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Interview With Washington Times Editorial Board

Secretary Condoleezza Rice

Washington, DC

March 11, 2005

(10:00 a.m. EST)

QUESTION: Why don't we just get started, and I'd like to give you the opportunity to say what you want us to hear, and then if we can we'll open it up to questions around the table. Everything will be on the record unless you specifically go off the record.

SECRETARY RICE: That's just fine, just fine.

I'd like to start by saying that I think we are living in quite remarkable times and obviously this has been, I believe very strongly, because the United States of America was willing to take leadership and do difficult things during the President's last four years. After September 11th, the President set out on a bold agenda, not a narrow one, to respond to what had happened to us on September 11th. Those decisions were not always popular but they were right, and they were decisions that included, of course, a very aggressive campaign and then war, of course, to take down al-Qaida's training operation and territory in Afghanistan. People seemed to understand that that was a part of the war on terrorism, but when the President said that the war on terrorism was indeed broader than that and that it was necessary to help bring about change in the Middle East, that in fact the only antidote to terrorism and the ideology of hatred that we were facing was going to be the spread of liberty and freedom, there was some skepticism about that. I think that's putting it mildly.

But that was a goal and an aspiration that I think was worthy of the largest power in the international system, perhaps the most powerful country in international history, but one whose foreign policy is based very much on values, and that linking again of our values and our interests in an extricable way I think has given us a leadership role that allowed us then, after some time, to bring others together around a common agenda. And there were obviously those who understood this from the beginning, like Prime Minister Blair and Prime Minister Berlusconi and the President of Poland, President Kwasniewski. It was interestingly an agenda that seemed to be best understood by those who had

just come out of tyranny, and not just the smaller states who had just joined NATO, but probably a lot of people don't realize that one of the firm supporter was Rwanda, for instance, that had experienced the horrors of genocide and the horrors of tyranny.

And so now I think what you are seeing is that, largely because we were willing to take -- the President was willing to take difficult decisions, but also because the people of this region, the Middle East, have been demonstrating and with -- incontrovertibly that the idea that freedom and liberty are universal aspirations, that that is right, you're seeing it and it's just you cannot deny it. So whether it's in Afghanistan, a place that is in many ways a very, very underdeveloped society, but you saw these people streaming along dirt roads to vote; to the Palestinian territories where again the President had said back in 2002 that the Palestinians needed new leadership, that we weren't going to be able to do anything with Yasser Arafat, well, the Palestinian people went to the polls to vote for a leader who talked about an end to the armed Intifadah and living in peace with Israel; obviously, Iraq in many ways a kind of capstone event with the Iraqi people facing down terrorism, literally facing down terrorists in order to vote; and on and on and on, what you've seen in Lebanon, where we've had, by the way, outstanding cooperation with the French on the Syrian withdrawal, Resolution 1559, and giving the Lebanese people control of their own future; and then even the ripples of change in places like Egypt and Saudi Arabia, modest as it is.

So, to my mind, it is an indication of how important it is that there be in American foreign policy core values, that there be in American foreign policy a willingness to stand firm and to hold to positions that are not always popular but that are right. And we're going to have to keep doing it. And we're seeing again, I think today -- I'll be talking in a little while about Iran and the decision to back the diplomacy of the EU-3. But if you think about it, Iran wasn't even on the agenda as a nuclear issue until the President put that on the agenda with the "axis of evil" speech. And now, slowly but surely, you have the international community uniting around the idea that the Iranians cannot have a nuclear weapon, that indeed there are suspicious activities that need to be dealt with. And we, for our part, have decided to more actively back those diplomatic efforts of the EU-3 by removing our objections to spare parts and to WTO application -- and I want to emphasize application -- by the Iranians, because it exposes where the problem is. If the Iranians can't come to agreement with the Europeans, it exposes what all of us suspect, which is that the Iranians don't want to come to agreement. So it puts the spotlight back on the Iranians, not on, well, what is the United States willing to do or why aren't you supporting the diplomacy and so forth.

