

## Interview on CBS' Face the Nation With Bob Schieffer

### Secretary Condoleezza Rice

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(10:30 a.m. EST)

**MR. SCHIEFFER:** Madame Secretary, Dan Rather is extremely positive this morning about what's happened. What's your assessment?

**SECRETARY RICE:** The Iraqi people are showing their bravery and they're demonstrating yet again that these values of the desire for liberty and freedom are universal values. They're not values that have to be imposed from the outside; they're universal values.

They're also showing their bravery because they are doing this despite threats of intimidation, Zarkawi going out and literally saying that he was going to attack democracy. And so this is extraordinary time and a remarkable day for the Iraqi people.

**MR. SCHIEFFER:** Madame Secretary, have you had a chance to talk to the President yet?

**SECRETARY RICE:** I talked to the President this morning, a couple of hours ago, and he, too, is heartened by what he's seeing. We all recognize that the Iraqis have a long road ahead of them, that the insurgency is not going to go away as a result of today, but the Iraqi people have taken a very important step in losing the sense of fear and intimidation that has been in their lives for decades under the tyranny of Saddam Hussein. And that's a first step towards finding your voice and finding your democratic future.

**MR. SCHIEFFER:** Well, do you feel that the election itself will have an impact on the Iraqi people?

**SECRETARY RICE:** It has to have an impact. I think that you're seeing that the Iraqis decided that they were going to go out and vote, but it is just a first step. And they will now put together a National Assembly. I'm quite certain that they will try to put together an Assembly that brings Iraqis together, rather than splitting them apart; that they will then move to write a constitution. And you know, Bob, that the process of democracy going forward now will have its ups and downs, its twists and turns as they try to put together institutions that can bridge their differences. But they've made a very, very good start today.

**MR. SCHIEFFER:** Last week, as you know, Senator Kennedy, who has emerged as the most prominent critic, I think, now, of the war said that once this election was past, we should begin the process of bringing our troops home. What would be the impact of that if we did?

**SECRETARY RICE:** The Iraqi people need to know that we intend to be with them through this process of democracy and the building of institutions. Obviously, our forces are there and the coalition forces are there under UN mandate. They are there because the Iraqis do not believe that they have the capability to defend themselves from these terrible enemies, some of them foreign terrorists, some of them remnants of the old regime that intends to try to oppress them again. And so the message should be to the Iraqi people, we intend to finish the job.

And we have to remember, we went to Iraq not just for the Iraqi people; we went to Iraq because American security interests were involved. We will train the Iraqis. When they can take these missions themselves, they will do so and I think you'll see us taking fewer and fewer.

**MR. SCHIEFFER:** Well, do you, in fact, think the Iraqi forces, at this point, could defend themselves should we leave?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Well, the Iraqi forces at this point are still very young. They've had some great successes. They were successful in Fallujah; they were successful in Najaf over the last several month. And they were successful today in defending their own democracy. General Casey has said recently on a conference call that he believes the Iraqi forces have done their job. There have been very few incidents where coalition forces had to take up the slack for them. So those are good signs, but they're young, and a lot of work as an institution and a lot of work still has to be done, but we will accelerate that process. We are going to come to a point where they are on the front lines, and that will be a good day.

**MR. SCHIEFFER:** As I understand it, various Administration officials have said there are something in the neighborhood of 140,000 Iraqi troops that have been trained. That's about the number of American troops that are in Iraq right now. How large is this insurgency force? I mean, if 140,000 Iraqis can't do the job, how big is this force that is opposing them?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Well, the numbers, which range in the 120-, 130,000, I think --

**MR. SCHIEFFER:** Insurgents?

**SECRETARY RICE:** No, in terms of the security forces. We don't know how large the insurgency is, but you have to remember that the numbers that we're citing include, for instance, policemen, who are not going to be able to stand up to insurgents. More than

50,000 of these are policemen. And the effectiveness of these forces has been variable when they've been put into the fight.

