

Interview by Arab Journalists

Secretary Colin L. Powell

Washington, DC

June 24, 2004

(1:15 p.m. EDT)

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, you met with a delegation yesterday from the Islam Conference. You also met the Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat. Could you tell us what you told him?

SECRETARY POWELL: Well, with the delegation from the OIC, we had a very good discussion. As you know, they have been going around to various Quartet members and to others giving their encouragement to the efforts of the Quartet and their desire to see movement with respect to the roadmap. And I reaffirmed to them that the President was fully committed to the roadmap and to the work of the Quartet and that he planned to do everything he could to move forward with Mr. Sharon's plan of removing settlements from Gaza and the beginning of removal of settlements from the West Bank, but do it wholly consistent with our previous policies of making sure that final status issues are resolved between the parties, resolved on the basis of 242 and 338 and consistent with the roadmap.

I was candid with him in saying that we know that there was some disagreement with us and disappointment in us when we made the initial announcement with Prime Minister Sharon. But I think in the weeks that have passed since then, we've been able to show our Arab, Palestinian and Muslim friends that we are fully committed to an independent Palestinian state that is contiguous, that is coherent, that will live in peace with Israel and the basic principles of 242, 338, roadmap, work of the Quartet, and final status issues resolved so negotiations between the parties remains intact.

And we also spent time talking about the fact that the Quartet met in New York and was able to come in behind us. We spent some time talking about the work that is ongoing between the Egyptians and the Palestinians with respect to security for Gaza when it is evacuated by the Israelis and how to organize Palestinian security forces for that purpose.

We also talked about -- and, of course, Mr. Erekat was in this meeting of the OIC as well, so he -- giving you both an opportunity -- I'll separate out Saeb separately -- separate out Saeb separately -- forgive me. (Laughter.) We also talked about Iraq, of course, and I appreciated the statements that have come out of the OIC supporting the transition to a sovereign Iraqi government on the 1st of July and full support for Resolution 1546 and the G-8 statements, which put the weight of the international community behind the

return of sovereignty and the plan forward to go to elections, a constitution, and then final elections at the end of 2005.

We also touched on reform and modernization. I made the point to them that the G-8 has made clear that they support such efforts, as does the United States, as a member of the G-8 separately as well, but that reform and modernization -- modernization has to be an initiative that comes from within, that has to be the desire of the nations that we are working with.

There was some misunderstanding of our ideas when they were first leaked some months ago that we were somehow proposing something on Arab nations and nations in the Broader Middle East and that's certainly not the case. We are trying to pick up what we're hearing from the region. The UN Development reports -- the UNDP reports that were written by Arab intellectuals and economists and civic society members, the lectures from the Alexandria Library comments, especially by President Mubarak, make it clear that the Arab world knows that there is a need for modernization and reform and what we are saying is the industrial world wants to help the broader Middle East. And it's a partnership with individual countries because each country is in a different place, with respect to reform and modernization, so there's not one model for all. Each has to find its own path and we will help each to the extent they wish to be helped.

With Mr. Erekat, of course, we focused in more directly when we were alone on Israeli-Palestinian issues. We reviewed where we are with the roadmap and the Sharon initiative and made it very clear to my friend, Saeb, that we really do need to see action on the part of the Palestinian leadership to consolidate security services, to give Abu Alaa real authority as a Prime Minister and we all need to convey this solid, consistent message to Chairman Arafat, that he has responsibility now to give a leadership necessary for working with the Egyptians and to consolidate the Palestinian security services into a smaller number of services and under the direction of the Prime Minister if we are going to move forward in an effective manner.

Mr. Erekat had some ideas with respect to elections in the near future. We have always said that elections have to be well thought-out, well prepared. We're for elections; one certainly knows that. But they have to be well thought-out, well prepared, and consistent with what's going on with respect to the roadmap.

I'll stop there. That's pretty much the conversation.

