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Interview by Hubert Wetzel and Guy Dinmore of Financial Times

Secretary Colin L. Powell

Washington, DC
November 8, 2004

(10:45 a.m. EST)

QUESTION: If we could begin with Fallujah, which is the story of the day, Prime Minister Allawi has given the authorization. And I'd like to see, well, does this make or break for the Iraqi process? I mean, it's a defining moment that will set the tone for the elections and the elections are held successfully or not. How do you see Fallujah in them? So why the contacts?

SECRETARY POWELL: Fallujah has become a hotbed of the insurgency, a magnet for terrorists and a source of instability in the Sunni Triangle, and so it was time to deal with Fallujah. And as you know, Prime Minister Allawi has put in place emergency powers and used his emergency powers and has given the political go ahead from the Iraqi side for actions in Fallujah, and the United States and other coalition forces and Iraqi security forces will be moving into the city to clear the insurgents, former regime elements, terrorists, and place it back under the control of the Iraqi Interim Government.

I wouldn't say that this is the final battle or only battle or single defining moment. There will be many defining moments. We had a defining moment in Najaf a few weeks ago. We had a defining moment in Samara. And as you see, we've subsequently had additional action in Samarra but it is part of a process of restoring control of the Iraqi Interim Government over all the cities of Iraq: south is reasonably stable; the north is stable; Sunni Triangle is a problem and Fallujah is the center of the problem in the Sunni Triangle.

QUESTION: But are you afraid that if the bloodshed in Fallujah reaches a level that, say, it did last April when there was a great concern about civilian casualties that you might have a situation where Sunni political parties boycott the elections or the elections can lose their credibility through excessive use of force?

SECRETARY POWELL: Well, obviously, we're going to do everything we can to minimize loss of civilian life and a good part of the population has left the city because they were in fear of the insurgents and in fear of an attack coming. And so, I wouldn't go into hypotheticals as to what might happen with a high level of civilian casualties, since we're not planning on a high level of civilian casualties and we're doing everything we can to avoid it.



Needless to say though, it is not a simple mission to go into a city. We don't know what the level of resistance will be. We don't know how many of the insurgents may have decided to go elsewhere to avoid battle and some will be there and fighting. We will know in the days ahead but I would not start to hypothesize on the consequences of high casualties when we don't know if there will be high casualties or the consequences of Sunnis not voting, we don't know yet how the battle will turn out.

QUESTION: Later this month, you will be in Egypt for the international conference on Iraq. I have heard, this may well be wrong, that the U.S. is going to call for some broad international support for the Iraqi Government in the troop process. But will you be going with specific requests to governments like France and Germany and others which haven't been very forthcoming in supporting that government? Will you be asking for specific?

SECRETARY POWELL: Of course, we'll be asking for all of Iraq's neighbors, the principal attendees at the conference, as well as the G-8 -- and it will also turn out to be Perm 5 if the Chinese attend -- ask for their support for Iraq. As you know, NATO has prepared itself to give support in the training of individuals. The EU, when they met with Prime Minister Allawi last week, put forward some financial support. We'll ask them all to do more. Other nations are prepared to help with the training of election officials. The UN is going to increase its presence in Iraq, and we certainly want to see all of Iraq's neighbors and the industrialized nations reflected -- represented by the G-8 and the Perm 5, to do everything they can to help Iraq.

I'm not going into this conference with the expectation that the French and the Germans are now suddenly going to do more than, you know, start moving in the direction of providing troops because they've made clear that's not what they would be doing. They are helping in other ways now through NATO and through the EU.

QUESTION: And is there maybe anything more specific on France and Germany you would like them to do outside the troop area?

SECRETARY POWELL: Any additional financial contributions, expressions of support for the Iraqi Interim Government, working to put the NATO mission in place as quickly as possible, and support of that NATO mission, and political support for the election process that's upcoming, I think all of these things would be helpful.

But there's no reason to believe that France and Germany is going to change its position with respect to troops (inaudible). So there's no point in arguing that point.