So that's the opening. I'm also on my way to Asia where we have also a number of challenges. But again, the President stands for the alliances that we have had there for many years. We are a force for stability, probably the force for stability in the Asia-Pacific region. The emergence of China as a major power is a challenge to the region but it can be an opportunity to the region if we show -- for the region if we show the same kind of principled foreign policy toward Asia that we have been demonstrating in Europe. And I believe that what we have in this President is someone who is just willing to lead from a position of principle and unless the United States is willing to do that, no one will. When the United States is willing to do that, it finds allies and it finds ways to unite what has been a great alliance both in Europe and in Asia around those principles.

So I'll stop.

QUESTION: I wonder if you could elaborate just a bit more on the Iranian decision to cooperate with the Europeans on the Iranian initiative.

SECRETARY RICE: Sure. When I went to Europe the first time, as opposed to the other two times I've been since, but the first time, it was very clear that the Iranians had succeeded in making the discussion about the United States and, in effect, sowing division between the United States and Europe so that it almost appeared that Europe was mediating between the United States and Iran. And in talking to our European allies, this didn't make sense because nobody wants the Iranians to get a nuclear weapon. It's the Iranians that are isolated, not the United States. How had we maneuvered into a position or gotten maneuvered into a position in which we were the problem?

So I came back, I talked to the President about it. He immediately saw this issue. And when he was in Europe he talked to his counterparts and basically said there are a couple things I need to know. Do you intend to -- do you believe that Iran has to be prevented from getting a nuclear weapon? Yes. Are you prepared to do tough things to make sure that they don't get a nuclear weapon? Yes. Because there is always chatter around, you know, well, how seriously did the Europeans take it. It was absolutely clear that they, too, understood how destabilizing it would be if Iran were to get a nuclear weapon and that they were suspicious of the Iranians.

Similarly, in his discussion with President Putin, where they were about to sign an agreement on civilian nuclear power cooperation with Iran, it was also clear that the Russians were determined to have certain antiproliferation measures with the Iranians, like a fuel take-back and so forth.

So, given all of that, we came back, the President met with his advisors, and when I went back to Europe I went back to see if we could then forge a common approach in which the Europeans would be somewhat clearer about their views of the Iranian problem and that there would be consequences and we would support the European diplomacy so that we had now a common approach, and so forging that common approach has been the business of the last ten days or so. And you may have seen that the Europeans sent a letter to their foreign minister colleagues that lays out their policy, and we will a little later today support them.

QUESTION: What specifically are the carrots that will be offered?

SECRETARY RICE: Again, the way that I would think about this, and I think we want to talk about it in a very specific way, which is we are removing our objection to some of the incentives that the Europeans would like to provide to have the Iranians -- to see whether the Iranians are really serious about this. The Europeans have given the Iranians a way out. They have given them -- or a way to comply. Let me put it that way. They've said a whole host of things to them. You know, you could have a better life with the world, you could have trade relations, but you cannot have a nuclear weapon and, given the history, you have to be able to demonstrate that you're not trying to develop a nuclear weapon.

The two that we would agree to remove our objection is an application to the WTO by the Iranians -- and let me just emphasize an application because obviously there's a long process for WTO accession -- and we would remove our objection, which mean we would be willing to license certain spare parts for Iranian commercial aircraft. They have mostly Boeing aircraft. In some ways it's almost a humanitarian thing, there is a safety concern here, and so we had considered doing this at one other point in time during the time of the earthquake.

QUESTION: Let me just follow upon that for a second. I appreciate the logic of why we're moving where we are on Iran. But the President, in his State of the Union Address, put down two unconditional conditions: one, no nuclear weapons, and; two, stop the terrorism. This deals only, as I understand it, with the nuclear weapons, but --

SECRETARY RICE: No. In fact, I'm glad you mentioned it because I should have. The other thing that we said to the Europeans is that we want in the letter that Iran's terrorism activities, particularly against the Palestinians but in general, have to be addressed and that the human rights circumstances in Iran have to be addressed. So those are both also on the table.

QUESTION: What is the benchmark, though, that you know that they are actually doing that? I mean, it's easy to say, okay, we won't support terrorism anymore, but, I mean, how do you measure that?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, this is going to be a long struggle with the Iranians, who are about as entangled in terrorist activity as you can possibly be. I can't give you an answer to what is the benchmark because it's a little bit -- you know, I'm an old deterrence expert. You know it when you -- is it working? Well, yes, because you haven't had a -- nobody has set off a nuclear weapon.

