

Interview by Hany El-Konayyesi of Abu Dhabi TV

Secretary Colin L. Powell

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MR. EL-KONAYYESI: Let me, first of all, thank you very much, Mr. Secretary, for giving us this opportunity with Abu Dhabi television. And let me start, because of the length of time, with the hot spot, hot issue now, Iraq.

To what extent, in light of the current situation, security situation, to what extent is Iraq elections a U.S., an American commitment to be held at the deadline at the end of January?

SECRETARY POWELL: We're all still working to having an election in Iraq by the end of January of 2005. That is the goal of Prime Minister Allawi and we are supporting him. And we're working with the UN to get the people in to support that plan as well.

We realize it's a difficult situation. We're fighting an insurgency, but our commitment is solid to have elections as required for the UN resolution by the end of January 2005.

MR. EL-KONAYYESI: Would you accept that the outcome of this election, the Iraqi elections even if it comes up with an Islamic Shia government? And Mr., the President Bush was not very clear about answering this question. Can you qualify it?

SECRETARY POWELL: Well, we would respect the election results if the election is held in a way that is free, fair and open, and all segments of the Iraqi population got to participate in such an election. I think it's unlikely that the Iraqi people want to have a government that is radicalized or will not protect the rights of all Iraqi people. We have a Transitional Administrative Law that recognizes that the Shia are the majority population of Iraq, but also protects the rights of the Kurds, of the Sunnis, of all of the other segments of Iraqi society.

And we would hope that any election following the Transitional Administrative Law, where all people got the opportunity to participate, would produce a government that would be respectful of the TAL and will move in the direction of a constitution that defended the rights of all.

I don't think the Iraqi people want to go from one form of a totalitarian state to another form of a totalitarian state. I think they want democracy. I think they want openness in their society. I think they want women to participate fully in the life of a future Iraq and I hope the election will produce that result.

MR. EL-KONAYYESI: How would you accept the Shia?

SECRETARY POWELL: If the election is free, fair and open, we will accept the results. I just don't think the result that you have hypothesized about is the result that we're going to get.

MR. EL-KONAYYESI: How far do you agree with what Mr. Putin, the Russian President said lately about that he -- there's a link between the escalating insurgency in Iraq and the U. S. elections? Do you see anything?

SECRETARY POWELL: Well, we have always thought that the insurgents in Iraq would increase their activity as we got closer to the Iraqi election. I think what they're trying to do is influence the Iraqi election. They're trying to make it more difficult for the Iraqi people to have a free, fair, open election. It happens that the United States election comes before then. So anything they are doing, people will immediately think they might be doing it with respect to our election or outcome.

But I think their real goal is to disrupt the Iraqi elections, because the Iraqi elections, if they're held, kind of like the Afghanistan elections were held a week or two ago, if those kinds of elections are held in Iraq, the Iraqi people will speak clearly about who they want to be led by. And I don't think they want to be led by terrorists and murderers and people who set off bombs and kill children and kill police officers and kill those who are trying to bring security to Iraq. So that's what they're targeting. They're targeting the free, fair election that we are committed to, and Prime Minister Allawi is committed to, at the end of January of 2005.

MR. EL-KONAYYESI: But Mr. Secretary, if the violence escalates more in Iraq, do you think, wouldn't this have some influence on the U.S. elections?

SECRETARY POWELL: I think the American people understand the difficult challenge that we are facing in Iraq. We have seen casualties over the past several months go up. We anticipated that it would be more difficult during this period. And the American people will not shrink from the task that is before us. And the American people are wise enough to put this into their calculation as to who they want to elect as president.

MR. EL-KONAYYESI: We heard President Bush saying lately that capturing Zarkawi in Iraq is a top priority. Does this mean that bin Laden is not on top of the list, of the wanted list, of the American list?

SECRETARY POWELL: Sure, bin Laden is a priority. He is the one who planned the strikes against the United States on 9/11. And so he's always been the top priority, which you can have more than one top priority. Bin Laden is somebody we will always be after, we will always be looking for. And we will not be satisfied until he has been brought to justice.

