



Interview by Arshad Mohammed and Saul Hudson of Reuters

Secretary Colin L. Powell

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MR. MOHAMMED: Mr. Secretary, thank you for taking the time to speak to us today.

The reforms that were announced by President Putin yesterday consolidate power even more firmly in the hands of the central government in Russia. *The New York Times* described it this morning in an editorial as Russia's lurch backwards.

Don't these reforms simply increase the concerns that you expressed in *Izvestiya* in January about the state of democracy in Russia and about the balance between the executive, the legislative and the judiciary?

SECRETARY POWELL: We do have concerns. We are studying the actions that President Putin took yesterday, and I'm sure we'll be having conversations with them. I'm looking forward to seeing Foreign Minister Lavrov in New York next week.

We understand then need to fight against terrorism, especially terrorism of the kind that we saw at Beslan last week, and the two airplanes that were bombed and the bombing of the subway station. But in an attempt to go after terrorists, I think one has to strike a proper balance to make sure that you don't move in a direction that takes you away from the democratic reforms or the democratic process that you are committed to.

And so we'll be discussing our concerns with the Russians in the days ahead. I think it would be not the best course of action to move in a direction, which will be seen by the international community as moving in -- toward the rear with respect to democratic reforms. And so we have to have a better understanding of what Putin has done and the reasons for it.

MR. MOHAMMED: Do you think that's what's happening? Do you think they are lurching backwards?

SECRETARY POWELL: Well, that's what we have to determine. I mean, in effect, this is pulling back on some of the democratic reforms as seen by the international community that have occurred in the past, so yes, we have concerns about it and we want to discuss them with the Russians.

MR. MOHAMMED: Do you believe -- do you still believe that Russia should try to find a political solution in Chechnya?

SECRETARY POWELL: I think the Russians believe that ultimately, a political solution has to be found, and that's been a policy discussion we've had with them over time. But you know, when you are faced with terrible tragedy such as they were faced with in Beslan, what you have to focus on is making sure you have identified who these murderers are, who these terrorists are, and go after them.

And there can be no political solution or political delegation with terrorists or murders -- people who would do such a horrible thing to young students on the first day of school. It is unconscionable, and there is no way to justify, rationalize or excuse this kind of action. And your response has to be direct and immediate, and that is to go after the murderers.

But at the same time, you have to find a balance between fighting terrorism in an aggressive way and also making sure that we don't undercut the institutions of state that are based on the foundation of democracy.

MR. HUDSON: On proliferation matters, regarding Iran, first of all, do you have a consensus among the IAEA Board to have a trigger mechanism for a final determination on referring Iran to the UN Security Council after the meeting?

SECRETARY POWELL: Well, as you know, the IAEA Board is meeting this week and we have seen some progress in recent days on a possible resolution that shows that the international community -- the people are concerned about what Iran has been doing with its nuclear programs.

I can't tell you whether or not the Board will act on a particular resolution until they have actually acted, but we believe that it's kind of a long pass, when the matter should have been referred to the Security Council. We believe that it should have been done a year ago. And we have watched patiently, and carefully, and hopefully over the past year to see whether or not Iran would satisfy all the concerns expressed by the IAEA and meet its commitments -- Iran's commitments -- to the European Union-3 foreign ministers. I don't think they have satisfied either party, and nevertheless, it's a matter that will be discussed this week in Vienna.

And we'll see what resolution does come out of the IAEA Board and whether it's prepared to refer it now, or whether they say, let's wait and see whether it should be referred in November. But I think we can't just keep having Board meetings with no action taken by the IAEA, which is an agent of the United Nations. And ultimately, if there is not satisfaction on the part of Iran, it has to go to the Security Council.

MR. MOHAMMED: A Security Council referral could simply usher in another lengthy period during which you talk about what should be done about Iran's suspected nuclear weapons program, and during which they would -- they could continue, conceivably, to pursue it. Why is that satisfactory for you?

SECRETARY POWELL: Well, we would like to see complete openness with respect to their nuclear program. But it is their responsibility to satisfy the international community that they are not developing a nuclear weapon. This is not hard to do: Full openness, no more hiding of things that are suddenly discovered.

But the way to handle this at this point is through the work of the international community. You know, the United States has been in the forefront of efforts to bring this issue to the attention of the international community. At the beginning of this Administration, we talked to the Russians about what the Iranians might be using Bushehr for.

We have talked to others to point out that we had evidence that certain things are happening that were not appropriate. And finally, the international community has recognized that there is a danger in what the Iranians are doing. And so, we will stick to the diplomatic track.

Now, how fast they could actually move forward toward the development of a weapon, and if that turns out to be their policy, and I believe it is, also shapes what approach you take to solving the problem. I don't think they are days or months away from such a development. And so, I think that we would like to see it stopped right away. But we still believe the best way to go about it is through the work of the international community, through the IAEA and the Security Council.