In this case, I think you would hope to see a diminution of funding for training of activity by terrorist organizations that we know Iran supports. But it's going to take time.

We have a chance to make a very concerted effort in this regard because the other thing that we've been saying around Europe is we can't have it both ways. You say you want peace between the Israelis and the Palestinians, and you then, they have to talk very tough to the states that are supporting the Palestinian rejectionists who would literally blow up the chances for an Israeli-Palestinian peace. In the context of movement on the Israeli-Palestinian issue, I think we've actually got more weight with others than we might otherwise have.

QUESTION: What about if I can ask about U.S.-Iranian relations? You say it's only an application, but why apply if there is no prospect of joining the WTO? And if I just can add to that, you haven't had diplomatic relations with Iran since 1979 and your friends the Europeans, including the British, do have those relations. Are you promising Iran any warming up towards them in this effort?

SECRETARY RICE: No. And, in fact, that goes back to what Tony mentioned. We have a lot of issue with Iran. It's not just the nuclear issue. Our challenge is to continue to speak to the aspirations of the Iranian people even as we deal with near-term issues like the Iranian nuclear program. And the president is determined to do that, determined not to lose the emphasis on the rights and the aspirations of all people, including the Iranian people, to live in freedom.

If you think about it, certain of the things that are going on in the region have created a different strategic context for Iran. They have a new neighbor in Afghanistan and they have a new neighbor in Iraq. They have a neighbor in Iraq that has the potential of having a Shia majority government that is not theocratic and that respects all people and that votes and pretty soon I would think Iranians would ask, well, why can that not be the case here? It must have seemed odd to Iranians that Afghan refugees voted in Iran for a free Afghan Government and Iraqi refugees in Iran voted in Iran for a free Iraqi Government, but Iranians can't vote in a free election in Iran.

So Iran is not going to be immune, I think, from the changing context around them and that's why we don't want to do anything that legitimizes this government -- the mullahs -- in a direct way. And so there isn't any indication here of "warming of relations."

QUESTION: There is an election in Iran for president in June.

SECRETARY RICE: There is.

QUESTION: Do you think that this election could be fair and represent the will of the people?

SECRETARY RICE: I think that given the role that elections have played around the world recently, we ought to make the case that it ought to be. It's very difficult for me to see how, in the current Iranian circumstances, that could happen.

QUESTION: Let me switch to another area where you've had some startling diplomatic success, Lebanon. I noted this morning this report that Terje Roed-Larsen -- whose name I'm sure I'm mispronouncing -- is giving an ultimatum to Syria that's backed up, apparently, by French, Egyptians and everybody else. And while it's impressive that we've got all of these countries together, the ultimatum that they give is different from the conditions that the President has said repeatedly in the last couple of weeks, that the army -- Syrian army and the security services must be out completely by the election, no half measures. And the conditions that are listed, at least in the *Post* this morning, are: the condition that the Syrians must honor the independence and sovereignty of Lebanon; second, a timeline, a timeline for full pullout that can be sequenced but must be expeditious; and then third, they must provide a timeline, but not the other (inaudible) part of that, for the pullout and the 5,000 intelligence services.

So while this is very good, it strikes me that what the UN is calling for, and even if Syria complied with providing the timeline but didn't pull the security services or all of the army out by the election, which is a scant two months from now, the President has got his own ultimatum on the table which he's been reciting of both a drop dead date of the election in Lebanon plus those very specific conditions of all-out, no half measures.

So how do we balance those two sets of similar but differently staged ultimata?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, I think you would find that Larsen is talking about a timeline so that people know when to expect Syrian forces to leave, but that he's talking about a very rapid timeline, not a long timeline. I'm sure the Syrians will want to have a very long timeline, but he's talking about -- he has told us that he believes it needs to happen expeditiously, but there does need to be a kind of forces will leave from here on this date and from there on that date and so forth, and I think that's what he means by timeline.

In terms of the complete and full, everybody is also absolutely foursquare on that. It has to be complete and full. We're not talking about half measures to Bekaa Valley or anything. We're talking about out of Syria.

QUESTION: And you feel reasonably comfortable that the timeline they're talking about is more or less is consistent with the President's timeline?

