



Interview on CNN American Morning with Bill Hemmer

Secretary Colin L. Powell
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(7:27 a.m. p.m. EST)

MR. HEMMER: Mr. Secretary, good morning to you, and thank you for your time this morning.

SECRETARY POWELL: Good morning, Bill.

MR. HEMMER: Let's talk about the mission for the U.S. Marines. What is their intention and purpose there in Haiti?

SECRETARY POWELL: To help restore stability to the country, and particularly in Port-au-Prince. I am pleased that the Haitian National Police have started to restore order, and I'm pleased that the Marines will soon be joined by other nations, and I'm pleased to hear that the French have started to arrive.

So this will be a multinational force, now endorsed by a UN Security Council resolution, to restore stability and help the new Haitian leaders put in place a functioning government, which is what we did not have under President Aristide.

MR. HEMMER: If the looting and the killing continues today, will the Marines have to stop it?

SECRETARY POWELL: Well, we'll have to wait and see. I would, of course, prefer for the Haitian National Police to do it. The looting and the disorder has gone down somewhat overnight. We'll have to see what daylight brings. And there are only a limited number of Marines there now, but the force will build up in the course of the next several days, as will multinational forces, other nations arriving.

MR. HEMMER: How do you defend yourself against the charge that the White House was too slow to respond?

SECRETARY POWELL: We responded when there was something to respond to that we felt was appropriate to respond to, and that was a change in the political situation; in this case, the departure of President Aristide. All those who say we should have gone in earlier were advocating a position that we should go in on the side of a president who really was running a flawed government, a flawed presidency. And we were not prepared to do that and find ourselves trapped once again for an indefinite period, supporting an individual who may have been elected democratically but was not governing effectively or democratically.

And we tried to find a political solution. We worked very hard on it, worked with the international community, the OAS, the CARICOM community, our French and Canadian colleagues, and we couldn't find that answer. So we felt by the end of last week that the only real answer was if President Aristide would take a hard look at the situation and decide to step down, which is what he did. And we said that under those circumstances we would come in, and we came in immediately.

MR. HEMMER: Mr. Secretary, there's an Acting President in charge there, based on the system of government set up in Haiti. But what is the contact you've had with the rebel leader Guy Philippe --

SECRETARY POWELL: I have --

MR. HEMMER: -- and what contact or communication have you had to make sure he stays at bay, if that's even possible at this point?

SECRETARY POWELL: We have ways of talking to the various rebel leaders, and I'm pleased that, at least so far, they said, they're not interested in violence anymore and they want to put down their arms. We will have to sort this out with the new Haitian Government. Some of these individuals we would not want to see reentering civil society in Haiti because of their past records, and this is something we'll have to work our way through in the days ahead.

MR. HEMMER: Can you explain why this poor, struggling nation continues to find itself in the middle of turmoil and strife, almost decade after decade, throughout its history?

SECRETARY POWELL: It's been a sad story for almost 200 years now that they have not been able to put in place the political institutions and the political philosophy necessary to organize this desperately poor nation and move forward. And we have tried over the years to help the Haitian people and to help Haitian political leaders, but it just hasn't taken. And we find ourselves in a situation every decade or so, as you noted. We'll try again this time. And I know the international community wants to help the Haitian people. They're desperately in need. But we also have to expect their political leaders to put in place responsive, functioning, non-corrupt governments, and not just continue to fight and argue with each other and watch the whole thing fall apart again.

Massive investment was made in 1994. President Clinton sent 20,000 troops in. I went in with President Carter and Senator Nunn to talk the generals out of power, brought President Aristide back in. The international community stayed for years after that with police monitors, rebuilding the police force, only to see, over time, President Aristide or his chosen successor -- and he was the man behind the scene, Aristide was the man behind the scene then -- watch that police force we trained become corrupt again. And so we really have to help the Haitians this time put in place political systems that work and start to create institutions that are responsible to and accountable to the people.

MR. HEMMER: The process begins again anew today. Mr. Secretary, thank you for your time. Colin Powell.

SECRETARY POWELL: Thank you. You're welcome.

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