



Interview on The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer

Secretary Condoleezza Rice

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MR. LEHRER: Madame Secretary, welcome.

SECRETARY RICE: Thank you.

MR. LEHRER: The North Korea talks now underway in Beijing, has there been progress?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, any negotiation has to be judged at the end, not at the beginning. But I think the atmosphere is very good. When I talked to Assistant Secretary Hill and I talk to him daily about the situation there, he talks about the good spirit, that people have come in a professional way, that they seem to be ready to talk about the difficult issues.

But the six-party talks are now going to have to achieve progress this time around. The talks for talks' sake is really not worth the time of these very fine diplomats. And so we are glad that people have come in a spirit ready to talk. I think that there are a lot of difficult issues that have to be gone through. We are prepared to roll up our sleeves and work for as long as necessary to make progress. But so far, the atmosphere has been very good.

MR. LEHRER: Much is being made today over the fact that Secretary Hill has had three one-on-one -- at least three one-on-one conversations with the North Korean representative. And this is being seen as a breakthrough policy change by you, that you said, "Okay, it's all right to talk to the North Koreans, one-on-one," and it hadn't been before. Is that a correct reading?

SECRETARY RICE: Jim, I don't know where this comes from because we have always talked to the North Koreans within the context of the six-party talks, one-on-one if necessary in bilaterals. We had bilaterals also with the South Koreans. We have had bilaterals with the Chinese. It is not unusual in a negotiation that is multi-partied as this one is to have breakout sessions in which people talk directly. But we have always said that contacts and discussions with the North Koreans, bilaterally in the context of the six-party talks, was just fine. And I believe Jim Kelly had done that on occasion, too.

We are going to concentrate on the policy goal here and the policy goal is that within a six-party framework, in other words not as a bilateral agreement between the United States and North Korea, North Korea will agree that it is time to give up its nuclear weapons programs, its nuclear programs, and to demonstrate to the world that it has made that strategic choice. That policy outcome is really only going to be achieved in a six-party framework. It is only going to be achieved when China is a party to this, when Japan and South Korea and Russia and the United States. Because what we are not prepared to do is to let North Korea go back to the early '90s when we had a bilateral arrangement with them, which they then broke out of practically before the ink was dry.

MR. LEHRER: The North Korea representative, as I'm sure you know, said yesterday, "Hey look, we're ready to make a deal." He said if the United States and others will agree to give us aid, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera, and if the United States will insist that South Korea get rid of any nuclear weapons it has, we're ready to sit down and get rid of ours. Is that not in the makings of a deal?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, the North Koreans and the South Koreans had an agreement in the period of 1991 to 1992 that it would be a nuclear-free Korean Peninsula, that neither would possess not just nuclear weapons but reprocessing and enrichment capability and so forth. The South Koreans have lived up to that deal; the North Koreans have not.

And so this should be a very simple matter then because the South Koreans do not possess nuclear weapons; the North Koreans do. So all that the North obviously needs to do is to demonstrate that it is ready to live up to those obligations to dismantle, verifiably, their nuclear programs. And we are not going to let the North Koreans change the subject of the six-party talks. It is about a denuclearized Korean Peninsula, but the problem, the obstacle to a denuclearized Korean Peninsula is the North Korean nuclear program.

MR. LEHRER: There are no nuclear weapons in South Korea?

SECRETARY RICE: The South Koreans are living up to the terms of the 1991-1992 agreement that they signed with the North.

MR. LEHRER: I know there's a lot of nuanced language, there always is in this kind of thing, but it's hard for the layman to understand what the problem is. North Korea says, "Hey, we're ready to get rid of our weapons, if you do this first." And you say, "No, no, no." The United States says and the others say, "No, no, no, no. You gotta do this first." Why -- it seemed like it, hey, what does it matter -- what does it matter who goes first?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, it is not a matter of who goes first; it is a matter of a strategic commitment that the goal of a nuclear-free Korean Peninsula is embraced by all. Now, we know that it is embraced by five of the parties. We know that the South Koreans, the Japanese, the Russians, the United States and China all agree that it has to be a non-nuclear Korean Peninsula. The question is do the North Koreans embrace that goal as well? And are they prepared to do what is necessary to make certain that we have a non-nuclear Korean Peninsula. In other words, give up their program.

