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Interview by Tom Brokaw

Secretary Colin L. Powell

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(11:10 a.m. EST)

MR. BROKAW: Mr. Secretary, what do we know about who is behind the attack in Madrid? Was it ETA, the Basque separatist movement, or was it al-Qaida?

SECRETARY POWELL: We don't really know yet. The Spanish Government believes it was ETA. That was the best of the information they had right after the terrible tragedy took place. But we can't rule out anyone yet, but ETA, I think, still seems to be the prime candidate. But we are working with the Spanish Government, providing them all the assistance that they might need, to get to the bottom of this terrible tragedy.

MR. BROKAW: On the other hand, al-Qaida leaders, including Usama bin Laden, had fingered Spain as a potential target. If it turns out to be al-Qaida, aren't the Spanish people going to say we're punished only because we were allied with the United States in Iraq?

SECRETARY POWELL: I don't know if it will turn out to be al-Qaida, of course. I think what the Spanish people will do is come together, as they have over the last 24 hours. They are outraged that this kind of action took place in Madrid. Regardless of who did it, they are now the enemy of Spain, if they weren't before.

And the Spanish Government and the Spanish people have shown great determination throughout this whole period and what we did in Iraq and what we have been doing on the war on terrorism. We've had no greater ally on the war on terrorism than Spain.

Spain has suffered from terrorism long, long before we did, or most of the nations in the world. ETA has been trying to bring down the Spanish Government for all sorts of reasons for years and years.

MR. BROKAW: But not on this scale, though.

SECRETARY POWELL: Not on this scale before. But the Spanish Government has dealt with this before, and I'm quite confident they will deal with it this time. And I think that President Aznar's decisions and the judgments he has made by aligning with us in the war on terrorism and us aligning with him on the war on terrorism -- remember, ETA is a terrorist organization on our list of terrorist organizations. And I think the Spaniards will show solidarity at this point.

MR. BROKAW: A lot of people are going to say we've got our priorities all wrong; we should be going after terrorists, not after Iraq; we could have set that aside, gotten to it later; and we should really have concentrated first on al-Qaida and cleaning them out wherever they ended up between Afghanistan and Pakistan or the remnants that are left in Afghanistan.

SECRETARY POWELL: Well, I'd make two points. One, we haven't neglected the war on terrorism. We've been prosecuting it. Arrests have been made. The major figures in the al-Qaida organization have either been captured or

they're on the run. We don't have Usama bin Laden yet, but we haven't neglected that part of the war on terrorism.

But the President also believed, and we believe, that what we were doing in Iraq was part of that same overall war, that we had an outlaw regime that was ignoring the international community's directions and was developing programs, weapons of mass destruction. Whether they had stockpiles or not is something that is to be determined, but they don't have any stockpiles anymore and we don't have to worry about them anymore because it's been dealt with.

And what the President was worried about was that there could be this nexus between a regime such as Saddam Hussein's and terrorist organizations. So we have not neglected the war on terrorism and we believe that Iraq is part of that war on terrorism.

MR. BROKAW: Here we are, a year after the war against Iraq began, and when the war began these were the judgments that were being made by the senior members of the Administration: Vice President Cheney was saying that Iraq was reconstituting its nuclear program and that it had a direct connection to al-Qaida; Condoleezza Rice, the National Security Advisor, was saying we don't want a mushroom cloud before we find the smoking gun; and you were saying, before the United Nations and the world, that there was hard evidence of biological weapons being developed in mobile laboratories.

None of that has turned out to be true, and a lot of people believe now it was a bait-and-switch.

SECRETARY POWELL: It wasn't a bait-and-switch. The information that I presented at the United Nations on the 5th of February reflected the best judgment of the intelligence community. It wasn't something we made up here in the State Department. It came from the intelligence community. It came from the intelligence communities of other nations. It came from all the work that the UN had done over a period of 10 or 12 years. It also reflected the same intelligence judgment that President Clinton received when he was in office and caused him to bomb Iraq in Operation Desert Fox in 1998.

And so we haven't found stockpiles. And they may yet turn up, but we haven't found them yet, and that's just the reality. But the reality is also that Saddam Hussein never lost his intention to have such weapons, he never lost the capability within his industrial base and in his laboratories and among the people who have knowledge of such weapons to keep that intact.

And I'm absolutely sure that if we had stepped away from this challenge, the United Nations had gone into yet another debating cycle at the next time the General Assembly came together, he would have been relieved of sanctions, relieved of pressure. And somebody else might have wanted to take a risk that he was not going to get involved in this again, but the President of the United States would not take that risk. And the evidence that we had was evidence provided by the intelligence community, not made up out of whole cloth.

MR. BROKAW: You raise the suggestion that the stockpiles may still be found. But David Kay, who was the weapons inspector over there, one of his conclusions was they found no evidence of the production facilities for those.

