



Interview on Radio Formula with Oscar Mario Beteta

Secretary Condoleezza Rice

Mexico City, Mexico
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MR. BETETA: Ms. Secretary, thanks so much for this interview.

SECRETARY RICE: Thank you. I'm happy -- enjoy being with you.

MR. BETETA: Two years after the invasion of Iraq, the Arab world is beginning to show tantalizing signs of change. Is it for Arabs to democratize with more and more of the people watching their Lebanese, Palestinian and Iraqi brothers on the streets and at the polling station? Is the era of despotic stagnation steadily drawing to an end?

SECRETARY RICE: I fully believe that with people seeing people vote in Iraq, before that Afghanistan, voting in the Palestinian territories, now people expressing themselves freely in Lebanon, what you're seeing is that this aspiration for the human dignity that comes with being able to say what you think, being able to express yourself, being able to vote. But that is a universal aspiration and for too many years it was policy to say, well, perhaps it won't happen in the Middle East, perhaps they don't aspire to liberty. Well, they do. And you are seeing a wave.

There's still a lot of very hard work to do. This will not be easy. But it has indeed been very heartening for those of us who are lucky enough to have been born on the right side of freedom's divide to see others expressing their desire for freedom.

MR. BETETA: Secretary Rice, the virtues of democracy through America's pro-democracy policy as a chief weapon in the war against terror have so far proved to be right. Nevertheless, what additional measures have to be taken to achieve a final victory?

SECRETARY RICE: It will take a generation to really lay the kind of democratic roots that we see in Europe, that have really come to being in places like Mexico and in this hemisphere. We forget that it was not too long ago that people did not believe that it was possible to have democracy in the Western Hemisphere and now there are vibrant democracies here.

And so yes, it takes a long time. It may take a generation. But slowly but surely, people are taking on the challenge. People indigenously. People of the areas. This is not something that America is imposing or that anyone can impose. When I hear people say, well, you're trying to impose democracy, what you impose is tyranny. Democracy, the will of the people, is something that is far more natural than that.

So we need to continue to work with civil society, with business groups, to empower women to be involved in politics, and over time these factors will change these societies. It will be a different speed in different societies, but they will change.

MR. BETETA: So what would be the main ingredient besides democracy to win the war against terrorism?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, the main ingredient to democracy is when people take it upon themselves to empower themselves in democracy, and as you know here in Mexico, they very often come not from the government down but from the bottom up. It comes from civil society. It comes from what happens when women's groups start to organize or environmental groups start to organize. And so part of what the United States is trying to do is to encourage the development of civil society to have people understand how to put together political parties, not to choose any particular group but to help empower people to take responsibility for their own political futures.

MR. BETETA: Secretary Rice, what would be your answer for those who maintain that since the rise of America as a global power the implementation of U.S. foreign policy in world affairs has aimed to protect American interests, and thus the result has been or is a double standard that denies America its perception as a champion of liberty?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, American interests and the drive for liberty are completely linked and of course the President of the United States wants to make sure that Americans are protected. That is his responsibility. But what we learned on September 11th is that we can really not protect ourselves in the long term unless liberty and freedom replace the kind of ideologies of hatred that cause events like September 11th. The promotion of freedom and liberty then is good for America, but it is especially good for people who have lived without freedom and liberty all of these years.

MR. BETETA: What would be the right strategy to follow with Iran and Syria after Iraq?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, Syria is currently being called upon by the entire international community in Resolution 1559 in the Security Council to take its troops and security forces out of Lebanon so that the Lebanese people can decide their political future. It is not for the United States, nor for France or for anyone else, to determine what the Lebanese political future is going to be. But it is for the international community to demand that there be the withdrawal of Syrian forces and that free and fair elections be held.

So with Syria, which is a state that increasingly is an impediment to people's aspirations, whether it's in Iraq where the insurgency is being supported from Syria that is killing innocent Iraqis, whether it is in the Palestinian territories where the Palestinians want to make peace with Israel but Palestinian rejectionist groups operate on the territory of Syria, or in Lebanon where the Syrians need to get out, increasingly it's Syria against the aspirations of the people of the Middle East and that needs to be understood.

