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Remarks After His Meeting With United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan

Secretary Colin L. Powell

C Street Entrance
Washington, DC
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(10:45 a.m. EST)



SECRETARY POWELL: I might take this opportunity before going to the White House to meet with Secretary General Annan and the President to confirm what you read in the papers this morning that the six-party talks will resume in Beijing on the 25th of February, including all the parties, to include the North Koreans and we hope that these talks will be successful. Thank you.

George.

QUESTION: Barry.

SECRETARY POWELL: I'm sorry. Barry, I'm sorry.

QUESTION: That's all right, sir. No. Could we retrace a bit, those of us who weren't in your newspaper interview yesterday?

SECRETARY POWELL: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: What is your position? I know it's a little bit hypothetical. Had you known what you know now about weapons, would you still have recommended?

SECRETARY POWELL: What I know now is that we were dealing with a despotic regime that had the intention to develop weapons of mass destruction, had weapons of mass destruction, used weapons of mass destruction and had never lost the intention to have such weapons.

What I know now, and nothing would have changed this, is that they had the capability and were maintaining that capability by keeping the technical infrastructure in place, making sure they had people around who knew how to make such weapons, make sure they had a warm base, they had the wherewithal to make such weapons.

The only thing that is even being discussed right now is what stockpiles were out there, and that is one element that we will let the various communities and intelligence groups that are looking at this, look at this; various commissions will be examining this.

But the bottom line is this: the President made the right decision. He made the right decision based on the history of this regime, the intention that this leader, terrible despotic leader had, and the capabilities at a variety of levels, the delivery systems that were there, and there is nobody debating that, the infrastructure that was there, the technical know-how that was there. The only thing we're debating is the stockpile.

And so the President made the right decision. There should be no doubt in the mind of the American people or anyone else in the world that we have done the right thing, and history will certainly be the test of that. But I think the test really has already been passed by the Iraqi people now seeing that they're going to have a democratic future, they're going to be living in peace with their neighbors, and will never have to have a discussion about weapons of mass destruction again with respect to Iraq.

The right thing was done. And other information that might have been available earlier, don't know it would have changed the outcome, nor did I say it would have changed the outcome. I think it was clear that this was a regime with intent, capability, and it was a risk the President felt strongly we could not take. And it was something we all agreed to and would probably agree to it again under any other set of circumstances.

We took the case to the international community, to the United Nations, reminded the world of all the resolutions this individual had violated -- Saddam Hussein. And it was time to act. Act we did. He is gone and the people of Iraq are free.

Thank you.

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[End]

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