



## Interview With Arab Journalists

### Secretary Condoleezza Rice

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**SECRETARY RICE:** All right. I will not start out with any comments so that we can have major -- our major time for questions and discussion. Do you want to start off?

**QUESTION:** Sure. Thank you very much again for making time to see us and we really appreciate it. I would like to ask you about your views of the political reforms in Egypt and Saudi Arabia. You have come to visit the region this week. The G-8-Arab League meeting was canceled as well. How do you view the reforms there and are you willing to back your demands for these reforms by action? Will cutting down the aid will be an option, or what?



**SECRETARY RICE:** Let me start by saying that there was to be a G-8 meeting, G-8-Arab League meeting, and when that meeting was postponed I thought it better to postpone my trip at this point, and then I'll go back to the region when I can have an opportunity to do a variety of things. And I look forward to that and I hope that will be fairly soon.

As to the specific circumstances in Egypt, I do think that the move by President Mubarak is a positive one. It begins to change the conditions of the Egyptian political circumstances. It begins to give to people a sense that they can start to compete in politics, which is ultimately one of the most important elements of a road to democracy. And we welcome that. There obviously will have to be follow-on steps, but I'm sure that the Egyptian people will begin to take advantage of the changed circumstances.

I think this is a time when we are -- the President is challenging friends to do their best to begin to enshrine democratic principles and to allow democracy to flourish. The President in his speech called on Egypt, which really has led the way to peace, to also lead the way to democracy in the Middle East. And I hope that there will be more of this. Conditions are not such that right now I would go to Egypt because we have a variety of things that we're dealing with and I want to make sure that we have the chance to deal with them all when I get there. For instance, I will see Egyptian counterparts here on the Palestinian-Israeli issues. I would expect at some point to go to Egypt to talk about that but it's unnecessary, meeting here -- since we're meeting here.

Also we will be working, I'm sure, on the security aspects of the Palestinian-Israeli problem and I look forward to getting General Ward out to the region again to do that.

So we have a broad and important agenda with Egypt, including reform, and I look forward to continuing it.

**QUESTION:** Just a quick follow-up.

**SECRETARY RICE:** Sure.

**QUESTION:** There was like three demonstrations in Cairo last week basically calling for President Mubarak not to run for at least -- the opposition think that it's impossible to have a fair election with the Emergency Law in place and political prisoners still there, including Ayman Nour, who you asked for his release. Do you have a position in that?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Well, we certainly don't have a position about who should run or not run in the Egyptian election. But I do think that the opening up of the political system, the ability for others to compete, the ability for others to access media, for instance, so that they can compete -- Egypt is a big country, people need to be able, through the media, to get to know a variety of candidates--. Those are all important elements of a developing open political system, and I think that's what we would encourage. It's really not the business of the United States to determine who runs in an election.

**QUESTION:** Concerning democracy, are you still running your Middle East -- big Middle East project or --

**SECRETARY RICE:** Oh, the Broader Middle East project?

**QUESTION:** Yes.

**SECRETARY RICE:** Yes, absolutely.

**QUESTION:** You changed the name or --

**SECRETARY RICE:** No, no. The name has not been changed: Broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative. But the name is not important. What is important is that you have a number of countries that have themselves gone through already a democratic change, some of them a long time ago like the United States, or even longer ago Great Britain, and some who are really new to the democratic enterprise who are gathered together to try and give support to the beginnings of a more open and democratic process in the Middle East.

The basis for this is the President's very strong belief that there is no place in the world in which the universal values of liberty and freedom should be excluded. No place in the world. For too long the West, and indeed the United States, assumed that it could turn a blind eye to what the Arab intellectuals called the freedom deficit in the Middle East and that that would be all right. We did that for almost 60 years. And we were doing it in the name of stability, but of course we got neither stability nor democratic change; and instead, it is our belief that we instead got a kind of malignancy underneath which produced al-Qaida and the extremist philosophies and that the only way to fight those extremist ideologies is to spread freedom.

And it is not -- and I want to emphasize -- it is not for the United States or Europe to spread freedom, to determine the course of freedom. It is for those countries to speak out for those values, to encourage the development of democracy in the Middle East, to engage the heroes of democracy who are emerging in the Middle East and to help give voice to them. But every single democratic development, every single democratic revolution, if you will, will have an indigenous character.

