



Interview on NBC's Meet the Press with Tim Russert

Secretary Condoleezza Rice

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MR. RUSSERT: First, joining us now is the Secretary of State. Madame Secretary, welcome back to Meet the Press.

SECRETARY RICE: Thank you very much. Good to be with you.

MR. RUSSERT: Iraq. Let me show you the kind of stories we're seeing around the country, around the word. Nearly six weeks after a landmark election, no new government has formed and people who risked their lives to vote wonder why they did. Shopkeeper Mohammed Saddoun lamented the delay: "I am not only frustrated. I'm ready to burst with anger. We put souls in the palm of our hands and went to the ballot centers. You remember the threats there were that they would kill people who voted. This vacuum of power increases the number of terrorist acts. It opens the way for the terrorists."

A lot of concern, rank and file voters in Iraq. When are we going to have a new prime minister?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, the Iraqis are clearly in a very intense political process following their elections. They have a lot of divisions to overcome, divisions that were really exacerbated by Saddam Hussein's reign.

But what's interesting about that quote is that the pressure is coming from the Iraqi people now to form a government. This is clearly a democratic process. I would note that they have said that they will seat the transitional assembly later this week, I think, in fact, directly in relationship to the pressure from the voter on the street to begin to get a government.

From all reports, they are getting close and I suspect that they will form a government fairly soon. But this is now an Iraqi process and we have to respect that process.

MR. RUSSERT: One of the leading contenders, Ibrahim Jafari, is the head of the Dawa Party. Are you concerned that he may have a terrorist past?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, I've had a chance to meet Mr. Jafari at one point and he seems to me someone who is devoted to a better future for Iraq. The Iraqi people, in any case, will have an opportunity to assess how well this works. He is an elected official and we will work very well with him.

In all my conversations with people who know him well, including in the conversation that I had with him, he seems devoted to trying to make this one Iraq which is representative of and respectful of all Iraqis, and an Iraq which will be a fighter in the war on terrorism. He has been very tough on the kind of terrorist activity that has been carried out by people like Zarqawi.

MR. RUSSERT: So if he was a terrorist in his past, that's forgotten?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, I don't know about the immediate past or about his past. A lot of people in that period of time who were fighters against Saddam Hussein were branded with various labels. But the important thing is that he is elected by the Iraqi people to the assembly. He is now being -- in a very intense political process with many other Iraqis, and he will have to govern and govern wisely if he becomes prime minister of the Interim Government.

MR. RUSSERT: Let me turn to Lebanon. Do you believe that Hezbollah is a terrorist organization?

SECRETARY RICE: Our view of Hezbollah has not changed, that it is indeed a terrorist organization. We are concentrating, Tim, on trying to remove the artificial element in Lebanese politics at this point, and that is Syrian troops and the Syrian security forces, intelligence services. Once that is done, the Lebanese will be able to have a political process that is free of that kind of foreign interference, a political process that will begin to develop and we will be able to see, or they will be able to see, what the real balance of forces looks like in Lebanon. But as long as you have an overwhelming security and troop presence there for the Syrians, it's not possible for them to do that work.

MR. RUSSERT: I think many people were surprised by this story in the *New York Times*: "U.S. Called Ready to See Hezbollah in Lebanon Role. After years of campaigning against Hezbollah, the radical Shiite Muslim party in Lebanon, as a terrorist pariah, the Bush administration is grudgingly going along with efforts by France and the United Nations to steer the party into the Lebanese political mainstream, administration officials say. The administration shift was described by American, European and United Nations officials as a reluctant recognition that Hezbollah, besides having a militia and sponsoring attacks on Israelis, is an enormous political force in Lebanon that could block Western efforts to get Syria to withdraw the troops."

Hezbollah, who says, "Death to America, destruction of Israel," it appears that we're willing to tolerate them.

SECRETARY RICE: Tim, we have not changed our view of Hezbollah -- in any dimension -- have we changed our view of Hezbollah. We consider it a terrorist organization.

What we are concentrating on -- and everything is happening very quickly in this process, and what we're concentrating on is getting Syrian forces out under Resolution 1559 and then allowing the Lebanese people to have a process that will, I think, reveal what the real balance of forces is in Lebanon. And it goes without saying that when you have a democratic process and you have a reform process and you ultimately establish rule of law, then those who continue to resort to violence outside of the legal and rule of law processes really can't be tolerated in a democratic process.

But first things first. When the Syrians go you will see what the balance of forces really looks like in Lebanon, the Lebanese will be able to deal with their differences. It is also extremely important for the Lebanese to have free and fair elections to legitimate any political process going forward. And that's what we and our European allies and a number of Arab states in the region are working for at this point.