**MR. SCHIEFFER:** Well, do we have a clue as to how many of these people are who are causing the trouble?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Well, we get all kinds of estimates, but I've learned to look at how the insurgency is fighting, not to try to guess their numbers. And we do understand that you defeat an insurgency by doing the kinds of things that we've been doing in places like Fallujah, by building Iraqi security forces that can fight the insurgency, but also politically, today, when Iraqis stand up to the insurgents and go and vote, that is -- that's an important day against the insurgency.

**MR. SCHIEFFER:** Some of the people who were so much for this election -- and I'm talking about the Iraqis campaigned on the idea: If we can this election done, we can tell the Americans to leave. Do you see any possibility of that?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Well, the day will be a very happy one when coalition forces can come home with their job very well done. We will work with the new Iraqi Government when it emerges to talk about the right mix of coalition forces, Iraqi security forces, but I'm quite certain that all Iraqis want to defeat this insurgency and get on with building a democratic Iraq. I think that was really the message of today's election.

**MR. SCHIEFFER:** Let me ask you briefly about Iran. The Vice President said today it was sort of at the top of the list of potential trouble spots. He said that the Israelis may take matters into their own hands unless it is resolved. Do you see it as the number one threat to this country now?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Well, the Iranians are clearly a destabilizing presence in the Middle East. And they have been -- they have a doctrine that says that Israel should cease to exist. They support terrorist groups that are trying to undo the very fragile peace process that may be starting to move forward, and of course, they have been pursuing, we believe, nuclear weapons under cover of civilian nuclear power, which is a very grave --

**MR. SCHIEFFER:** And we think they're still doing that?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Well, the -- we are working with others, the IAEA, and with the -- International Atomic Energy Agency -- and with the Europeans, as well as with states like the Russians.

**MR. SCHIEFFER:** Is it conceivable we would invade Iran or attack it in some way?

**SECRETARY RICE:** We really do believe, Bob, that this is something that can be dealt with diplomatically. What is needed is unity of purpose, unity of message to the Iranians

that we will not allow them to skirt their international obligations and develop nuclear weapons under cover of civilian nuclear power.

**MR. SCHIEFFER:** Let me also ask you about the Middle East. You're going to Europe and to Israel next week. Prime Minister Sharon is talking about withdrawing troops from the Gaza, which I think most people think would be a major step if he can pull that off.

**SECRETARY RICE:** Yes.

**MR. SCHIEFFER:** What will the United States' role be there? Will we just stand aside? Will we try to be a bridge with the Palestinians? What sort of diplomatic approach are we going to take, and what will you tell him?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Well, we want to be an active partner with the states in the region and with the parties in region to help them get back onto the roadmap and ultimately to get to a two-state solution, as the President outlined in 2002.

I'm going there to talk with them about what we can do. Obviously, the parties themselves are taking very important steps to create new conditions. You mentioned the Gaza withdrawal plan, the Palestinian elections and the Palestinian development of democratic institutions, Palestinians who will fight terror with unified security forces that are not part of the problem, but part of the solution. A lot of pieces are starting to come into place, and I intend to go there and work with the parties to see if we can bring them all together.

**MR. SCHIEFFER:** Well, let me just -- some people say that we basically stepped back when the Bush Administration came to power from diplomacy in that region. Will you be more active in the Middle East?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Well, the President was willing to say some tough things; that the parties themselves had some fundamental choices to make before we could make very much progress and we've been very active in the region all along. But now, the parties are making some fundamental choices. Prime Minister Abbas and his statements about needing to end the armed Intifadah, actually deploying Palestinian security forces to deal with the terrorist threats against Israel, Israel recognizing that it has an obligation to withdraw from territory -- these are fundamental steps, and we are prepared to be with the parties as they move forward to what we think could be a very bright future.

**MR. SCHIEFFER:** Madame Secretary, thank you so much.

**SECRETARY RICE:** Thank you.

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