that terrorism presents to the United States and to the world, and that terrorism is a problem that has not gone away. It is very much a problem. We see it manifest itself in so many places in the world.

So we are treating terrorism as a problem. The President said it would be a long struggle to defeat terrorism, and we're not looking to make it look better. We want to put the facts out to the American people, which is why I asked for the entire database of the report to be reexamined, and we'll put out new numbers. But don't expect to see that those new numbers will be significantly different in terms of the number of terrorist activities. We just want to make sure we get it right.

**MR. MIRAZI:** At least it would make it more than lists terrorist acts contrary to what was claimed after that, that the terrorism incident have decreased?

**SECRETARY POWELL:** What it will do is make sure that it is a complete description of what happened in 2003, in terms of the serious nature of terrorist incidents and those that were nevertheless reported, even if they weren't that significant. And it will be a solid analytical foundation upon which these numbers are resting, and that's what our friends at the Terrorist Threat Information Center\* have been working on for the last several days.

**MR. MIRAZI:** In the same spirit, Mr. Secretary, are you willing also to correct what you said at the Security Council on February 5th, before the war, about Iraq's position of weapons of mass destruction, especially that your credibility is on the line and was on the line, with people internationally consider you the most credible one?

**SECRETARY POWELL:** The only thing that I have a question about is the fact that we

did not find any actual stockpiles. There is no question in my mind that the message I conveyed to the world, that Saddam Hussein had the intention of having weapons of mass destruction. He had them in the past. He used them against his own people in the past. He used them against the Iranians in the past. He was not giving us complete answers when asked to do so by the United Nations. He kept the infrastructure in place, and he kept dual-use facilities in place. All of that is correct and I stand by it.

What we don't know the answer to is why haven't we found actual stocks of weapons? And I can't answer that. I am disappointed that that part of the presentation is not supportable yet by evidence and I am trying to find out: Did we go wrong somewhere? Did we have bad sources? Why did we use bad sources?

But I think the message that I conveyed on the 5th of February of my presentation was that this was a regime that has used these weapons in the past, had every intention to do so in the future. The previous administration believed it. Most of the major intelligence organizations in the world believe it, and the UN believed it for years because they kept passing resolutions -- regret we haven't been able to demonstrate why there were or why there were not any stockpiles found. I don't know.

**MR. MIRAZI:** The handover in Iraq has been anticipated with a lot of excitement. But now what is left for to be handed over on June 30th, given the fact that the Governing Council has already dissolved itself and the interim government is in place? Is there going to be a handover between two U.S. Ambassadors, Paul Bremer and John Negroponte?

**SECRETARY POWELL:** No, we've made this very clear that the handover will be from Ambassador Bremer, who is the governing authority in Iraq, to the new governing authority. And the new governing authority is Prime Minister Allawi, and, of course, his colleagues, President Ghazi al-Yawer, and the others. And they are going to be the ones who are going to get the legal authority, once again, restored to the Iraqi people.

Ambassador Negroponte will arrive to be the Ambassador to the new government of Iraq. He will present his credentials to them, just as he would if he was arriving in any other country in the world. So people keep wondering, is sovereignty really going to be returned, and the answer is yes, Bremer is leaving. He's done a tremendous job, a brilliant job, but he is leaving and the Coalition Provisional Authority, as a governing institution, will come to an end. And the Iraqi interim government will take over.

I'm very impressed at the steps that Prime Minister Allawi has taken so far. He is showing great skill. And as you know, 15 of the 26 ministries have already been fully stood up. Ministers are operating on their own. And they now, of course, ultimately, report to Ambassador Bremer; but on the day of transfer, they will immediately start reporting to the new Prime Minister.

**MR. MIRAZI:** Well, in this case, the Administration is entrusting Mr. Allawi and his

government, or new government, to take over Iraq. Why not entrusting them to take over Saddam Hussein because President Bush contradicted Mr. Allawi just one day after he said -- after Allawi said to Al-Jazeera that he's expecting to receive Saddam Hussein?