QUESTION: I guess I'm not telling you secrets if I say that probably a lot of European -- or part of the European governments would have liked a different outcome of the election and would have preferred to deal with a different president from January on. What would your advice be to these countries to -- how to deal with the second Bush Administration?

SECRETARY POWELL: Well, I could -- the beginning premise of your question, I can probably name you just as many, if not more, that are quite pleased with the outcome of the election. Be that as it may, we have an outcome of the election. The President has won handedly. It turned out not to be as close as people were suggesting it would be. He won the popular election, he won the electoral election, and if you look at our famous county map it was quite impressive and he will continue to reach out to all of our European friends.

And as he has indicated in his initial press conferences, he wants to work with Europe. He specifically mentioned the

European Union and NATO in his opening statement to his press conference last Thursday afternoon and he means it. And he has been talking to various heads of state, as they call in, and I will have the opportunity to convey this message in greater fidelity when I attend not only the Sharm el-Sheikh meeting, but after that I have a number of meetings that are with my European colleagues.

There's a U.S.-EU meeting, there's a North Atlantic Council meeting, there's an OSCE meeting that I hope to be able to attend. And I think he will continue to convey a desire to work with Europe in its many forms -- NATO, EU, OSCE -- to move our mutual interests forward, and that is to resolve regional conflicts, to get over the disagreement of 2003 over Iraq, and let's all come together in whatever way one can contribute to the solution of the problem in Iraq.

Everybody, I think, now agrees that whatever you may have thought in April of 2003, it is in everyone's interest for the Iraqi people to be successful in defeating this insurgency and in having elections. I don't know of a single European leader that I deal with who thinks it would be in their interest, in any way, for Iraq not to be a success, and they're all now determining how best to make it a success.

But I think you'll -- my European friends will see a President who respects partnerships, respects alliances. He's demonstrated that over the first four years and he will continue to demonstrate it over the next four years: the expansion of NATO; working with the EU in so many areas; working together to give the Afghanistan, the people of Afghanistan an opportunity to vote for a president in an exciting election a few weeks back; working with our European colleagues in the Balkans.

So there are many things being done with Europe that should not be overwhelmed because of the one disagreement, major disagreement, not an insignificant, a very significant disagreement that we had with some of our European friends over Iraq last year.

QUESTION: One --

SECRETARY POWELL: Look at the President's National Security policy, which people tend not to read the whole thing, but it's a policy and not of preemption, it's a policy of partnerships. It's a policy of reaching out. It's a policy of working with others on opening up trade around the world. It's a policy of dealing with the infectious diseases that are really killing many more thousands of people a day than any terrorist incident will. It's a policy of expansion of alliances. It's a policy of working multilaterally to deal with problems like the nuclear issue in Iran and the nuclear issue in North Korea.

I sometimes get attention deficit syndrome when I listen to people argue with me, why aren't you being more unilateral in Korea and Iran? Why are you, quote, "working with the Europeans or with the six-party framework, when you ought to be doing it one-on-one or unilaterally, or doing something?"

The President is very clear. He will work with the international community to the greatest extent possible but even the most multilateral approach requires a leader. And we will always keep in mind what we believe is in our national interests and the national interests of our friends and partners, but the President wants to work with partners and friends around the world and he's demonstrated that.

Europe will find the United States engaged, listening, consulting, working with our European friends, those who have disagreed with us in the past on certain issues, and those who have fully agreed with us in the past on certain issues.

QUESTION: Specifically on Germany, the German Government has made it clear that they are interested in a permanent seat in the Security Council. If it comes to a point where there will be a vote in the General Assembly, the UN Security Council reform and possible German permanent seat, will the U.S. support this bid by Germany?

SECRETARY POWELL: At the moment, the position we are taking, which we think is the sound position to take right now, is to wait for this panel to finish its work and make the recommendation. I've been in touch with the panel, and I'm not sure what its recommendation will be. And if the recommendation includes an expansion of the Security Council and there are different ideas as to how to expand it -- additional permanent members without veto, additional rotating members -- I think it's best to wait to see all of that.

