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## Interview With CBS Evening News

### Secretary Condoleezza Rice

Washington, DC

May 31, 2006

**QUESTION:** Let me start off by asking you why did the U.S. change its thinking as far as interfacing with Iran?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Well, the President has been determined to support the negotiations that were going on between the European Union three and the Iranians for more than a year now. We've been supporting those negotiations. We've been, in some sense, party in that we were discussing and knowing what was going on at the table. And this is another way now, a more effective way, more dynamic way to support those negotiations.

**QUESTION:** But it's clearly a break in strategy.

**SECRETARY RICE:** Well, but the timing is important because Iran was, after having broken negotiations with the Europeans, steadily moving along in its nuclear programs, steadily improving its capability, one day saying, "oh, we'll negotiate" or "we're interested in the Russian proposal," but it was time to know whether negotiations are a reality or not, whether there's a real option there or not. And this really does now confront Iran with a choice: Suspend your enrichment activities; and have negotiations, including with the United States at the table. It's a kind of moment of truth for Iran.

**QUESTION:** Madame Secretary, several weeks ago, a letter comes from the President of Iran to the President of the United States. And the Administration refuses to use that as an overture for negotiations.

**SECRETARY RICE:** We read the letter and I have to say that this letter which was somewhat philosophical, had a lot of religious overtones, but mostly was a broadside attack on the President, American policy, and, by the way, on democratic liberal institutions in general, democratic states, didn't seem like an opening.

**QUESTION:** But was there a sense after you elected not to use that letter as an opening that pressure from the

world community required the administration to do something different.

**SECRETARY RICE:** Well, we have been talking about this now for some time, for at least a few months, how to really get to the place that we know whether or not the negotiations are real or not. And if we don't, if the negotiations are not real, then we have to be committed to a track of bringing more pressure on Iran through the Security Council so that they have another reason to change their minds. And that was the logic here. We've talked a lot to our allies. They are pleased that we're going to enter the negotiations. But we had been working steadily along with them for sometime in these negotiations.

**QUESTION:** I can't imagine that you would have said what you said today without some assurance from the Russians and the Chinese that they will back the idea of sanctions, if Iran does not comply.

**SECRETARY RICE:** Well, we are very clear with our partners and that includes the Russians and Chinese that there ought to be a package; that that package ought to have incentives for Iran if it negotiates and penalties for Iran if it doesn't negotiate. And that's the package that we think will come to closure in Vienna where we've been making good progress on that package. So there's a clear understanding that if Iran negotiates, there's a positive to that and if Iran doesn't there are negatives.

**QUESTION:** Does the clear understanding include support from the Russians and Chinese for sanctions?

**SECRETARY RICE:** The clear understanding is that we would go back to the Security Council and we're not going to go back for another presidential statement. Of course, there have to be penalties.

**QUESTION:** The way that the Administration is approaching dealing with Iran, has it been effective or informed by how the Administration dealt with Iraq in the run-up to the war?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Well, Iran and Iraq are very different circumstances. People forget that we had gone into war against Iraq in 1991. It's just (inaudible) nuclear weapons. We have many, many problems with the Iranian regime, its support for terrorism, the way that it treats its own people, it's the attitude of its President toward Israel and toward the Holocaust. This is why -- this is not a grand bargain. This isn't an offer for somehow to let bygones be bygones and go to normalization of relations. But we are informed by the nature of the Iranian regime and the fact that no one wants the Iranian regime to get a nuclear weapon. The way you do that is to present Iran with a clear choice, while we believe it is still early enough to arrest the development of a nuclear weapon.

**QUESTION:** But I don't think anybody would disagree this is a significant step and you will be part of a multilateral contingent at the table. Is that stance, that change in attitude, is that for world consumption: "hey, we're not unreasonable."

**SECRETARY RICE:** No. It is for -- the reason that we're doing it is that we want to know if negotiations are a real option. If Iran accepts the offer and suspends its enrichment activities, all the better, then we can get to the table and we believe that there is a civil nuclear program that would meet Iran's needs, but that would give confidence to the international community that they're not trying to build a nuclear weapon. Now, if they don't, then we have to be on another course and that is, of course, to use sanctions and to use penalties to convince Iran that it can't stand the isolation that can be brought about. So this is a very serious offer. And I think the Iranians would, I hope, be well placed

to take up the offer.

**QUESTION:** Beyond hope, do you have any real sense that they'll accept the offer?

**SECRETARY RICE:** I don't know what they will do. I do know that they now face a critical choice. I do know that they're going to inform the world a lot about whether they really are serious about negotiations or not by how they respond to this offer.

**QUESTION:** What do you think will be in the incentive package that's offered up to them? And I know you're not going to negotiate with me right now.

**SECRETARY RICE:** Well, no, no. I'm not going to -- that's right. (Laughter.)

**QUESTION:** But give me a sense of what might be in there.

**SECRETARY RICE:** Let's just say that there are obvious penalties that could be brought to bear, economic, political, financial. There are also obvious benefits that Iran could have. But I'm not --

**QUESTION:** Does that include selling them airplanes?

**SECRETARY RICE:** I'm not going to get into the details of what a potential package might look like because we owe it to our negotiating partners to talk to our negotiating partners about that and ultimately for someone to say to the Iranians here is what is at stake. But I can say that I believe that the benefits that would accrue to Iran for abandoning this dangerous course would be substantial ones and good ones for the Iranian people. The Iranian people deserve better. They deserve to be integrated into the international community and not isolated.

**QUESTION:** I'm getting the one minute. So let me ask you to just pull back for a second, widen out the picture. Do you think this issue with Iran and its nuclear ambitions will be solved while you're still Secretary of State?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Well, we are getting to the point that we have to resolve this issue. In one way or another, we have to know where we are. Iran should understand that it can't benefit from a nuclear weapon because the United States is going to be steadfast in the defense of its allies and steadfast in its own defense. But it will be a very dangerous thing and a very volatile reason -- region if Iran pursues -- continues to pursue this course. And so the reason that we did this now is that we do believe the time has come for the international community to know exactly what it's dealing with. That will certainly come in the next several months.

**QUESTION:** Have you made Russia or China guarantees to get their support in a way that you haven't had prior to this?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Oh, with the Russians and the Chinese we've had discussions about strategy. We've had discussions about how to -- the way forward. But what we have with Russia, China, and the Europeans is agreement that there have to be two plans for Iran: one, negotiations and incentives; the other penalties and isolation. And on that, we are fully agreed because no one wants Iran to have a nuclear weapon and everybody agrees that the conditions for

a return to negotiations (inaudible) stop now, suspend this program and come back and negotiate seriously.

**QUESTION:** Hoping to preserve my viability for future interviews, I think I'd better shut my mouth now and honor the seven-minute commitment. Thank you very much for your time.

**SECRETARY RICE:** Thank you very much.

**QUESTION:** I really appreciate it. Thank you.

**SECRETARY RICE:** Thank you. A pleasure to be with you. Thank you.

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