**QUESTION:** Do you consider Ayman Nour as a hero of democracy?

**SECRETARY RICE:** I'm sorry?

**QUESTION:** Do you consider Ayman Nour as a hero of democracy?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Well, there are people who have certainly suffered for their views, who have refused to remain silent, and that is the way that democratic development begins. And I think it's clear that we've been concerned about that case. We've raised it with the Egyptian Government. We hope it will be resolved soon.

**QUESTION:** I would like to ask about Syria, actually. Yesterday the President Assad, Bashar al-Assad of Syria, said that America is aiming at, hitting at Syria. And now Syria is under extreme pressure. And the feeling there, maybe, in the Arab world is that, you know, United States taking the Arab Muslim countries one after another. Yesterday it was Iraq, today it is Syria. To what extent this pressure might lead to such a scenario, especially the scenario now is exactly the scenario that was before the Iraq war?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Iraq was a special circumstance. We had been through a war with Iraq in 1991. This was, after all, a regime that had used weapons of mass destruction on its own people and on its neighbors. We had had 17 resolutions calling on Saddam Hussein to disarm. He defied one more time the international community, defied a unanimous resolution, Resolution 1441. Iraq is a special circumstance.

But it is important that Syria respond to the just demands of the international community. There is a United Nations Security Council Resolution -- 1559 -- that calls on the Syrians to withdraw their forces from Lebanon, that calls on the Syrians not to be involved in trying to interfere in the Lebanese elections that will come up. It is a very important resolution. And you'll notice that it's not just the United States that has backed that resolution; it was introduced by France and the United States.

The Syrians also need to be responsive on questions of their support for -- their support or the support of their territory -- for insurgents who are fighting in Iraq to deny the Iraqi people a better future. Let's be very clear about what the insurgents are doing. Yes, we are concerned about the American and other coalition soldiers who are in danger, but the insurgents yesterday killed more than a hundred innocent Iraqis because they are determined that they are going to take Iraq back to the days when Saddam Hussein raped and murdered and tortured people. That's what the insurgency -- and if Syria wishes to support an insurgency against the Iraqi people, it needs to be exposed as a problem. And so the Syrians need to respond to that and the Syrians need to stop supporting terrorism of the kind that is attempting to deny to the Palestinian people a better future with a two-state solution in a Palestinian territory so that you can have Israel and Palestine living side by side.

So the Syrians shouldn't try to change the subject here. This is about what Syria is doing to destabilize the Middle East, to deny the Lebanese people, the Iraqi people and the Palestinian people a better future. And they cannot change the subject and say this is about the United States and Syria; this is about what Syria is doing in the region.

**QUESTION:** Do I conclude for a fact that Syria is not under a direct threat from the United States? Because it's doing now its best to please at least the Americans; it's ready to withdraw from Lebanon and now Jihad offices are closed in Damascus and they're trying to do its best to please. Is that enough for you?

**SECRETARY RICE:** The Syrians know what they need to do and we have spent the last four years listening to Syrian promises about what they were prepared to do. They were prepared to close this office or they were prepared to stop this set of terrorists. And it is always not -- it's always the minimum that Syria can do, not the maximum that Syria can do.

Syria has to make a strategic choice and that strategic choice is: Is it going to continue to be a destabilizing and negative factor in a Middle East that is changing very rapidly and where people in the Middle East are beginning to assert their right to a more democratic and prosperous life? And Syria needs to stop being a barrier to that.

**QUESTION:** But when you were asked about Iran, at least (inaudible) about Iran, you said that anybody who assumes that Iran will be attacked by the U.S. or by Israel, it is a silly assumption. Here --

**SECRETARY RICE:** Let me not para --

**QUESTION:** And I see strong words, stronger than your situation regarding Iraq.

**SECRETARY RICE:** No, let me -- the President of the United States always retains his options. Now, what the President said was that the diplomatic track with Iran has plenty of time. He believes that the diplomatic track can succeed, particularly because when we were here just a few days ago, when we were in Europe a few days ago, the President had very good discussions with his European counterparts that suggested that there is a united front that Iran should not have a nuclear weapon. And we are supportive of what the Europeans are trying to do to get Iran to live up to its international obligations.

As to Syria, Syria has before it demands from the international system. It ought to comply. So I just would emphasize again that this is not a matter of the United States and Syria; this is a matter of the international community calling on the Syrians to get out of the way of people who want to have a better life.

And you would note that the Iraqi Government has said that the Syrians are supporting insurgency and you would note -- you should note that the Lebanese in the streets are concerned about Syrian interference, and so on and so on. So this is not the United States and Syria; this is Syria against people who are -- people in the Middle East -- who are trying to have a better life.