It is not the South Koreans that have been talking about becoming a nuclear power and they might test and talking about their ability to repel aggression by nuclear means. It's not the South Koreans who have been using that kind of language. It's the North Koreans.

So they need to make that commitment. We then need a plan to move forward to the realization of that goal. But I will say, Jim, that as we've been talking to our other partners -- the Chinese, the Japanese, the South Koreans, the Russians -- the tremendous commitment and coherence of commitment to that goal by the other members of the talks, I think has created an atmosphere, an environment in which the North will have to be

responsive.

No one, no one in that room -- the six parties -- wants to invade the North Koreans. We have said that they are a sovereign country, something that we consider a statement of fact. There is a proposal that they will be given energy supplied by the South Koreans, which they've said is one of their most daunting problems. It is possible that their economic relations could improve with the rest of the world. There is a lot at stake if the North Koreans are prepared to make this strategic decision and we sincerely hope that they are.

MR. LEHRER: They also want to normalize relations with the United States. Is the U.S. prepared to do that?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, back in 2002, the United States -- Jim Kelly -- went to -- then Assistant Secretary Jim Kelly -- went to the North Koreans with what we called a bold proposal to say all kinds of things can happen in an environment in which North Korea is not nuclear and is not brandishing its nuclear capability.

Over the next two and a half years, we had six-party talks that went nowhere. And then, on February 10th of this year, the North Koreans said that they weren't going to return to the talks. That had been the atmosphere in response to the idea that with a strategic decision and plan for the dismantlement of those programs, there could be all kinds of openings for the North Koreans to the rest of the world.

Now, to be sure, Jim, the nuclear issue is not the only issue. Of course, we're concerned about the humanitarian conditions in North Korea. We are a large food --

MR. LEHRER: It hadn't gotten any better, has it?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, no, it has not. And we are a large food aid donor to North Korea because we don't link humanitarian assistance to political issues. But there are also human rights issues that will eventually have to be addressed because the North Korean people deserve better than they have. But the first step is to have, from the North Koreans, a clear indication to the rest of the world and a plan for the dismantling of those programs. Much is possible after that.

MR. LEHRER: Bottom line, do you see us moving toward that at a better rate than we had moving before, right now?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, I do see that, as I've said, that the talks seem to be professional in tone and people are working hard and that's good; and by all accounts, all of the parties are working hard. The real issue is going to be at the end of the day, and I don't mean just at the end of the session, are we going to succeed. I would not expect that out of this round of the six-party talks, we're going to have a solution to this problem. It took us some time to get there. People forget that the North Koreans have been trying to build the nuclear weapons since the late 1960s when they had cooperation with the Soviet Union. So it's going to take some time to change this circumstance.

But to the degree that all of the parties are ready to work seriously -- and I want to emphasize all of the parties -- because what this will not be is a deal between the United States and North Korea.

MR. LEHRER: Okay. On Iraq, Secretary Rumsfeld said yesterday, it was essential that Iraq stay with the August 15th deadline to draft its constitution. Do you agree with that?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, I think not only do I agree with it, but the Iraqi people seem to believe that this is important because they need to maintain political momentum toward their goal of elections for a permanent government in December. And the constitution has to give way to a referendum, which then has give way to elections.

The insurgency is very brutal and very tough in Iraq. But what the insurgency does not have going for it that the Iraqi Government does is a political way forward that would give the Iraqi people a political strategy for their aspirations to be expressed. In order to defeat the insurgency it's, therefore, very important to mobilize their best asset, and that's this political course that they're on. Every day that more Iraqis see their goals and their aspirations being met through the political process, the insurgency loses any hope of holding a political base for their brutal and violent activities.

MR. LEHRER: I'll come back to that in a minute. But on the constitution, speaking of goals and whatever, there are drafts of the constitution around, as you know, that would kind of localize some of the -- or regionalize some of the governments and the governing, and including the rights that would affect women in some dramatic ways. In some way, it would deny women rights that they had even during Saddam Hussein's regime. Can the U.S. permit that to happen?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, let me start by saying that obviously the United States stands for equality for women worldwide. I think I've been out there even in some places where equality for women seems quite far away, saying that the United States believes that you cannot be half a democracy. And we've communicated that very clearly to the Iraqi Government. More importantly, I think there are many, many Iraqis who feel exactly that way.

