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Interview With Jonathan Karl of ABC News

Secretary Condoleezza Rice

Berlin, Germany
February 4, 2005

QUESTION: Madam Secretary, you made some history just by getting sworn in. What was your feeling when you walked into that press conference with Chancellor Schroeder and saw all those cameras and that kind of a reception?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, I don't think I've ever seen that many cameras, so it was quite an experience. This has been a great opportunity, to be here in Germany, to earlier be in Great Britain. I wanted very much on my first trip as Secretary to come to some of our great allies and friends to talk about the common heritage that we have, the common values that we have, the opportunities that we have before us, to spread freedom and democracy, and it's just been a wonderful reception, it's really been a great day.

QUESTION: Now you've promised and the President has promised to support the Iranian people. How?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, we are supporting the Iranian people. When you hear across these discussions that we've had today and in these press conferences that we've had, people saying the Chancellor of Germany, the Foreign Secretary of Great Britain that the Iranian people deserve to have their aspirations met. Just telling the Iranian people, that they are not forgotten in the great reform movement that is going to sweep through the Middle East is extremely important. And holding the Iranian regime responsible for its behavior both internally and externally is also extremely important. The Iranian people are no different than the people of Iraq or the people of Afghanistan or the people of Ukraine or the people of Germany or the United States- they deserve the human dignity of being able to live in liberty.

QUESTION: Well, words are one thing. Are you planning anything specific to help the Iranian opposition? Anything by way of programs, by way of, you know, radio broadcasts, what are you planning? What new?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, in fact we do have broadcasts that are available in Iran. But let me just give you an example. We have something called the Forum for the Future, which is an outgrowth of the Broader Middle East initiative, and it is

an effort to allow not just governance to talk, but also for civil society groups, for women's groups, for business groups to talk. The Moroccans invited the Iranians to the Forum for the Future and obviously would have invited their civil society groups and the like. It would be a wonderful thing, if the civil society groups of Iran could participate in such an activity.

So, there is much that can be done to sustain the hopes of the Iranian people. They are a sophisticated people who have demonstrated time and again that they want a democratic way and it is just extremely important that they not be forgotten as we talk about reforms in the rest of the Middle East.

QUESTION: It is no secret that that's an unpopular regime. If the Iranian people were to rise up against that regime, would the United States be there?

SECRETARY RICE: Obviously, I'm not going to get into speculation about events that have not taken place. But the President of the United States, when he speaks of freedom on behalf of peoples around the world, is doing so because the United States has to stand for people who are not having their aspirations met. And the good thing is that I was listening earlier in my discussions with Foreign Minister Straw to what he said in the press conference, that of course, the discussions that they are having with the Iranians are not just about their nuclear weapons, not just about the support for terrorism, but also about their human rights records. There is a common purpose here to remind the Iranian regime that their efforts to be a member in full standing of the international community of states cannot be carried out if they are pursuing policies, internally and externally, that are policies that are out of step with the growing trends toward democracy and reform in the region. This is a long process of change in the Middle East, it is a generational commitment to change in the Middle East, but we have to have an agenda that says that it is a process of change from which no one can be omitted.

QUESTION: So am I sensing a subtle change in our policy, where we are talking about the human rights and democracy issues regarding Iran now and not so much just focussing on the nuclear issue and terrorism issue?

SECRETARY RICE: Oh, I think if you go back, the President has talked about the Iranian human rights issues for quite a long time. He's issued statements that talk from time to time when the Iranians have done terrible things to their own people; he's issued statements about that.

It is important that this be a range of issues that, when we look at the kind of Middle East that we're trying to build, it is a Middle East in which we are seeking for instance a peace between Israel and the Palestinian people. That is one of the most hopeful areas right now because with the election of a new Palestinian leader, with the Israeli plans for disengagement from the Gaza, we really have a new chance. What is one of the great frustrations? It is that there are rejectionist terrorist groups who at every turn try to frustrate the efforts of the Palestinians and the Israelis for peace. The Iranians are major supporters of those rejectionist groups and the Iranians of course have believed that Israel should not exist in the Middle East. They are out of step. They are out of step with where the Middle East is going.

QUESTION: If you want to see the change out of this regime, why not have diplomatic relations with the Iranians. After all, our friends, the British do. I mean, if you really want to engage them, why not sit down and talk to them?