SECRETARY RICE: I believe that everybody understands that the elections need to be held in an atmosphere in which Syrian interference can't be carried out -- or can't be used. Larsen, he's going to go over to Syria and we will see what the interaction looks like, but he's a very strong advocate of 1559. His mandate is Resolution 1559 and that's what he's going to be operating from. And the key is to get the Lebanese to the place that they can truly have free and fair elections. And when they are able to do that, then I think you're going to see a very different dynamic inside Lebanon.

QUESTION: I think one last enforcement question and then --

QUESTION: The enforcement provision, as these articles are describing it, is economic sanction. (Inaudible) work, but if economic sanctions don't work to move Syria, the President requested, instructed them absolutely to get out. Do we have options -- I mean, there are two options, either the economic and diplomatic system works or it doesn't work. If it doesn't, there's a military option. Is there a third option available to the President beyond economic, diplomatic, acceding to Syrians resistance, and military action?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, I think that articles are probably going beyond where the UN and even we are right now. This has all happened very fast and so the plan is that when Larsen returns, he will report to the Security Council on what he has found. I think at that point we have to have a discussion of if the Syrians are willing to comply, fine. On what timeline? How do we make sure it doesn't interfere with the elections? If it appears that they are not willing to comply, then what are the sanctions available? I wouldn't jump to it's going to be this set or that set. I think those are people speculating.

QUESTION: Well, I'm just even curious as even if is -- the characterization ultimatum in that story strikes me as a bit of an overstatement. I mean, it was reported both by us and the *New York Times* yesterday that he was going there with a timeline. Basically, here's the timeline again now being described as an ultimatum.

SECRETARY RICE: Well, the ultimatum was 1559.

QUESTION: Which is not new news, basically.

SECRETARY RICE: Yeah. The ultimatum was get out. Under -- and it was delivered to him by the UN Security Council, by the Saudis, by the -- and that's where I think the ultimatum -- I agree with you, I don't think this is news in that sense.

QUESTION: Okay, let me ask you a couple -- I want to ask a couple of follow-ups to that though.

One, are you surprised by the fact that some of the other countries in the region are turning the heat up on Syria (a)? And secondly, is there any kind of credible opposition in Syria and are we doing anything at all to try to support that?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, the second question of credible opposition, you know, I think people will explore. It's important to recognize that this has been a police state and it is -- it has gone out of its way to eliminate credible opposition.

QUESTION: Right.

SECRETARY RICE: But people arise and people come to the fore and rise to the occasion that you might not expect to, so I think we'll just have to see what's there internally. But it's like any police state; it's very hard to tell what's underneath there under the current circumstances.

I'm sorry, you had a --

QUESTION: The other question was, are you surprised by the reaction of some of the other countries in the region?

SECRETARY RICE: Oh, right. I am heartened by it. Let me put it that way. The unity with which the international community, including the region, has responded to this has been heartening, I think in part is because the Syrians are clearly showing themselves to be such a problem for the region. They've been fairly heavy-handed with their friends. They have not been helpful; in fact, they've been a problem on things like stability in Iraq, which I think is not a popular position to take in the region. So I'm heartened by it. It's been good.

QUESTION: President Bush -- how much credit does he deserve for the current trend towards democratization?

You suggested a correlation in your opening remarks between his policies that he's had since he got into office and what we're starting to see. And yet, obviously, you've heard his critics say that it's really indigenous factors that has nothing to do with it. He doesn't seem to be willing to sort of -- obviously he doesn't want to crow about this or gloat about this, but does he deserve some credit?

SECRETARY RICE: Absolutely. Unequivocally. The President of the United States goes out and puts this on the agenda in the way he has, and everybody focused on the inaugural speech but of course he had talked about this in Whitehall in England, he talked about it at the National Endowment for Democracy. When the President puts something on the agenda like this, then it does stir people to change the conversation and to change their view of the parameters of the possible. That's really what's happened here is -- and I watched it also before with the fall of Communism. On day one this looked possible, and several days later this looked possible. And that's what the President can do.

Now to be sure, the rhetoric without the policies would not have had this effect. And it was the combination of the President's very strong commitment to democracy, really reversing 60 years of Western policies -- Democratic and Republican Presidents' policies -- coupled with the willingness in Iraq to take the -- to hold the belief that the Iraqis were going to be able to pull off this election. I'll tell you what I think the President doesn't get enough credit for is being firm that, in fact, the Iraqi elections could take place on the 30th of January.

