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Interview With Mohamed Chebaro of Al Arabiyah TV

Secretary Condoleezza Rice

London, England
January 30, 2006

QUESTION: Thank you for this interview with Arabiya. You're in London for what seems to be intensive talks on Middle East issues and also participation in Afghanistan conference, especially Iran and the P-5 meeting is of interest to us. So if we start with Iran, what are you hoping to achieve from this P-5 meeting today?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, clearly, the international community has come together to say to the Iranians that they need to find a way to have peaceful nuclear energy, if that is what they desire, but in a way that removes proliferation risk associated with the current Iranian course, the course that they're on. Iran has shown no evidence that they are prepared to do what the international community is asking them to do. So this P-5 meeting tonight, I think will assess the situation. We will want to hear from everyone. But we have a Board of Governors meeting coming up in a few days and I think it's very important that Iran get a very strong message from the international community that it cannot continue on the course that it's on.

QUESTION: I mean, is the transfer of the Iran nuclear forum, I mean, and to stop Iran through Security Council, is it inevitable now? I mean, the shift of this fight to the Security Council, is it inevitable?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, when the European 3 in Berlin came out and asked for this extraordinary meeting of the Board of Governors, they did so, so there has there could be a referral by the Security Council. I would like to remind people that several months ago, we actually had a resolution to refer Iran to the Security Council, but decided to not act on that resolution, so that Iran would have time to demonstrate that it was prepared to return to the talks with the EU-3 or perhaps look at the Russian proposal seriously. Instead, Iran decided to end its moratorium on enrichment and reprocessing, it broke the seals unilaterally on the equipment for those experiments. So Iran has given the world a very good reason now to take the next step, put this in the Security Council where the diplomacy doesn't end, but it begins a new phase, a phase in which the weight of the Security Council can be brought to bear to help the IAEA with its work.

QUESTION: I mean, talks have been going on for more than two years. And Secretary of State -- Secretary of State



Jack Straw of Britain said in Davos that they have been really the most difficult talks he's ever gone through. But also there have been talks that not enough incentives and assurances on the security for Iran been given during these talks. Are you hoping maybe to offer Iran other incentive to bring them around?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, the Iranians have plenty of incentives. First of all, the package that the European 3 put on the table -- trade relations, political relations -- it was very broad. And --

QUESTION: It's a an American --

SECRETARY RICE: Well, but the United States has backed that and for instance, Iran had wanted to be -- to apply to the World Trade Organization. The United States removed its objections so that that could take place. But this isn't an issue of incentives for Iran. The Iranian incentive should be to get back into good standing in the international community and that means to accept a proposal for peaceful nuclear energy development that does not raise proliferation concerns by giving Iran access to enriching and reprocessing technology. That's really what this is about. It's that simple. The Iranians have many proposals that they could accept. The Russians, for instance, when they designed their Bushehr reactor, designed it in a way that they could bring the fuel back to Russia after the reactor is fired. So there are lots of options for the Iranians. The incentive is for Iran to get back on the right side of the international community.

QUESTION: Do you believe that a nuclear-powered Iran is a reversible process?

SECRETARY RICE: I am quite certain that if the international community really stands firm and has a coherent approach, that this march toward a nuclear weapon for Iran can be arrested because Iran has a lot to lose from isolation in the international community. The Iranian people deserve better than their regime is giving them. They deserve better than being led down a path where they're going to get neither peaceful nuclear energy nor access to the international system. And no one wants to isolate the Iranian people. The Iranian people are not the problem here, but the Iranian regime is undertaking policies that are going to isolate Iran; that are going to result in the inability of Iran to do the things that it needs to do.

QUESTION: Iran has been isolated according to the Iranian diplomacy, have been isolated, especially by the U.S. since 1981. So what more isolation or sanction will do? They are under a certain kind of sanction?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, the United States and Iran have a particular relationship going back to the seizure of our embassy at the end of the 1970s. And yes, there is a lot of history between the United States and Iran. But Iraq* has not been isolated from Europe. It has not been isolated from Russia. It has trade relations. It has been able to have people to come to these countries.

We in the United States would like to see a way that the Iranian people are not isolated from America. I would love to see Iranian soccer players playing in the United States. I would love to see Iranian university students coming to the United States. The Iranian people should not be isolated. But the Iranian regime has not -- we don't just have a nuclear weapons problem, we have a problem with terrorism with the Iranian regimes, support for Palestinian rejectionist groups, support for Hezbollah and violent activities. And of course, Iran's own history in the last several years has been to move back from any reformist tendencies domestically that might have been there.

QUESTION: Many people that never spoke of anything short of recognizing that a (inaudible) regime of Iran would not form a secure or assurances to this regime. What do you say to that?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, I would say that this regime has been offered an awful lot -- there's an awful lot on the table. But this an issue of behavior. There is no reason for Iran to fund terrorist organizations that are frustrating the hopes of the Palestinian people for peace; that are frustrating the hopes of the Lebanese people for peace. There's no reason for Iran to support insurgent activity in Iraq that ends up in the deaths of innocent Iraqis. If these behaviors and these policies change, I think Iran will start to move back to a place where it is no longer isolated.