MR. RUSSERT: If the Lebanese people chose Hezbollah Party as the governing party, we would recognize and accept it?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, we have seen, Tim, that in democratic processes people have to address a whole different set of concerns than they do when there are no democratic processes. But our view of Hezbollah has not changed. I really want to emphasize though this is a Lebanese process of coming to terms with their own political future and that really can't happen in a way that goes forward smoothly until Syrian forces are out.

MR. RUSSERT: But we would recognize Hezbollah if they were chosen by the Lebanese people?

SECRETARY RICE: Tim, our view of Hezbollah has not changed and it's not going to change. The key here is for the Lebanese people to be able to deal with the divisions in their society that we all know are there, with the various forces in their society that we all know are there. And the role of the international community, and indeed of the United States, is to make certain that Resolution 1559 is enforced.

Eventually, in a society that is devoted to rule of law, you cannot have organizations that continue to resort to violence.

MR. RUSSERT: Let me turn to the appointment of -- nomination of John Bolton as Ambassador to United Nations. The President went to Europe and said, you know, we had our differences about the war in Iraq but now we must come together. You had a tour across Europe, embracing people -- the French, the Germans and others -- and yet the appointment of Mr. Bolton has raised a lot of eyebrows in Europe and around the United States. Comments like these, an interview he gave with National Public Radio:

Mr. Bolton: If I were redoing the Security Council today I'd have one permanent member because that's the real reflection of the distribution of power in the world.

(Interviewer): And that one member would be John Bolton?

Mr. Bolton: The United States.

Great Britain, France, China, Russia -- all permanent members pretty much left out. And then this interview comment from Mr. Bolton. Let's watch:

"There is no such thing as the United Nations. The Secretariat building in New York has 38 stories. If you lost ten stories today it wouldn't make a bit of difference."

Why are we sending him to the United Nations?

SECRETARY RICE: Because John is a very good at diplomacy. He has a lot of experience in UN affairs. But the fact of the matter is there are five permanent members of the Security Council. John Bolton knows that and he's going to be perfectly prepared to and ready to work with them as well as other members of the Security Council, with Secretary General Annan and with the agencies of the United Nations.

MR. RUSSERT: Does he sometime say undiplomatic things?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, sometimes we all say undiplomatic things. But the key is that this is a very good diplomat. I can tell you, Tim, that I had the opportunity to work with John when we were developing the Proliferation Security Initiative, on which he did a lot of the negotiation. When we were doing the Global Partnership for removing nuclear materials and weaponry from the old Soviet Union in concert with our G-8 partners, he did the negotiation on that. John is one of the few Americans who actually, on his own nickel, supported a UN project when he worked as the Special Assistant to former Secretary of State Jim Baker on the Western Sahara problem in the UN.

The United States needs a UN that is efficient, that is effective, that can meet the challenges of the 21st century. The UN itself -- Secretary General Annan's people, the UN, members of the UN -- all know that the UN needs reform, that there are problems that have been exposed, for instance, through the Oil-for-Food program or through some of the problems with peacekeeping. The United States is going to work with the Secretary General and with the UN to make sure that we address these problems, and John Bolton, who is going to be a very important part of my team and I expect to see him often in Washington, I expect to be in constant contact with him, John Bolton is going to be someone who is going to be a strong voice for UN reform and for an American role in that.

MR. RUSSERT: Will we allow Iran to develop a nuclear bomb?

SECRETARY RICE: We and our European allies are now united publicly in a concerted effort to make sure that Iran doesn't get a nuclear weapon because it isn't acceptable because it would be so destabilizing to a region that is already very troubled. And what we were able to achieve over the last few weeks is a really clear common purpose and common approach with the European Union 3 so that Iran knows that it really has only one choice, and that is to live up to its international obligations not to develop a nuclear weapon under cover of civilian nuclear power.

MR. RUSSERT: It will not be allowed, period?

SECRETARY RICE: The Iranians can't have a nuclear weapon and that's what everyone has said.

MR. RUSSERT: Afghanistan. You'll be going there soon. A presidential report saying that it's on the verge of becoming a narcotic state, that opium production is bigger, broader, wider than ever before. What are you going to tell the Afghans? Are you going to stop the opium growth in Afghanistan?

SECRETARY RICE: Tim, sometimes it's important to step back and look at where Afghanistan was three years ago when it was under the Taliban rule and when there was no process by which Afghan citizens, most especially women, could even participate in the political process. If you fast-forward to now, we have a democratically elected president in an election that is around the world very much renowned for the fact that so many Afghans voted in that process. It is a place that is now fighting against terrorists. They're making progress. But yes, they have a counter -- a narcotics problem. The growing of poppy has been a problem in Afghanistan for a very long time.