And obviously, if there is an expansion Germany would be a candidate and there will be many other candidates as well, and so it's best to wait for that panel to make its recommendations before we start singling out particular countries. Germany, I know, feels strongly about it, along with India, Brazil and South Africa; the four kind of spoke up, self-appointed four.

QUESTION: On the transatlantic cooperation side, we have the news this weekend of the EU-3 negotiations with Iran.

SECRETARY POWELL: Yeah, mm-hmm.

QUESTION: And it does appear that they've reached or are close to reaching an agreement whereby Iran would freeze but not for the moment indefinitely suspended uranium enrichment program. The U.S. never seemed hugely enthusiastic about this. They just had one press conference that said the U.S. did not endorse this plan. What is your response now to this partial agreement in the making?

SECRETARY POWELL: Well, we don't have an agreement yet. I had conversations over the weekend with some of my European colleagues and we're waiting to see exactly what the agreement is. There are many reports about an agreement. We haven't seen it yet. The only thing we are enthusiastic about achieving is end to Iran's nuclear weapons ambitions and over the last three years we have done a great deal to put heat and light on this issue.

When we started three years ago, everybody thought we were overplaying our hand and being very aggressive and unilateralist about Iran's programs. Over the past three years, the world has now seen that Iran is doing things that surprised the international community and shouldn't have been doing. And so we were able to get the Russians to be more circumspect about providing fuel for the reactor at Bushehr. We've gotten the IAEA more energized and our European Union colleagues, in the form of the three foreign ministers, began an active role in the fall of 2002 -- 2003, excuse me, to try to see if they could find a solution.

When we met with the European Union 3, a few weeks back, before they made their latest overture to the Iranians, we said, fine, go ahead, you know, we believe it's time to refer this thing to the Security Council, but if you want to make another run at it, fine, go ahead -- without us putting our name on the approach because it was an EU-3 approach, not a U.S. approach and not a total EU approach. We thought it best for them to continue the work that they were doing with our knowledge and with appreciation for their efforts, but without an endorsement of the specific proposal.

They have now gone forward and we'll wait to see what the Iranian reaction is to the proposal. There are still some outstanding issues, at least as of this morning, and we're waiting to hear more.

I'm sorry, go ahead.

QUESTION: I know it's slightly hypothetical, but if the reports are true and they're close to an agreement, do you think on the basis of your conversations that the U.S. would accept and give up the idea of referring Iran to the Security Council?

SECRETARY POWELL: I can't say that yet because everybody is talking about an agreement and there's a great deal of press reporting about agreements and endorsements of an agreement, but I haven't seen this agreement yet and we're waiting to get more information back from the EU-3. And after we've gotten it back, we'll make a judgment. I think it has to be an agreement that really does solve the problem and not another agreement that doesn't solve the problem and gives the Iranians a way to slip away from referral again.

I think the EU-3 realized that the commitments they got from the Iranians in the fall of 2003 and the early part of 2004 didn't do the job because the Iranians essentially said, well, we suspend it, now we unsuspend it. And so we have to see what it is the EU-3 have been able to achieve in this round. And so I'd be reluctant to hypothesize along with you as to what might or might not happen later in the month until we actually see the agreement. And I hope we will have a little more information on it within the next 24 hours.

QUESTION: The next 24 hours?

SECRETARY POWELL: I hope.

QUESTION: One more question on the EU-3 proposal. Would you say that it was helpful to the EU to make this proposal, in the sense that it allows or might allow Iran to drive a wedge between the EU and the U.S. and play the two sides against one another?

SECRETARY POWELL: We have felt for a year that it should go to the Security Council, but that was not a consensus view or a uniform view within the IAEA. And to the extent that the EU-3 wanted to continue to work the problem and see if they could find a solution, we said, fine, go ahead. But we have felt for a long time now, the last seven meetings -- six meetings with the IAEA, that it should have been referred to the Security Council.

