



Interview by Ennio Caretto of Corriere della Sera

Richard L. Armitage, Deputy Secretary of State

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MR. CARETTO: I am from Italy, from Corriere della Sera. One of the accusation that have been the object of polemics in this campaign, electoral campaign in Afghanistan, is that practically the United States are interfering the election by carrying President Karzai around and privilege him compared to the other candidates who don't have neither the means nor the freedom of movement he has.

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: Well, we protect several people in Afghanistan. Obviously, he is the interim president and we do protect him. We have 18 candidates who are running for office, including one woman, and we look forward to whatever choice the people of Afghanistan make.

MR. CARETTO: Do you see in the election in Afghanistan sort of a rehearsal of the election in Iraq?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: Well, I don't know that the situations are quite the same, and we're almost three years after the original invasion of Afghanistan so we're a lot farther along the way.

But I think there will be lessons learned from Afghanistan that might appeal to the leadership of the Interim Iraqi Government.

MR. CARETTO: Do you foresee a situation where, in Iraq, where you have the same support that you have in Afghanistan from NATO, from the United Nations, et cetera?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: Well, we've got now NATO discussing a training facility in Iraq to train the army of Iraq, which I think is a very good thing. The United Nations and the Special Representative of the Secretary General, Ambassador Qazi, are very active. Carina Perelli is very active in trying to arrange this electoral process. So we've got a pretty robust capability in the international community with the UN and NATO and we're pretty pleased with it.

MR. CARETTO: What do you -- can you -- I'm Italian. Can you express your opinion on the Italian contribution in Afghanistan and Iraq?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: I don't think anybody can express it more ably than our President. He has told Prime Minister Berlusconi time and again of the enormous gratitude, the enormous gratitude of the people of the United States, but moreover the people of Iraq, for the Italian contribution. And we know you have sacrificed, you've had hostages killed, and this is a terrible blow for the nation. But the strength and the courage of the people of Italy is one that, I think, fills Iraqis themselves with some hope and some energy for their own future to fight the tough battles they have to fight for their own future.

MR. CARETTO: We have a problem in the United Nations, that is, that the United States supports Japan and Germany, and Italy would like to know if it has the support of the United States to get into the Security Council.

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: Gosh, I think I'd better go talk to the President about that. (Laughter.) And the Secretary of State. (Laughter.)

MR. CARETTO: What about -- what do you expect from the Afghan election as far as the Muslim world is concerned?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: I think a democratic election held in the Muslim world will be a further sign that there's nothing antithetical about democracy and the great religion of Islam. I think that's a good sign. We've seen this in Indonesia. We've seen this in Malaysia. We've seen it in various places. And now to have another Muslim nation be able to have a democratic election I think is making the point that is made so dramatically by Turkey; there can be secular governments who have Islamic character or who have Islam as the dominant religion in the country. There's nothing antithetical about democracy and Islam.

MR. CARETTO: What about the Iraqi elections? Do you think that Sadr should take part in them?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: It doesn't matter what Rich Armitage thinks. It matters what the people of Iraq think. And Muqtada al-Sadr, thus far, has been a very divisive and troublesome element. It seemed to me that if he could play by legitimate rules and no violence, the people of Iraq then could make a different decision about whether he is eligible for their political process.

MR. CARETTO: I thank you very much, Mr. Secretary.

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: Thank you, sir. Best of luck to you.

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