Now, so much has happened that it fades into -- it fades from our memory of how many people were saying, well, you should postpone the elections and they'll never be able to hold them because of violence, what if this, what if that. And trusting that the Iraqi people were going to face down the terrorists and come out to vote may have been the most important.

QUESTION: Let me just follow up on one thing you said. You've made the analogy to what happened when the fall of Communism manifested itself -- and you're obviously an expert on that. Is that too strong of an analogy? Some say that the Berlin Wall -- that these are tentative steps, that Mubarak isn't really going to do anything to allow anybody else to be elected president, that, you know, on and on and on. Is there a parallel there or not?

SECRETARY RICE: It's an imperfect analogy because Europe was in a different state than the Middle East and there had been years of contacts between East and West and it was more fully cooked, if you will, when it happened. So I wouldn't want to stretch the analogy, but there are two things that I would take from that historical set of circumstances.

Someone told me Mark Twain said that history doesn't repeat itself but sometimes it rhymes. (Laughter.) And that's how I would put this, that what we saw in '89, as I said, was that suddenly what was possible became different. And that

is happening now. People see possibilities that they did not see six months ago, frankly. I'm not talking about a year ago or two years ago, three months ago. That is somewhat analogous to what happened in '89 because when these things start to happen, the possibilities seem to expand quite suddenly.

The other thing is that it because of all this possibilities expanded, local people began to take over. And you're seeing that, too. Now, that isn't always easy when it -- but the United States has helped to create conditions but the carrying out of this is going to be the work of local people. And that also was 1989.

QUESTION: Madame Secretary, I'd like to turn this subject to Korea. Before I do, just one last point on this.

There is a possible dark side to it all. When they had the elections in Saudi Arabia recently, they elected all Islamists. In Algeria, several years ago, free elections were about to bring extremist Islamists to power and don't let the army stop them. We've seen the power of Hezbollah. In Egypt, there's real possibility with real elections would bring Muslim brotherhood to power.

Are you prepared for the possibility? Do you have a plan if, you know, this brings to power people who don't like, who hate us more, you know?

SECRETARY RICE: That's a very good point. And by the way, I just want to say one other thing. This is hard work now. We've all been feeling terrific about what's going on, but this is now hard work. This is not going to be easy and there are going to be ups and downs and it's going to go back and forth.

It's one reason to focus on the fact that elections are not the end of the story. You need then institutions. After those elections that began to mitigate against some of the harshest elements that elections, just will of the majority, if you will, might break. And that's why when Iraq, you had elections, those elections then set up a political process of putting in place institutions that would not allow extremism to emerge. Because what you're seeing in Iraq is that any tilt toward extremism is actually being checked by others. And that is -- just having an election is not enough. You do have to have these institutions start to develop as well.

The only other thing I'll say is that I tend to believe that when people start getting elected and have to start worrying about constituencies and have to start worrying not about whether their fire-breathing rhetoric against Israel is being heard, but about whether or not that person's child down the street is able to go to a good school or that road has been fixed or life is getting better, that things start to change.

The elections in the Palestinian territories were kind of interesting in this regard. You know, there were a lot of -- nine out of ten municipalities went to Hamas. Well, we've kind of gone back to see what did they talk about. Well, they talked about social services and they talked about kids going to school and things like that. I don't mean to underestimate the impact of radical Islamists having a say in the political process, but remember that the political process also has an effect on those who run in it.

QUESTION: On Korea now.

SECRETARY RICE: Yes.

QUESTION: Fascinating. Your new approach to Iran that you're now announcing today is pretty much what some of your Asian allies are recommending towards North Korea, where up till now there's been no consideration of any kind of incentives for North Korea before they decide.

Would you consider a similar approach with North Korea as well?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, North Korea is a little bit different -- a lot different -- because we have some experience from 1994 which, with what happens when you get the incentives too far out ahead of the actions by the North Koreans. And what they did was they took the carrots and never lived up to their obligations, in fact, started breaking their obligations.

