

Interview With The New York Times Editorial Board

Secretary Colin L. Powell

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QUESTION: So we have to thank you for coming and your busy schedule, taking time away from the Adriatic Charter to come here.

SECRETARY POWELL: Yeah. No, thank you very much. I won't say much at the beginning because I know you're more interested in questions and answers, but I was kidding Gail and Bill coming up in the elevator that it's been a very busy morning with the meeting with the Adriatic Charter members. Gail pretended she knew who they were. (Laughter.) She got away with it, too. (Laughter.)

But to sit with the foreign ministers of Croatia, Macedonia and Albania -- and they had invited to the charter group Bosnia-Herzegovina and Serbia-Montenegro -- and just sit with them and talk about how they have to do more to put themselves on a path to membership in NATO and the European Union. And it was about two years ago, was it, that I signed the charter. The Adriatic Charter is something that I cosigned with the three of them, bringing them to together to work as a group to start down the path to membership in the transatlantic community. And it's pretty exciting. It's not going to make page one, I don't think, but for them it's page one in those five countries.

And most of the morning was spent in an even more exciting event, and you remember we started this Broader Middle East and North Africa initiative on reform and modernization, which started off very controversially, in a very controversial way, because somebody leaked one of our early papers and it looked like Uncle Sam was coming to show you all how to be Jeffersonian democrats and just sit there and listen and we'll show you how it's done.

It took us a while to back that off and convey to our friends in the Arab world that, no, reform has to come from within and we can help you. And then at the G-8 Summit in Sea Island, we got that message across. And this morning we had 28 nations, including most of the nations in the Arab world who had expressed some reservations earlier, particularly Egypt and Saudi Arabia and the Russian Federation. We had the whole EU represented.

And we had some very powerful presentations from business leaders and John Thain was there, CEO of the New York Stock Exchange. This was just a preparatory meeting

to the first full meeting of the Forum for the Future, as it's called. And I'll never forget one of the presenters in talking to the group said there's a ticking time bomb in the Middle East, and we lean forward, and he says, "It's unemployment."

And we talked about Israel and Palestine and Iraq and everything else. He said, "But the real ticking time bomb that's going to go off in all of your faces is unemployment, rising birth rates, many young people coming into the workplace not being educated, not being prepared, and you're not creating the jobs for them. It's going to blow up in your face." And that was a very sobering moment. We talked about that for the next hour and a half.

And so that's what my day has been like so far. This is always an exciting week for me because I get to see so many different ministers in so many different formats. Yesterday, I met with the Libyan Foreign Minister, the first time that that's occurred in either 25 or 35 years. We're still running this to ground since you caught us this morning as not knowing exactly how many years it has been. I think it's 25. They think it's 35. But we'll find out.

But to talk to him about how we want to go forward with Libya now that weapons of mass destruction have been dealt with. There's still terrorism. There's still other aspects of their behavior in their system that we do not approve of. But it doesn't mean we can't find areas of cooperation, ways to work together.

And I had the same kind of conversation the day before yesterday with the Syrian Foreign Minister, who I have spoken to many times over the years, but this was perhaps the most positive conversation I've had with him since I've been Secretary of State.

So this is a great opportunity during these five days of UNGA for me, and I'm leaving my staff here for another week worth of discussions to show how important the UN is to us and how important these many interlocking relations are that we have, with these Broader Middle East folks, with the Adriatic Charter folks or the Russian Federation, European Union. It's reassuring that we are participating in these fora notwithstanding claims to the contrary from time to time. And people still look to us for leadership and for inspiration in what they are doing around the world and we're pleased to be able to give it to them.

With that little sermonette, Bill, I will turn it over to you.

QUESTION: I'm sure there are a few people here who do want to ask about the Adriatic Charter, but I think I'd like to pick up on something else. What you just -- before David Unger comes in --

SECRETARY POWELL: Maureen isn't here. (Laughter.)

QUESTION: What you just referred to as Uncle Sam helping the world get ready for Jeffersonian democracy, and specifically in Iraq, there's been a lot of back and forth lately in the political campaign, and I guess between our editorial page and others about

exactly what the situation is there, ranging all the way from a fairly apocalyptic view of current conditions to a much more optimistic view that Prime Minister Allawi and President Bush have been articulating.

Do you have -- I assume that yours is more on the optimistic side, but why? What are we not seeing that should give us cause to think that things are a lot better than they're being portrayed by not just our journalists but all the journalists who are there?

SECRETARY POWELL: First of all, Jeffersonian democracy probably is uniquely American and only works as Jeffersonian democracy in America. Every one of these countries has to find its own way. And I think there are some universal principles, but has to find its own way.