MR. HUDSON: In the context of the diplomatic track, an Iranian official in Vienna says that Iran is ready to hold talks to reassure the United States that Iran's programs are peaceful. Is there any interest in the United States in pursuing such an offer?

SECRETARY POWELL: Iran has to reassure the entire international community, the IAEA -- all 35 members of that Board of Governors -- that its intentions are totally peaceful and that they're interested in nothing more than in nuclear power generation with a closed cycle on the fuel and no possibility of that program leading to the development of a nuclear weapon.

They have not yet assured the international community of that; and as Dr. ElBaradei has said in recent days, he doesn't know whether it is a program intended to produce a weapon or it is not. Well, there shouldn't be that kind of uncertainty in this matter. Iran knows what it has to do in order to remove that uncertainty, and that's what we're waiting for Iran to do.

MR. MOHAMMED: You're not interested in bilateral talks with them?

SECRETARY POWELL: There is -- we just don't want to make it a U.S. and Iran issue. People are very anxious to do that. It is an Iran-international community issue. The fact that it was the United States that was in the forefront of pointing out this danger is an important fact, but it is a matter for the international community to deal with. And we have ways of discussing it with Iran present in the room by our attendance at the meetings in Vienna.

MR. MOHAMMED: We're halfway through September now. Are you losing hope that North Korea will agree to hold another round of six-party talks this month?

SECRETARY POWELL: Well, they have -- they had been reluctant to move forward. They've been stalling. We've also got reports today from a British official who was in Pyongyang that and the Viet -- North Koreans have said to him that they are anxious to keep working in the six-party framework, but they're stalling. Nevertheless, we still have confidence in the six-party framework.

We put forward a good proposal at the last meeting. We showed considerable flexibility. We're committed to a security agreement, which is what the North Koreans said they needed. And the Chinese and the Japanese and the South Korea and the Russians were also part of this security arrangement. And some of the six-party participants, the Japanese and the South Koreans have indicated a willingness to provide some assistance on very short notice -- immediately, as soon as we begin the process, to the North Koreans.

I think all the pieces are there to move forward. The North Koreans continue to stall, continue to make demands and continue to make bellicose statements.

Our interest is a simple one: To see that the Korean Peninsula is denuclearized, that opportunities present themselves for us to assist the North Korean people through the difficult times they're having. And that's our goal. That is what that the President has always been about. We have no intention of invading North Korea or attacking it; and we have no hostile intent. Why would we? We are trying to solve a problem and bring stability and peace to the Korean Peninsula and, in turn, to northeast Asia.

MR. MOHAMMED: But what would you say to North Korean officials who may be waiting for the results of the U.S. election to see if they can deal with another Administration?

SECRETARY POWELL: Well, what I would say to them is that I wouldn't waste the time waiting for something different to happen. I've said that to them. It's my belief that they will see the same group of individuals working on this problem after the first week of November.

MR. MOHAMMED: Do you have any better idea of what caused last week's explosion in North Korea? Do you believe their explanation that it was preparing for (inaudible)?

SECRETARY POWELL: The information they gave is consistent with what we saw that it might have been some demolition work for a hydroelectric facility. But the reports I have today say that the North Koreans are actually taking people to the site to look at the site, so we'll have a better understanding of that within the next day or so.

MR. HUDSON: Still on the Korean Peninsula. Do you believe South Korea's uranium enrichment and plutonium experiment should be referred to the UN Security Council? Do you have a sense that that's in the interest of even-handedness?

SECRETARY POWELL: All of that's being examined at the IAEA and I will wait for the IAEA to make a judgment as to how to handle this matter.

From all I have and I've been able to determine, and in my conversations with the South Korean Foreign Minister the other day, it appears just to have been experiments that had been conducted over an extended period of years, and has not in any way caused a problem or suggests an interest in a nuclear weapons development program.

So let the IAEA consider this and make a judgment as to whether that should be the end of it or, to close the case down entirely and refer it to the Security Council just as an informational matter. And I'll let the IAEA Board of Governors make a judgment on that.

MR. HUDSON: Shifting gears and moving to Iraq, there was another blast today in Baghdad, and I guess 47 people have been killed. Given the violence, the general insecurity and the absence of a central government authority in much of Iraq, how can there be credible, legitimate elections by January?

SECRETARY POWELL: Well, we'll see whether there will be or won't be. We're still confident that there can be, and we're working toward that end. Prime Minister Allawi and his government are determined to have these elections, and the UN wants to see them, as does the coalition. But we have insurgents who are determined to keep the Iraqi people from expressing their view, through elections, as to how they wish to be governed.

There are insurgent elements and terrorist elements, who believe that the way to determine the future of Iraq is through bombs in the streets that kill innocent people. They can't be allowed to succeed. They can't be allowed to prevail. The country is not totally out of control, as suggested by the question, though.

