



Interview With Katie Couric of CBS's 60 Minutes

Secretary Condoleezza Rice

Washington, DC
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QUESTION: Turning now to one of the key players in this developing story, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. Madame Secretary, five years ago President Bush labeled North Korea, Iran and Iraq as the "axis of evil". And now former democratic Senator Sam Nunn said, "We started on the wrong end of the 'axis of evil' and with the least dangerous of countries, Iraq." How would you respond to that?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, I would say that they were all dangerous in their own way and we're dealing with each one of them separately. Iraq was *suigeneris*. We had been to war with Iraq in 1991, were still in a state of war with Iraq. There were lots of reasons to worry about the Iraqi threat in the world's most volatile region.

But when it comes to North Korea, what the President has done is to put together a very important coalition of states that have an interest in stopping the North Korean nuclear program, including China and South Korea, which have real leverage.

QUESTION: But has a nuclear-armed North Korea emerged as a bigger threat to national security than Iraq ever was?

SECRETARY RICE: Oh, I don't think we have to choose between them, Katie. We actually went to war against Iraq in 1991 because they invaded and tried to annex Kuwait and we believed at the time were threatening Saudi Arabia. So I don't think that one can say that Iraq was not a dangerous country.

But certainly North Korea in its own way, with this announcement about nuclear tests after -- just a month and a half or so after it had decided to test missiles, presents a real threat to international peace and security. But you're seeing the international community act with a resoluteness and with an urgency that I have to tell you I have not seen in the entire time that I've been involved in international politics.

QUESTION: So you disagree with Sam Nunn when he says we started on the wrong end of the "axis of evil"?

SECRETARY RICE: I think you have to deal with all the threats before you and they all have different answers. The idea that you use the same methods that you would use with an Iraq where you were essentially still in a state of war, or North Korea where you have a coalition of states on the -- in the region that have great interest in bringing their nuclear program to an end, of course you're going to deal with these differently. And with Iran we've dealt even differently with that one, that program, which is somewhat earlier in its genesis.

QUESTION: We'll get to Iran in a moment. But what can be done to deal with this new threat?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, the first thing is that the international community has to react and react strongly, and I think you've already seen the Chinese use extremely strong language about North Korea, language that they've really never used about North Korea. And I think you're now going to see in the UN Security Council that there will be a strong resolution that brings punitive measures against North Korea for its program.

But I have to note that there is an agreement that was signed on September 19th of 2005 which gave a path to denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula verifiably, to better relations, an opening for North Korea to the international community, for assistance to North Korea. And we will leave that path open should North Korea decide to pursue it.

QUESTION: But given the events of the past few days, has that paper worth the -- you know, is that agreement worth the paper it's written on?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, right now the choice before us is to make very clear to North Korea -- the task before us is to make very clear to North Korea that its behavior is unacceptable and that the world is going to mobilize to put pressure on North Korea to change its direction.

Katie, this nuclear program -- North Korea has been pursuing this for decades and we tried bilateral talks with the North Koreans in the '90s. Not only did they break out of the Agreed Framework by cheating and finding another path to a nuclear weapon, but they launched a missile test during that period of time in the Sea of Japan. So North Korean behavior has been a problem for a long time, but we finally now have a coalition of states with China which has real leverage with North Korea, and South Korea which has real leverage with North Korea, united with the United States, Japan, Russia and indeed the rest of the international community to put pressure on North Korea to take a different course. It may take some time, but I think they will.

QUESTION: If this international pressure goes nowhere, is there a realistic military option?

SECRETARY RICE: The President is not going to take any option off the table. But we have many other options short of military force. We are, for instance, involved in something called the Proliferation Security Initiative which interdicts potentially dangerous cargo so that we can use the international law to try and stop transfers of dangerous technologies from North Korea. We have of course important alliances in the region and I think North Korea is not confused about the security situation and about the military balance in the region. So we have many other arrows in our quiver short of military force.

QUESTION: North Korea's never built a weapon that it hasn't sold on the black market. How concerned are you that this is a real possibility?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, it's certainly something to be concerned about and I think it's one reason that you're seeing the international community react so strongly. But as the President said yesterday, North Korea should know that should it cross that line and try and transfer a weapon or technologies to a non-state actor, to a dangerous actor, then it would have to be held fully accountable for that act.

