



Interview With Samir Nader of Radio Sawa

Secretary Colin L. Powell
Washington, DC
December 2, 2004

(2:00 p.m. EDT)

MR. NADER: Mr. Secretary, thank you for doing this. I would like to ask you first, what would you like to achieve during your visit to Rabat to attend the Forum for the Future?

SECRETARY POWELL: I hope that at the Forum for the Future, we will come to an understanding of the need for reform and modernization in the Broader Middle East and North Africa region. Many countries are moving forward with reform now. They are conducting more and more elections, or they're trying out election procedures, as they're doing in Saudi Arabia, or they're opening more opportunities to women, or they're investing more in their educational facilities, or they're doing more to help young people enter the job market.

And so, there is a wave of reform that is taking place in that part of the world and I hope that we can come to some understanding of how the industrial world, the United States and the other members of the industrial community can help the nations of the regime as they move down the reform path. Every country has to go down its own path as they design that path but we can help them on its journey.

MR. NADER: Do you feel the initiative to promote democracy achieve some progress in the region because we saw lots of human rights and pro-democracy groups were formed. Do you think this a fruit of your initiative?

SECRETARY POWELL: I think it is partially the fruit of our initiative but I think it's also the result of feelings in the region. I mean, it was the Arab Development Report that focused on some of the problems that exist in the region. And so, I think there is a homegrown and indigenous desire for democracy in these nations. And so, a lot of these organizations and these democracy movements are coming along on their own, and to the extent that we have given them some assistance or sort of given them some guidance, I'm very pleased.

MR. NADER: I'd like to ask you about Mr. Kofi Annan. Does Washington maintain its confidence with Mr. Annan? Today, the President avoided hinting any support for him.

SECRETARY POWELL: Oh, no, no. I think the President just would not be drawn into this very public debate. As you know, there is an investigation underway on the Oil-for-Food program and until the investigation being conducted by Mr. Volcker and other inquiries that are being made by our Congress are completed, it would be inappropriate for the President to offer an opinion on this matter. We have all worked very closely with Kofi Annan. He is the Secretary General of the United Nations, and I know that he is as interested as we are to get to the bottom of this. And so, the President would, of course, not take a position at this point, nor would I. We want to see the results of these inquiries.

MR. NADER: The Palestinian Election Commission today qualified Marwan Barghouti to run for president, and since he is very popular, as they say, how -- you said yesterday that if he ran, this would be problematic. How are you going to deal with him, and if he is elected would we face another situation like we had with Chairman Arafat?

SECRETARY POWELL: You have an individual who is not available to assume the office, and it seems unlikely that he would be available to assume the office. So it would be problematic, if he is on the ballot. He's been certified as an independent, I understand, and if he wins the election then you have elected someone who is not in the position to fill the office.

I think that is problematic and I would assume that the Palestinian people, as they make their decision in the weeks ahead, getting ready for the election on the 9th of January, will consider the consequences of voting for Mr. Barghouti, as opposed to voting for some other candidate. But it is up to the Palestinian people, each and every one of them, who is qualified and registered to vote, to make their own judgment. It is not for the United States to make a judgment for them.

MR. NADER: Did you reach the understanding with Congress on the \$20 million paid to the Palestinian Authority?

SECRETARY POWELL: We're still working on it and I haven't received a report today yet as to the status of the money, but we believe that the Palestinian Authority needs support at this time and we're trying to do everything we can to support them and we're still working with the Congress and with our internal system, political system.

MR. NADER: What do you make of this? And you (inaudible) between Syria and Israel that's happened today regarding the restarting of negotiations? You met with Minister Shara in Egypt. Do you see a change in Syria's attitude?

SECRETARY POWELL: We really didn't get into a discussion of the Syrian track. Everybody was focusing in our most recent meeting on the situation with respect to Iraq and taking note of the new opportunities presented in the aftermath of the death of Chairman Arafat but we didn't get into a discussion of the Syrian track. And I can't tell from what I have seen in the press and the wire services today whether there is any serious back and forth here or it is just one of these day-long stories that don't last. I don't have any other information on it.

MR. NADER: Do you see any progress in the attitudes of Syria and Tehran to cooperate on Iraq, like after Sharm el-Sheikh?