Now, the Iranians have been doing everything they can to avoid that referral, but what they need to do to avoid the referral and to solve the problem is to come into complete compliance with their obligations, stop hiding things, and to make a firm commitment to the proposals laid out by the EU-3. If all that is done, then we will have to examine then to see whether, in our judgment, this resolves the matter.

There's a basic question here: Do you believe or not that Iran is moving toward a nuclear weapon? Do you believe that they are doing all this and sort of hiding things and moving things around simply because they want to have civilian nuclear power?

Our judgment is they've been moving toward a nuclear weapon. Not everybody shares that judgment. And we're not going to abandon that judgment because we think it's a well-supported judgment and we have to make sure that anything that is done by the EU-3 or anyone else deals not just with, you know, some potential nuclear power plant problem, but the fact that this is a government that seems to have made, in our mind anyway, a commitment to go forward toward a nuclear weapon.

QUESTION: A quick follow-up on Iran. About a year ago, Richard Armitage told Congress that regime change was not U.

S. policy. Do you think it's possible, in a second administration, given that you're going to be sitting across the table with the Iranians later this month at Sharm el-Sheikh that a second, the next administration could talk more directly to Iran on certain issues?

SECRETARY POWELL: Well, we'll have the first opportunity to talk to the Iranians at the Sharm el-Sheikh meeting and we'll see what develops. I think the nuclear issue is an important one to resolve in one way or another, but there are other aspects of Iranian behavior that are troubling -- support for terrorist activity -- and we'll just have to see whether or not there are openings here or not.

Regime change is not something that I've heard discussed, although I hear it speculated about a great deal in the papers. So what Mr. Armitage said is accurate.

What do I have? I have something. Yeah, I've got to go talk to a large group of people in a minute.

QUESTION: Okay, I'll be very quick then. Is there a possibility of new initiatives in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict now that Yasser Arafat seems to -- I mean, there's a definite change in the political equation now whether or not the poor man --

SECRETARY POWELL: We stand ready to move forward. We have been ready ever since the meetings at Sharm el-Sheikh and Aqaba last year with the roadmap. The roadmap is intact. The President is committed to the roadmap. He is committed to a two-state solution. He reaffirmed that again last week and I'm sure he and Prime Minister Blair will be talking about it later this week.

What we have been looking for for this whole period is responsible leadership on the part of the Palestinians so that we can get going. And we recognize that Israel has obligations as well with respect to outpost elimination and settlement activity. And in this period that we're in now, waiting to see what transpires with respect to Palestinian leadership, we hope that opportunities will come out of this transition period.

I don't know what Mr. Arafat's true medical status is. Maybe we will learn more in the days ahead. But I think there is an opportunity presented by, if there is a transition -- not necessarily meaning he's dead, but if there is a transition he might continue to live and the transition takes place anyway, and Mr. Sharon's efforts towards disengagement, I think, is an opportunity or we stand ready to seize that opportunity, to seize it aggressively, just as we had last summer when we had the Aqaba meetings. And I'm quite sure that's what the President will say to Prime Minister Blair.

Anything else? You've got another minute or two.

QUESTION: Okay, let's ask a very quick one. It's a bit theoretical. Four years ago --compared to four years ago, the dangers facing the U.S. now seem to be rather greater than they were in terms of problems in Iraq, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, al-Qaida and everything, and yet the constraints on your foreign policy are probably also greater. You're debts are bigger and so are your deficits. The military is stretched more. The credibility of the U.S. has been damaged to an extent by not finding WMD, what's happened in Abu Ghraib.

Qian Qichen, the Chinese former Vice Foreign Minister, said these are all examples of imperial overreach. But do you, as Secretary of State, feel that things are closing in on you a bit in terms of conditions of the world that make it more difficult for you to act in (inaudible)?