**SECRETARY POWELL:** I don't think there is really a contradiction here. We all have the same goal, and that's to return full sovereignty, and full sovereignty means that you will have responsibility for dealing with criminals in your society. But we have a particular problem with Saddam Hussein in that we have to make sure, one, that he is protected, and secondly, that he can't get away.

And I think we will work out with Prime Minister when would be the appropriate moment, not only to pass legal custody of Saddam Hussein, but physical custody of Saddam Hussein to the Iraqi authorities. And as the President said yesterday, all that will be worked out in a good course of time. And I think Prime Minister Allawi is in that same position. It will be worked out.

**MR. MIRAZI:** Are you reaching out now to Moqtada al-Sadr, the Shiite leader? It has been reported that Ambassador Christopher Ross is trying to arrange a meeting with him. Is that a change in U.S. policy?

**SECRETARY POWELL:** Well, I don't know if there were meetings that had been arranged. But, certainly, we are trying to persuade Moqtada al-Sadr that this is the time to end all of his militia activity. This is the time to find peace and not find ways to create tension between Iraqi security forces and his militia or our coalition forces working now with the Iraqi sovereign government and his militias. It's time for these militias to go about other work and to find a peaceful resolution to this situation.

You have to remember that --

**MR. MIRAZI:** And he could be rehabilitated in that sense? He could be --

**SECRETARY POWELL:** That is a matter for -- guess who? -- the new sovereign government. It's not a matter of rehabilitating him in the eyes of the Americans. It's a matter of him finding a proper role to play in Iraq and discussing it with the new sovereign government.

See we really believe when we say full sovereignty means full sovereignty. So the issues that are being asked about with respect to reconstruction, with respect to relations between the Kurds and the Sunnis and the Shias, these are now issues that the new Iraqi government will work out, as the sovereign.

**MR. MIRAZI:** Okay. Let me move to another subject because it seems that we still have many questions in a very limited time left. The 26 former top diplomats and military commanders, they came out with a statement in Washington, criticizing sharply President Bush and his Administration policies.

Let me just make two quotations from what he said: "Never in the two and a quarter centuries of our history has the U.S. been so isolated among the nations, so broadly feared and distrusted." In another one, they are saying, "The U.S. suffers from gross identification with autocratic regimes in the Muslim world and from the perception of unquestioning support for the policies and actions of the present Israeli Government."

I'd like to ask you to give your comment.

**SECRETARY POWELL:** If this is a political statement from 26 individuals, most of whom I know, and this is their point of view, I disagree with their point of view. I disagree that the United States is so isolated, as they say.

I mean, the President has gone to the United Nations repeatedly in order to gain the support of the international community. We are in Iraq with many other nations that are contributing troops. Are we isolated from the Brits, from the Poles, from the Romanians, from the Bulgarians, from the Danes, from the Norwegians?

These are people who have put their young people in harm's way in order to bring peace and democracy to the Iraqi people. This doesn't seem to be the isolation.

**MR. MIRAZI:** Unquestioning support for --

**SECRETARY POWELL:** And as you will notice -- you will notice that the authors of this letter won't name which particular autocratic regimes they are making reference to. What this letter is is the point of view of 26 individuals, who have made it clear what they wish to see. They wish to see President Bush not reelected. I do not believe that will be the judgment of the American people.

**MR. MIRAZI:** Have you invited any dictators into the Sea Island summit, or all of them from the Arab world with democratically elected leaders?

**SECRETARY POWELL:** That isn't the issue. We invited to Sea Island the representative selection of Arab leaders. And they were pleased to come and the G-8 heads of government and state were pleased to receive them and they had good discussions, and they talked about modernization and reform in the Broader Middle East and North Africa and there was good-spirited engagement and discussion with these leaders.

And each of these nations, every nation, in the Broader Middle East and nations in Africa, nations in the Western Hemisphere, increasingly, are trying to figure out a correct path of reform for those nations in order for those nations to bring greater democracy, greater economic benefits to their society. The G-8 and the United States, part of G-8, wants to help those nations on their path to reform, not dictate a path to reform.