And I would caution against reading drafts. This is an intensely political process and there is a lot of staking out of positions. There are still a lot of negotiations to go. There are may be a lot of coalitions mobilizing on important issues. And so let's give the Iraqis a chance to work through some of these very difficult issues without focusing on early drafts.

I just want to note one thing, Jim, because this notion that women had certain rights under Saddam Hussein. Well, yes, Saddam Hussein was an equal opportunity oppressor. I don't think it is right to talk about rights of anyone, male or female, in Saddam Hussein's Iraq.

MR. LEHRER: In a general way, though, is it conceivable that the United States, in the interest of bowing out and letting the Iraqi people have their way, you may have to swallow a constitution that, whatever it is, has to do with rights of women or whatever, has some things in it that go against the grain of the United States?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, we are going to stand for the principles that we're standing for around the world, and most especially in Iraq, where America has sacrificed and sacrificed lives and treasure. And so, of course, we're going to stand and stand strongly for the rights of women. We're making that very clear to the Iraqi Government.

But again, if the Iraqis themselves, who want to live in a society in which there are -- in which citizens of both male and female and where they recognize that the trend in the world is not to move away from women's rights but to move in the other direction.

MR. LEHRER: On the violence, the insurgency, you, the President and many, many others have said, once the political process got underway, the violence and the insurgency would diminish. It has not. What happened?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, let me say that what I think we have said is that the insurgency will lose its political -- any political basis. Now, the fact of the matter is, it is -- it doesn't take that many people, unfortunately, to have a suicide bomb and to blow up innocent children standing next to American soldiers getting candy. That's something that can actually be done fairly easily by a few violent and evil people. And so the pictures that people see on television every day, which are very dramatic of the bombings, are the work of not the majority of Iraqis, probably not even a substantial minority of Iraqis.

The political process, which is underway, is harder to see, but the Iraqi people are clearly tiring of the evil few who are determined to continue the violence in Iraq. And so the ability to get better intelligence, the ability of the Iraqi security forces, who are ultimately going to be very much better at fighting an insurgency than coalition forces will be, as their capacity improves they will also make headway. But I don't want to give the impression that the violence or the use of suicide bombs, that there's going to be a direct correlation between improvement in the political process and the end of that kind of violence.

And, Jim, just one other thing, which is that the neighbors can help with this, too. And so the Iraqis are working very hard, we are working very hard, because on some of these borders the willingness of neighbors to cut off supply to the insurgents, and indeed the supply of people coming across the border to carry out these acts, is also very important.

MR. LEHRER: More generally about terrorism, in light of the Egypt bombings and, of course, the bombings in London, there's a new poll out today that suggests that more than two-thirds of the American people believe that there is going to be another horrendous terrorist attack in the United States soon. Do you feel that way, too?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, I think on any given day you have to be concerned that that could be the case because, as hard as everybody works, and everybody works very hard at intelligence, everybody works very hard at homeland security to try and secure ourselves, there is a massive international umbrella of law enforcement and intelligence that is focused on this problem every day, but we have to recognize that it is an unfair fight on the defense because we have to be right 100 percent of the time, they only have to be right once. And that's why we have to continue the efforts that we're making. We have to continue the efforts to break down these terrorist organizations. And we are making progress. But we also have to fight this on the offense. We literally have to deny them the sanctuaries and the terrorist -- the havens that they've used before.

MR. LEHRER: What about the additional element here that, increasingly, terrorism experts and Muslim experts are saying that the combination of Iraq and other foreign policy decisions by the United States are actually creating more terrorists every day than they are eliminating them.

SECRETARY RICE: When we are going to stop making excuses for the terrorists? The terrorists on September 11th attacked the United States. We weren't in Iraq. We weren't even in Afghanistan on September 11th. They have attacked in places that had no forces in either place. They've attacked all over the world. They've attacked in Morocco and in Bali and in Egypt and in London and in Madrid.

When are we going to stop making excuses for the terrorists and saying that somebody is making them do it? No, these are simply evil people who want to kill. And they want to kill in the name of a perverted ideology that really is not Islam, but they somehow want to claim that mantle to say that this is about some kind of grievance. This isn't about some kind of grievance. This is an effort to destroy, rather than to build.

