

Interview by Warren Strobel of Knight-Ridder

Secretary Colin L. Powell

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MR. STROBEL: And you know the first question, the Duelfer report. Mr. Secretary, it doesn't just say that there weren't stockpiles, it also seems to indicate that this was perhaps a decaying threat, at least on the nuclear side, and that even if Saddam had gotten WMD his main initiative or motivation for doing so would have been Tehran and to increase his regional status.

Given that and given the report on Zarqawi that came out last week -- maybe there's a relationship, maybe there's not -- did the Administration miscalculate the threat from Saddam?

SECRETARY POWELL: The only thing that I think we got wrong, really, was that he did not have stockpiles. And I think between what Mr. Kay has said and what Mr. Duelfer has said, it appears they did not have weapons. But I still have no doubt in my mind about the intention that he had and the capability that he retained. And as you saw from the Duelfer report, he was doing everything he could to get out from under the sanctions. He was cheating on the sanctions. He was deceiving the world, sometimes in ways that are incomprehensible as to why he was trying to deceive the world in that way, which was just putting him at greater risk. But that's what he was doing.

And the intention and the capability were there, the history was there of what this guy has done in the past, and there was no reason to believe, at least in my judgment and in the judgment of the President and the other coalition leaders, that if left to his own devices and allowed to be free of the sanctions regime, you could put a bet down: Was he going to go back to weapons of mass destruction or not? And I don't think it was reasonable to think he would not. And certainly Duelfer, when you read the report, it pointed in that direction.

You can then make an assumption, as you did in your question, oh, he was just doing this to deter Iran. Well, you could believe that if you wish. He has used them in the past to kill his own people; and in the post-9/11 world, do you really want that kind of regime around with potential connections to terrorist organizations? Zarqawi had a presence in Baghdad. He traveled in and out. He had murdered, was responsible for the murder of Mr. Laurence Foley in Jordan. And all those things taken together suggest that this was a danger to the region, to the world; and in a post-9/11 environment, it was a risk the President was not going to take, nor were the other coalition leaders.

We tried to keep the sanctions reasonably intact, as you'll recall, Warren, with the smart sanctions.

MR. STROBEL: Right. That was one of your first initiatives.

SECRETARY POWELL: Everything -- first initiative. The reason? Because when I came in, we sat in this room in my first week and discussed this with my staff. The sanctions were falling apart and this guy was going to get a free ride to do whatever he wanted. And he had given every indication over years that if allowed to get that free ride, he would go right back to the same kind of behavior that he had had in the past.

Now, we also believed, based on the intelligence information that we were presented by the Director of Central Intelligence and the work done by other intelligence agencies in other countries, that he had stockpiles, and that was information provided to the Congress, to the Senate and to the House, to the President, to me and to everyone else, and information the CIA and the Defense -- the Director of Central Intelligence fully stood behind.

MR. STROBEL: It was in the NIE.

SECRETARY POWELL: Mm-hmm.

MR. STROBEL: Stockpiles. Different subject --

SECRETARY POWELL: There was nothing in my presentation of 5 February, nothing the President said, that wasn't supportable based on the collective body of intelligence that the DCI and CIA had provided to policymakers.

MR. STROBEL: Switch subjects real quickly. I understand you made some comments on Cuba on your travel -- I mean, that caused a little bit of a storm.

SECRETARY POWELL: Yeah. Well, I don't --

MR. STROBEL: Can you clarify or make a clarification?

SECRETARY POWELL: I don't think that I need a great deal of clarification. We're in a political environment.

Castro is an anachronism. He is causing his own people to suffer greatly. He is a troublemaker in the rest of the region. He is a troublemaker in Venezuela. He's a troublemaker in Colombia. He has never stopped being a troublemaker. But he is not the kind of threat he was when he had the Soviet Union backing him up about 15 or 20 years ago.

So I have no illusions about Mr. Castro. And the sooner he has left the scene, the better the region will be, and more importantly, the better the Cuban people will be.

Now, let's keep in mind that I was the chairman of the commission that produced this study

over the last year for the President, and in that commission work we described why he is a challenge and a danger to the region and to his own people, and why we have to do everything we can to help bring this regime to a new -- to a successful conclusion and bring new leaders in. And a good part of the study dealt with the issue of how we have to get ourselves ready for assisting the Cuban people when they finally were able to rid themselves of this terrible regime.

And so I know exactly who Mr. Castro is. I have been facing him on and off for the last 15 or 20 years in many places: in Grenada, in Nicaragua, in a variety of places. I am pleased that democracy is on the march and 34 of the 35 countries of our hemisphere are now democracies. The only one that is not is Castro's Cuba. And as long as that is the case, we have a problem with Castro in his country and in the region.

I am pleased that we have been able to get the countries of the hemisphere to come together more and start to point out the human rights problems with the Castro regime, and I have been in the forefront of pointing out the human rights problems with the Castro regime and taking action in Geneva to bring attention to this.

So my record with respect to Fidel Castro is rather clear, but we are in a campaign season where people go beyond what is said in order to make a political point.

MR. STROBEL: Have you seen this article that was written on Salon.com by an anonymous senior Foreign Service officer?

SECRETARY POWELL: Mm-hmm.

MR. STROBEL: This is not a backdoor way of asking you whether you're going to be around in a second Bush term, but I just wondered if you had read it and what you think of it and whether you feel that it represents not just one person's view.

SECRETARY POWELL: Well, I don't know. I don't know who the author is. I read it, of course, and really have no comment on it. Anonymous articles floating around on websites certainly come up, a regular thing in our world.

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