QUESTION: Okay. Sir, on Iraq, as you probably know, the Arabs now very much increasingly perceive the U.S. occupation of Iraq as sort of a mirror of the past Israeli occupation of Palestine, targeting homes in Fallujah, using the same missile tactics, and then it comes down to New Yorker's report, some pressures about -- I almost had it -- Simon or?

MR. BOUCHER: Seymour Hersh.

QUESTION: Seymour Hersh, right -- from the New Yorker, basically saying that the

Mossad is now working very actively in northern Iraq. And I wondered if you can -- whether confirm these reports that Mossad is working in northern Iraq, and what the State Department and the U.S. intends to do to try to disengage this image that the U.S. occupation is very similar to the Israeli occupation.

SECRETARY POWELL: I don't think it is. We're turning over sovereignty, for openers. We're turning sovereignty over on the 1st of July. We have put in place a political process with the Iraqis that will allow them to assume that sovereignty and get on about the writing of the constitution, Transitional Assembly elections at the end of the year and then full elections, as I mentioned earlier. So I don't think there's -- there is no comparison. I don't think there's any comparison. I only wish that the process was as far along between the Israelis and the Palestinians, but it's not.

With respect to Mossad in the northern areas, I glanced at Mr. Hersh's story. I didn't know anything about it or recognize what he was talking about and I will let you ask those who know about Mossad. But I don't know about Mossad in the north. We work with the Iraqis and with our coalition partners in Iraq.

QUESTION: Sir, I'd like also to ask about Iraq. Of course, you know the 30 of June deadline is apparently a very important one for the United States, but many people -- and due to the violence, ongoing on even today in Iraq, are wondering what would really change, you know, after the transfer of sovereignty.

And my second question concerning the Palestinian track. On practical grounds, what shall we see before the upcoming U.S. elections in November?

SECRETARY POWELL: On the second question, don't even connect the U.S. elections to what we're trying to do with the Middle East peace process. Ambassador Burns, as you know, finished a Quartet meeting yesterday.

QUESTION: How was that?

SECRETARY POWELL: Hmm?

QUESTION: How was that, sir?

SECRETARY POWELL: It went quite well, and the Quartet will be meeting again, the envoys of the Quartet will be meeting again in July, I think, and then we are shooting for a Quartet ministerial meeting in September.

We want to be fully engaged and we hope by September, the Palestinians will have made some decisions and taken some actions with respect to their security forces. So a Quartet meeting at ministerial level in September would be in synchronization with what the Palestinians say they might be doing with respect to the reorganization of their security forces and how they go about that working with the Egyptians in September.

So I think the Quartet meeting went well. And the President has made it clear to me in

every way that he can that I should pay no attention to the United States' forthcoming election. The Secretary of State does not get involved in politics and he wants me to keep driving on. If he was concerned about the elections, we would not have done anything with Prime Minister Sharon or anything with King Abdullah. I would not have gone to the World Economic Forum at the Dead Sea. We would not have Ambassador Burns out there working for this. He wants to see progress and it has no connection to the U.S. elections; he made it clear.

With respect to what's going to happen on the 1st of July, I don't know. It's up to these terrorists and these former regime elements and murderers to decide whether or not they will stop this activity and support their own leaders who are now in charge of their country, or whether they will continue to try to kill innocent people, policemen who are trying to protect the Iraqi people or, as in the case we saw a couple of days ago, two sisters coming home from work, working with an American organization but that organization was helping the Iraqi people.

And so after the 1st of July, this kind of murderous, terrorist, criminal activity being directed at the Iraqi leadership, at the Iraqi people and at the hopes and dreams of the Iraqi people, your readers have been saying they wish to see sovereignty returned. We have now created conditions where sovereignty is being returned.

And I hope that as we watch these next days, which we expect to be difficult days, we expect them to try to do everything to disrupt this, I hope that your readers will ask the simple question: Why are they doing this? And if they continue doing it after the 1st of July, I hope you will ask in your editorials and in your columns: Why are they doing this?