And until everybody in the world calls it by name -- the evil that it is -- stops making excuses for them, then I think we're going to have a problem. And I hope that after the bombings of innocent people in London, innocent people at Sharm el-Sheikh, innocent children in Iraq, that people will call this by name and stop making excuses for these people. No one is making them do it. They're doing it because they want to create chaos and to undermine our way to life.

MR. LEHRER: New subject, Madame Secretary. The Senate goes out of the session, takes its summer recess this weekend. Is the President going to appoint, give a recess appointment to John Bolton to be UN Ambassador?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, the President will make that decision. I would have hoped that we would have had an up-or-down vote on John Bolton. He is the person that the President and I believe is the best person to lead our efforts at the United Nations. John is a tough diplomat. He has been critical at times of the operation of the United Nations. But, frankly, there are reasons to be critical of some of the operations at the United Nations. And the reform efforts that are now underway need the leadership of the United States, leadership on management reform, on Secretariat reform, on the peace building commission which would help us in a more active and in a quicker way to deal with the kind of the situation like we faced in Sudan. We can't have a Human Rights Council where, on the one hand, Sudan is being accused of war crimes and, on the other hand, sitting on the Human Rights Council.

MR. LEHRER: But is he going to get a recess --

SECRETARY RICE: Well, the President will make the decision, but I would have hoped he would have gotten an up-or-down vote because the -- I understand the advice and consent role of the Senate and we've tried to cooperate on the myriad requests that have come in about John Bolton. But at some point in time, he either has the votes or he doesn't, and so there should be a vote. And we believe that he would win, and win handily.

MR. LEHRER: Clearly, though, he isn't going to get a vote before the summer recess. That's a matter of fact.

SECRETARY RICE: Well, that's unfortunate and we -- what we can't be is without leadership at the United Nations. I can tell you, Jim, that I'm spending an awful lot of time these days preparing for the high-level meetings that are going to take place in September where all of the world's leaders are going to be here to talk about refreshing the United Nations after 60 years. The United States needs to be active in that and we have a good team at the UN, but we need our Permanent Representative to the United Nations.

MR. LEHRER: Finally, you're talking about what you're up to. This week marks six months for you to be Secretary of State of the United States of America. Looking back on it, does it meet your expectations in terms of the trade-offs between frustrations and dissatisfactions and satisfactions and pleasures?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, it's been a real pleasure. It really has. Of course, there are days that are not so pleasurable. We're in a terribly challenging time. We have a lot of difficult issues. But you don't have the chance to change history, you don't have the historic times, unless it comes with challenge and difficulty. And so I've been very privileged and I am so grateful to the President for his confidence in me. I am grateful to the Senate for the confirmation. I'm grateful to the team of men and women here at the State Department that get up every day and press and pull in the direction of a more

prosperous and freer world. And I'm enjoying it because I think we are in a time of consequence. We have a President who doesn't just see the world as it is, but the world as it can be. And when that's your mandate every day, it's pretty exciting.

MR. LEHRER: I noticed on your recent trip to Darfur, however, you seemed terribly frustrated that there is -- millions of people have been made homeless, thousands of people have been killed, and here the United States and the rest of the world can't stop it.

SECRETARY RICE: Well, it's very sad and --

MR. LEHRER: It must be terribly frustrating. Why can't we do anything about it?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, we are doing something about it. We have finally gotten the UN Security Council resolutions that we need to bring some pressure on the Khartoum Government to respond. We have finally gotten an increase in the AU mission, police -- African Union policing and monitoring mission after months of the Sudanese Government dragging its feet about increasing the ceiling. We are making progress, and when I was there, Jim, the Rwandan forces were just arriving by American airlift. There's NATO airlift involved in this.

So we're making some progress. But when you go to Darfur and you see, particularly the children, who are in makeshift kindergartens in the sand and you think to yourself, we don't want to see these children grow up in these camps, despite the remarkable job that the nongovernmental organizations are doing in making life better for them, that you do then want to accelerate and hasten the day when there is a political settlement to the situation in Darfur so that these people can return home. And I'm going to do everything that I can to bring that day about. My Deputy, Bob Zoellick, has been to Sudan three times. I've been there once. I think you'll see much more of us because we have to keep the spotlight on this very difficult situation and not let the international community forget our responsibility to try and resolve the issue.

MR. LEHRER: Madame Secretary, thank you very much.

SECRETARY RICE: Thank you very much.

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