But Zarkawi is also a problem, a problem to the Iraqi people. He is somewhere in Iraq planning strikes that are going to kill innocent Iraqi people tomorrow. It's bin Laden who is

doing that. And he is doing it to the Afghan people, and Zarkawi is doing it to the people of Iraq. Both of them are people who have to be brought to justice. They cannot be applauded, they cannot be recognized, they cannot, in any way, be given any sort of credit or approval for what they're doing.

What are they doing? Bin Laden, in his part of the world, and the Afghan-Pakistan border, and who are trying to direct people throughout the world, going after innocent people. And Zarkawi is doing the same thing in Iraq, and they should be condemned for their action. Their actions reflect no aspect of the Muslim faith that I understand, and so it is in the interest of the world that the world come together and say, "Let the people decide how they will be governed, not terrorists decide how they will be governed, for terrorism to be allowed or any toleration for terrorists who can kill innocent people."

MR. EL-KONAYYESI: So this, you are assuming that the al-Qaida is active now in Iraq? Is there a link?

SECRETARY POWELL: No. We -- I am not making any link to al-Qaida and Iraq from the old days. We know that al-Qaida had some contacts with the Saddam Hussein government over a period of time, but I've never seen any evidence that connected al-Qaida formally to Saddam Hussein in a way that would suggest that Saddam Hussein had anything to do with 9/11.

But al-Qaida is always looking for places that it could have influence or it could cause trouble. The principle challenge we have in Iraq is with Zarkawi and for what he is doing, as well as others. It's not just Zarkawi, Zarkawi, former regime elements.

And as you know, we have seen reports that Zarkawi is trying to reach out and form a relationship with al-Qaida through bin Laden.

MR. EL-KONAYYESI: There have been many different reports contradicting sometime statements about the need for more U.S. troops in Iraq. Can you please clarify your plans in this regard?

SECRETARY POWELL: The military, United States military and coalition commanders speak to this, and as General Abizaid, our overall commander, and General Casey, our commander on the ground in Iraq have said, they believe they have the necessary U.S. troop strength. And what they are trying to do now is to build up the size of the Iraqi security forces. They need more Iraqi security forces. And as those forces are built up, police forces, military, border guards and the rest, then the need for coalition troops will go down and we can start to readjust our position there, how many people we actually have to have there.

But the President has made it clear he will give our commanders what they say they need, and they are satisfied, our commanders are satisfied with the number of troops they have right now.

MR. EL-KONAYYESI: It seems that the UN has a problem now in Iraq. They don't have

enough safeguards for more countries to protect their troops there. I believe the latest statement from Mr. Annan saying it's only Fiji, the only country offered to send troops. How would you solve this?

SECRETARY POWELL: Fiji has made an offer, and there are one or two other countries that we are working with to see if they will make a contribution. And if we don't get enough through that means, then the coalition will have to deal with the security need of the United Nations.

But it's important for the United Nations to step forward and to increase the number of people they have in the country who would be working on the election.

MR. EL-KONAYYESI: Moving to Syria, what would be the next step after the latest Security Council, the rejection of the latest Security Council resolution on Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon? What's, what will be the next step towards Syria?

SECRETARY POWELL: Well, the next step has been taken by the Security Council to the issuance of a Presidential Statement -- takes note of the fact that Syria still does not respect the UN resolution. And when we see the personnel changes that have taken place with Mr. Hariri stepping down and others coming into positions of power who are even more closely linked to Syria, once again shows that Syria is playing an inappropriate role in political life and in the civic life of the Lebanese people. And that is what this resolution was about.

Syria should allow the Lebanese people to decide how they will be governed, and they should remove their military forces from Lebanon after all these years. And the United Nations will continue to monitor this, and we'll be asking for reports on a regular basis.

