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Interview With Andrea Koppel of CNN

Secretary Condoleezza Rice

London, England
October 15, 2005

QUESTION: You've just come from meetings with President Putin and Foreign Minister Lavrov. When they came out and spoke to reporters, they indicated that they're clearly in no hurry to refer Iran to the UN Security Council. How much does that undermine U.S. efforts and EU efforts to turn up the heat on Iran?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, the Iranians are under plenty of heat. They faced a resolution a couple of weeks ago in the Board of Governors that I think was a surprise to the Iranians because the only ones who voted against the noncompliance finding and the possibility of referral was Venezuela. The Russians abstained, and an abstention is a wait and see. And the wait and see is can the Iranians use the next period of time to get back into negotiations with the international community that will come to a solution on Iran's civil nuclear ambitions that will give confidence to the international community.

QUESTION: And you, in fact, had said that that meeting, that next IAEA meeting on November 24th, is crucial to finding out whether or not the Iranians are serious about coming back into compliance. Do you still feel that way? Do you feel that that is the deadline to send it to the UN?

SECRETARY RICE: I haven't set deadlines. I do think that every meeting of the IAEA Board of Governors, given the course of the Iranian events, is extremely important, indeed crucial. But we will, with our allies, and the EU-3 is still in the lead on this because they are the ones on whom the Iranians walked out, and so we will continue to work with them to determine the best course. As the French Foreign Minister said yesterday, the Security Council is a real possibility and we're going to keep it as a real possibility, but at a time of our choosing.

QUESTION: Right. But the day after the last IAEA Board of Governors meeting some of the senior officials in your Department were briefing reporters, and I was among them, and they said effectively - come the next board meeting in November, the next stop if Iran hasn't come into compliance and hasn't agreed to come back to negotiations is the UN Security Council.

SECRETARY RICE: Well, certainly if there's been no movement and the Iranians continue to say to the world they are going to threaten instead of coming back to negotiations, we may well be in the position where the Security Council is the appropriate step.

QUESTION: So what are the triggers?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, you know, Andrea, that I don't like to talk in terms of triggers and red lines and deadlines, because that's not how diplomacy works. What we said to the Iranians and the international community has said to the Iranians in the strongest possible terms is get back into negotiations; that's your course ahead.

Now, in the first days after the vote, the Iranians threatened all kinds of things. They were going to pull out of the additional protocol, they were going to start enriching again, they were going to do all kinds of things. More recently, they've been saying, well, perhaps they'd rather negotiate. So let's see where we are in a few weeks.

QUESTION: But Madame Secretary, you know very well from having watched this country for the last five years that they are very good at playing one side against the other. Aren't you afraid that this is going to be drawn out and that they're going to be playing for time?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, at this point, the Iranians, of course, are not enriching and reprocessing, which is extremely important. I don't want anyone to underestimate the pressure that the Iranians are under, not just from the vote but from concerted and consistent efforts that we know are being carried on with the Iranians by a wide variety of parties to tell them that they have one course and one course only, and that's to find a satisfactory solution to the negotiation. If not, I am quite confident they're going to be referred to the Security Council.

QUESTION: What are the consequences if they don't give -- basically come back to negotiations by November 24th? Are there any?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, I'm not going to set any deadlines, but it's quite clear in what the Foreign Minister in France said yesterday and what the IAEA Board of Governors resolution says that the Iranians have got to come back to negotiations. They've not just got to come back to negotiations; they've got to come back seriously to negotiations.

QUESTION: And what is an indication -- how can they show they're serious?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, it would help if they would come back to negotiations without continuing the kind of threats that their President levied against the international community when he spoke at the United Nations General Assembly. And indeed, they've backed off some of those threats.

But the Iranians know what they need to do. They need to find a solution that if they're going to pursue civil nuclear power, and we don't believe they need to, but if they're going to pursue civil nuclear power, that does it in a way that gives confidence to the international community that they're not going to use that technology to build nuclear weapons. That means the fuel cycle.

