



Interview With Neda Farhat of Radio Liberty and Radio Afghanistan

Secretary Condoleezza Rice

Kabul, Afghanistan
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(1:25 p.m. EST)

MS. FARHAT: Secretary Rice, what is your main purpose in travel to Afghanistan, and do you have anything new to discuss with Afghan authorities, and what is the main object that you talked to President Karzai today?

SECRETARY RICE: This is my first trip to Afghanistan and it's a place that I've been spending a lot of time on for several years now. I came here to demonstrate the commitment of the United States to be a long-term partner and friend for the Afghan people, to congratulate the Afghan Government and especially the Afghan people on the inspirational efforts that they are making to build a democracy and a better, more prosperous life.

I discussed with President Karzai the upcoming parliamentary elections, and I had a chance also to discuss that with the electoral commission, the independent electoral commission, and that was very good. I had a chance to talk to people about the rights of women and the progress that women are making in this country, the need for further education, and I very much look forward to coming to Afghanistan again when I can see more of the country.

MS. FARHAT: The time you arrived in Afghanistan, -- the exact time -- the United States and Afghanistan were talking about discussing, establishing a long-term, perhaps permanent U.S. military presence in Afghanistan. Is there any relation?

SECRETARY RICE: We have not yet determined what we would do in terms of our programs here but we are committed to a long-term relationship, whatever that might mean. And we understand that it was not a good thing the last time when the Soviet Union left, the United States did not stay by the Afghan people. This time the Afghan people could be certain that they'll have friends and partners for a long time to come.

MS. FARHAT: OK, it's your first trip in Afghanistan. How do you find Afghanistan and -- what do you think -- what challenges do you think the Afghan government and the United States is facing here in Afghanistan?

SECRETARY RICE: I think Afghanistan is incredibly energetic and vibrant. I was saying to people in the car, all of the shops along the way, the shopkeepers who are selling things and producing things, the Afghan people obviously have a tremendous challenge after 25 years of civil war. To build a strong and stable economy will take time. To deal with the narcotics problems will take time. I hope that the Afghan people are responding to President Karzai's call that responsible Afghan citizens would not engage in poppy growing. And I know that he has made that call.

We've also, together, have got challenges to complete our efforts to rid Afghanistan of terrorists on this side of the border and also with the Pakistanis. But it is a wonderful story of the last three years. So much has been accomplished, and even though there is much more to achieve we have seen a lot of progress.

MS. FARHAT: You talked about narcotics. Some time before the United States said that Afghanistan is going to be a narco state. So don't you think that the failure of Afghanistan in controlling the drugs is a failure of the United States and the other countries who are helping in reducing the poppy cultivation in Afghanistan?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, ending the poppy cultivation will take time. It is a problem that took a while to develop and it will take time to end the problem. But we and Great Britain and others now have an integrated strategy to work with Afghanistan in public education, in eradication, in alternative livelihood and in law enforcement, and these efforts, I believe, will bear fruit because the Government of Afghanistan is committed to eradicating the poppy problem.

I believe the Afghan citizens, when they look at what poppy growing does to a society, will be committed to that goal as well. And it is not just a problem for the Afghan people alone. It is a problem that the Afghan Government needs the support of the international community and I think they are starting to get that support.

MS. FARHAT: One question about the foreign policy of the United States. After invasion of Iraq, the people of Afghanistan think that the message sent is not doing as well as before inside Afghanistan and when -- probably if United States is involved in (inaudible) matters people are afraid that maybe America forgets Afghanistan forever. What's your comment on that?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, indeed, we did -- we engaged in the liberation of Iraq, but it was never at the expense of the -- finishing the job in Afghanistan. In fact, the number of American forces in Afghanistan did not decline in order to create forces for Iraq. I think we've had a very strong emphasis here in Iraq. We continue to believe that a stable and democratic Iraq will be a strong ally in the war on terrorism and an important part of a broader Middle East that is beginning to democratize.

And so our attention will be very strong on Afghanistan. That is one reason that I wanted to come here to demonstrate that this is a long-term commitment and partnership with the people of Afghanistan.

MS. FARHAT: Thank you.

SECRETARY RICE: Thank you.

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