SECRETARY POWELL: David Kay said that he's found no evidence that there are stockpiles. But I think there is evidence that there is dual-use capability in their industrial base that could rapidly be turned to this kind of activity.

And David Kay went in with the same belief that we had, that there were stockpiles. And so we have to take a look at how we generated that intelligence and there are a number of commissions being formed now to look into that. The President has designated a commission. The Congress is looking into it. And we'll get the right answer.

But there was nothing intending to be misleading about any of this. It was the best information we had, and the President acted on the best information provided by the professional intelligence community.

MR. BROKAW: One of David Kay's other objectives was to restore the credibility of the American intelligence community. He doesn't feel that he was able to achieve that. When you go now and meet with your counterparts in Europe or anywhere in the world and talk about American intelligence, aren't they going to look at you a great deal more skeptically than they have in the past?

SECRETARY POWELL: Well, I hope they will always look at me with a penetrating glare to make sure that I am giving the best information.

But the intelligence community didn't do badly when it discovered what Libya was doing and finally created a set of circumstances -- it was the intelligence community that conducted the discussions with Libya that got Libya to turn over its weapons of mass destruction.

It was our intelligence community that gave us information about Iran's activities that we could then take to the IAEA, to the Russians and to the European Union, and say, "You can't ignore this anymore. This is what we know." It turned out to be true.

It was the intelligence community that generated a great deal of the information with respect to Dr. A.Q. Khan and his proliferating activities. And, finally, the case was so clear and we could confirm it with what we found in Libya, that the Pakistanis have acted now against that network, and that network is being pulled up.

It was the intelligence community that discovered that the North Koreans were trying to develop nuclear weapons through another technology.

So the intelligence community that we have is a good one. It's a solid one. Now, why didn't we have better information about the stockpiles? Let's find out. Let's inquire into that.

MR. BROKAW: That litany of countries that you just mentioned -- North Korea, Libya, Pakistan peddling its nuclear secrets all over the Middle East -- will just lead people to say, "Look, those were the real dangers. They were engaged in a lot more onerous activity than Saddam Hussein was." David Kay says it was chaos in the last two years of his administration.

SECRETARY POWELL: Well, let me say something about Dr. Kay. Dr. Kay also said that the President did absolutely the right thing, with or without the stockpiles. There was no question in his mind that Saddam Hussein and that regime would have returned to this kind of activity and that they were clearly in breach of their obligations. And David Kay supports the action that the President took, even though he says we haven't found the stockpiles.

I think he's absolutely right: The intention was there; the capability was there; when freed of constraints, Saddam Hussein would go back and do exactly the kinds of things he has done in the past, develop these weapons. Let's not forget that we're not making up the fact that in March of 1988 he gassed 5,000 of his own people in a city called Halabja. Let's not forget that he used chemical weapons against the Iranians in battle. So this is an individual who has demonstrated that he would do it.

But, you know, the good news now is, as we debate this issue, there won't be any weapons of mass destruction in the future that we have to worry about. That program is gone. A new government is in place. It's right now called just the Governing Council. They've just put down on paper an administrative law that will lead to a constitution. They'll be regaining sovereignty. And democracy is slowly coming into being in Iraq, and it will be a different kind of country than it was a year ago with a different kind of leadership than a man like Saddam Hussein, who filled mass graves and tortured and barbarized his own people, if I can use that word.

That's all in the past now. We have a better life ahead for the people of Iraq and a safer region, and we'll be safer and the region will be safer.

With respect to the other countries you mentioned, all of them are being dealt with; not each requires an invasion. In the case of Pakistan, we now have that network being pulled up. We are learning a lot more about the A.Q. Khan network and the Pakistanis are cooperating with us. So we've dealt with that network.

With respect to Libya, we've dealt with their weapons of mass destruction. Those weapons of mass destruction and their components are on the way to the United States or are in the United States now. It's quite remarkable.

With respect to Iran, we're putting pressure on them in every way we can. With respect to North Korea, we have gotten all of North Korea's neighbors to join us in saying to North Korea, "This must stop. We cannot have nuclear weapons on the Korean Peninsula."

So we can solve these problems, I hope, over time diplomatically. Not every solution require -- is a military solution.

MR. BROKAW: But you wouldn't argue with the fact that there are other consequences to this war. One of the objectives was to democratize the Middle East, and Zogby International, which has been pulling out there, says that in all of the Arab nations now, they believe that there is less chance of democracy as a result of the war in Iraq, that there is a greater chance of terrorism as a result of the war in Iraq.

SECRETARY POWELL: Terrorism was there before the war on Iraq. And democratization, I wouldn't agree with that poll because there are a number of nations in the Middle East now that are moving forward with the kind of reforms that one might call democracy. Tunisia, Morocco, other nations in the region, Bahrain, UAE, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, in different ways, and at different -- at a different pace, each of them, they are starting to reform their societies to make those societies and their economies and their political systems more relevant in the 21st century.