**QUESTION:** How high is Syria figuring in your policy and is the regime change part of your strategy?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Well, Syria figures in the policy because Syria is an impediment to change in the Middle East and it's increasingly being exposed as an impediment to change in the Middle East.

The Syrian regime is out of step with what is going on in the rest of the region. We were talking about some potential openings in Egypt. There have been some potential -- admittedly modest -- but changes in Saudi Arabia. Regimes need to change in accordance with a Middle East that is changing very rapidly.

**QUESTION:** You talked about Iran. Now, how far are you prepared to go to stop the Iranians obtaining nuclear weapons?

**SECRETARY RICE:** The first and most important condition is that the international community be united about what it's demanding of Iran, and there I think we have unity of purpose and unity of message that the Iranians should not use the cover of civilian nuclear programs to build a nuclear weapon.

The Europeans have engaged on a set of negotiations, set of discussions, with the Iranians that give them an opportunity to show that they are prepared to live up to their international obligations. They ought to take the opportunity that the Europeans are giving them.

The United States has made no secret of the fact that we believe that the international community also has the possibility of taking Iran to the Security Council and that is a possibility that remains on the table.

**QUESTION:** Are you adopting a more European approach with regards to Iran now?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Well, we've been in constant discussions with the Iranian -- I'm sorry, with the Europeans about their Iran policy and the efforts that they're making. It's been very close contact. The President had extensive discussions with the European leaders when he was here and I'm going to continue those discussions with my counterparts while I'm here.

But we've said all along that if the Europeans can convince the Iranians to verifiably cease their enrichment activities so that the world can be sure that they are not trying to build a nuclear weapon under cover of civilian nuclear power, then we would be supportive of that.

**QUESTION:** I want to stick to the issue of democracy because I believe this is a really growing issue for the region now. Everybody there is talking about it. I want to ask you about Saudi Arabia. Give me what you'd like for answer. The next days is seen to be less clear the Saudi people, will have what in their future, than it is with the Lebanese people, with the Iraqi people, with other people in the Middle East and the same may go to Egypt as well. There is no election, proper elections, in Saudi Arabia. I was looking at the United States Department of State report of human rights was issued yesterday critically looked at human rights situation there. You are not seen to be doing anything about it.

**SECRETARY RICE:** Well, we are certainly -- first of all, the President of the United States has put this on the agenda. And let's step back for a moment. We are talking about something that really began less than two years ago. And you're seeing very, very rapid change in this region. And it does show what can happen when the President of the United States and others who have been fortunate enough to enjoy freedom and liberty begin to really speak out for it and to declare that it is no longer acceptable to deny it to people. So the first thing I would encourage is that we just step back and look at how far we've come. Elections in Afghanistan. Elections in Iraq. Elections in the Palestinian territories. Now the events in Lebanon and the move by the Egyptian President.

In that context, it is true that the Saudi municipal elections are a modest step, but they are at least a step and the goal will be to encourage those steps to develop, to become larger over time. This is not going to move at the same speed everywhere. Traditions and history and circumstances are going to be different. But when the President said that we expect a lot of our friends, he meant all of our friends, not just some of our friends. And those are discussions that I think we can have with governments with whom we have good relations and long historic relations.

So I will say that the Saudis are doing some things, for instance, in the war on terrorism that they were not doing before, which is recognizing, for instance, the role of al-Qaida inside the Kingdom and going after that. That, too, opens up opportunities.

So I understand fully the impatience of people who have been denied because in every historic circumstance it has to be driven forward by impatient people, and that's a good thing. But if we stand back and look at where we are in history, this has been a remarkable two months and within the scope of about -- a remarkable 18 months, let's say.

**QUESTION:** But would you rule out sanctions to push forward reforms in the region generally, particularly, I mean, in Saudi Arabia and Egypt?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Well, part of the goal of moving with history is to know when trends are starting to develop that way and how we encourage them. And sanctions are not always the best way to encourage positive trends. If you engage negative trends, that's a different matter. You know, we've had sanctions on Iran. We imposed some limited sanctions on Syria. But when you see that there are openings and governments that are starting to recognize that there is a need for change, you need first to look for ways to encourage that, and I think we will be looking for ways to encourage it.

And going back to the Broader Middle East project, the Forum for the Future I would hope would gain new energy because civil society in these countries will lead these changes, not the United States, not Great Britain, not France, but civil society in these countries. And what the Forum for the Future does is to give civil society groups in those countries an opportunity to engage civil society outside of those countries. And so I think you will see us trying to energize more the Forum for the Future. This will not all come from what governments decide to do. Civil society will be a very important part of this.

