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Interview on CBS Evening News With John Roberts

Secretary Condoleezza Rice

Washington, DC
January 12, 2006

QUESTION: First of all, Madame Secretary, thanks very much for taking time out of your busy day to be with us.

SECRETARY RICE: Thanks, John. Glad to be with you.

QUESTION: I always appreciate it. Let me ask you, first of all, how would you characterize Iran's behavior this week?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, the entire world is characterizing Iran's behavior as defiant, as having taken none of the signals that have been given to Iran that it needs to find a solution, a negotiated solution. They were given a chance by the EU-3, the Europeans. They were given a chance by the Russians to have a solution. And Iran has clearly decided that it's going to defy the international community.

And so, taken together with many of the things that Iran's president has been saying recently, I think we have an Iranian regime that is determined to be on the wrong side of the international community and I think they're going to have to bear the consequences of that.

QUESTION: You have called their actions dangerous and provocative. What is the U.S. prepared to do?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, the United States is working very closely with the Europeans, with the Russians, with other members of the international community, with the IAEA, the International Atomic Energy Agency, to -- now, I think we're going to have to refer Iran to the Security Council.

And the reason that you do that, John, is because once you're in the Security Council, the Security Council has authority to do a whole host of things, including, if necessary, to compel a member state to go with the just demands of

the international community. So, the first step is going to be an extraordinary meeting of the Board of Governors of the Atomic Energy Agency, then, I believe, followed by a referral of the Iranian case to the Security Council.

QUESTION: You have said that a very important threshold has been crossed here. What are you saying to the Iranians? Basically, "You're misbehaving, you have to understand that you're misbehaving or else?"

SECRETARY RICE: Yes. Well, I think what we're saying to the Iranians and I want -- to the Iranian regime -- and I want to be very clear, we don't want to isolate the Iranian people. They deserve better than they have in this regime, but their regime has isolated Iran. And what the world is now saying to the Iranians is, "We're not going to allow you to engage in a nuclear technological development that can lead to a nuclear weapon," because nobody trusts the Iranians with nuclear technology.

Everybody gave them a chance to have civilian nuclear power without the proliferation risks of having what we call the entire fuel cycle; that is, the ability to enrich and reprocess. They refused the European Union's very generous offer, which also would have had all kinds of trade benefits attached to it. The Russians came up with another idea of a kind of joint venture. They showed little interest in that.

Instead, they broke a moratorium on enrichment and reprocessing activities at their major plant in Iran. They did it by breaking the seals that the International Atomic Energy Agency had put on those facilities and they essentially said to the world, "We're not listening. We have no intention of going with the just demands of the world." And so, now, the world is reacting.

QUESTION: Are you convinced this is about nuclear weapons, despite Iran's protestations to the contrary?

SECRETARY RICE: Absolutely. This must be about nuclear weapons, because they had every opportunity for civilian nuclear power with the provisions that the European Union was offering, with the provisions that the Russians were offering. If this was about civil nuclear power, and nobody's arguing that -- we don't think, by the way, Iran needs civil nuclear power, given that they're one of the world's large oil producers.

But let's say that they wanted civil nuclear power. They had every chance to have it without the kind of proliferation risks that the world is unwilling to take, because, John, this has a long history. Iran has, for 18 years, been engaged in surreptitious activities that they were not reporting to the IAEA. They were found out. They didn't report it. They were found out. So clearly, they have been engaging with the intention to do -- to build a nuclear weapon.

QUESTION: Iranian officials were pretty cavalier about all of this today. They said, "We're not worried about a Security Council referral." Should they be?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, of course they should be worried about a Security Council referral and I think they are worried about a Security Council referral. They've done everything that they can to avoid it. They miscalculated. They believed that they could face down the international system. I don't think they're going to succeed in facing down the international system.

And when you're in the Security Council, you are essentially a state that has been declared a regime that is in

noncompliance with your obligations. That carries certain risks. That carries certain consequences. We will go through a series of steps. Nobody is saying that there have to be immediate sanctions in the Security Council. Everybody wants to give the Iranians a chance to show us -- to reconsider their position.