QUESTION: The 9/11 Commission Report said the U.S. has not done nearly enough to address the threat of so called "loose nukes." What has the White House done?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, we've done a great deal to address the issue. We have of course a major program with Russia which everyone agrees would have been one source of not just loose nukes but also scientists who had the knowledge coming out of the Soviet period. People forget that with Kazakhstan and Ukraine and with others those programs were actually terminated. We have with Libya terminated their weapons of mass destruction programs. And, Katie, probably the most important thing that we did to deal with the problem of nuclear black marketeering was to take down the A.Q. Khan network, who was the Pakistani scientist who was literally selling nuclear technology and know-how to practically anybody who would buy. So there has been a lot of progress, but there is more that needs to be done. And the international community needs to be better united and better organized on this matter, and President Bush has been a leader in doing so.

QUESTION: Let's get back to North Korea if we could, Secretary Rice. What do you, the President and your entire foreign policy team have against one-on-one talks with North Korea?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, I think it's a misconception that we don't talk to the North Koreans. In the context of the six-party talks, Chris Hill, our negotiator, has had discussions in effect one-on-one with the North Koreans. But it's in the context of the six-party talks because you have to ask yourself, Katie, why are the North Koreans so insistent that there be bilateral talks? It's because they don't want the pressure of having China and South Korea and Russia and Japan at the table too. They would like nothing better than to have all of the pressure be on the United States to deliver a deal, and then if something goes wrong to have others turn to the United States and say this is your problem, you fix it.

What we've done by multilateralizing this, by making sure that states like China and South Korea that have real leverage are at the table too, is that everybody now has a stake in any agreement that we do finally sign with the North Koreans in North Korea's adherence to that agreement.

QUESTION: I think in an obliquely critical remark by Secretary of State James Baker regarding sort of the foreign policy philosophy of the Bush Administration, he said that diplomacy is made by engaging in dialogue with your enemies and not your friends. And you know, we heard the same thing from the former Israeli Prime Minister as well. So why not make more of an effort to reach out to the enemies of this country?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, we have certainly, as I said, talked to the North Koreans in the context of the six-party talks. We are not without contact with them. We even have channels that we still pursue. We gave the Iranians an offer to talk. All they had to do was suspend their enrichment and reprocessing activities, something that would keep them from continually practicing the technologies that lead to a nuclear weapon, and we were prepared to talk to the Iranians. We have talked repeatedly to the Syrians. Colin Powell went to Syria. Rich Armitage went to Syria. It's not the absence of talking that's the problem; it's the absence of results. And indeed, if you're not careful, what you do is you substitute talking for results.

So when we believe that there is something to be gained by engaging with a country, we are more than willing to do it and we have done it. The problem has been with some states that they simply don't act.

QUESTION: Finally, Iran today announced that it won't step back from its nuclear program. Are you concerned at all, Madame Secretary, that Iran has been emboldened by North Korea's actions?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, I would think it would be just the opposite; that when Iran watches the fundamental condemnation that the international community has delivered as a result of the North Korean program, and I think you will see a strong UN Security Council action, that Iran will need to stop and think twice about the path that it is actually headed down. Because when one is under a Chapter 7 resolution, which is what we're now contemplating for Iran, a resolution that brands your country and its activities a threat to international peace and security, that's not a list that you want to be on. That's not a list that you want to be on from the point of view of investment. That's not a list that you want to be on from the point of view of diplomatic engagement. And I would think that Iran, watching what the world is doing in regards to North Korea, would want to think twice about the path it's chosen.

QUESTION: And finally, when it comes to North Korea having nuclear weapons, is the scariest part of this whole equation the notion of having these weapons get into the wrong hands?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, certainly one of the great worries if North Korea were to continue down this path is that it would try to transfer a weapon to either another state or perhaps, even more alarmingly, to a non-state actor, a terrorist. But the President has made very clear that North Korea would be held fully accountable for any effort to try to use weapons technologies to threaten the security interests of the United States and its allies and certainly the transfer of these technologies would do precisely that.

QUESTION: And is a military response something that is on the table?

SECRETARY RICE: The President never takes any of his options off the table. But we believe that there are many diplomatic options before us. Those diplomatic options are strong because we have not just the United States involved with North Korea in trying to solve this, but also China and Japan and South Korea and Russia, countries that have leverage of their own. And the North Koreans have to face a united front in the international community, not just the United States.

QUESTION: Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. Thank you so much.

SECRETARY RICE: Thank you.

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