With respect to Iraq, it is difficult to calibrate it day by day. What my own judgment is that we've got a tough road ahead of us. The insurgency has to be defeated. It is a more serious insurgency than we had anticipated. I believe it is mostly self-generated from within Iraq, although there are certainly others who have come in from other parts of the world to make trouble.

And I am not going to underestimate or understate the seriousness of the insurgency. If we were not having an insurgency in the Sunni triangle of the kind we are having now, you'd be writing about all the progress that we have made. But it is a black cloud over that progress we are doing.

My own view is that a lot of good things have happened. We have succeeded in a period of a year and three months or so, four months now, I guess, six months, of getting rid of that regime totally so that those remaining remnants of the regime are attacking us from hidden places and constitute the insurgency. We have succeeded in putting in place a Transitional Administrative Law that is a precursor to the constitution we hope will be written and ratified next year. And the TAL preserves the rights of minorities. It preserves the rights of women to participate openly and fully in the society. And we have succeeded in putting in place an interim administration of dedicated men and women who get up every day and put their lives at risk, people such as Prime Minister Allawi.

Now, at the same time last week that I was reading my daily reports and looking at television and seeing bombs going off, I also got a report about municipal elections that were being held all over the southern part of the country where people gathered, went to polling places and voted for their municipal leaders. I also see statistics that say the oil is now coming out at 2.5 million barrels a day, of which 1.8 to 1.9, roughly, is exported and the remainder is used for internal purposes. So that system is up and working and is a continuing and increasing source of revenue to the society.

An economy that certainly isn't where we would like it, but new currency has been put in place. It's a relatively stable currency even in the midst of the insurgency that we are seeing. The Prime Minister listed a number of other things yesterday, to include 95

percent of the kids going to school; and a military force and a police force, a security force, that is slowly but surely starting to grow steadily, be fully equipped and taking on greater responsibilities. We saw them really in action for the first time, I think, in the way Najaf was handled, where they were prepared to go in and use the final element of force necessary to take the shrine when the Ayatollah Sistani came along and found a political solution so that wasn't necessary.

Under General Petraeus, this force, I think, will rapidly improve. Dave knows what he's doing. In order to make sure he has the resources that he needs to do this, Ambassador Negroponte recommended to us that we reallocate some of that 18 billion to security because we're not going to be able to spend that \$18 billion effectively until we improve the security situation and so it was a sensible transfer of the money. And where the money is coming from, if the need is still there in due course, then we'll go and get another supplemental to take care of that need. But security is number one.

The Iraqi forces have to be built up as fast as we can build them up. There is, however, a practical limit as to how fast that is. You just don't get 500 guys, give them a week's worth of training, give them a rifle and think you have a battalion. It takes time. It takes leadership development. But that force will be built up. And the goal is to build it up as quickly as is practical and then slowly let them take on a greater burden, a greater burden for the security of the country.

With respect to elections, I've seen all kinds of things over the last couple of days. Prime Minister Allawi has said yesterday that he is committed to going forward with these elections by the end of January 2005, and I think he used a good statistic yesterday when he said 15 of the 18 provinces you could have an election in tomorrow. Well, there's something going right if we're confident enough we could have elections in 15 out of 18 provinces.

Does that mean no polling station will be shot at or hit? No. But it means that the country is sufficiently secure that you could probably have elections in 15 out of the 18 provinces. The tough one is the Sunni triangle and the provinces within that triangle. And our military commanders know it, John Negroponte knows it, we all know it in Washington, and our major effort for the next several months has to be to recover those cities inside the Sunni triangle where we don't have governmental control or governmental control is inadequate -- Samarra, Fallujah, Ramadi, North Arbil, a number of other places.

When you look at the overall country and you sort of stand back and look at it from a political and military perspective, what I see is occasional disturbances in the south but, for the most part, reasonably good government control. Things are functioning. Rebuilding is taking place. Every now and then something will flare in Basra, but it calms down; it can be brought under control.

In the north, in the Kurdish area, the Kurdish militia is working now increasingly with our folks and with the Iraqi security forces, have pretty good control. You can get flash point

in Mosul, Kirkuk, as we had last week. We had a big flash point in Talafar. Or two weeks ago, I guess it was now. But they can be dealt with, brought back under control. The tough one is that triangle.

So, from my military perspective as an old soldier, no longer a practitioner but not forgetting everything I once knew, the main effort, the main attack, the primary objective has to be the insurgency in the Sunni triangle. If you can crack that, you not only have cracked it but you probably also eliminated the source of some of the occasional flare-ups in other parts of the country. I think it is the center of the problem.