The Americans are there to provide security. They are there at the consent of and, of course, at the request of the new Iraqi government. So why are these people doing this -- to bring back the kind of leaders that they used to have, like Saddam Hussein? Is that what your readers want? Or would your readers prefer to see a government where the people have decided who the leaders will be, a government that is using the wealth of this nation, both the financial wealth through oil and the intellectual wealth of its people, to put in place a better society? This was a country that had the highest GDP in the Arab world.

QUESTION: Sir, but you'll appreciate that my readers -- just a small follow up.

SECRETARY POWELL: Yeah -- no, no.

QUESTION: You'll appreciate my readers --

SECRETARY POWELL: I haven't finished my answer yet, sorry. And the United States is anxious to finish the work and leave. We have no desire to stay. This is costing the American taxpayers a great deal of money and it is straining our armed forces considerably, but we are prepared to do what is necessary and are determined to do what is necessary to help the new government because we think it's the right thing to do.

And we hope that your readers, when they, and if they see these sorts of activities continued after the 1st of July, will understand that it is -- these are attacks that are directed against Iraqis and the Iraqi government, not us, even though we will, you know, bear some of the brunt of these attacks.

QUESTION: Just to follow up. I'm sorry. Just to follow up, sir, you know that the majority of the readers in the Arab world did oppose the war in the first place.

SECRETARY POWELL: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: And we got statements even here in the United States, I'm sure you've read reports about this anonymous CIA officer who wrote a book recently and the statements made by Richard Clarke that this war was an unnecessary war, that it caused more problems for the United States than it could solve in terms of bringing stability in the region. So I was wondering how would you respond to voices from within the United States that saw this war as completely --

SECRETARY POWELL: There are always many voices. The United States is never short of voices and dissenting voices, and there are those who believe that.

QUESTION: But they are important people.

SECRETARY POWELL: Huh?

QUESTION: Important people like Richard Clarke.

SECRETARY POWELL: Oh, it's so important he won't give his name to his book? (Laughter.)

QUESTION: Because of his job, because of his job, right, sir?

SECRETARY POWELL: I mean, well, then you step down -- I mean, step down and tell us who you are. It is hard to argue with anonymous. There's another famous American author who used anonymous not too long ago and then finally found out who he was. And so it's -- you know, nevertheless, he -- I'm sure that he is honest in his views and well meaning in his views, but the fact of the matter is that what we did has the opportunity to create a level of stability in the region once the work is finished.

Who is the source of instability right now? The 138,000 American troops and their coalition partners who are there to help the Iraqi people or the former members of this regime that are doing what? They are blowing up the pipelines, they are blowing up the sewers as fast as they're built and blowing up the electrical transformers. They're bringing down the power lines. They are blowing up police stations that are full of Iraqis, not Americans.

So who is creating the instability in the region? Who? It is not our soldiers. Our soldiers

want to finish the job and come home and turn it over to the Iraqis. We did not come to own Iraq. We did not come to take Iraq's oil. We came to depose a dictator who had gassed his fellow citizens and neighbors in the region, a man who ran his country into the ground.

And so it is the fact that we had to act militarily has created a difficult situation, but the situation is being made more difficult by these individuals who want to thrive in this instability. And so the current source of the instability are these terrorists and murderers and former regime elements.

If they were not there, if I could snap my finger and make them all go away, what your readers would be seeing is a country at peace, on its way through a political transformation with the American taxpayers contributing over \$20 billion directly to this country to help it get back up on its feet and no more mass graves, no more rape rooms, no more palaces instead of schools and no more mansions instead of hospitals. That's what your readers would be seeing. So the source of instability in the region now are these individuals.

QUESTION: Sir, I have two questions. But before I say my two questions, I need to thank you very much for this opportunity you give to us and --

SECRETARY POWELL: Pleasure.

QUESTION: Be sure to (inaudible).

SECRETARY POWELL: Delighted to hear it. Thank you very much. Why not, man? I mean, you know, the guy's nice, the (inaudible) nice. (Inaudible) to ask me tough questions. (Laughter.)

