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Interview on CBS's Face the Nation with Bob Schieffer and Doyle McManus

Secretary Condoleezza Rice

Washington, DC

March 13, 2005

(10:30 a.m. EST)

MR. SCHIEFFER: And good morning again. With us, the Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. Joining in the questioning is Doyle McManus of the *Los Angeles Times*.

Madame Secretary, I must say you got the kind of reception last night at the Gridiron that Secretaries of State don't often get around here. I believe it says, "Careful, that dish is hot -- at the Gridiron Dinner, hams glazed over with Condi." When you walked in, people in the lobby were shouting, "Condi, Condi, Condi." How do you react to that sort of thing?

SECRETARY RICE: Oh, I think the lesson here is never wear red, apparently. (Laughter.) No, it's very nice. People were very friendly and it's very nice to have people be friendly at --

MR. SCHIEFFER: Well, I must say you caused quite a commotion in the lobby of that hotel last night.

Well, let's get serious here. Syria has agreed to pull a third of its troops out of Lebanon by the end of the month. They are talking about putting the rest of the troops, moving them back. You have been asking for a timetable and been telling Syria to get out of Lebanon. Does this meet what the administration has been demanding?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, first of all, we'll have to talk with Mr. Larsen to see precisely what has happened here. None of us have had an opportunity to talk with him. There are obviously some positive elements of this. The fact that it is said to be both troops and security personnel --that is, intelligence officers -- because in many ways the intelligence officers are as important or more important than the troops. It's useful that they would be pulling completely out of Lebanon these forces.

But there needs to be full and complete compliance with 1559 and that means that all troops need to be out and they need

to be out on a timetable that is expeditious. And so we will be talking with Mr. Larsen about this.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Why is it important for Syria to get out of Lebanon?

SECRETARY RICE: It's important for Syria to get out of Lebanon so that the Lebanese people can chart a political future for themselves without foreign interference and without this overhang that has been Syrian troops and Syrian security personnel. It's really not even possible to know about the balance of forces in the country when you have such a heavy presence of security and military personnel from a foreign power. And the Lebanese people clearly have a lot of divisions and difficulties to work through but they can't do it as a Lebanese process when you have Syrian forces in the country.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Let me just ask you about this whole question of Hezbollah, which in this country we look on as a terrorist organization, yet it appears that they're a major political force in Lebanon. Will the United States favor a government in Lebanon if it includes Hezbollah? Are they a legitimate political party?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, our view of Hezbollah has not changed and that needs to be made clear. But we are concentrating on getting the Syrian forces out because that will then allow a Lebanon process in which you can see what the balance of forces actually is and elections also can be a change agent in and of themselves. They can begin to change the political circumstances, the framework in which politics goes on. It goes without saying that a democratic society in which you have rule of law cannot ultimately have groups that resort to violence outside of the political framework.

MR. SCHIEFFER: But Israel considers them a threat.

SECRETARY RICE: Well, we consider them a terrorist organization too and we've been very clear about that. But so much is happening on the ground very quickly here and clearly it will be a better place if the Syrian forces are out and if Lebanon is a stable, democratic state I think you will start to see a framework in which a lot of this gets resolved. And you just -- you can't have a situation ultimately, in which you have organizations that resort to violence outside of the rule of law.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Doyle.

MR. MCMANUS: If a new Lebanese government is elected and it includes Hezbollah in it, will you deal with that part of that government?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, Doyle, let us do first things first. Let's get Syrian forces out. Let's see what that produces in terms of the Lebanese political space, so to speak. They're going to have free and fair elections. One interesting thing about elections is it tends to change the conversation from grand slogans and grand rhetoric to, "What are you going to do for the good of the people and to make people safer, more secure and prosperous?" And it's a rare circumstance in which people really want to see their children blown up, their political future one that is covered by violence. When ordinary people can get to be a part of this process, it may be a very different process.