The President has laid out our agenda: a free trade area of the Middle East, Middle East Partnership Initiative, and now something that's called, been called the Greater Middle East Initiative. But it really is helping our friends in the Middle East determine how they can pace reform in order to bring more freedom and openness to their societies, not being imposed by the United States, but working with our friends in the region.

And do you know what? It's controversial, but it is now the talk of the region, how best to go about this and make sure it is seen as something that the region wants and how can they work with the United States, European Union and others, to bring about the kind of reform that we think will bring a better life for people in the region, and make it less likely that terrorists will find fertile ground in which to grow.

MR. BROKAW: If there is so much enthusiasm for it, why is the Arab League resisting the idea of the industrial nations putting democracy in the Middle East at the top of its agenda when it meets in June?

SECRETARY POWELL: Well, there is no reason not to have the industrialized nations talk about democracy. We talked about it during a period when the Cold War was on. We never got away from those universal principles of democracy and human rights.

And what we have been saying to our Arab friends in recent days -- and it's I think now being discussed throughout the Arab world -- that is not the European Union and the United States coming, the industrialized nations, Japan and the rest of us, coming to impose anything on anyone. We can't do that. We wouldn't do that.

It's letting you know that we are here to help, whether it's with a free trade area, bilateral trade agreements, programs that will help you with education and infrastructure development, creation of civil society institutions.

And what we want the Arab nations to do is to take a look at themselves and say, "What do we need to do to reform in our country?" Each one is different and unique. And the industrialized nations are prepared to be partners in this effort.

MR. BROKAW: There was a recent Associated Press poll, just earlier this month, that said a majority of the people living in Canada, Mexico, United Kingdom, Italy, Germany and Spain all had an unfavorable view of the United States, and particularly of President Bush and his role in the world.

In the United Kingdom and Canada, two-thirds of the people felt that way. How do you close that gap?

SECRETARY POWELL: I think we'll close that gap as we move forward. Iraq was a very difficult issue for many nations, and for people in many nations. I mean, some of the countries you mentioned, they were for us, and they were part of the coalition even though there was popular discontent against the decision.

But we did the right thing. We did the right thing, and I think as people throughout the world see that Iraqis regain their sovereignty later this summer, in the summer, and as they see a constitution written and they see democratic elections being held, and they look at this country and see for the first time in its history it's going to use a democratic system to blend the different ethnic pieces of Iraq together; the Kurds, the Sunnis, the Shias, the Turkomans and the other components to this group, this society, are going to learn how to resolve their differences not by one group

suppressing another, but by a democracy being built.

I think as that takes hold, and as people really look and see schools being built, hospitals being built, democracy thriving, the electrical system better than it was before, no weapons of mass destruction, no terrorists coming out of this place because we'll put a democratic system in place or the Iraqis will put a democratic system in place, I think these trends that you've described will start to shift, Tom.

MR. BROKAW: Why are we so good at the military component and appear to be so bad at winning hearts and minds?

SECRETARY POWELL: It's a question of making sure we have enough resources applied to our public diplomacy operations and we're working on that. But it's also overcoming the message that some people get that somehow we are acting in a preemptory way or unilateral way.

And that message is sometimes hard to overcome, but we can overcome it because if people look at what the United States is doing, we're reaching out to partners. We're working hard to expand NATO. We're supporting the expansion of the EU.

The President and my Department are working hard on getting a solution to the crisis in Cyprus, resolving the problem with North Korea, working on HIV/AIDS in Sub-Saharan Africa and the Caribbean and other parts of the world.

That's a significant contribution on the part of the United States to going after AIDS. President Bush put this initiative before the world -- a \$15 billion initiative -- the same thing we're doing with respect to our Millennium Challenge Account, a massive increase in the development assistance that we're providing to developing nations.

So this isn't a unilateral, preemptive nation not considering the views and interests of others and not working with our partners and allies. That's exactly what we're doing in dozens of places around the world to benefit mankind, to bring peace, and to end the threat of terrorism throughout the world.

And I think as people see this and understand it, this year and in the President's next term, I think we will be able to change these attitudes that you describe.

MR. BROKAW: But what bumps up against that is the President's saying, "You're either with us or against us;" Don Rumsfeld saying, "It's old Europe, not new Europe," and those kinds of messages going out across the world, and a feeling that it is the United States that's going to do what it wants to do when it wants to do it.

SECRETARY POWELL: But it's the same President, the same Administration, the same America, that went to the United Nations and brought the problem of Iraq to the United Nations. We didn't say at the General Assembly year before last, "Forget it. We're just going." We said to the General Assembly, "We've got to do something about this problem."