There are some difficult areas in Baghdad and there are some challenges in southern cities in the Sunni Triangle, and we have had to deal with some insurgencies up north. But we're confident that our military, working with the Iraqi security forces increasingly will deal with these challenges and get on top of it and start to restore order in these places, as we did in Najaf and Kufa, recently.

And as you know, we're settling the situation in Telafar, up in the northern part of the country. And so, it's a question of going after these insurgents, defeating them, bringing them under control, and then going forward with the elections.

MR. MOHAMMED: How would you answer critics who had suggested it's hard to hold a free, fair, open election when you have 140,000 American troops deployed in the

country?

SECRETARY POWELL: We've had many free, fair, open elections in countries where United States troops have been deployed in the course of the last 50 or 60 years. It's an election that will be run by the United Nations and the Iraqi Interim Government.

We're providing a security guarantee for the Iraqi security forces that this election can be held, and we're there to stand by them, but we're not an occupying army anymore. We're an army that's there at the invitation of the Iraqi Interim Government to help them move forward and defeat these insurgencies.

The essence of these kinds of questions, "Well, gee, it's tough, it's difficult; there's an insurgency there. Why don't you just give up and quit and come home?" We're not. We're not going to give up. We're not going to quit. We're not going to come home. The stakes are too high. The stakes are too important.

The Iraqi people deserve a better future that rests on democracy, and freedom and openness. And we cannot, because we're in a difficult period now, essentially say to the insurgents, "Fine, you, through the rule of the bomb and the gun, decide how these 25 million people will be governed." That's not an acceptable outcome. It's not an outcome that President Bush will accept -- and, nor should the international community accept such an outcome as well.

MR. MOHAMMED: On Libya, has Libya met it's so-called, phrase 3 commitments to agree to devise a verification -- an ongoing verification system -- so that you can ensure that they're out of the WMD business for good?

SECRETARY POWELL: We're examining that now. I'm expecting a report from my staff in the next few days on those phase 3 issues, and we are committed to the process that we laid out with the Libyans to move forward.

MR. MOHAMMED: Does it look like they're going to meet those now or they still inclined?

SECRETARY POWELL: Well yeah, I'm encouraged, but I'll wait to hear what my staff has to say.

MR. MOHAMMED: If they do, are you then ready to end the last two remaining non-terrorism sanctions?

SECRETARY POWELL: We will do what is consistent with the plan that was laid out with the Libyans to resolve this matter. If they meet their commitments, we will meet our commitments.

MR. MOHAMMED: So, take steps on negation of the frozen assets?

SECRETARY POWELL: If they meet their commitments, we will meet what we are committed to do. But I would rather not go further until I've gotten a report and a recommendation from my staff.

MR. HUDSON: In the few days since you declared genocide that took place in Darfur, have you seen any improvement in Sudan's effort to improve security and reduce attacks by the Jingaweit?

SECRETARY POWELL: Not really. They have to do a lot more. And we've got to get that African Union force in. And I hope that the Security Council members examining the resolution that we're putting before them will see that it is time for the Council to speak with a clear voice to the Sudanese Government about the need for them to: (1) make sure they continue to allow the humanitarian aid to come in and humanitarian workers to do their job; and (2) that there is a need for them to do what is required to bring the security situation under control, to include accepting and facilitating the addition of AU monitors and protection forces for monitors. And we must keep within such a resolution the possibility of sanctions if Sudan does not act in an appropriate manner in response to the desire of the international community -- the direction of the international community.

MR. MOHAMMED: So you're not willing to drop the threat of sanctions, particularly on the oil industry?

SECRETARY POWELL: We are in discussions with our friends. We believe that sanctions is an essential part of the solution.

MR. MOHAMMED: But not for forced oil sanctions?

SECRETARY POWELL: Yeah, as you noticed, the resolution does make a reference to petroleum.

MR. MOHAMMED: And you want that to stay?

SECRETARY POWELL: It's what we have on the table.

MR. HUDSON: And when you say that there hasn't really been improvement from Sudan, is there any sense that your declaration of genocide may be counterproductive to your agenda of helping the people on the ground?

SECRETARY POWELL: I don't -- no, I don't think it was counterproductive. I think the Sudanese heard it quite clearly. I know they are -- they responded negatively, of course. I'm surprised about that. But I think it got their attention, and I hope they realize that they need to get out of a situation they find themselves in. They need to get out of being seen by the world as responsible for the death of tens upon tens of thousands of people. And what it will take is for them to bring the security situation under control. And I don't think it was counterproductive. It was, essentially, in our judgment, a statement of the reality of the situation. It was a statement of fact.

MR. HUDSON: On another subject, would John Kerry make a good president?

SECRETARY POWELL: That's a judgment for the American people to make. I don't insert myself into partisan political opinion making.

MR. MOHAMMED: Thanks very much for your time.

SECRETARY POWELL: Thank you.
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