MR. SCHIEFFER: But just to go back, are you optimistic or you look with favor on what the Syrians have announced? Are you just still in a wait-and-see mode?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, I think it's a good step. I don't know if it is a step that is really going to bring them fully into compliance with 1559 but there's no doubt that this is a positive development.

MR. MCMANUS: Secretary Rice, let me switch to Iran for a moment. The administration has now given the Europeans an endorsement for offering the Iranians incentives to -- positive incentives if they stop their nuclear program. But you haven't put a timeline down. You've been very careful not to put a timeline down. They're still working on nuclear weapons so time is not on our side. Are you giving a signal that the Europeans have an indefinite amount of time to work on this?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, I don't think anyone wants an indefinite amount of time. This has been going on for some time. And the question is: What are the Iranians going to do? Are the Iranians going to finally demonstrate that they intend to live up to their international obligations? I would think they would want to do that sooner rather than later, given that everybody in the world appears suspicious now of Iranian activities.

But we had said some time ago that we supported the diplomacy that the Europeans were involved in, that this needs to have a diplomatic solution. What the President did this week was to make that support more active by withdrawing our objection to a couple of things that the Europeans would like to offer in a package to the Iranians. So there's no change here in terms of supporting diplomacy. We've been supportive of it all along. This just makes it more active.

And I think, Doyle, it gives a more common approach, a more common front. The conversation had started to turn to what would the United States do. This puts the spotlight back on what will the Iranians do.

MR. MCMANUS: I kind of noticed though that you didn't get any closer to a timeline. How long should we wait to get a positive answer from Iran? Is a year too long?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, this is a negotiated -- a negotiating process. Look, the Iranians are in suspension at this point in time and that's important. But everybody understands that there has to be a permanent arrangement in which the Iranians forego the means by which to develop nuclear weapons, and that needs to happen sooner rather than later.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Madame Secretary, according to the *Times of London* this morning, Israel has drawn up secret plans for a combined air and ground attack on targets in Iran if diplomacy fails to halt the Iranian nuclear programs.

SECRETARY RICE: Well, I'm not privy to Iranian -- or to Israeli planning. But I will just say that we believe in the United States, the President believes, that there is an opportunity to resolve this diplomatically. And we have many other steps at our disposal -- the UN Security Council, a number of other steps within the Security Council.

The President, of course, doesn't take any options off the table, but I think he's made very clear that from our point of view this is a problem that can be resolved diplomatically.

MR. SCHIEFFER: But so far Iran seems to dismiss the offers that we have made as "too insignificant" to talk about.

SECRETARY RICE: Well, the Iranians, I am quite certain, are uncomfortable with the notion that they have failed to split the United States and Europe on this matter. They now have a united front. And by the way, the Russians too have, in the way that they've structured their Bushehr nuclear reactor deal with the Iranians, demonstrated, we believe, that they

also do not believe that the Iranians should have this kind of activity. That's why they would provide fuel and take back spent fuel rods.

So the Iranians are facing a common front. Everybody told President Bush when he was in Europe -- President Chirac, Chancellor Schroeder, Prime Minister Blair, President Putin -- Iran must not get a nuclear weapon. And so the Iranians now have to demonstrate that they are not going to seek a nuclear weapon.

MR. SCHIEFFER: I have to ask you about this. You have visited several of the Sunday programs this morning and I know you have said you are not going to run for President, you have no intention of running for President, even though there are a lot of those rumors out there.

Why?

SECRETARY RICE: I've never wanted to run for anything, Bob. I don't think I ran for class president at any time. I was sort of searching my memory banks. I don't think I even ran for class president at any point.

Look, I know what it takes to run for President. I've watched it up close a couple of times. I have enormous respect for people who will do that. But I want to do what I'm doing. I love being Secretary of State thus far. I liked being National Security Advisor. And one of these days very soon I'm going to want to return and be an academic again and get back to the California life and to the world of ideas.

MR. SCHIEFFER: All right. Madame Secretary, thanks so much for being with us.

SECRETARY RICE: Thank you.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Always glad to have you.

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