The Iranians too need to listen to the aspirations of their people. Remember the unelected few there continue to deny to the Iranian people that ability and we know that the Iranian people are sophisticated people who, when they have had an opportunity, have expressed their desire for human rights.

MR. BETETA: Secretary Rice, the document that contains the International Strategy for Drug Control at the State Department lodges a complaint to the Mexican authorities for the increasing power of organized crime and lack of resource in drug control. If you add diverse statements from different

representatives of the U.S. Government that stress or emphasize the insecurity environment that prevails in Mexico, it seems as if the Bush Administration would interfere in our internal affairs, which is definitely not acceptable. What would be your comment?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, by no means is the United States attempting to interfere in the affairs of Mexico. We think that this is a partnership, that Mexico does not want to have a drug trade that is a source of crime, a source of instability, a source of violence, not just against -- it's certainly not just against the Americans but against Mexico. That is why we believe that the Fox government has been so insistent on the rule of law and trying to bring prosecutions, and indeed bringing some extraditions, because this is also important to Mexico.

When it comes to terrorism, yes, it's important to the United States. But safe borders are important to Mexico as well. And so we share a continental -- we share a continent and that means that our security is intertwined. So we think of this as a partnership and we have had good partnership with the Mexican Government in trying to deal with these very serious problems.

MR. BETETA: Secretary Rice, the United States nightmare of a second Cuba is coming true in Venezuela with Hugo Chavez. How dangerous do you consider the possibility of Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador becoming president of Mexico? How would you feel with a third Cuba in Mexico, even if democracy prevails, being very sincere and very objective?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, Cuba is a state unto itself. Fidel Castro has ruled for 40 years. There's nothing that even approximates a democratic process or the Cuban people be able to speak their own minds or to elect their leaders. And Venezuela is quite a different matter. We just hope that a democratically elected leader there will actually govern democratically and will not interfere in the affairs of his neighbors.

Mexico is a vibrant democracy and Mexicans will choose their next president. And the democratic process here is strong and vibrant. Institutions are increasingly strong. The press is free. So from our point of view, what is important is that Mexico is becoming a strong democracy and that's important not just for Mexico, but it's important for the region.

MR. BETETA: The current climate of growing hostility to Mexican immigrants in many parts of United States and considering that workers take the jobs Americans don't like, how important to give priority to migration maybe similar the one or to a guest worker program similar to the one we have with Canada, how far should we go and by when?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, I think that the important point to emphasize here is that the United States recognizes, the President of the United States recognizes, that we need immigration reform in the United States. The President was Governor of Texas and he knows well the immigration issues. He has said from the day he was elected, before he was elected, that we have to have an immigration system that is humane, that recognizes the economic realities between Mexico and the United States, and but one that respects American laws. And that's why he does not favor clemency.

He has talked about a temporary worker program. There are members of Congress who are interested in this and we are working on exactly this. There is more that needs to be done as well to make sure that circularity takes place so that Mexicans are able to return home because Mexico has an interest in having its most ambitious workers stay in Mexico, and as the Mexican economy improves that will happen.

So there's a lot of work to do here but the President is committed to immigration reform. He's talked about it very recently in this State of the Union Address and he will continue to do so.

MR. BETETA: Do you think that hopefully next meeting of President Bush and President Fox and Canada's Prime Minister will serve as a turning point for specific results in the near future?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, I do think that the meeting of the Prime Minister and the two presidents gives us a chance to look at our continent again and to see what we can do to increase the security of the continent but also the competitiveness of the continent. We want to work on what can be done to improve business processes, to make some of the regulations less so that this can be the best place to do business, because it's a very competitive international economy out there and North America needs to be competitive.

MR. BETETA: Some seconds left. Since you're young and someday you would be working in the White House, do you have today the same thoughts and feelings for the U.S. President?

SECRETARY RICE: Oh, my goodness. I think I'd better try to be a good Secretary of State. I have enormous respect for those who run for office. It's kind of hard for me to imagine ever doing it myself.

MR. BETETA: It's a pleasure meeting you. You're a great one. Thanks.

SECRETARY RICE: Thank you very much.

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