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Office of the Press Secretary
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Interview of the National Security Advisor by WTVT-TV, Tampa, Florida

The James S. Brady Briefing Room
November 10, 2003

3:00 P.M. EST

Q Thanks for joining us this afternoon.

DR. RICE: Pleasure to be with you.

Q Let's first talk about this Patriot Act, if you will. As you know, it's coming under fire yet again. Did the administration, in your opinion here, go too far, infringing on some Americans' rights? At the same time, is the administration open to modifying this at all?

DR. RICE: The Patriot Act was one of the single most important steps that this country took to defend itself. Many of the questions that had been asked, for instance, about the sharing of intelligence between various intelligence agencies -- the agencies like the CIA and the FBI, were solved -- problems like that were solved by the Patriot Act.

We had to be able to know who was in the country and to be able to deal with the new threat of terrorists living amongst us. And so the Patriot Act has been extremely important to the fight on terror. This country remains open. This country remains committed to constitutional principle. The Patriot Act is completely in line with constitutional principles and requirements. But it's been an extremely important tool for us in the fight against terror.

Q So you don't anticipate the administration allowing any changes at this point?

DR. RICE: The administration and the President and General Ashcroft believe that the Patriot Act is appropriate as it is. And I just want to emphasize, completely consistent with and in the context of our constitutional obligations.

Q Okay, what about weapons of mass destruction in Iraq? Of course, you know the kind of attention this has gotten. Americans have grown increasingly frustrated. Is there any new concrete information or any intelligence you can share with them that indicates these weapons of mass destruction, in fact, do exist?

DR. RICE: Well, let me first go back to what we knew at the time that we went to war. And there was -- nobody who was really serious about Iraq believed that Saddam Hussein did not have weapons of mass destruction. The United Nations talked about the missing or unaccounted for weapons of mass destruction, multiple intelligence services from around the world. The former administration -- the Clinton administration went to war in 1998, air strikes against Iraq because of his weapons of mass destruction. So he had them. He had used them. He was under 12 years of sanctions because of his weapons of mass destruction programs.

Now, since we've been there, we've been on a consistent and coherent course to try and find out the true nature of the extent of his programs, what became of the weapons of mass destruction that he had. And we're finding interesting things.

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When Dr. David Kay was here before, he talked about the continued ambitions of Saddam Hussein. He talked about finding undeclared biological laboratories that were capable of making biological weapons.

And really in Dr. Kay's list, any one of the things that he found, including the tremendous deception activities that Saddam Hussein went through to try and deceive the weapons inspectors, any one of those things would have had us back before the United Nations, declaring him -- declaring Saddam Hussein in material breach.

So the American people can be certain that we went to war on solid information, on information that had been gathered over 12 years, on a history of use of weapons of mass destruction, and that we are finding confirmation that this was somebody who hid his activities from the United Nations and intended to continue those programs.

Q Do you think any of them -- or do you have any evidence that indicates some of them could have been moved into Syria, perhaps?

DR. RICE: I've seen reports, as everyone has. We don't have any evidence at this point that that's what happened.

Q Okay, and about Saddam Hussein, do you think the administration has made it clear to the American public that Saddam had nothing to do with September 11th?

DR. RICE: I think that the administration has made it clear that we have no evidence and have never claimed a direct link of Saddam Hussein and his regime to the events of September 11th, saying that he planned them or controlled them or something. It is very clear that he had links to terrorism that were broad and deep, including numerous contacts with al Qaeda, including an al Qaeda associate, a man named al Zarqawi, who was operating his network out of Baghdad. The network that ended up ordering the killing of an American citizen, an American diplomat in Jordan, Mr. Foley.

So, yes, Saddam Hussein had links to al Qaeda, links to terrorism. But we have never claimed that he had a direct link to the September 11th events.

Q Dr. Rice, we're about to run out of time, but I want to get one more quick question in if I can, with regards to MacDill Air Force Base. Base closures may come up again in 2005, do you have any indication MacDill could be on a closer list?

DR. RICE: We have no such indication. The President is determined to have the best possible force structure. And that's what we'll do. But there is absolutely no indication at this point.

Q And the future of Central Command, for that matter, staying in Tampa? Any news on that?

DR. RICE: Well, there's no reason to think that there's going to be a change there.

Q Okay, Dr. Condoleezza Rice joining us from Washington. Dr. Rice, thanks very much.

DR. RICE: Thank you very much.

END 3:05 P.M. EST

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