SECRETARY POWELL: At Sharm el-Sheikh, I think both Syria and Iran joined in the consensus for the resolution and the resolution and communiqué talked about non-interference. It talked about respecting the rights of the Iraqi people to select their own governments. It talked about preserving integrity of Iraq and protecting the borders from terrorists and others who would cross the border to go to Iraq to cause trouble.

So I think this is a positive attitude but we think Syria can do more with respect to border protection and can do more with respect to individuals who might be using Syria as a place from which to cause trouble, and the Iranians, I hope, they will do more to watch their borders and to play a helpful role. It is in Iran's interest to have an Iraq that is one country that is living in peace and freedom with no intention of threatening its neighbors. That is in Iran's interest. And I think that Iran should work toward that end.



MR. NADER: We were told that you raised the issue of implementation of Resolution 1559 with Minister Shara. Did he imply that they are willing to respect this resolution?

SECRETARY POWELL: Well, no, we didn't have a very full discussion of it. I just reminded him that this resolution reflected the will of the international community and that Syria should take it into account. But as you know, they have reservations about 1559. So I can't say that any progress was made as a result of our discussions.

MR. NADER: Will the U.S. ease its pressure on Syria to withdraw from Lebanon, if Syria cooperate on Iraq and Israel?

SECRETARY POWELL: I think the issue of Syria and Lebanon is dealt with in the resolution and it stands alone. It is not linked to other issues.

MR. NADER: Regarding elections in Iraq, are you having any -- achieve any progress to diffuse the opposition for the timing of the election?

SECRETARY POWELL: I think that after reports surfaced last week that some people thought the election should be delayed. There was a solid response from the Iraqi Interim Government, from President Sheikh Ghazi and from Prime Minister Allawi and from a number of political leaders and from the international community and from the UN that says, let's go forward. We have put this in train now. Let's go forward and have the election as scheduled on the 30th of January, and not let anything deter.

Would it be any better a month, or two months, three months later? No, the UN resolution calls for an election no later than the end of January 2005. The people want it. The people are organizing. Registration is taking place. The lists are being prepared. Registration packets are being sent out across the country. The security plan is being put in place, so let's go forward and have this election.

MR. NADER: Some warning that if the election takes place with this opposition to the timing that this may lead to more -- (simultaneous conversation)

SECRETARY POWELL: When you say, "with this opposition to the timing," most people are for the election now. Whatever opposition that may have been expressed in recent days is not clear to me how strong, really, that opposition was. Some of those who said they were representing Kurdish interests were not representing such interests because the Kurdish leaders have now said that they -- we should go forward. So I think we're on a track to go forward. There may be still some who think, well, perhaps we should delay, but I think the bulk of the opinion is that we should move forward.

MR. NADER: What is the recipe, in your opinion, to get rid of the insurgencies in Iraq?

SECRETARY POWELL: They have to be defeated. They're not going to give up. They have to be defeated. Insurgents have to be defeated. And we also hope that if we have a successful election and the people in the Sunni heartland can see that with a National Assembly, a Transitional National Assembly, their political interests will be represented in such an assembly and then maybe they will stop encouraging or providing any support to these insurgents and say, stop, we now want to take out our grievances, or we want to represent our political interests, not by the gun, but by the ballot and by being part of this political process, by arguing in the National Assembly, the Transitional National Assembly, not throwing bombs at each other in the streets and killing innocent people and killing the dreams of the Iraqi people for a better future.

MR. NADER: How much more time do I have?

SECRETARY POWELL: I'm afraid I've got to -- no, I have to go.

MR. NADER: You have to leave?

SECRETARY POWELL: Yeah.

MR. NADER: Okay, one final question.

SECRETARY POWELL: Yeah.

MR. NADER: I can't resist but ask you, what's your plans for the future after you leave the State Department? Now, there are lots of rumors that somebody say if you cannot be the president of World Bank, maybe Secretary General at the UN.

SECRETARY POWELL: (Laughter.) No, I have no plans and I will not be president of the World Bank. It's not anything that has been suggested to me, nor is it something I would be interested in. I plan to return to private life and see what comes.

MR. NADER: Well, thank you so much.

SECRETARY POWELL: Thank you.

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