We have said to the North Koreans, the last proposal the United States and the other members of the six-party talks made at the last round of the six-party talks said to the North Koreans, all right, if you're prepared to make a strategic choice then you could have multilateral security guarantees, you could have work done on how to meet your energy needs, and almost parallel to what we've said, we said we would not interfere with what others might want to do in terms of some energy fuel supply and so forth.

So, there are things out there that show the North Koreans that there is a different path available to them than the path they're currently on, which is a path of confrontation. Thus far, nobody has been able to convince them that this is a good idea. But I think you would want to be careful with the North Koreans on frontloading incentives because we know that story. We know how that worked out last time.

QUESTION: They're currently saying that they won't return to the six-party talks until you personally apologize for calling them an "outpost of tyranny." Will you apologize?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, I don't think there's any doubt that, you know, I spoke the truth. And I know they want us -- one apologizes for speaking of the truth, you know. It's sad with the North Korean people. You read these stories, you know, of people eating bark and the starvation there, and sure, the United States has tried to do its part.

But again, yes, we need to solve the near-term problem of the North Korean nuclear program, but we can't do it at the expense of being afraid to speak out about what is actually going on in North Korea.

QUESTION: A few of us at this table have been there and I think that it's even worse than what you hear.

SECRETARY RICE: Yeah.

QUESTION: Let me ask -- I want to ask you something about South Korea.

SECRETARY RICE: Yes.

QUESTION: We had an article in the paper the other day -- pardon me for having to read this. There was a quote on -- an analyst said, "South Korea is fast approaching a critical decision whether to revive its troubled alliance with the United States or dissolve their joint security agreement, expel U.S. forces from the peninsula, and seek an alliance

with China."

Would you agree with that assessment and, by extension, what is the state of the U.S.-South Korean relations?

SECRETARY RICE: Thank you. Given all that we've been doing with the South Koreans and every conversation I've had with the South Koreans, it's inconceivable to me. The South Korean relationship is probably as strong as it's ever been -- with a democratic South Korea -- and of course, it's a democracy now so there are people who question whether this is right, if the relationship is right or whether it's wrong. That's a democratic society.

But I'd just remind people, the South Koreans are in Iraq with us. And they said they went to Iraq. You ask, do the South Koreans have a near-term or a near-geographic interest in what happens in Iraq? No. They are in Iraq because they believe that that's what allies do. When the United States believes that it's got a security concern, then allies help. So I would cite that as a counter to what's said there.

QUESTION: Can I ask about China and what's going on in Asia? You're getting ready to go to the region there. I've been working on an article about the rise of China and, you know, it used to be maybe five years ago that experts would certainly talk about a Chinese amphibious assault on Taiwan as a million-man swim. Unfortunately, the trends are not good and there's a lot of people very worried about the Taiwan Strait. The CIA Director last month said that the military balance is shifting in favor of Beijing and they've just passed the anti-secession law. It seems to me that that is probably going to be the biggest flashpoint, has been, and will remain so.

How are you going to deal with that as Secretary of State in the sense of trying to manage the rise of China?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, China is clearly a rising influence -- I mean, there is no doubt about that -- economically, politically, in terms of its sort of global interests. We have Chinese police in Haiti, which, by the way, is a good thing to have them there because we need the police.

But it has to be managed a couple of ways. First of all, it's very important to be clear about American policies and American interests in the region and that means being very clear about policy, for instance, on Taiwan, where we've had and continue to have a "one China" policy where we are the kind of upright anchor, where we don't expect either side to try to exploit the situation or to provoke the other side, where we've been very clear to the Chinese that we have obligations under the Taiwan Relations Act.

And therefore, when I went to China, I said, you know, the arms sales are a matter of record and we've already agreed to do that. You know, we'll see when Taiwan is capable of actually paying for them, but we are, in fact -- I've said that clearly. So the first thing is to be clear about what our policy is.

The second is to be active in making certain that our alliances in the region are as strong as possible. That means with South Korea and I think we've actually strengthened that alliance by what Don Rumsfeld and his folks worked out by removing those 12,000 forces from South Korea, but modernizing the forces, getting out of the area around Seoul, which had been an irritant to the South Korean people. I think that alliance is in better shape now than it's been in a long -- maybe ever. And with Japan, we just had this remarkable meeting with -- Don and I met with the Minister of Defense and Foreign Affairs, where we really had a much more articulated, coherent strategy for the United States and

Japan together in the region.