And I hope the Syrians realize that we are now in a new age. Things are different. And it is time for them to examine their strategic position on policies they have been following and adopt policies that are more relevant to the new world that we're in.

MR. EL-KONAYYESI: Are you planning any extra sanctions, any plans to put more pressure on the Syrians?

SECRETARY POWELL: We always are reviewing our obligations under the Syria Accountability Act, but I have nothing to announce today.

MR. EL-KONAYYESI: Okay. From another state, Iran, how far are you satisfied with the negotiations between the Europeans and the Iranians with regard to their nuclear program?

SECRETARY POWELL: Well, as you know, we have felt for a year now that the matter should be referred to the Security Council, referred to the Security Council by the Board of Governors of the International Atomic Energy Agency. We have watched with interest and cooperated with our European friends as they have made approaches to Iran to find a way to solve this, and the European Union has been at it for almost a year now with the three countries that represent the European Union, and that is France, Germany, and the United

Kingdom.

They have a delegation in Vienna now talking to the Iranians again, and I'll wait for the results of that. But I don't know what results will come yet. The fact of the matter is, though, when the IAEA examines this again in November, next month, I think it is time for the matter to be referred to the Security Council, unless there is a complete change of attitude on the part of the Iranians and they come into compliance with all of their obligations under IAEA strictures, and also in compliance with the commitments they made to the European Union-3.

MR. EL-KONAYYESI: Mr. Secretary, let me ask you this question, especially with the latest circumstance from Iran. The fact is a wish or a desire toward dialogue. What kind of incentives would you give Iran if they comply with your requests?

SECRETARY POWELL: We think they ought to comply with requests, not because we're giving them incentives, but because they have an obligation to. They have an obligation under the international accords to which they are a party, and they have an obligation under the commitment -- the letters, the agreements they made with the European Union they made commitments to.

And so, incentives should be meeting their commitments. Now, the European Union is prepared to offer them some additional incentives, I believe, and I'll wait and see what was actually offered, if anything.

MR. EL-KONAYYESI: And you don't know what kind of incentives?

SECRETARY POWELL: We have some idea of what the European Union was thinking, but it is their document, and I'll have to wait and see what they actually presented to the Iranians and what the response was from the Iranians.

We do not wish ill of the Iranians. We just think that it is very destabilizing for Iran to have a nuclear program that we believe is really a nuclear weapons development program. And over the past several years, this Administration, President Bush and all of us in his Administration, have been pointing out to the world that this is a danger to the region and to the world.

And Iran denied it; they still deny it. But the IAEA kept finding out things about their program, kept discovering things about their program that they were hiding from the IAEA. That should be a concern to all of us. Why have they been hiding? Why haven't they been forthcoming? Why aren't they meeting their commitments? Why do they need nuclear power in the first place with all of their oil reserves? Well, if they want nuclear power, they why aren't they prepared to satisfy concerns that have been raised by making, you know, by finding a way to make a closed fuel cycle that comes from the outside and goes back, instead of finding a way to enrich uranium in a manner that could give them the wherewithal for a nuclear program.

MR. EL-KONAYYESI: On the Palestinian-Israel conflict, can you safely say that you have stayed on track with the roadmap?

SECRETARY POWELL: The roadmap is there. It remains the position of the Quartet, consisting of the United States, the European Union, the United Nations and the Russian Federation. It is there. It is ready to be exercised. It still is supported by the President because it captures his vision of a Palestinian state living free and independent side-by-side with Israel, and the roadmap is also -- represents President -- Prime Minister Sharon's position. He wants to do everything consistent with the roadmap.

We're going to get started. We're going to get started by, on one side, the end of terror, the Palestinian Authority operating in a more responsible manner, the Palestinian leadership taking action to empower their Prime Minister in order to bring the security forces under better control, and to get the Palestinians ready to take over Gaza and other West Bank settlements when the disengagement takes place.