And if you can crack that, I also think you bring it down to a level of activity, continue to be problems of violence, but what we hope to do is bring it down to a level where it's within the capacity of the Iraqi security forces to handle with our backup and with our assistance. They are at about 95- to 100,000 and the numbers change on a regular basis, but I think that's what Don Rumsfeld is carrying it at now. And that includes police, national guard, regular army. It does not include the facilities protection force that guards the pipelines and electrical grid.

And so it's a mixed picture. We tend to see a single picture every morning, and that was the latest car bomb going off, but on balance I am optimistic because on balance we are still moving toward elections, we are still moving toward giving this Interim Government more capacity and capability. We are still blessed with terrific leaders in the center of government who have stood up and stood for the Iraqi people.

As the insurgency is brought under control, and I think it can be brought under control, you'll see the reconstruction becoming more effective. We have tripled the amount of money that has gone into reconstruction. It's still too small a number. It's slightly over a billion dollars, 1.1, 1.2, but when John Negroponte got there it was somewhere around 300. And so it's ramping up, and as security is reasserted and communities are reclaimed, the money will flow more rapidly. Najaf, for example, now that it is back under government control, we're going to be doing a lot more with the government to rebuild the infrastructure in Najaf.

Mixed picture. We've got a tough insurgency on our hands. I would not downplay it or underestimate it. But I'm also confident that we know how to deal with it, we have to deal with it and we will be successful.

QUESTION: Can I ask you --

QUESTION: What did you make of the NIE of July?

SECRETARY POWELL: I don't know when I read it. Lots of documents come over. It was not a document that came over as stop the presses, everybody read this. I may have seen it at the time, but I read it again when it got such attention ten days ago or whenever it was. And I would characterize it as a sober assessment of the situation. It

wasn't apocalyptic. It was what intelligence folks are supposed to do -- not give you the happy news but to lay out to you the problems that are ahead and the dangers you have to watch out for.

So it was a very sober assessment of the situation as the intelligence community saw it. And I didn't find anything in the NIE that stunned me or shocked me as a revelation. It was a pretty sober assessment.

QUESTION: It has not escaped our attention that during the campaign, spokesmen for both the administration and the campaign have depicted news reports that are negative about the war or presidential candidates who are critical of the way the war is being operated as people who give comfort to the enemy or who encourage the terrorists or demoralize the troops. Do you share that thinking?

SECRETARY POWELL: I really would like to recuse myself from answering this because what I try to do is explain the President's policy and when it is attacked I will explain the President's policy. But as Secretary of State, I don't want to get into charges and counter-charges that go on back and forth between the candidates. It's part of our tradition and it's also part of the instruction that I received from the President on this matter. So I'd rather not get into anything that pulls me in the direction of commenting on what the campaign folks say about each other from day to day.

QUESTION: Does that rule go for Mr. Armitage, too?

SECRETARY POWELL: Yeah. Why? Did he say something I don't know about?
(Laughter.)

QUESTION: I'm sure you had no idea.

SECRETARY POWELL: I leave for two days -- (laughter). I gotta get out of here. Get the plane. (Laughter.) No, I know what Rich said. Yeah, but it applies to Defense, State, Treasury and -- I think Treasury -- Homeland Security and the FBI. Sometimes, you know, when you're getting a direct comment on our policies, I have to respond directly, and some people might read that into a campaign attack but it's really -- I try to be very careful and respond to the charge, not the individual.

QUESTION: Do you think it's dangerous to be critical of the war effort during a time --

SECRETARY POWELL: This is --

QUESTION: As an old general?

SECRETARY POWELL: This is an election season. The American people deserve a full, free-spirited open debate on the major issues of the day, and this is certainly a major

issue of the day.

QUESTION: I'll stop torturing you. (Laughter.)

SECRETARY POWELL: No, we are a very strong nation, and if there is one thing I have absolute confidence in, it's the judgment of the American people to make their judgment in due course as to whether this is correct or not correct. And so I don't -- you know, I just don't get into commenting on it.

QUESTION: May I pick up on what Secretary Rumsfeld said this morning? This is not to put you in opposition to him, just to raise the question back. Is it worth having an election if one cannot get into those three provinces, in effect, if people are going to accept Dr. Allawi's characterization? Do you believe that it is better to have an election, even if it is flawed or unable to fully represent the Sunnis, or is it better to postpone it, knowing that the Shiites will be extremely upset? How would you weigh that?