QUESTION: I need to share with you that you one of the most respect person in Middle East, all the people, especially you personally. And of course you know that personally, not only from the high dignitary or the state official but also from the man in the street.

SECRETARY POWELL: Thank you very much.

QUESTION: I have two questions on Saudi Arabia. The first one, how do you characterize the U.S. relations, Saudi relations, and what is your assessment for the Saudi diplomacy as quiet diplomacy?

SECRETARY POWELL: The Saudi -- ?

QUESTION: Diplomacy as quiet.

SECRETARY POWELL: Diplomacy?

QUESTION: Yes. As quiet diplomacy. And is the friendship between you and Prince

Bandar has enough influence to keep and develop the relations between the two countries? This is the first question.

The second, what is the American position now from Libya after the discovering the attempt to assassinate the Crown Prince Abdullah?

SECRETARY POWELL: On the first question, relations between the United States and Saudi Arabia are good and those relations just don't rest on the personal relationship that I have with my very dear friend, Prince Bandar, or the very strong relationship that I have with his father or with my colleague Foreign Minister Saud or the Crown Prince or the relationship I have with the King and so many other members of the government. We have known each other, all of us, on and off for 20, 25 years almost and we have been through shared moments of crisis together in the Gulf War. So I have strong feelings toward all of these individuals, but that's not the basis for a relationship between nations. It helps, but it's not the basis.

The basis is we have a mutual and shared interest to make sure that Saudi Arabia remains a free nation that can make its own choices for itself in accordance with its political system and that terrorists are not allowed to destabilize Saudi Arabia or to take advantage of Saudi Arabia in any way, and the United States will stand firmly with Saudi Arabia to keep that from happening.

Saudi Arabia has practiced quiet diplomacy over many, many years and they've practiced it rather successfully, but in the past year Saudi Arabia has been afflicted by terrorists who have come into the Kingdom or might have been in the Kingdom and have decided to attack the Kingdom directly with these bombings and with these assassinations and with kidnappings and beheadings and with damage to facilities within Saudi Arabia.

And I am pleased that the Crown Prince has responded in a vigorous way and has made it clear that he is going after these terrorists. And his statement yesterday, I think underscores it: I am going to give you a period of time for amnesty, and after that we're going to get everybody. That's not quiet diplomacy. That's doing what has to be done.

But the Saudi leadership is doing other things. They are taking a look at how charitable money has been spent and they're putting controls on the flow of money and I think they are taking other steps that show that they are a full partner in the campaign against terrorists because now they are victims of terrorism just as so many other nations are.

With respect to the reports about Libya and Saudi Arabia and the alleged plot, we take that seriously. We don't know the facts. We are waiting to learn more about it. The Saudis are in touch with us and giving us information, but we take it as a serious allegation and we take it into account as we lay out a roadmap for the Libyans to return to some normalized relationship with us. And this is a new element that will be taken into account as we move down that roadmap.

QUESTION: Sir, I wanted to ask you about the resolution yesterday adopted at

Congress. It was proposed by Tom Delay and Congressman Lantos to support, I guess, the endorsement of President Bush. But Mr. Delay also said that --

SECRETARY POWELL: I'm sorry, which resolution?

QUESTION: Yeah, it was passed yesterday at Congress. It's -- I don't remember the resolution but it was adopted by (inaudible).

MR. BOUCHER: What's the topic?

SECRETARY POWELL: What is the topic, subject?

QUESTION: Sharon plan.

QUESTION: Endorsing the Sharon plan and making it a resolution in Congress.

QUESTION: Right. But he -- Mr. Delay said that, put simply, Israel not -- will not retreat behind the 1949 line and there will be no right to return. Is that wise, sir, in terms of affecting a UN resolution that would speak to these things?

SECRETARY POWELL: The President --

QUESTION: (Inaudible.)