The third element -- so the first is be clear about your policies, the second is strengthen your alliances. The third is that you have to recognize that China is going to be an influence and so to try to steer that influence into positive directions, not negative ones. We were proponents of Chinese accession to the WTO because in a rules-based system it's better to have a big economy in a rules-based system than not. But that means on something like intellectual property rights, that my now-Deputy, but then-USTR, Bob Zoellick, was just constant about the problem that the Chinese were causing on intellectual property rights. The President is determined to have a level playing field.

But it's a positive place for China to exercise influence through the WTO. When we go to regional fora we're pretty clear that regional fora that ought to be held are ones in which we are also an actor, not just China. So we have a lot of levers to deal with this and, of course, the American military is going to keep modernizing so that the Chinese should never get the idea that they're going to be able to have a unilateral advantage somehow in the Asia-Pacific region.

QUESTION: Just to follow up, this is kind of an al-Qaida question, but, you know, we haven't been attacked since 9/11 in a major way and that is leading some people in the government to begin to think "Well, maybe the back is broken on al-Qaida." Do you have any sense of --

SECRETARY RICE: I am never going to underestimate al-Qaida, never. I think that we've hurt them, clearly, and we've taken away a lot of their territory. They can't operate in Afghanistan with -- certainly within impunity, maybe in little, small groups, but they can't operate in Afghanistan. They can not operate in Pakistan the way they once did. They can't operate in Saudi Arabia the way that they once did. So we've hurt them and we've taken down a lot of their key leadership, and we have hurt them in terms of their financing.

But as I said when I testified before the 9/11 Commission, the problem is that we have to be right 100 percent of the time and they only have to be right once. And that's a kind of unfair fight and it's why, as much as we need to do in terms of homeland security, we really have to stay on the offense and keep taking away their territory and keep taking away their allies and making it harder for them.

QUESTION: Was John Bolton your first choice to be UN Ambassador?

SECRETARY RICE: John Bolton was my first choice to be UN Ambassador.

QUESTION: Why?

SECRETARY RICE: Because -- first of all, because I happen to work well with John. We worked together on the PSI, we worked together on global partnership, on nuclear security. And because I think John is a straightforward, tough-talking, very good diplomat and I think that's what you need at the United Nations.

He also has spent a lot of time thinking about the United Nations, about how it might change, about how -- what American leadership means to it. He was the Assistant Secretary for International Organizations in George H.W. Bush's administration. And we're going to have some difficult times ahead in figuring out how to help the UN remain relevant for the 21st century and how to deal with issues of reform.

You've got the whole UN operation saying it needs reform. And to have somebody who has thought about these issues, who is critical of many things about the UN about which, frankly, it's right to be critical, to go and lead that effort is very important. And I've told John he's going to be a fully integrated part of the team. I expect to see him often. I expect him to be back in Washington often for those discussions. It's not an outpost in New York. It's an extremely important instrument of American policy. I think he's going to be very good.

QUESTION: Before we let you get away, we've got to talk about the fun political stuff.

SECRETARY RICE: The fun political stuff?

(Laughter.)

QUESTION: And that is starting with, are you -- would you consider running for President in 2008?

SECRETARY RICE: Oh, jeez.

(Laughter.)

QUESTION: You know people are talking about it.

SECRETARY RICE: I know. I have never wanted to run for anything. I don't think I even ran for class anything when I was in school. I'm going to try to --

QUESTION: But you could save us from Hillary.

(Laughter.)

SECRETARY RICE: I'm going to try to be a really good Secretary of State. I'm going to work really hard at it. I have enormous respect for people who do run for office. It's really hard for me to imagine myself in that role.

QUESTION: So are you ruling it out?

QUESTION: Will you do a sermon?

(Laughter.)

SECRETARY RICE: Oh, that's not fair, but --

(Laughter.)

QUESTION: Newspapers aren't fair.

SECRETARY RICE: The last thing I can -- I really can't imagine it.

QUESTION: Well, let me just follow up on this because that's perfectly understandable. But one of the things people are confused about -- and they understand your foreign policy positions, you've been very clear about those -- but there is some confusion about some of your domestic policy issues. And I know that's not your bailiwick, but, for example, I interviewed Colin Powell last year as Secretary of State and he talked about how he was pro-choice, how he was pro-affirmative action, how he was against an amendment that would ban the burning of a flag, these kinds of social issues.