SECRETARY RICE: The Iranians know what they need to do. We don't need to talk about it. they know what they need

to do. And we will work with our friends and allies. We have many means, diplomatic and political, at our disposal to continue to impress upon the Iranians that they are out of step with the trends that we hope to see develop in the Middle East.

QUESTION: But isn't it time to at least reassess whether it makes sense because it has been twenty five-some years that we have not had any formal conversations with the Iranians? I mean, how do you encourage a country to change you're not even sitting down and talking to?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, it's not hard to encourage change in a country when it should look around and see that the rest of the region is going to move on. If you think about the prospect or the perspective of those in Iran who have watched Afghans vote - in Iran - for a free Afghan government, who have watched Iraqis vote- in Iran -for a free Iraqi government, but are going to participate in effectively a sham election in a few months, if they participate at all. It says to the Iranian regime, to the unelected few, that this is not the future. And we have to say that. It doesn't mean that the United States does not understand that this is a time for diplomacy. I've said that many, many times. This is the time for diplomacy. But it is also a time to be straightforward about what needs to be done.

QUESTION: In the first term, the administration was perfectly clear that regime change is not the policy of the United States. Richard Armitage said it directly, just like that. You've been asked that question three, four, maybe five times on this trip, have not answered it directly, so let me try one more time: is regime change not the policy?

SERETARY RICE: Well the policy of the United States is to deal with both the external and internal behavior of an Iranian regime that is out of step with where the Middle East is going.

QUESTION: Do we think that it's time for that regime to go?

SECRETARY RICE: The Iranian people clearly deserve better. But the Iranian regime needs to be reminded that the entire world, the entire International Atomic Energy Agency, for instance, is united in its concerns and suspicions about what the Iranians are doing with their nuclear programs. That the world is not going to stand by, those of us who are interested in Israeli and Palestinian peace, and countenance the continued support for terrorism which will undo the very peace that we seek. That, as in my discussions here in Europe, as people have said, we have to stand for democracy in Iran. If we don't stand for democracy in Iran, why are the Iranian people any different than the others for whom we stand for democracy? So, our policies are pretty clear here. The goal of this administration is to work with others to deal with Iranian behavior that is both internal and external, that is a problem for the kind of Middle East that we wish to build.

QUESTION: But even your own spokesperson yesterday at the State Department, Adam Ereli, said "regime change is not the policy". And I'm just wondering why you've passed up the opportunity to say that. Are we now saying that we want ...

SECRETARY RICE: Jonathan, we don't need slogans; what we need is a policy that is clear about what it is we're trying to achieve. And I don't think sloganeering helps us here, and I'm not going to engage in it. What we have is a policy that says, and in which we have plenty of help, you've heard this question asked of Foreign Secretary Straw today, you've heard it asked of the German Chancellor, should democracy in [Iran] be an issue? Yes, of course, because in an alliance based on values, it has to be an issue.

QUESTION: You've also, you have a situation we have ... Last question, we're running out of time. You said, that the question of war with Iran is not on the table and not on the agenda and then you added "at this time." What does that mean, does it mean it's some other time?

SECRETARY RICE: The American President is never going to take options off the table. My point was, I was asked a question and I think I said the question of an attack on Iran is not on the agenda at this time. And it's not. Because we believe that we have many diplomatic means by which to deal with the challenge that Iran presents for an international community that is trying to diminish the threat of weapons of mass destruction- not create a new nuclear state. That is trying to move to peace in the Palestinian territories- not support terrorist rejectionists who frustrate that effort. That is trying to move toward reform and democracy in a region where people are crying out for reform and democracy.

And so this I said in my confirmation hearings, that this is the time for diplomacy. We fully believe that we have diplomatic and political levers at our disposal, that we have commonality of purpose and unity of message to the Iranians about what is expected of them. And we will engage with our friends and allies to try and affect that behavior which, as I said, is very much out of step with where the rest of the region is going.

QUESTION: You said: the time for diplomacy is now. You gave us all world atlases, pocket world atlases?

SECRETARY RICE: Right.

QUESTION: That means we're going to be seeing you on the road a lot?

SECRETARY: That means that diplomacy requires a lot of travel. I'll see you on the road.

QUESTION: Madam Secretary, thank you very much.

SECRETARY RICE: Thank you.

2005/121

Released on February 4, 2005

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