SECRETARY POWELL: Yeah. The President made it clear that the line between the two nations, when we have a Palestinian state, will be a line determined by the two parties. That's a final status issue. He also said that everybody who has looked at this, and if you look at the previous history of negotiations, particularly during the last month of the Clinton Administration, and if you look at what negotiations might produce in the future, he felt it necessary to point out a couple of realities: one, that modifications to the armistice line will probably be required and because of the reality on the ground; and, two, that with respect to the right of return, with the creation of a Palestinian state, would that not be where you would expect Palestinians to go and not to the new -- the now demarked state of Israel, in a sense demarked from the state of Palestine.

The President said this is, however, something for the parties to decide. He made it very clear in the opening part of that paragraph that we are not trying to prejudge or predetermine the outcome, but he felt it important to state a couple of realities on the ground.

It sounds like the resolution has reflected those realities in a stronger formulation, but the President's words are clear and that remains our position as he laid it out in his exchange of letters with Prime Minister Sharon.

QUESTION: Sir, the new wall that goes around area which really cuts deep into the West Bank territory and Mr. Sharon made a big deal that this would be part of Israel,

could you tell us your position on that, sir?

SECRETARY POWELL: We are concerned about the wall. We have expressed concerns about the wall directly to the Israelis and the route that the wall takes that might be seen as prejudging final outcome issues and affecting the lives and livelihood of Palestinian citizens and puts land previously in Palestinian hands away from Palestinian hands on the other side of the wall.

The Israelis have made adjustments to their wall. A wall is something that is proper if a person needs it on your boundary line, but when it goes deeply into someone else's land or territory it is a problem and we have made clear is a problem. We have made it clear to the Israelis that, with respect to the issue of outposts, the issue of expanding settlements and the issue of the wall, we have a problem with the wall and we are not supporting the increased settlement activity and we believe the outposts should be removed and we will continue to press the Israelis on these issues.

Mr. Ambassador Kurtzer spoke to this a couple of days ago, you may recall.

QUESTION: Sir, I have two questions, again on Iraq and on Iran. Sir, what's your position on giving immunity to the U.S. forces in Iraq? Do you support limited or sweeping immunity?

SECRETARY POWELL: I support the CPA Order Number 17 that was just issued. It was necessary to do this to cover this interim period coming up before there is a new elected transitional assembly and elected government.

QUESTION: Sir, I'm not sure it was actually issued.

SECRETARY POWELL: Well, it's about -- yeah, well, it's under consideration for issuance. And, frankly, you know, I think we expect it. It's something that's been worked out with the Iraqis. They're not opposing this. And, in fact, if you look at the exchange of letters that I had with Prime Minister Allawi, there is an allusion to making an arrangement that would provide this kind of coverage.

So Ambassador Bremer is working in his last few days with the Iraqi interim government that's coming in on this letter. My understanding is that there is agreement between the new incoming government and the CPA and us that this is an appropriate step to take to cover the individuals who will be serving and working in Iraq, and it is also consistent with the UN Resolution 1546 because the letters are a part of that resolution, attachments to the resolution.

Now, when the next transitional government comes in, then it can act in a different manner. When the final government comes in, we expect that there would be debates and discussions and negotiations with respect to privileges and immunities and with respect to SOFA agreements if our troops are still there and are in need of such arrangements.

QUESTION: Okay. And sir, on Iran, there are --

MS. MILLER: We only have a couple more minutes as well.

QUESTION: Okay. Briefly, sir, on Iran, if Iran does succeed in building up its nuclear capabilities, would the U.S. consider a military answer to that, and would it perhaps allow Israel in any way to take down those facilities?

SECRETARY POWELL: I would never speculate on future military action.

QUESTION: Right. What's your next move then --

SECRETARY POWELL: But nice try. (Laughter.)

QUESTION: What's --

SECRETARY POWELL: I think it's in the interest of the region and in the interest of the world for Iran not to have a nuclear weapon. I think it would be very destabilizing. The very fact that you have to ask the question that way suggests it would be very destabilizing to see them go down this path.

