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Interview With Sir Trevor McDonald of ITV

Secretary Condoleezza Rice

London, United Kingdom

March 1, 2005

(3:00 p.m. EST)

MR. MCDONALD: Secretary of State, doesn't the latest suicide attack in Israel show that despite all the outward signs, that a genuine settlement in the Middle East might still be a very long way off?

SECRETARY RICE: We're certainly in a period of hope and opportunity in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but of course, it is going to be a process that will have its ups and downs. Had this been easy, we would have resolved it many, many years ago.

But the important step here was that we saw from the Palestinian leadership is a clear statement about the effect of terrorism on the aspirations of the Palestinian people that are heartening and give some hope that the Palestinians can reform their security services, that they can be a good partner for Israel in terms of dealing with terrorism. But the Palestinian leadership will have to deal with the terrorists. It cannot ignore this.

MR. MCDONALD: Yes, the Israelis call on the Palestinians to round up the militants and put them behind bars. Can Mahmoud Abbas actually deliver on that? Can he do that?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, there are certainly some things that the Palestinians can do. They can arrest people who are engaged in this. They can begin to dismantle some of the infrastructure of terrorism: bomb-making factories, tunnels, and the like. And there is, I believe, a will on the part of the Palestinian Authority this time to create better conditions on the security front.

Now, there is still hard work to do in making the Palestinian security forces capable and making them part of the solution, not part of the problem. And we in the United States and others are prepared to help the Palestinians in that regard, but I



do believe that this is something the Palestinian leadership wants to do.

MR. MCDONALD: But he is caught, Abbas is caught, in this both delicate and potentially dangerous position. He must listen to the Israeli calls to try to round up these people; at the same time, he must produce tangible evidence to his own people that Israel is prepared to make genuine concessions of peace.

SECRETARY RICE: Well, I think that the Palestinian leadership certainly needs to show the Palestinian people that under the leadership of this Palestinian Authority they will have a better life. And one of the reasons for the London conference is to demonstrate to the Palestinians that if they are prepared to reform, the international community is really prepared to help them, to help them financially, to help them politically, to help them with technical assistance.

And we have called on the Israelis to be certain that they are living up to their obligations so that there can be a peaceful Palestinian state. And that, of course, is buttressed by the Israeli decision to withdraw from the Gaza and the four settlements in the West Bank, which will begin to dismantle settlements and to show that Israel can be committed to a two-state solution.

MR. MCDONALD: And yet, some Palestinians fear that Prime Minister Sharon is sacrificing Gaza to, in fact, annex part of the West Bank. That's not in the roadmap, is it?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, the roadmap is still the reliable guide to getting to a two-state solution and Prime Minister Sharon has made clear, and indeed the United States has asked that Israel make clear, that the Gaza withdrawal is not separate from the roadmap but consistent with the roadmap. We eventually will have to get back onto the roadmap where the parties are taking the necessary steps on the way to the two-state solution, but we also need Palestinian reform; we need a peaceful Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza, a coordinated withdrawal from the Gaza, which the Israelis now appear ready to do; the Israelis and the Palestinians need to engage in security cooperation so that when there are terrorist events -- and there will be terrorist events -- when there are these events, that they can work together to keep the talks on course and to make certain that the perpetrators are arrested and dealt with.

MR. MCDONALD: But it won't help that the Israelis are talking about building more homes in the West Bank?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, we have been very clear with the Israelis that we believe that it is incumbent on Israel to do nothing that prejudices a final status outcome. And we --

MR. MCDONALD: But building homes is a bit provocative, isn't it?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, when there is a final status outcome, I would certainly believe that the Israelis understand that the United States believes that they have prejudged nothing, and the Israelis do need to get out of the Gaza and the four settlements in the West Bank peacefully. I believe if we see that and we see Palestinian reform over the next several months, then not only will we be ready to be back on the roadmap, but we will see an accelerated move on the roadmap.