But the Security Council has, in its arrow -- in its quiver, many, many more means of authority, many other levers that the International Atomic Energy Agency does not have on its own.

QUESTION: Madame Secretary, is anything going to happen on this at the Security Council? And I ask because a similar referral on North Korea has been before the Council for three years and nothing's happened on it.

SECRETARY RICE: Well, John, it is true that the North Koreans were also referred, but North Korea is a somewhat different state. North Korea thrives on isolation. Clearly, this is a regime that is probably the most -- certainly the most closed regime in the world. The Iranian people don't deserve this kind of isolation. People go back and forth to Iran. Iran is a great civilization. This is a place that has normal relations with a lot of countries in the world, that has trade ties with a number of countries in the world.

I do not think that the Iranian regime can afford the kind of isolation that it is now flirting with, in the way that even the North Korean regime has been able to do.

QUESTION: Do you have the votes at the Security Council for sanctions, should it come to that?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, we believe that we certainly have the votes to refer to the Security Council and then, we're going to have consultations about what to do next. There is a menu of options before the Security Council of what to do. I don't think anyone is talking about sanctions today. We're talking now about the referral and then we'll see what's necessary.

Some of this will depend on Iranian behavior. Iran is still going to have an opportunity to return to negotiations. This is a new phase of the diplomacy. I've heard people say, "Well, diplomacy has failed." No; this particular set of negotiations with the EU-3 is at a dead end, as the German Foreign Minister said. But we are open to continuing to give the Iranians a chance to suspend their activities, to go back to negotiations. Everybody wants to see that.

But if they don't, there are many graduated steps that the Security Council can take to compel Iranian compliance.

QUESTION: Iran's new president, Mahmud Ahmadi-Nejad, is he a dangerous man?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, he's certainly an unusual one for a president and yes, I think he's dangerous. I think it's dangerous to say things like you want to see a member state of the UN wiped off the map?

QUESTION: Israel?

SECRETARY RICE: Israel. I think it's dangerous to talk about -- there was no Holocaust or it's been exaggerated. It's dangerous because these are thoughts and words that have consequences. It's had a consequence for Iran to the

degree that anybody who thought Iran might be a state that could pursue normal relations -- his activities and his words have really called that into question.

QUESTION: This Administration has said repeatedly it wants to solve this diplomatically. Is force off the table?

SECRETARY RICE: John, the President of the United States never takes any of his options off the table and nobody would want the President to do that. We are on a diplomatic track and it's not on the agenda at this point to move from that diplomatic track, but we believe that if the international community remains united, if the international community is as forceful as it has been today in condemning what Iran does, and if the international community is willing to follow that up with actions, we can solve this diplomatically.

QUESTION: Can the Administration manage another international hotspot with Iraq taking up so much of the plate?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, Iraq is important and it's a key goal to have a democratic and stable Iraq. But of course, we do other things as well. I think we've seen the diplomacy that the Administration has been involved in since March, supporting the EU-3 negotiations, leading to a very fruitful outcome today where it's Iran that is isolated, not the United States.

This President has the best relationship with India, with China that any president has had. We have an active process to try to move the Middle East peace process forward. And of course, we're doing good work in Afghanistan and in other parts of the world too. Of course, we can deal with this.

QUESTION: One last question if I could. How concerned are you that Israel may launch a preemptive strike if it feels that Iran is within reach of developing a nuclear weapon?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, the Israelis have real security interests here and --

QUESTION: And how concerned are you about that?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, we talk to them all the time. I don't think it's useful to speculate on this issue, but I do think that the Israelis will be heartened by the response of the international community today that effectively says, "We are not prepared to tolerate Iran's march toward a nuclear weapon."

QUESTION: There are some people in this Administration who believe a preemptive strike by Israel would be disastrous.

SECRETARY RICE: Well, John, what this speaks to -- all of the talk that this sometimes brings is the destabilizing effect that an Iranian nuclear weapon would have in this already very volatile region. And that's why we're so focused on bringing a diplomatic solution to the problem.

QUESTION: Madame Secretary, thank you again for your time.

SECRETARY RICE: Thank you, John.

QUESTION: Pleasure seeing you again.

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