



## Interview on Egypt Television with Mohamed Elsetouchi

**Richard L. Armitage, Deputy Secretary of State**  
Washington, DC  
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(2:05 p.m. EDT)

**MR. ELSETOUCHI:** Mr. Secretary, thank you very much for your time.

**DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE:** Thank you.

**MR. ELSETOUCHI:** And you are back from Syria.

**DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE:** Yeah.

**MR. ELSETOUCHI:** So let me start with asking about your meeting with President Bashar Assad. How was this meeting?

**DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE:** Well, I thought it was pretty straightforward. He and I both had some things to say, and we got our points of view across without being rude to each other, so I think that's good.

**MR. ELSETOUCHI:** What did you get from him?

**DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE:** Oh, I didn't say I got anything from him, nor did he get anything from me, other than an exchange of views. But I think it's quite clear that the U.S. view is that Syria needs to do more on the question of foreign regime elements who are using Syria as a base from which to have operations into Iraq. I think I made it very clear that the whole international community is watching to see that UN Security Council Resolution 1559 is fulfilled and, among other things, it calls for an elimination of foreign presence in Lebanon.

And finally, I hope that both of us would take advantage of the opportunity presented by Sunday's elections, Palestinian elections, and move forward on the peace process.

**MR. ELSETOUCHI:** But what the Syrians are saying is that you don't have enough evidence or you don't provide us with accurate information. So what's your response?

**DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE:** We had that discussion. In some cases, they're right. In some cases, we don't have exact locations.

But our view is that they know these people, they've known them from the previous regime, and with a good effort, they can find them. And we're counting on Syria to help bring these fellows to justice and to stop their activities.

**MR. ELSETOUCHI:** Is what you're saying now is that they know where they are and they know them, but they allow them operate from Syria?

**DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE:** Yes. I don't know that they know where each and every one are, but in general, they know where the foreign regime elements are, and they have to crack down on them.

We're expecting them to do this and we're counting on them to do this and we'll see if they do.

**MR. ELSETOUCHI:** What did they say, what do they tell you when --

**DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE:** Well, I don't think it's up to me to give away the internal discussions we had, but I made our points clear, and I think they understand them, that they've done some things recently, and it has to be acknowledged. They've made some improvements on the border; they've made more barbed wire to make it a little more difficult to get across the border.

But we do believe that former regime elements are existing in Syria, and that the Syrians know that they're there and they have to be stopped.

**MR. ELSETOUCHI:** Okay, moving to Iraq.

**DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE:** Yes.

**MR. ELSETOUCHI:** Listening to President Bush today, it looks more certain now that we're heading for elections on the 30th. Why not postpone the elections if -- with this lack of security and no significant participation by Sunnis?

**DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE:** First of all, no one is calling for postponement of the elections, except some of the Sunnis. A great majority of Iraqis want these elections held, number one. Mr. Bush didn't just come to the conclusion today that these elections should be held on the 30th. He's been saying this for months. And lastly, those who call for a delay call for a delay in order to do what? What is their program? What do they hope to accomplish? They have no program. They only want to delay to give some encouragement to the insurgency. We won't have it.

**MR. ELSETOUCHI:** But to allow more participation by Sunnis.

**DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE:** I think the way we allow more participation by the Sunnis is by having as rigorous security procedures as possible. Both the Iraqi forces, the Iraqi police forces, and the coalition forces are going to be doing their utmost to provide security in ways that benefit the Sunnis, particularly, and allow them to vote, should they desire.

**MR. ELSETOUCHI:** But what about the day after the elections, with no significant participation by the Sunnis. Will you have enough legitimacy?

**DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE:** Well, I think first of all, legitimacy will have to be judged and will be judged by the international community, but most importantly of all, legitimacy will be judged by the Iraqi people. And I've noticed that both Kurds and Shia alike are reaching out to Sunni tribal elders and tribal sheikhs now, sitting down with them and trying to encourage Sunnis to fully participate.

We don't want to have a repeat of what happened in the 1920s, when the Shia opted out of the political process, and then for 70-odd years thereafter found themselves on the negative end of the stick.

**MR. ELSETOUCHI:** Do you see the possibility of having real negotiations between the Palestinians and the Israelis after the Palestinian elections?

**DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE:** Well, I think all of us think that after a rather historic election, which will be a real election, someone won't be elected by 99.9 percent. I don't know what the percentage will be for the winner, but it will be, I think, a much more contested election.

There is the possibility to move forward, and I think with enlightened Palestinian leadership supported by the international community, the Palestinian people can be let out of the wilderness they've been in for, lo, these many years since 1967.

**MR. ELSETOUCHI:** I know I have limited time, so this is my last question.

**DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE:** You have two questions, if you want them. (Laughter.)

**MR. ELSETOUCHI:** Thank you very much. Secretary Powell has sent a letter to some congressional leaders on Egypt.

**DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE:** Yes.

**MR. ELSETOUCHI:** What about this letter?

**DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE:** Well, we've been very heartened that after a rather different period in U.S.-Egyptian relations, we've had some real progress lately, and most recently, the QIZ, the industrial zones between Israel and Egypt.

So we find a lot to celebrate and salute in the U.S.-Egyptian relationship, and we wanted to make that point crystal clear to members of Congress.

**MR. ELSETOUCHI:** Is it a step forward to have FTA?

**DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE:** Is it a step towards that? Yeah, well, I think it has to be. It's much easier to negotiate something like a Free Trade Agreement when your relationships are a little warmer than when they're cold.

**MR. ELSETOUCHI:** Thank you very much. I know this will be our last interview before you leave office, but I enjoyed very much interviewing you and Secretary Powell over the years.

**DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE:** Thank you so much. You're very kind.

**MR. ELSETOUCHI:** Thank you.

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