I think we have succeeded in the last year or so to bring enormous pressure to bear on Iran, both through the actions of the IAEA, through the work of the European foreign ministers three, and the United States that has been very active in pointing out to the world the dangers associated with Iran's programs and pointing out to the world that Iran has not answered the questions that have been put to her and that Iran was doing things that were inconsistent with its statements and its obligations.

I think it has now been established clearly that Iran was not telling the world everything. And to this day, we still think there are unanswered questions that have to be answered. And so I am pleased with the recent UN resolution. There will be another opportunity for -- I'm sorry, IAEA resolution, not UN resolution -- and there will be another opportunity in September for the IAEA to review this, as well as in November for the IAEA to review this.

I hope Iran, rather than saying, well, you know, we've done all that we can do or will do, when we know there is more they can do, will realize the seriousness of its situation and that the international community will not simply just look away while they continue moving down this road.

We also, I think, have gotten the serious interest and attention of the Russians, and the whole international community, it seems to me, is unified in trying to convey to Iran that they should not move down the path of developing of nuclear weapons.

Okay.

QUESTION: Sir, very important question -- I'm sure you are -- (crosstalk).

I mean, again, the nuclear issue, I mean, for the average Arab reader, that's an issue that comes up. Why do you make such a big deal about Arab countries, or Iran, trying to possess some of these weapons --

SECRETARY POWELL: I think --

QUESTION: -- and not Israel, which is a classic question I'm sure you face everywhere. And the second thing is that your comment about Egyptian efforts, Omar Suleiman visit and all these things.

SECRETARY POWELL: Well, I want to congratulate another friend of mine of many years standing, Omar, for his efforts under the leadership of President Mubarak to engage in this matter. He has been doing some excellent work. My concern right now is that there be no introduction of nuclear weapons into the region. We don't need Iraq, Iran or anyone else bringing nuclear weapons into the region. This is the time to find ways to get rid of nuclear weapons and contain and constrain this kind of development, not to find excuses to allow it to go forward.

I know a bit about this. I used to, as you know, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, where I had a very large number of nuclear weapons that were under my stewardship. And I like to say that in 1989 when I became Chairman, I had 29,000 nuclear weapons, 29,000, of all kinds -- artillery shells, submarine-launched torpedoes, strategic bombers, strategic missiles, "boomers," as we call them, submarines with strategic missiles -- and I was responsible for the plan to use them all. And it was a frightening responsibility and I'm glad that in the four years I was Chairman that number headed down and we cut the number by about 80 percent, 70, 80 percent, and we're going even lower. The agreement we entered into with the Russians -- two years ago, was it? -- the Moscow Treaty, will take us down to somewhere around, I think it's 4,500, 6,000, something like that.

But we have been getting rid of nuclear weapons as fast as we can for the last ten years and I pray for the day when no one has any nuclear weapons, including the United States. There's no need -

QUESTION: What about Israel?

SECRETARY POWELL: I pray for the day when no one has any nuclear weapons, to include the United States. It won't happen in my lifetime, but we're moving in the right direction, all of us, and proliferation is something to be stopped. Libya, an Arab nation, surprisingly made one of the best strategic choices I've ever seen a nation make when they took a hard look at themselves. Colonel Qadhafi said, Wait a minute. I've been spending a lot of money on this stuff. In fact, I've been spending a lot of money on this stuff. And what has it gotten me? Has it brought me security? No. Everybody's mad at me. Those Americans, look at them. You know, they're going around and taking military action. And has it improved my economy? No. Is my health care system any better? No, it's worse because I've been spending money on these weapons.

And rather than providing security to his nation and having a deterrent, he was getting weaker and having the world give him nothing but grief and condemnation. And so he said, I'll get rid of it all. And we said, really? And he said, really. So the United Kingdom and the United States entered into a discussion with him. I sat here getting the reports in disbelief. This isn't the way we used to do it with the Russians, they would hide everything and here are the Libyans showing me, showing everything.