MR. MCDONALD: How much pressure is the American Secretary of State prepared to put on Syria to stop meddling in Lebanese affairs?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, the United States, along with France, has pressured the Syrians through Resolution 1559. There is an international UN Security Council Resolution telling the Syrians to get their forces, their troops, the troops --

MR. MCDONALD: But they've ignored that, haven't they?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, they're having a hard time ignoring what's going on in Lebanon right now. What is being exposed is that Syria is a barrier. Syrian policies and Syrian behavior are barriers to a better life and a more democratic future for the people of the Middle East.

When the Syrian support insurgents or allow their territory to be used for insurgents, they are frustrating the aspirations of the Iraqi people. When the Syrians allow their troops and their security forces to operate in Lebanon, they are frustrating the aspirations of those Lebanese people who are in the streets of Lebanon. When the Syrians support, from their territory and with their activities, terrorist groups who carry out bombings in the Holy Land, they are frustrating the aspirations of the Palestinian people.

So the Syrians should not be allowed to change the subject. This is not about Syria and the United States. This is Syria frustrating the aspirations of people of the Middle East for a better and more democratic life.

MR. MCDONALD: But it's tough talk from you, the Secretary of State, and tough talk from the United States. What are you prepared to do about it?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, the United States already, of course, has some sanctions on Syria. But let's remember that the kind of pressure that the Security Council and the international community can bring to bear is very important for the Syrians, who I do not believe want to be as isolated as they are now. They are very isolated.

And the French and the United States went to the Security Council. We got a resolution. The Syrians fought it, fought it gravely, to try and avoid 1559. The United States, of course, pulled its Ambassador from Syria as a signal to the Syrians. But the Syrians have managed to isolate themselves and they're having to answer for their policies, not the United States for its policies.

MR. MCDONALD: So you talk about the resolutions. So you let diplomacy, it seems, take its course. I wonder, though, would you be prepared to countenance an Israeli attack on Syria? The Israelis have been making very tough noises about Syria, too.

SECRETARY RICE: Well, the Syrians should recognize that they are a destabilizing factor right now in the Middle East and they're isolated. I think we're doing, actually, very well with the international community bringing the kind of pressure on Syria that --

MR. MCDONALD: What about the Israeli attack -- steps that they should take?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, the region needs not to have destabilizing events, but the Syrians need to recognize that this is not a question about other people's policies. This is a question about Syria's policies.

MR. MCDONALD: What is the Administration prepared to do about the fact that two days ago the Russians agreed to supply spent nuclear fuel for an Iranian nuclear reactor, in clear contradiction, it seems to me, of what American policy is?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, the United States has been skeptical of Iranian claims that they need civilian nuclear power, given their huge energy reserves. But we've also talked frequently over the last year with the Russians about their Bushehr nuclear reactor and we recognize that the Russians have gone some way to try and put in place with the Iranians measures that would mitigate proliferation risks.

Now, I don't know enough about the final arrangements that the Iranians and the Russians have made, but I would note that the Russians have talked about an additional protocol for verification measures, I would note that the Russians have talked about a fuel take-back so that the Iranians can not have the full fuel cycle which would increase proliferation risk. And so there are some --

MR. MCDONALD: So you've got a -- you're relaxed about that?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, we can't be relaxed about Iran. Iran is a state that has everybody nervous about its attempts to, under civilian nuclear power development, potentially create a nuclear weapon. That's why the Russians have been insistent on certain anti-proliferation measures. That's why the EU-3 are engaged with the Iranians in the talks that they are. That's why the IAEA continues to call on the Iranians for further cooperation.

So no one should be relaxed about the Iranians, but we are forming, increasingly, a united front with unity of purpose, unity of message to the Iranians, that they should not try and build a nuclear weapon.

MR. MCDONALD: Do the Americans now categorically rule out an attack on Iran?

SECRETARY RICE: The President of the United States never categorically rules out anything, but we are in a state in which the diplomacy has time to work and which we have many other diplomatic arrows in our quiver. The United States has been clear that we are supportive of what the Europeans are trying to do in giving the Iranians an opportunity to show the world that they're prepared to live up to their obligations, and of course, we retain the possibility of referral to the Security Council.

MR. MCDONALD: What about the disagreement with the Europeans about breaking the arms embargo on China? What are the Americans prepared to do about that?