When people say -- you know, it's interesting, Tom. We are receiving a lot of criticism because we are not unilateral working with the North Koreans to solve the problem, now, of their North Kor -- of their nuclear weapons program. Instead, we're working with Japan, with South Korea, with China, with Russia, in order to bring pressure.

That isn't a rogue nation not considering the views of others. That's called diplomacy and political pressure. There are many tools in a presidential foreign policy tool kit: military, diplomatic, political, economic, the strength of our value system; and the President selects from those.

In the case of terrorism, though, when it was absolutely clear that this was a threat against the whole civilized world, yes, the President made it clear: You've got to be with us in this; you're either with us or against us; if you are not against terrorism, then you're providing fertile ground for terrorists to thrive. And so you ought to be with us or against us when it comes to acts of terror and going after terrorist organizations.

It was a sobering remark on the part of the President to wake the world up to the threat of terrorism, and I think the world has been awakened to the threat of terrorism.

MR. BROKAW: In the short time that we have left, let me deal with a couple of other urgent issues.

One of your former military colleagues, General Anthony Zinni, who ran the Central Command -- that part of the world -- says he believes that there will be a civil war in Iraq by July, once we pull out.

SECRETARY POWELL: Well, we're not pulling out.

MR. BROKAW: Not militarily, but politically.

SECRETARY POWELL: Well, we're not pulling out politically either. We are giving sovereignty back to the Iraqi people, which everybody has, has wanted and been pressing us to do. We will have a fairly large military presence, in the neighborhood of 100,000 troops, and we will replace the CPA, the Coalition Provisional Authority, with an embassy and we will have a significant diplomatic and political presence in Baghdad.

We will also have a large amount of funding available made available by the United States Congress to help with the reconstruction and rebuilding effort. So I think we will still have considerable influence in the country --

MR. BROKAW: And no civil war?

SECRETARY POWELL: Well, I don't expect a civil war. I expect that the Iraqi people will understand that this is the time for them to build a democracy and go forward.

I mean, if you look at what happened over the past ten days, two weeks, as the Iraqis came together to finish the work on this administrative law, which is the precursor to going to a constitution, they argued, they fought, they broke up and went to neutral corners for a while, they went down and visited with the Ayatollah Sistani, they came back, and they came into agreement.

They didn't go to civil war. No hand grenades were thrown. The hand grenades are being thrown and the bombs are being set off by terrorists and by those old regime elements who want to see the days of Saddam Hussein return.

Those days are not coming back. We are going to help the Iraqis build the kind of society that we saw reflected in the work they did on the administrative law. And now they are anxious to go forward and write their constitution. So we should be proud of what we have done to bring Iraq to this point and to give this kind of hope to the Iraqi people.

It's been an expensive operation, both financial and in terms of some of the political issues that you raised a moment ago, and we've lost the lives of wonderful young men and women serving in the cause of freedom and serving their nation. And we regret every life lost, but I don't think there should be the slightest doubt in the mind of any American mother and father, wife or husband or other loved one, that their young Soldier, Sailor, Airman, Marine, Coast Guardsman died in vain. They died in the cause of freedom and to give the people far away an opportunity for a better life.

MR. BROKAW: What's the greatest single lesson for you in the last year as a result of the war against Iraq and the very difficult time once major combat ended?

SECRETARY POWELL: Once major combat ended, it was a very challenging period to figure out the right model to move forward with respect to creating an interim government for Iraq.

MR. BROKAW: Had we not given enough thought to that?

SECRETARY POWELL: I think a great deal of thought was given to it. But you know, every plan one has and all the preparation one does always changes when you get into, onto the field. And a lot of the assumptions that had been made about the integrity of the Iraqi army that might be used to assist in the effort afterwards, some of the assumptions that were made by the existence of a political structure, all of that changed as soon as the active part of military operations ended. So we've had to do some audibles along the way.

I have not been in any one of these operations, and I've been in many over the years, where you don't have to do

these kinds of audibles. We did the audibles. Ambassador Bremer came in and he's been doing a brilliant job ever since he took over last summer.

MR. BROKAW: Finally, Mr. Secretary, *Time Magazine* says that you've got one foot out the door here and even in your admirers in your own party, the Republican Party, are worried that you're being marginalized.

If President Bush is reelected, as you indicated you think he will be, will you tell him you want to stay on as Secretary of State?

SECRETARY POWELL: Oh, he'll be reelected, I'm confident. And I serve at the pleasure of the President. I have both feet in this Department. This is the kind of fun stereotype that people enjoy in Washington, but I can assure you, I know what the President wants done, and we're working on his agenda, and he knows that I'm working on his agenda and our relationship is just solid as can be.

MR. BROKAW: I know that you serve at his pleasure, but do you want to stay?

SECRETARY POWELL: I serve at his pleasure. That's the only answer one can give this question, Tom.

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