SECRETARY POWELL: I think we should do everything possible to have an election. That's what we're shooting for. That's what the Prime Minister wants. It's hypothetical to suggest, what would you do if it's one province or two provinces or three provinces that are not included. I think after a while you have to ask yourself the question, "Are we having the right kind of election if a large segment of the population is excluded, contained in one, two, three or four provinces?" If all of Baghdad is excluded, or the Baghdad metropolitan area, that is a significant chunk of people and I think that would be one issue, one set of circumstances. If it was something that was more remote that only involved a small percentage of the population, that would be different.

But I don't think it's helpful right now for me to speculate on what it would take to decide whether or not to have an election. I think that will be a judgment that's going to be made by the Iraqi Interim Government, not us.

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, in the resolution at the United Nations, there was language creating a distinct force, language put in there by the Americans in the hope it would attract countries which had been against the war in the first place, a force to protect the United Nations.

As you know, Kofi Annan has not been able to sign up a single nation to that. Some of the nations I think you wanted to attract passed that resolution. I have France and Germany in mind. What's the problem? Is it that they don't believe in the positive assessment that you've just given us about the future there or is there something else at work that no country will come to help us, even to protect the United Nations?

SECRETARY POWELL: Well, it wasn't put in the resolution in order to draw in those who were opposed to the war. It was put in the resolution in order to draw anybody, opposed or not opposed, to participate in protecting the UN.

Initially, there were a number of nations who expressed an interest in it. But the fact of the matter is many of the nations who might do this kind of work are used to sort of peacekeeping, or peace "maintening," peace maintenance sorts of operations. This looks like tough combat work in a very dangerous environment. And notwithstanding the fact that it's the UN, they are reluctant to involve themselves in that.

A lot of the countries who might even be still interested may not have the capability. This requires very highly trained, sophisticated personnel who could provide inner security to the UN people and then another ring of security, regional security, and then an intelligence system that can track them and follow them. And I am disappointed that we weren't able to get a force for the Secretary General. It would probably have had to be a brigade size force, which was with all the equipment and helicopters and everything that goes along with it. There aren't that many nations that have that kind of capacity. And I think the dangerous nature of the mission and the demanding nature of the mission is what dissuaded those who might have been initially attracted.

QUESTION: Can I press just a little bit more about the election question, then I'll go back?

SECRETARY POWELL: Mm-hmm, sure.

QUESTION: I understand you don't want to speculate about how many, but if you were weighing -- I think what Secretary Rumsfeld said was, okay, it's an imperfect election, we can live with it. What's the definition of "imperfect," you know, in your mind? What's live-withable and what's not live-withable?

SECRETARY POWELL: I didn't make the comment. (Laughter.)

QUESTION: Aaah, I know that.

SECRETARY POWELL: No. Well, I don't think --

QUESTION: You know, as you look --

SECRETARY POWELL: There's not an answer to that, really. It's going to be a judgment that will have to be made as we get much closer to the election by the Iraqi Interim Government in close consultation with the United Nations. It's the Iraqis who are running the election, not the UN. The UN is empowering them, providing assistance, showing them how to do it, bringing enormous expertise to the task, but it's a judgment that will have to be made by the Iraqi Interim Government.

And I'm sure they'll ask us about it, they'll consult with us, but I think it is premature, nor do I think Don would even try to define to you what that means. It's just I think he was displaying a potential problem that we might face and speculating on what one might do

with it at that time.

But we are driving ahead, as Don would say as well, toward an election. And our whole effort is not to make a judgment over what point do we say we can go, but to try to get it all, to bring control to the Sunni triangle.

When we were all together this morning at the Broader Middle East event, the Foreign Minister of Afghanistan, Abdullah Abdullah, spoke to us and he talked about what's happening in Afghanistan, the 10 million people who have registered, the 3 million refugees that have come back, and they're looking forward to an election in two and a half weeks time. And he said, "We know that people will try to stop us. We know that people will go after polling places. We know that there are people who are determined for us not to have a good election because it would defeat them, because the people will have spoken, and have said, we don't want any part of you. And notwithstanding that danger, notwithstanding the fact that it might be a problem for people in one province to vote or if something else goes wrong over here, we're going forward. We're going to have this election." And I think that's the attitude we have to approach the problem in Iraq with. We're going forward with this election, and we will get closer to it and see what the level of control is by the end of the year, roughly. I can tell you, our military commanders are responding to this challenge in that way. How do we concentrate our efforts, political and diplomatic, in order to make sure that the whole country is able to vote openly and freely and fairly?