SECRETARY RICE: We had very good discussions when the President was here with our European counterparts so that they could understand better our concerns. This is a problem. It's a problem because the United States was a (inaudible) power and we are concerned about the military balance, and perhaps it was important that that be fully understood in ways that I think it had not been fully understood. It's a human rights problem in that the 2,000 or so people who were arrested for Tiananmen Square, to my knowledge, are still arrested and are still behind bars in China.

So, for those reasons, we've been very clear that the breaking of -- the lifting of the embargo would not be a welcome step and that it could have unfortunate implications for the military balance and for human rights and for China's reading

of what the Europeans are saying about human rights.

But the good thing is we've had open and candid discussions about it and we believe that the Europeans will at least listen to our concerns. We will see what happens.

MR. MCDONALD: Secretary of State, after the bombings out in Baghdad yesterday, more than a hundred people were killed. It looks as though the Americans are getting sucked more and more into this insurgency. Do you have a clear exit strategy for getting out of Iraq?

SECRETARY RICE: We don't talk about exit strategies. We talk about --

MR. MCDONALD: I know you don't talk about it --

SECRETARY RICE: We develop --

MR. MCDONALD: -- but I wonder whether you do have one.

SECRETARY RICE: No, we don't talk about them or think about them. We think about success strategies. We think about what we went there to do, which was to remove one of the worst dictators in the region, to remove a dictator who had been a destabilizing factor in the region, so much so that we had fought a war against him and were at a low level of hostility continuing to fight him with no-fly zones, where our military were shooting at his -- where he was shooting at our military aircraft patrolling his territory, a terrible dictator who was subverting UN sanctions so that the regime put in place to contain him was breaking down, and giving then an opportunity for a different kind of Iraq, which I think you can see is now starting to have an effect on the Middle East more broadly.

MR. MCDONALD: But more people are being killed in Iraq every day.

SECRETARY RICE: But the Iraq -- the insurgency in Iraq is brutal. The insurgency in Iraq is ruthless. But the insurgency in Iraq has no political future because the Iraqi people have demonstrated, by going to the polls in huge numbers, that they believe their political future is in the process that will culminate in December of 2005 with free and fair elections.

There is real politics going on in Iraq where you're trying to form a government that will be representative of and respectful of all Iraqis. The insurgents have no answer to that. We are training Iraqi security forces who will increasingly be able to take over more of the obligation and the work --

MR. MCDONALD: It's going very slowly, though, isn't it, because --?

SECRETARY RICE: Well --

MR. MCDONALD: Even the Iraqi interim prime minister the other day acknowledged that this process is terribly, painfully slow.

SECRETARY RICE: It is difficult and we are training people who are having to take on very dangerous and difficult roles. But if you look at how the Iraqis performed in support of their own elections, you can see that they are beginning to be effective. General Casey has said that there were no -- to his knowledge, no cases in which the coalition had to step in for Iraqi security forces. And Iraqi security personnel -- a person -- actually threw himself on a suicide bomber to save his fellow Iraqis.

This is a difficult task in Iraq because of the decades of repression there. It is going to be hard for some time to come. But it is a positive development that the Iraqis have taken to the politics this way and that they're moving their country toward a more democratic future. And that will have an effect on the rest of the region. The circle -- the symbolism of Iraqis voting in Iran for a free Iraqi government -- of Iraqis voting -- of Afghans voting (inaudible) for a free Afghanistan, the symbolism of what is happening in Lebanon, of moves in Egypt, and the like; Iraq is having an effect on the region.

MR. MCDONALD: Can I finally ask you, Secretary of State, what is America's ultimate sanction against North Korea?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, it's not America's sanction against North Korea. It's North Korea's neighbors. The one thing that we have not permitted the North Koreans to do is to make this a contest between the United States and North Korea. North Korea is hearing from its neighbors, including from its most supportive neighbor, China, that there must be a nuclear-free Korean Peninsula and that North Korea has no entry into a better relationship with the international community but to give up its nuclear weapons. And so if the North Koreans want to end their isolation, they have one course and one course only.

MR. MCDONALD: Secretary of State, thank you.

SECRETARY RICE: Thank you.

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