**MR. MIRAZI:** One more question --

**SECRETARY POWELL:** Most of the incentive for reform is not coming from the United States or the G-8. If you look at the Alexandria Library presentations that President Mubarak participated in, if you look at the UN Development Reports that were written by Arab leaders, the Arab --

**MR. MIRAZI:** I wish I had more time --

**SECRETARY POWELL:** -- the Arab world -- I have more time. I have more time.

**MR. MIRAZI:** Yes. You have? Okay, fine.

**SECRETARY POWELL:** (Laughter.) I sense, from reading the UN Development Reports, reading the Alexandria Library Conference reports, I sense that the people of the Middle East are asking for reform. It's not just a question the United States wants it. No, it is in their interest, and they're asking --

**MR. MIRAZI:** But reform in the Arab world means to be able to change peacefully their own government and elect it.

**SECRETARY POWELL:** Of course, yeah.

**MR. MIRAZI:** And if it is business as usual between Washington and Arab governments, as long as these governments would deliver to Washington, I don't think that they would --

**SECRETARY POWELL:** But we're not suggesting that the United States should change these governments here. What we're saying is, it's up to each of these nations to decide its proper path forward toward modernization and reform.

The United States has friendly relations with almost every nation in the Broader Middle East and North Africa. Some nations we don't have as close a relationship as we might like to have. And we don't. But with most of them, we do. We call most of them friends. We disagree on some issues, but we are here to help our friends and help our partners with reform and modernization, just as we are going to help the Iraqi people.

You have to remember that on the 1st of July, there will be this sovereign government, no later than the 1st of July. And at that point, those who are setting off bombs now, those who are killing contractors, those who are blowing up oil pipelines, who are they attacking? The United States, or are they attacking their own interests?

They're attacking their own interests. And those who individuals in the world who say this is good, they applaud this kind of terrorist activity, what they're doing is applauding the

worst kind of despotism. They are applauding the past, they're not applauding the future.

This is a time for all of us to come together and condemn this kind of activity and support the Iraqi people with their new leaders as they try to build peace, schools, hospitals, roads, infrastructure, to be a democratic nation and a force for good, that we will never have to ask any more about weapons of mass destruction or mass graves or torture rooms or dictatorships.

**MR. MIRAZI:** How far could you go in helping also the Saudis in security matters, especially when you have a U.S. citizen taken hostage in Saudi Arabia?

**SECRETARY POWELL:** We are doing everything we can to help the Saudis investigate these crimes, and also to find ways to protect Saudi citizens, as well as those expatriates who are working and living in Saudi Arabia and helping the Saudi Government conduct its business and to extract the oil that is so important for the rest of the world and important for the Arab world. And so, we are working with them to see what more can be done to protect these innocent people who are the victims of terrorism.

And, once again, I encourage all of your viewers to remember that what is happening now is terrorist activity that is substituting for political action, substituting for a democratic way of doing business. And this kind of terrorism will not bring us closer to peace, will not bring us closer to a stable Middle East.

It, in fact, is denying the dreams of the people in the Middle East for stable democracies. Let each country reform according to its own path, modernize according to its own history, its own tradition, its culture. Let's not let bombs be the source of reform and modernization.

**MR. MIRAZI:** Mr. Secretary, let me just conclude with one question by asking is the U.S. still committed to support independent media in the Arab world and in the Middle East and refrain from penalizing any government if that government is supporting independent media, as in the case of the Government of Qatar and Al-Jazeera?

**SECRETARY POWELL:** We believe in free and open and independent media. We believe that in order for a free, open and independent media to do its job -- and its job is to serve its viewers, serve its listeners, serve its readers -- then that presentation ought to be balanced and it ought to reflect all views. And it should not just be slanted to one particular point of view or the focus strictly on polemical actions, polemical activities.

And so, free, open, independent, yes, but with those values comes the value of balance and perspective. And as your role of the free and independent media is to educate people, help them understand issues of the day. That's all we ask of them.

**MR. MIRAZI:** Thank you, Mr. Secretary. Appreciate very much. It's been a pleasure, always, to meet and interview you.

**SECRETARY POWELL:** The pleasure is mine.

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\*Terrorist Threat Integration Center

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