QUESTION: What would you do if Israel takes some of the nuclear facilities -- nuclear facilities of Iran?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, I think it's best not to get involved in hypotheticals, but that people even talk about such, says -- speaks to the volatility of an Iranian nuclear weapon. And this is not just an issue of Israel. I'm quite certain that you will have a much more insecure Middle East as other states, who worry about Iran's policies, try and develop their own options.

QUESTION: I'll move on to the Hamas issue and the election of Palestine (inaudible). I'll read my report: "Free and fair election led to the right of Islamists to power in Iraq and today in Palestine." Are you likely to review your approach towards reform in the Middle East and democracy?

SECRETARY RICE: I think that the fact that democratic elections have taken place in Iraq three times and in the Palestinian territories twice is a very good thing. I would quote a little bit; I think in Iraq what we have is the rise of a set of powers who are now looking to form a unity government. And the Iraqi constitution guarantees all Iraqis access, not just those who are Islamists. Though clearly, the Islamists play an important role in Iraq. I think that the way the United States has dealt with these elections, the fact that we have welcomed the Palestinian elections that were nonviolent, says -- should say to the world that we're quite serious about democracy.

The problem with the Middle East over the last 60 years is the authoritarian governments have not given space to legitimate political development. And the only options for people have been extremism and in some cases extreme violence or to live within an existence that would not allow expression of their political views. Now those systems are opening up. And I think you will see that the range of parties, the range of views that now start to get represented in Middle East politics is going to expand and it's going to get greater.

We have nothing to fear from democratic processes. That's why we have supported democratic processes. I would say to anyone who wins in a democratic process that they then have an obligation to govern democratically and the same process that has allowed parties to come into power have to be preserved, opposition has to be preserved so that others can come into power as well. That is an obligation of participating in a democratic process. That is why we have talked so much about the disarmament of militias. You cannot have a democratic process in which a party that is in government also maintains the right to violence. That isn't fair to those who would be in opposition.

So it is a complex situation, but I think it's a much better one for the Middle East. And on Hamas, of course, Hamas now, I think, will face some very difficult choices. The Palestinian people, the Palestinian Authority, the PLO before them, undertook a series of obligations starting with Oslo, going up through the roadmap, in order to find a solution for

peace that would be a two-state solution. The right of Israel to exist has simply got to be acknowledged. Putting away violence and eschewing violence has simply got to happen. Disarmament of militias is an obligation that the Palestinians have taken on over a long period of time.

You can't have one foot in politics and one foot in terror. But it is a positive development in the Middle East that people are going to the ballot box. Those who win have now got to be held to a very high standard of behavior.

QUESTION: So what will you ask from Hamas to do next?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, I think the key here is that Hamas came to power because the Palestinian people were clearly looking for change. They had dealt with too many years of corruption and ineptitude and they were looking for change. They're also looking for peace. They're also looking for a peaceful life and a peaceful life is only going to be obtained in a two-state solution with Israel and that's an obligation now of governing, too. And so that Israel should be recognized, that violence has to be renounced, that militias have to be disarmed and that there has to be a recognition of all the obligations that the Palestinians have taken on before. I think it's now a responsibility of governing.

QUESTION: I mean, today, Ehud Olmert, the acting Prime Minister of Israel, froze or asked to freeze the tax revenue for the Palestinians. Israel started clearly some step to strike at the Palestinians. U.S. and EU might follow suit because of Hamas and (inaudible). Many say that this will consider the final blow to the peace process and also to President Mahmoud Abbas and whatever the PNA that existed in the last ten years.

SECRETARY RICE: Well, it does matter. First, let's remember that Mahmoud Abbas was elected in his own right by the Palestinian people more than a year ago. He was elected by, I think it was 62 or 63 percent of the vote and he was elected on a peace platform and we need to keep that in mind. I think we will want to review the obligations that we have to the caretaker government prior to the formation of a new government. And I want to say about President Abbas and his team, they did make some changes. The Finance Ministry got much, much better and much more transparent and people began to get confidence in it. They tried to make some changes on the security front. They didn't do enough but they did make some changes. I think we will also want to be -- we know that the Palestinian people have humanitarian needs and we will want to look at that. But the United States, many people will find, that most of the -- that Europe and others will not be able to have assistance programs with a government that is run by a terrorist organization. It's just going to be -- that would be the case.

But the Palestinian people deserve to have a better life. And if their leadership can find a way to live up to the obligations that have been undertaken, to peace, to the existence of Israel, to renouncing violence, I think there's a very good way forward.

QUESTION: I would just recall that (inaudible). And you don't want to say anything about the Quartet meeting tonight?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, the Quartet meeting will take up these issues, but I think you've been seeing consistent statements from the international community. It's a time for the international community to stand strong in terms of principle because Hamas had some choices to make and some difficult choices to make. But the Palestinian people now deserve an opportunity to have a government that can fulfill their aspirations for peace.

QUESTION: But don't you think that Hamas in power would be more responsible, especially that (inaudible)?

SECRETARY RICE: I think that's where we are, right? Thank you.

QUESTION: Thank you.

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* But Iran has not been isolated from Europe

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