QUESTION: Can I ask you about Syria and Iran? You yourself said last week that you believe that Iran is providing direct support to, I think you even said Muqtada al-Sadr, but certainly the insurgents. You have seen the Syrians now, and I'd love to ask you more about exactly -- I know you talked about the Lebanon thing, but I'm curious more about the Syrian participation and letting borders stay open, sending arms in, facilitating the insurgency.

SECRETARY POWELL: Yeah.

QUESTION: You talked to Mr. Allawi two days ago, and he said both of those countries were problems. He is proposing a regional meeting, including the G-8 and all of them. So my question is, what's going on there, and what can you do? And what did the Syrians say when you say -- as I assume you said, "We think you're helping those people come across the border?"

SECRETARY POWELL: Yeah. Let's start with the regional meeting. We are planning to have a regional meeting consisting of all of the neighbors of Iraq and the G-8, I hope sometime in October. That's what Prime Minister Allawi wants and this is going to be his meeting.

QUESTION: That would include Iran?

SECRETARY POWELL: Yeah. The neighbors. Now, with respect to -- let me start with Syria and then I'll get to Iran, Assistant Secretary Burns went to Damascus right after we passed the Lebanese resolution that essentially said to Syria, "Don't meddle in Lebanon and leave." And he took with him a strong interagency team: the Pentagon, White House, National Security Council, and Bill laid it out once again to President Bashar Assad our concerns with respect to weapons of mass destruction development, the border, harboring of terrorist organizations inside of Syria, the need for Syria to go after any financial activities taking place in Damascus that might be a way of hiding money belonging to the Iraqi people, or funding activities in Iraq.

Bill had good, strong, candid discussions with the Syrians. Then I saw Foreign Minister Farouk Shara day before yesterday, and I've met him a number of times. We always speak to each other at the UNGA. And this was a different kind of conversation; it wasn't the usual, you know, "You give me your talking points and I'll tell you my talking points." We had a good conversation on all of these issues, and the day before I saw him, the Syrian army began a partial withdrawal from Lebanon, three to four thousand troops leaving from an area that they had not left from previously, south of Beirut, which I thought was a positive step. It's not the whole Syrian army, but it's a step.

And we went through every issue. And with respect to the border, the Foreign Minister said, "We want the border to be secure. We don't want strangers going across the border. We don't want to cause trouble for Iraq. It is in our interest to live next to an Iraq that is stable, not unstable, and therefore, we want to cooperate with you and with the Iraqi Interim Government."

And so there will be tripartite meetings: the coalition, the Iraqi Interim Government, and the Syrian Government at different levels, to include military levels, to see what can be done to get better control of the border.

It's a long border, and it's a border that's been used for moving things back and forth for 5,000 years. And so any suggestion that it can be sealed entirely is not a practical suggestion. But a lot more can be done with technical means and other means. And the Syrians say they want to work with us on it. We say fine, let's do that. You also want to make sure, though, that you don't have people in Damascus still who are trying to get to that border and get across. We've got to dry it up. Fine. They gave me some -- I can't go into details on this, but they gave me some information with respect to financial activities and how we can cooperate more fully on that.

We're looking at ways to improve our intelligence exchange, and with respect to the terrorist organizations, Hezbollah and the others who still are able to find haven in Syria, we made it clear to them that this was a major problem for us, because you can't ask us to solve the Palestinian question while those who are keeping the question from being resolved through terrorist action can find haven in the outskirts of Beirut or in Damascus. They didn't have an answer for me on that, but we are looking at some creative ideas.

So I characterized the meeting when I came out as being of a different tone and positive, but I also said, with respect to the meeting, that we need actions, not just announcements.

And so we'll be working with the Syrians. With respect to Iran, I'm not sure I ever quite said that they were providing wherewithal to Muqtada al-Sadr, but certainly, there's a great deal of movement taking place across the border, and I suspect that the Iranians have been providing some assistance to insurgent efforts. How much, I can't quantify, and I'm sure that Prime Minister Allawi shared his enormous concerns with you when he was here the other day.

And so, we have ways of speaking to the Iranians, if not directly, and we're communicating to them the need for them to act in a responsible way, because it is in their interest to have a stable government in Baghdad and to have a unified Iraq, one country.

People debate whether the Iranians, and I don't know the answer to this question, but people debate, do the Iranians want one country or would they prefer three countries? And our judgment is, I'm not sure which one they prefer. I think they should prefer one country, and that's what we're telling them is in their interests and therefore, they should do nothing to derail that.