I googled Condi Rice and abortion and I've gotten so much murky, contradictory information. Could you clear it up for us today? Are you pro-life, are you pro-choice? What is your thought on abortion?

SECRETARY RICE: I believe -- if you go back to 2000 when I helped the President in the campaign, I said that I was, in effect, kind of Libertarian on this issue, and meaning by that, that I have been concerned about a government role in this issue. I am a strong proponent of parental choice -- of parental notification. I am a strong proponent of a ban on late-term abortion. These are all things that I think unite people and I think that that's where we should be.

I've called myself at times mildly pro-choice.

QUESTION: That was the phrase that kept coming up.

SECRETARY RICE: Yeah, mildly pro-choice. That's what that means. I think that there are a lot of things that we can unite around and that's where I would tend to be. I am very comfortable with the President's view that we have to respect and need to have a culture that respects life. This should be an issue pretty infrequently because we ought to have a culture that says that, "Who wants to have an abortion? Who wants to see a daughter or a friend or, you know, a sibling go through something like that?"

And so I am a -- I believe the President has been in exactly the right place about this, which is we have to respect the culture of life and we have to try and bring people to have respect for it and make this as rare a circumstance as possible.

QUESTION: The only reason I even brought it up was because there is a school of thought that says that no conservative Republican can be elected President if they're not firmly pro-life. I know you haven't ruled anything in or out but --

SECRETARY RICE: I'm not trying to be elected.

(Laughter.)

QUESTION: But it sounds like you do not wish to change the laws that now allow (inaudible).

SECRETARY RICE: Well, I don't spend my entire life thinking about these issues. You know, I spend my time really

thinking about the foreign policy issues. But you know that I'm a deeply religious person and so, from my point of view, these extremely difficult moral issues where we have -- where we're facing issues with technology and the prolongation of life and the fact that very, very young babies are able to survive now, very small babies are able to survive; these are great moral issues.

What I do think is that we should not have the federal government in a position where it is forcing its views on one side or the other. So, for instance, I've tended to agree with those who do not favor federal funding for abortion because I believe that those who hold a strong moral view on the other side should not be forced to fund it.

QUESTION: You mentioned your deep religious faith. We talked to the President the other day in our interview with him and he talked about how his faith -- how it bears on the conduct of his duties. Could you talk about how your faith bears on your duties as Secretary of State and how?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, first, my faith is a part of everything that I do. You know, it's integral to who I am and it's not something that I can sit outside or set outside of anything that I do because it's so integral to who I am. And prayer is very important to me and a belief that if you ask for it, you will be guided. Now, that doesn't mean that I think that God will tell me what to do on, you know, the Iran nuclear problem. That's not how I see it. But I do believe very strongly that if you are a prayerful and faithful person, that that is a help in guiding us, as imperfect beings, to have to deal with extremely difficult and consequential matters.

As an American, when I talk to others out there in the world, particularly people who are going through processes of democratization, I would be the first to say that I think America has it right in that you can worship freely in any way that you wish, but you can also choose not to worship if you wish, and that you can choose to believe or you can choose not to believe, and that that is the genius of the American system, that somebody as deeply religious as I am is a fully appreciated and respected American as someone who has no faith at all.

So I can speak in terms of faith and my personal circumstances, but I can also, I think, speak from the perspective of an American, where I think we've gotten this balance right.

QUESTION: Let me ask one last foreign policy issues. Regarding the war on terror and the President's powers in time of war, putting aside the war in Iraq and the war in Afghanistan, but only about the more general war on terror, is it your understanding that this is a war for the legal purposes or for the President being able to have greater powers during a wartime than during peacetimes?

SECRETARY RICE: I think we -- I think that this is, in effect, a wartime situation and the --

QUESTION: So that the legal powers that a president like Roosevelt had during World War II --

SECRETARY RICE: I believe that we have struck the right balance here. Obviously, it's a different kind of war.

QUESTION: I understand that.

SECRETARY RICE: But yes, I do believe that the President has different powers than he would have in peacetime.

QUESTION: Thank you.

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