We have a five-part strategy for dealing with it. You have to attack the poppy problem from many sides. You have to have reliable interdiction. You have to have eradication of crop. You also have to have alternative livelihoods for farmers who agree not to plant. You have to have a legal system that can punish activities of narcotraffickers. And you have to have public education. And I have to say that the Karzai government has been more forthright about the poppy problem in Afghanistan than any other government had been. He has had a public campaign against poppy growing. He has a minister who has that responsibility.

And I indeed intend to spend some time with the Afghan Government seeing how we can support their efforts. The United States is putting a lot of money into this. The British have doubled their effort. It's going to have to be a concerted effort. But let's give the Afghans credit for being now a democratically elected government that can try to deal with this problem.

MR. RUSSERT: But you will raise the issue?

SECRETARY RICE: Absolutely. And Karzai wants the issue raised.

MR. RUSSERT: You told the *Washington Times* on Friday you were mildly pro-choice. What does that mean?

SECRETARY RICE: It means that, like many Americans, I find the issue of abortion very difficult. I believe it ought to be as rare as possible. Nobody wants to see anyone go through that. I favor parental notification. I favor a ban on late-term abortion. But I, myself, am not a fan of having the government intervene in the laws.

MR. RUSSERT: You would not outlaw it?

SECRETARY RICE: No.

MR. RUSSERT: The U.S. Government has now stopped \$34 million going to nongovernmental agencies to provide counseling and family planning to women around the world because they do not want abortion suggested as an option. Do you support blocking that funding?

SECRETARY RICE: I am carrying out the laws of the United States of America. It's the President's policies. I happen to agree. I also am not someone who believes that federal funding ought to be used for something about which there is so much difference in America.

We do so much to support women around the world, including supporting family planning efforts around the world. We spend a lot of money on -- almost \$400 million we've spent on family planning opportunities on trying to help women with these difficult choices. And so I'm perfectly comfortable with where we are in this project.

MR. RUSSERT: Before you go, let me show you some photographs on the screen. Jefferson, Madison, Monroe, Adams, Van Buren, Buchanan. What do those six men have in common?

SECRETARY RICE: Oh, Tim, that's too tough for a Sunday morning.

MR. RUSSERT: They were all Presidents of the United States that were at one time Secretaries of State.

SECRETARY RICE: Okay. All right.

MR. RUSSERT: In light of that, I was up on the Internet last night and found this website: www.americansforrice.com, and it features these bumper stickers and this song. (Song is played.)

Should that website be removed?

SECRETARY RICE: It's freedom of speech. But let me say, I don't have any desire or intention of running for President. I've never wanted to run for anything and I just don't have any desire to do it.

MR. RUSSERT: Desire or intention?

SECRETARY RICE: Both.

MR. RUSSERT: There was a great American named General William Sherman, and this is what he said: "If nominated, I will not accept. If elected, I will not serve." Will you issue a Shermansque statement?

SECRETARY RICE: Tim, I don't want to run for President of the United States.

MR. RUSSERT: I will not run?

SECRETARY RICE: I do not intend to run for -- no, I will not run for President of the United States. How's that?

MR. RUSSERT: Period?

SECRETARY RICE: I don't know how many different ways to say no in this town.

MR. RUSSERT: Period?

SECRETARY RICE: I really don't.

MR. RUSSERT: Period? I will not run as President -- for President?

SECRETARY RICE: I have no intention. I don't want to run. I think people who run are great, but I don't want to run.

MR. RUSSERT: That's a Shermansque statement?

SECRETARY RICE: A Shermansque statement.

MR. RUSSERT: You're done. You're out?

SECRETARY RICE: I'm done.

MR. RUSSERT: There's news. (Laughter.)

SECRETARY RICE: I hope not.

MR. RUSSERT: Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, who just said she will never run for President; correct?

SECRETARY RICE: Tim, why do you keep pressing me to make these statements?

MR. RUSSERT: Well, because if you're Secretary of State will it affect your ability --

SECRETARY RICE: I don't want to run for President of the United States. I have no intention of doing so. I don't think I'll be President of the United States ever. Is that good enough?

MR. RUSSERT: And you'll never run?

SECRETARY RICE: I don't intend to run.

MR. RUSSERT: But it's different --

SECRETARY RICE: I won't run.

MR. RUSSERT: Oh, we got it.

SECRETARY RICE: All right, there you go.

MR. RUSSERT: Thanks very much.

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