This one country will have a Shia majority in political power, but it will have a TAL and a constitution that preserves minority rights, and that's what it's going to take to keep this country together. It's going to be a Shia majority. But the whole structure of the TAL, the structure of the constitution, has to be such that the Kurds and the Shiites and others feel that they have a stake in the future of this one country.

QUESTION: Staying in Iraq -- sorry, Bill, I'm not going to ask about the Adriatic. Some have suggested --

SECRETARY POWELL: I can't get a bite here. (Laughter.)

QUESTION: There's still time.

QUESTION: My second question. My first is that some have suggested that the Iranians would like to have a lot of balls in the air at the same time -- the border, the nuclear issue -- so that they can talk about a package deal maybe involving an end to our sanctions, and actually, some of our European partners have talked about such a kind of package deal. Do you sense, when you're dealing with the Iranians that that might be their game, and if so, how do you respond to it?

SECRETARY POWELL: I've heard this, and I've heard suggestions of grand bargains. But I have seen nothing to suggest that the Iranians are awaiting something to be put on the table in the form of a grand bargain, which takes me to the nuclear question, which is

where I think you might have been heading.

This Administration came in in 2001 and started screaming about Iran's nuclear program. We raised our concerns in the most direct way with the Russians and what was going on with respect to the facility they were building at Bushehr and other facilities they might be building in Iran. And they kind of, you know, pushed back for a while. It was this Administration that started uncovering information and making it known to the IAEA. And it's in the past year that we have been able to show, and with the help of dissidents who have pointed out things that even we didn't know about, that now the IAEA saw and could not deny and have been looking into.

So we have been pushing the fact that we believe Iran has a nuclear development program that is intended to lead to a nuclear weapon. And there are very few people around now who don't accept that as a very, very distinct possibility, if even though they may not be totally convinced. And we have been pressing since last fall to report it to the Security Council, knowing that the consensus was not there. So five times over the last 11 or 12 months, we have tried to get it to the Security Council, knowing the consensus was not there.

But at the September meeting that took place last week, with the assistance of the EU-3, who have been trying to help us, help the international community with this, I think we have now reached a point where, if Iran does not satisfy the concerns we have and answer the questions that the international community has, there is a much higher likelihood than ever before that the IAEA will refer to the Security Council.

What will happen to it when it gets to the Security Council is a question that we don't have an answer to yet. The point is that Iran has been put under a blinding spotlight and a heat lamp. Now, will this stop them from moving forward? I don't know. It doesn't seem like that would be the case. I think they have determined to do this. But I think, as a result of what we have done, and the international pressure that's been brought to bear, and the spotlight and the heat lamp that's been put on them, I'm thinking it makes it a lot more difficult for them to move forward.

Now, we worked this multilaterally. You know, we didn't go off. We worked it with the IAEA. We worked it with the European Union. The European Union said, "Let's have our three foreign ministers," my three buddies, "Joschka, Michel and Jack go do it." They came out with an agreement, we respected it, we went along, and the commitments made in that agreement by Iran have not been lived up to.

So the EU-3, and if you look today, you'll see reporting from the French Minister that pretty much says, you know, we're running out of air space, altitude and speed with these folks, and it's time to take stronger action.

And so, the Iranians are going to have to make a judgment as to whether or not they want to keep moving in this direction in light of all the heat and light that's been put on

them. The question always comes up: Well, how close are they? The answer is, not sure, different estimates. They have not been terribly successful over the last bunch of years that they've been working on it, but I must say that it is this Administration that really did ratchet up the pressure, and I think convinced most of the world that this is a problem that has to be dealt with.

And when we put the resolution before the IAEA last week, it was the United States, the EU-3, and the Russian Federation. It would not have been possible a couple of years ago.

QUESTION: If I could just follow that up. Do you feel we have a stronger or weaker hand in dealing with Iran as a result of events in Iraq?

SECRETARY POWELL: I think stronger, and I think it will get stronger if we get the insurgency under control and the political process leading to an election goes forward.

QUESTION: Secretary, this Administration did more than most, as a sort of Masonian concept of helping, the idea of spreading democracy. We value our values and so on, the themes that the President pushed the other day, which you would have thought would be reasonably well received in the world. On the other hand, it seems to me that -- I don't have data of decades ago, but the view of this country and this Administration now is at a very low point around the world. I don't mean that when you go to the UN, people don't talk to you. I understand that you had good meetings today and continue to.

But broadly, popular opinion and official and intellectual opinion has an extremely low view of this country. How do you explain it?