**QUESTION:** If you please, I would like to go back to Syria.

**SECRETARY RICE:** Yes.

**QUESTION:** And I have two questions. First is if we don't work really by changing regime (inaudible), so why you don't a balanced, more balanced, political proposal with Syria, for example, allowing Israel and Syria to go back to the negotiation?

Second question. To which extent you can go support the Lebanese position because now I think we have a big fight opposite. Are you really change your political attitude towards Lebanon?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Well, the internal developments in Lebanon will, of course, be up to the Lebanese. The United States is not going to try to choose governments for the Lebanese. That's for the Lebanese people to do.

What we and France and others will try to do is to create conditions in which they can make those choices by bringing pressure to bear on Syria to withdraw its forces and to cease its pressure on those governments to -- on the Lebanese Government to do -- to act in a particular way. And when I say Syrian forces, I mean Syrian military forces and Syrian security forces.

So that is the way in which we can help the Lebanese people. Obviously, there is the matter of perhaps helping with the election monitoring, trying to help create conditions in which the elections will really be free and fair. Those are the types of things that the international community can do. The international community cannot choose the government, but it can help create conditions in which those choices are free choices.

As to the Syrians, the Syrians need to stop making excuses and stop trying to place conditions on what the world is seeing and what the world is telling them to do. I just want to repeat that what is now being exposed is that Syria is an impediment and has chosen to be a barrier to change in the Middle East that is now being demanded by the people of the Middle East.

That means when Syria supports terrorists who undermine Abu Mazen and the Palestinian Authority as they are trying to create a decent government and to negotiate a peace with the Israelis, the Syrians don't undermine just Israel, they undermine the Palestinians. When the Syrians have their forces, security forces and their military forces, in Lebanon, we have now seen Lebanese opposition in the streets saying that Syria is the problem. When the Syrians allow their territory to be used for Iraqi insurgents, it is the Iraqi people who are undermined by Syria.

So it's now time to call this as the world sees it. It is not Syria sitting out here somehow being pressured by the international community because Syria is just sitting there. The pressure is coming because Syria is engaged in policies that are very destructive to a Middle East that is finally beginning to make some progress.

**QUESTION:** Iraq.

**SECRETARY RICE:** You have the last question. Okay, last question. Yes.

**QUESTION:** The situation in Iraq. Did the elections produce a more complex result than you anticipated?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Well, democracy is always complex and it certainly produced -- well, there's two things. First of all, it produced a very clear signal from the Iraqi people that they see their future in a democratic political process and that they want to engage that democratic process despite the dangers and despite the insurgent and terrorist threats against them. That's the first thing that it produced.

Secondly, it produced normal politics. The Iraqis are now trying to develop an interim government, a transitional government that balances the interests of all of the different parties in Iraq, that is representative and respectful of all of the different parties in Iraq. We need to remember, again, it's a matter of time frame. We need to remember that many of these divisions were exploited by Saddam Hussein. When you look at the oppression of the Shia, 60 percent of the country just brutally repressed, it is quite remarkable to see the Shia, when given their freedoms, saying, no, this has to be an Iraq for all people. They are not talking now about trying to repress the others. They are talking about building an Iraq for all people.

So this is a hopeful process but it's going to be complicated. It's going to be complex. It's going to be difficult. And we need -- those of us who are watching it -- and if I may say so, especially people who have to write a story every day on a deadline -- we have to watch a tendency to be up and down every day because the politics will be up and down. I can guarantee you that there will be times when it seems they will never come to a solution. There will be times as they write the constitution when somebody will walk out. In the United States we almost lost the Rhode Island delegation one time and the New York delegation the other time during the writing of our Constitution in 1789. So that's normal politics and it is exciting to see normal politics taking place in Iraq after many decades of the brutality of Saddam Hussein. I think it's tremendous testament to the Iraqi people that they are capable of engaging each other in this way.

I have to go.

**QUESTION:** A very quick one. About London Conference, what do you expect from it?

**SECRETARY RICE:** From the London conference I would expect, and I think we all expect -- first of all, let me just say we appreciate Prime Minister Blair doing this. I think it's an important signal.

The Palestinian people have a substantial road ahead of them, a difficult road ahead of them, in reforming their political institutions, reforming their economy, in reforming their security services, and I see this conference as an opportunity for the international community to say we support reform and we will be there financially, in terms of technical assistance, in terms of political support, to help those reforms.

Thank you.

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