QUESTION: So did you and the Russians discuss any ideas as to how if they're going to continue -- the Iranians -- with that civil nuclear program, they might dispose of that fuel?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, we are very aware of the fact that the Russians are having conversations. I'm not going to talk about the Russians' conversations with the Iranians. That's for the Russians to do. But we know how the Russians structured the Bushehr deal. The Bushehr civil nuclear plant that the Russians are under contract to build for the Iranians has what is called a fuel take-back provision, meaning that they will help the Iranians with the power generation that the fuel -- that the generator would give, but that the fuel would be taken back to Russia. That would seriously reduce the proliferation risk of having a civil nuclear power plant in Iran.

QUESTION: And did the Russians raise that with you today or did you raise it with them?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, we've talked about this on numerous occasions and we talked about it again today. But we have to remember that right now the problem for the Iranians is that they are not in compliance, they are not in good standing with the international community. There are multiple unanswered questions about why the Iranians were lying about their activities 18 years ago until the present of how certain things happened, of why the enrichment activities were discovered when they were unveiled by Iranian opposition, why none of that was reported to the IAEA. That's the question that's on the table.

QUESTION: Ambassador Bolton, the U.S. Ambassador to the UN, today said that the United States was afraid that if Iran did have nuclear weapons it would give them to terrorists. Do you agree?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, whenever you have nuclear weapons in the hands of a state that is irresponsible where it comes to terrorism, that is certainly a concern. The Iranians have plenty of terrorist friends: Hezbollah. They've supplied terrorist groups within the Palestinian territories. They are, to our classification, a state sponsor of terror.

So as the President has said many times, our worst nightmare is nuclear weapons or nuclear materials in the hands of terrorists. The Iranians support terrorism. So it's a natural concern that if the Iranians, if there's proliferation in Iran, that some link with terrorism is entirely possible.

QUESTION: I want to ask you about the elections in Iraq today on the referendum. Before the referendum took place, a senior official in your Department said that it didn't really matter whether or not the referendum went well or not that violence was going to increase and that it was going to be a number of years before the political and economic situation could stabilize such that basically the situation were calm. What does that mean for American troops in Iraq?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, first of all, it is absolutely true that a few terrorists can continue violence against innocent people. It doesn't take many people to strap a suicide bomb onto someone and blow up schoolchildren. That doesn't take a lot of people. But what the terrorists are facing is that the Iraqi political process is continuing and Iraqis are demonstrating every day that they see their future as linked to the political process. And this referendum is an important step, an important milestone, but they have elections in December for the election of a permanent government.

The Iraqis have also been training their forces. We have been training their forces and the coalition has been training their forces. And so over time they will be able to fight the terrorists, stand up and fight the terrorists themselves. They

are already making great progress. In many cases they've been able to fight on their own. In some cases they fight with us. But if you look at a place like Talafar, that was really a triumph for the Iraqi security forces where they were able to make a difference.

So yes, Iraq has a long road ahead to full stability and democracy and prosperity. Everybody understands that. But what is at stake here is an Iraq that will either be a stabilizing force in a different kind of Middle East, a Middle East in which we will not have to see the forces of evil and the forces of hatred produce suicide bombers in New York and in London, or an Iraq that is unable to stabilize, where the Zarqawis of the world become the masters of Iraq. That's what's at stake.

And we strongly believe that the Iraqis have every probability of achieving that stability, but they need our help. They don't need our help alone. They need to take responsibility themselves and they're doing that. But there is a great deal at stake here and if we leave this work prematurely, not only are we going to condemn generations of Iraqis and generations of people in the Middle East to fear and desperation, we're going to condemn generations of Americans to insecurity and fear.

QUESTION: I know we're out of time. I just need very quickly your response, your reaction to today's referendum.

SECRETARY RICE: The referendum today was an important step forward for the Iraqi people. What's remarkable is that they have been on a political course since the creation of the Transitional Administrative Law before the occupation ended and before sovereignty was transferred to Iraq, and they've taken it step by step. They had elections in January. They wrote a constitution. Now they had a referendum on that constitution. Then they're going to have elections for a permanent government. This is a process that has momentum and Iraqis know where their future is. There are a few people who are going to try to stop them and who are going to succeed in carrying out spectacular violent acts, but the future of Iraq is in the political process and a referendum like today, where Iraqis participated in large numbers, is very bad news for the terrorists.

QUESTION: Madame Secretary, thank you very much.

SECRETARY RICE: Thank you.

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