SECRETARY POWELL: Disagreement in many nations and -- that oppose what we did in Iraq, and even nations that supported what we did in Iraq, were doing it in opposition to the public opinion. And so that has been a big dark cloud over public views of the United States, and intellectual views of the United States. Intellectual views can change rather rapidly as the situation changes. I'm more concerned about the public opinion in the world, especially in the Arab world.

And so Iraq is a major cause of that. The other major cause of it is the Palestinian-Israeli conflict that we have not been able to get traction on. We came into office and we had an intifada going on that President Clinton worked so very, very hard on this up until his last day. He spoke to me at four o'clock on his last day and this is what we talked about.

But nevertheless, that process collapsed, and then Ehud Barak was gone and in came Ariel Sharon, a different approach to the problem. And we have tried a number of ways -- the Mitchell Plan, the Zinni Plan, the Tenet Plan. I went over several times. I rescued Chairman Arafat from the Muqata twice, and we made a major effort last year to get it going at Aqaba. We were the reason there is a position of Palestinian Prime Minister. We have not been able to get power to that Prime Minister to act.

And so we are looked at as the ones who are supposed to make all of this happen. And because it hasn't happened, there's another big black cloud over public opinion of the United States.

If we can deal with those two clouds, or either one of them, I think things would change significantly. I still find that, in my travels and the President's travels, people might be disappointed in these policies and are concerned at how it affects their publics. But there's still residual -- a great deal of residual respect, admiration and occasional resentment -- not occasional resentment, frequent resentment of the United States because of our power. And so it's a problem we have to deal with. It's a problem both of the message that we're putting out now that is not always favorably received, and we've got to do a better job of putting out the message.

And it's hard to get traction on some of the things we have done. Speaking to an African audience the other day, what we've done over the last three and a half years is pretty impressive with respect to Africa: expanded the Growth and Opportunity Act; we helped resolve the problem in Liberia last year by pulling the African Union together at the right moment, with a little bit of touch from the American military force; we have been working with our friends in resolving conflicts in Sierra Leon, Cote d'Ivoire, the Congo. I met with another grouping yesterday that I'm sure Gail will be familiar with. Well, nevermind. (Laughter.) But it's with the Great Lakes folks: Rwanda, Uganda and the Congo. I met with them as a group yesterday. That's another group we formed to bring them together to talk about these conflicts; the HIV/AIDS initiative, and especially the Millennium Challenge Corporation, which is going to revolutionize, and you'll see it in due course, the way in which we have been delivering aid.

And so, all of that is appreciated by these countries. And they may sit there and be unhappy about Iraq, but they're very happy about what we're doing with respect to our African programs, or in our own hemisphere, with respect to the Andean Trade Preferences Act, with respect to bilateral trade agreements with Chile and with others, and the Andean Free Trade Agreement. They aren't happy about the fact that we haven't solved the Israeli-Palestinian dispute and that Iraq is so unsettled, troubling. And I think if we could clear those two clouds out of the way, you would see quite a considerable rebound in these attitudes.

QUESTION: Can I ask you one more question about one of the clouds? Israel, we sympathize with your difficulty in dealing with the Palestinians. But every time another settlement is built, the chances of undoing this stuff becomes more difficult. Why have we been unable to do anything to convince the Sharon government not to go forward with settlement building?

SECRETARY POWELL: Enormous political pressures inside Israel for settlements. What we did succeed in doing is taking Mr. Sharon's unilateral decision about Gaza, to remove those settlements, and making sure that some West Bank settlements were included, in order to bring the whole process into the roadmap. The cost of that was to

make some statements that got all kinds of attention back in April, when we said, "Let's face the reality of what right of return is and can be, or cannot be," and the fact that every previous attempt at solving this problem, to include President Clinton's tremendous effort, always recognized that there would have to be some adjustments at the very end, meaning there's some settlement activity that would not be reversible and everybody understands that. So that was said clearly.

We had said to the Israelis, and the President did it again in his speech at the UN the other day, that there must be a freeze in settlement activities. And we are engaged in the most elaborate discussion with the Israelis as to what "freeze" means, and how to define settlements, so that we know when a settlement looks like it's being unfrozen, should it be.