The disengagement, as controversial as it is in both Israel and on the Palestinian side, is an opportunity to finally start to get rid of settlements, which is what people have wanted all along. And we need more responsible action on the part of the Palestinians, and when Mr. Sharon has succeeded in moving it through his political system, and the disengagement actually begins, I want to see the Palestinians at that point ready to take advantage of that opportunity, and ready now to engage inside the roadmap for the disengagement of the four settlements in the West Bank and more to happen.

But we have to end terror. As long as bombs keep going off and rockets keep going into Israel, it makes it difficult for us to gain traction on the roadmap.

MR. EL-KONAYYESI: Talking about the settlements, *Ha'aretz*, the Israel newspaper, today published a report, an official report, parts of the report stating that, stressing that the Israel Government were involved somehow in supporting financially and security-wise some illicit settlements in the West Bank in Gaza. How do you respond to this?

SECRETARY POWELL: I haven't seen the article, so I better not respond to it until I've had a chance to read it.

MR. EL-KONAYYESI: Yeah, but now, when Mr. Sharon doesn't have enough support for his disengagement plan, do you think that there is --

SECRETARY POWELL: I don't know that he doesn't have enough support for his engagement plan. He is in a political discussion with his colleagues in the government, and in those who are in opposition and with the Israeli people. The Israeli people have expressed strong support for disengagement, and it is a democratic nation with a Knesset and with a Prime Minister, and I'm confident that they will work their way through this difficulty.

And I believe that Mr. Sharon is right in this disengagement issue, and I hope he will prevail

within his government, within Israel.

MR. EL-KONAYYESI: One last question about Sudan. How do you read the latest, the outcome of the latest summit in Libya that stressed that the Darfur crisis is a fully African crisis, a message that they don't need any interference from outside, from countries and, but particularly the United States?

SECRETARY POWELL: Well, the United States is doing everything it can to help the people of Darfur. We are putting a lot of money in. We have shown leadership in taking the case to the international community, in taking the case to the United Nations, and in my conversations with the leaders of the Sudanese Government in Khartoum.

Now, if that's interference, I think that's the wrong characterization, calling it interference. It's trying to help these desperate people. Do you really want the international community and the United States to step back and watch these people die without food, without water, without medicine? No. The international community, the UN, the United States, others who are coming to help the people of Darfur, we are also prepared to help African nations put more troops on the ground, as part of the African Union monitoring protection force, and we think that is an appropriate task for us to do.

So these are African troops that are going in on the ground, not United States troops, not British troops, not any other outside troops. The African troops are going in to give a level of protection and security to the area so that people will be comfortable, and maybe they will start returning to their villages without fear of being murdered, attacked, raped or in some other way abused.

And so, I think the United States and the industrialized world is playing a correct role. We're not putting our troops on the ground, but we're enabling other troops, African troops, to go on the ground.

MR. EL-KONAYYESI: If the African troops couldn't solve the problem, how long will you wait until you interfere or take action?

SECRETARY POWELL: Why do you think we're going to take action or interfere? The African troops are going in on the ground. It's almost as if you're inviting us to do something that you will immediately object to. And what I'm saying to you is that the United States is a nation that reaches out and tries to help people who are in desperate need. And we saw a situation in Darfur where over a million people were not being fed, were not being housed, were being driven out of their villages and driven out of their homes.

And the United States, working with our friends in the international community and the United -- and within the United Nations, stepped forward. And I went to Sudan. I went to Sudan with Kofi Annan, the Secretary General of the United Nations. And we talked to the Sudanese because we went to Darfur, and we mobilized the international community. And the sense of your question is almost that we are to be criticized because we did this. We should be complimented because we did this, frankly, because if we hadn't done it, these

people would still be in desperate straits. They still are in difficulty. They have to get back home. But at least we are creating conditions so that the food is flowing, the water is flowing, health care is flowing. Not as much as needed, but much more than would have been flowing if the United States hadn't played a role.

MR. EL-KONAYYESI: Thank you very much, Mr. Powell.

SECRETARY POWELL: You're welcome.

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