And when we made the deal, they said, come get it. And another dear friend of mine, Mohamed ElBaradei, and I worked out the arrangements and what the IAEA would get, and it's all out. There are still some issues we're working, but the very serious stuff is gone, no longer in Libya. Not only did they destroy -- because "we don't want to destroy it, you take it, you destroy it." And suddenly, Prime Minister Berlusconi is visiting Tripoli and Prime Minister Blair is visiting Tripoli and Colonel Qadhafi is received in conferences and meetings in Europe. And I suspect when he goes home late at night, he says, why didn't I do that years ago? And I hope that other nations can draw that same lesson in his experience.

I have to go.

QUESTION: Yes, okay. Last one.

SECRETARY POWELL: Last one?

QUESTION: Yes, your statement that American people should not have to leave the Saudi Arabia because this is, well, it leads victory to the terrorists.

SECRETARY POWELL: Yeah.

QUESTION: This was very well received in the Saudi people, by the Saudi people. Is your statement geared to reflect the American strategy fighting terrorism?

And the second question, is it true that obtaining weapons of mass destruction by the terrorists is matter of time?

SECRETARY POWELL: I'm sorry, the second one I didn't understand.

QUESTION: Is it true --

QUESTION: It was a statement by Mr. ElBaradei yesterday, I assume.

SECRETARY POWELL: Who?

QUESTION: Mr. ElBaradei.

SECRETARY POWELL: ElBaradei? Yeah.

QUESTION: He said that -- my question, is it true that obtaining weapons of mass destruction by the terrorists is matter of time?

MR. BOUCHER: That it's only a matter of time until terrorists get a hold of weapons of mass destruction.

SECRETARY POWELL: I hope not. I hope that through the initiatives that we can launch -- the Proliferation Security Initiative, our global programs to help sources of weapons material, Russia, elsewhere, get rid of those sources -- will make it difficult, if not impossible for terrorists to get their hands on these kinds of weapons.

QUESTION: Because this was raised by Mr. ElBaradei yesterday.

SECRETARY POWELL: Yeah. He speaks for himself. I say no, it is not inevitable. Nothing is inevitable if you work hard. They won't be getting any from Iraq, which is one of the reasons we did what we did. But I don't view it as inevitable.

Now, I don't know whether he was -- he may have been talking, since his expertise is nuclear weapons --

QUESTION: Yes.

SECRETARY POWELL: I think he may have -- I don't know if he was talking about nuclear weapons or other weapons of mass destruction.

QUESTION: Nuclear, specifically.

SECRETARY POWELL: Nuclear? No, I don't think it is inevitable. You can't go into a store and buy this material easily. You have sophisticated procurement systems and you have to have sophisticated people who know what to do with these materials. And it is within our wherewithal if we all join together behind many of the initiatives that the United States has launched, I think it is possible to keep these materials from falling into the hands of terrorists and the knowledge from falling into the hands of terrorists. We're also paying scientists from other nations to do profitable work so that they don't think about selling their nuclear knowledge to someone else.

And so I don't view it as inevitable, but I think Mr. ElBaradei was making it a good point to say that this is a danger. And it is a danger. That's why we have to join together in these counterproliferation efforts.

QUESTION: What about the people (inaudible) in Saudi Arabia, the Americans leaving Saudi Arabia, your new statement is very well received?

SECRETARY POWELL: Yeah, we have to -- we have an obligation, and Mr. Boucher has said this, we have an obligation to warn our citizens of the dangers that exist

overseas and we have done that in Saudi Arabia.

At the same time, it is up to each citizen to make their own judgment as to whether they wish to leave or not. I have discharged my legal obligation to our law and to our Congress by putting out the warning. But at the same time, my policy concern is that we don't want the terrorists to win if it were to happen.

QUESTION: Thank you.

SECRETARY POWELL: Thank you very much.

2004/713

Released on June 25, 2004