QUESTION: Are you saying the inclusion of the West Bank ones was an American idea, you mentioned --

SECRETARY POWELL: I'm saying that in our discussions with the Israelis about the Gaza disengagement, we said, "Okay, you're doing this unilaterally, whether it's connected to anything or not, but we need to see this connected to a comprehensive solution, and so we need to look at the West Bank." They agreed, and we looked at a number of alternatives. It wasn't just those four settlements; we looked at several alternatives. And we decided that the best way to get started was with those four, not hard ones to get rid of, as a way to get started. And then we also said to the Israelis that this has to be seen as part of the roadmap, and it has to be done in a way that does not give up --

-- It was our suggestion, and if I've gotten it wrong, you'll know it within an hour -- (laughter) -- but I don't think I do. As the Israelis came forward with this idea, we started to pursue it and really understand it, and we made it clear, this is unilateral, it has nothing to do with the Palestinians. We're going to do it. And in the course of discussing that, we said, you know, "This is just going to stand alone. It's not going to achieve the purpose we would like to see it achieve as the start of a process for a comprehensive solution, and therefore, let's talk about how the West Bank gets involved."

Now, when and where it all came together, that's how it came together, got glued together, and the Israelis agreed, because the President, you know, a lot was being asked of the President in that April statement, and it was needed in order for Prime Minister Sharon to take it to his government and to the Israeli people and so we put it forward.

But in turn, we needed this to be linked to a comprehensive settlement, no prejudgment of final status issues, and it had to include the West Bank. And that's the way it turned out. And after the big bru-ha-ha you will all remember in April, I then spent a lot of time with the Arab nations, and I went to Davos in the desert, the World Economic Forum at the Dead Sea and explained our position, and the Arabs finally accepted that they might

not like what was said, but an opportunity has been created. It's an opportunity that's sitting there. It's going to happen. He is going to withdraw. I'm confident he'll get it through his government. He's starting to -- has gotten legislation to pay the settlers, pay some of the settlers. It's going to happen. He's announced the date this past week. And what we've got to do is get the Palestinians to get their act together, and empower a Prime Minister who can take advantage of this opportunity.

So the question of settlements, we can begin this question of settlements by getting rid of 25 right away, and then see where we go from there.

QUESTION: Can I ask you something about something that's happening on my beat at the UN today, which is the Russians are about to introduce a resolution to expand the terrorist list. I know you spent a good deal of time with Sergei Lavrov. Can we do business with this? Is this a way that the United States might succeed in getting groups like Hamas and al-Aqsa on the list of -- and if they put Chechen groups on the list -- where does that stand, if you might just talk about --

SECRETARY POWELL: Yeah, my guys are examining the Russian ideas and proposals, and we're very open to it. We may have some concerns over language and if you cover the UN beat, you know how much time I spend on language. (Laughter.)

QUESTION: (Inaudible.)

SECRETARY POWELL: You've seized at the moment. I could tell you -- I won't regale you with stories of the difference between "and" and "or" in a resolution, but it's significant.

And so we're looking at it with an open mind and with a positive attitude, but I can't tell you we're ready to buy off on a particular resolution.

QUESTION: But is the idea of getting groups on that list, that we would like to see on that list, is that one of the possibilities that is open?

SECRETARY POWELL: Yes, but I -- yes, it does offer that possibility, but I haven't read the resolution. There are a couple of them floating around; there are several different ideas that the Russians have. Sergei and I had a long one-on-one meeting yesterday, and we discussed it. And I told him we have an open mind, we want to look at it.

They have a concern over an individual who has gained asylum here, and that's troubling and they want to create a set of circumstances which would allow him to be expelled, and I've said to the Russians, "Look, it's not the State Department, not Homeland Security, it's our judicial system." And he has been granted asylum because a case could not be made that he shouldn't be granted asylum. So he has been granted asylum, and that's a judicial matter. And that's the way this country works, and Sergei, you've lived here ten years, you know how it works.

MR. BOUCHER: Sir, I think we're going to get going here.

QUESTION: Time for a last one, or --

QUESTION: Yeah, I'd love to -- Mr. Secretary, last time I saw you, almost in that very chair, you were in uniform. And I've watched this sort of interesting part of your career in this last decade or so. Where are you likely to be next year at this time, number one? And when are you going to write that next book?

SECRETARY POWELL: You've got to be kidding. (Laughter.) I've never had it asked quite that way, so good job. I have no plans to write a book at the moment. I'm serving now as Secretary of State and serving at the pleasure of the President. And that's all I'm focusing on right now, being Secretary of State. Remember, I don't serve a term. Others serve terms. The only thing that ends my term is if some dramatic thing happens in early November and bosses change. But I serve at the pleasure of the President. In due course, the President and I will talk about all this.

And so I have no answer to your question, other than to say I'm Secretary of State, I'm working as hard now as Secretary of State as I did in the first part of my tenure, and I will continue to do so. I'm glad Bill's not writing any editorials these days. (Laughter.) Thank you all.

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