SECRETARY POWELL: No. No, and I think the American people have, through this election, demonstrated to the President that they expect him to keep acting in the manner that he has been acting.

Well, how has he been acting? He's done more than any President in recent history with respect to development assistance and increasing aid to nations that are trapped in poverty and ill health, a whole list of initiatives with respect to development assistance, Millennium Challenge Account, HIV/AIDS, money we're pouring into all of that, the clean water initiatives, a variety of things, and he'll continue to do that.

We have an excellent relationship with China, perhaps the best in 30 years. We cooperate in so many areas. When we have disagreements with them, we face those disagreements, disagreements with respect to human rights and proliferation. Mr. Qian Qichen's comments were quickly pushed aside by the Chinese leadership as not reflecting their view at all, and it's not clear whose view it reflected. It's a little murky as to what that article was all about and where it came from. But I can assure you that my conversation with Chinese leaders over the last several days reaffirmed their desire to work with us.

Our alliances in Asia are strong. South Korea and Japan are standing alongside of us in Iraq, and not only with troops, but with a great deal of financial support. Our Australian colleagues are doing likewise, so our situation in Asia is quite good. We've succeeded in creating a relationship with India and Pakistan that each one of those stand on their own good U.S.-India and good U.S.-Pakistan relationship; and, as a result of having two good bilateral relations, we can help them as they reach out to one another.

This is quite an improvement from where we were two years ago when they were on the verge of war that some people were writing could go nuclear within a few days. That's not the case now. Now, they're having soccer matches and the buses are going back and forth. They're even starting to deal with the difficult issues of Kashmir. Afghanistan is no longer a threat to the United States.

You said we are in greater danger now. Not from Afghanistan, we're not -- Usama bin Laden hiding in caves and issuing taped messages from time to time. We haven't been attacked in the United States since September of 2001, and Afghanistan is having free elections.

With respect to Iraq, a regime that we determined was dangerous is gone. We still have a difficult insurgency to face, but there's no reason that Iraq cannot go down the path that Afghanistan has gone down.

In terms of Europe, we had major disagreements over Iraq with Germany, with France, and, to some extent, with Russia. I think we can get over that because there is so much that pulls us together compared to that which pulls us apart.

Our relationships with the Eastern European nations, the Central European nations are all good, Britain good, Italy good. We had a disagreement with Spain, but we'll find areas of cooperation. We are operating in Central Asia in a way that we never could a few years ago. And the Russians are working with us because we face common enemies of terrorism, of smuggling, of illegal immigration.

We have been very successful with our free trade agenda. So the President has had an active foreign policy that has been controversial in the sense of, should we have done what we did in Iraq? We did it. Now what we're going to do is complete the effort to give the Iraqi people a democracy.

But in so many other parts of our foreign policy it has been a reaching out policy. It has been aggressive in terms of going after challenges and issues that needed to be dealt with by the nation with the most power in the world. And the President is going to keep moving in that direction. Where we have had disagreements, we'll try to now get beyond those disagreements.

And we recognize that the Middle East is -- the Middle East peace process is one of the biggest overhangs on the -- our foreign policy and the way in which we are perceived in the world, and we want to do more about that. But we need responsible partners on the Palestinian side.

So the President is not going to, as has been said, trim his sails or pull back. It's going to be a continuation of his principles, his policies, his beliefs. And I think people will see that it is a foreign policy of national interests and the interests of our friends and alliances, multilateral in nature, willing, however, when necessary, to act if we have to act alone or with a willing coalition to defend our interests and our needs. And the President took that message to the American people and the American people accepted that message and gave him more than a marginal mandate to keep moving forward.

I think you will see, as he has a chance to meet with European leaders, that he will be able to convey this to them and to explain it to them, and he is anxious to reach out to them. He's spoken to almost all of them in the last two days subsequent to the election.

MS. MILLER: Thank you all.

QUESTION: Thank you very much.

MR. BOUCHER: Okay. Thanks.

2004/1203

Released on November 9, 2004



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