

## Interview on CNN's Late Edition With Wolf Blitzer

### Secretary Condoleezza Rice

Washington, DC  
January 30, 2005

(12:15 p.m. EST)

**MR. BLITZER:** Dr. Rice, thanks very much for joining us. Congratulations on becoming Secretary of State.

**SECRETARY RICE:** Thank you very much, Wolf. It's great to be with you.

**MR. BLITZER:** All right, the polls are now closed in Iraq. What are you hearing initial reports on the turnout?

**SECRETARY RICE:** I believe it's going to be quite a while before we know the turnout in the country, because as you know, in our own country, it takes a while to establish turnout. What we're hearing from the Iraqis is that they are very pleased because they believe it's better than expected. They believe that there obviously is great enthusiasm by the Iraqi people for this vote. And what we're seeing, Wolf, is a remarkable day for the Iraqi people. They have turned away the threats and intimidation that Zarkawi and his people leveled directly at the democratic process, and they decided to go to the polls and vote because they believe that's the way to a better future, so this is a remarkable day for the Iraqi people.

**MR. BLITZER:** We all expected that there would be significant turnout among the Kurds in the north, the Shiites, the majority population of Iraq; the Sunnis, specifically, what are you hearing about Sunni turnout, especially in that so-called triangle of death or the Sunni Triangle, as they call it?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Well, of course we expect, because of the levels of intimidation and violence there that there may be fewer Sunnis who can turn out. But clearly, they want to. And they are voting in places like Fallujah and Baqaba and Samara. There are people who are voting there despite the terrible levels of violence and intimidation.

The most important point is, of course, that this is a first step for the Iraqis on the process. They now are going to have to write a constitution. And there have been several statements by Iraqi leaders, Shia, Kurds, others, saying that they understand the desire and the need to build one Iraq, that the constitutional process is going to be one in which all Iraqis are represented. And they understand what we should know, that their Sunni brethren, if they were unable to vote it was not because they did not want to vote,

but because of the intimidation. So I'm sure that they will have a process moving forward that takes account of everyone's interests.

**MR. BLITZER:** By all accounts, the Shia, who represent 60 percent of the population, will have the dominant say. How concerned are you, if you are concerned, that some sort of Islamist, clerical regime could emerge out of this election.

**SECRETARY RICE:** Well, let's remember, first of all, that the Shia have been an oppressed people for decades now. And so, it is a good thing that Shia are turning out and that they are able to vote. But I've talked with many Iraqis, and they emphasize that this is a society that knows how to overcome differences, that in fact, Saddam Hussein's regime with its tyranny probably exacerbated differences. The Shia and the leaders of those movements are also saying that Iraqis do not want a theocratic regime.

I'm sure that they will have a healthy debate about the role of Islam, about the role of religion in their society. This is the democratic process, but I fully expect that it is going to be a process that, while it will have its twists and turns, its ups and downs, will come to represent the interests of all Iraqis.

**MR. BLITZER:** The Shia, as you point out, were suppressed, oppressed during the regime of Saddam Hussein. Some fear this could be payback now by them against the Sunni, which were the dominant role -- had the dominant role during those decades.

**SECRETARY RICE:** You know, Wolf, we just need to show more faith in the Iraqi people than some are showing. There is no evidence that that's what they intend to do. In fact, when there have been attacks by Zarkawi and his people against Shia, trying to stir up sectarian violence, he's not been able to do it. The Shia have said, we're not going to allow that to happen. Sunnis and Kurds have gone to Shia areas that have been attacked to say, we want one Iraq. The Iraqis are demonstrating remarkable resolve. They're demonstrating remarkable bravery. They're demonstrating once again that the values of democracy and liberty are universal values. And I hope, given our own history of ups and downs as we moved forward to build our own democracy that we will show greater faith and confidence in these people who are showing us that they want to get there.

**MR. BLITZER:** There was an attack on the United States Embassy in Baghdad yesterday. Two Americans were killed, one civilian, one military. What else, what can you tell us? How did this happen?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Well, there obviously will be an investigation, but it's a very dangerous place and we know that the insurgents have tried to attack American installations. We mourn, of course, the deaths of the two people there and it just reminds us that our military people and our diplomats are taking tremendous risks, that they are putting their lives on the line for the exercise of democracy in support of our security and freedom. And so that's what this is a reminder of.

**MR. BLITZER:** Let's talk a little bit on U.S. troops in Iraq right now. It looks like the security environment for the elections worked relatively well by all accounts, based on the initial reports we're getting today. But let's talk about what's down the road now that the elections are over.

General George Casey, the U.S. Commander on the ground in Iraq spoke out this week. Listen to what he said.

**GENERAL CASEY:** There's going to be an insurgency here for some years. I mean that, historically, insurgencies just don't come and go overnight; they're there for a while.

**MR. BLITZER:** How long do you believe U.S. troops will have to remain in Iraq?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Well, General Casey's assessment I totally agree with -- that it's going to be a while before the insurgency can be defeated. But of course, the goal is to get Iraqis into a position that they can defeat the insurgency. And we've always said that the conditions on the ground will dictate the particular mix of Iraqi forces and coalition forces. The coalition is there under UN mandate to help the Iraqis because they're not quite capable, yet, of carrying out their own security functions. But we are concentrating on training those forces. They had a good day today, the Iraqi security forces. General Casey reports that they've done well. And so they've done well in support of their own democracy. That's a good sign.

**MR. BLITZER:** How many Iraqi troops are combat capable right now?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Well, Wolf, the -- we've trained about 120,000 security personnel, but that includes more than 50,000 police, for instance. And one really never knows how well they're going to fight until they're in the fight. They had a good fight in Fallujah; they did well. They did well in Najaf. But we know that there are problems with leadership of the Iraqi forces. We know that there have been problems with desertion and absenteeism. We're moving to address those problems, but they've done really well today, and that's a good sign.

**MR. BLITZER:** A year, two years, three years -- when will the 150,000 number, in your estimation, begin to go down?

**SECRETARY RICE:** I really believe that we should not try and put artificial timetables on this. We need to finish the job. We went into Iraq because our security interests were at stake, not just the region's. And because of that, we need to finish the job. But there will be a very clear point at which American and coalition forces are stepping back as Iraqis are more capable in their own right. And we just have to get to that point.

**MR. BLITZER:** Senator Kennedy, who voted against your nomination, as you know, says that the U.S. military presence in Iraq now is part of the problem, not the solution,

because it's creating this animosity, giving the Iraqis the impression they're an occupied country.

**SECRETARY RICE:** Well, I see coalition forces sacrificing and giving their lives so that the Iraqi people could have the kind of day that they had today. That's how I see coalition forces and I believe that's the way that many people see coalition forces. They're there under UN mandate. And of course, we will work with the new Iraqi Government to understand the right combination of our forces, coalition forces and Iraqi forces. But the men in women in uniform of the coalition are heroes to -- in this march forward for democracy.

(Break.)

**MR. BLITZER:** Going into the war, let's look back a little bit; did you ever imagine that two years after the war started that you'd be asking for another \$80 billion, approaching \$300 billion, the cost of this conflict?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Well, Wolf, the important point is that the President has said that our forces will have what they need to do the job. And I just want to remind everyone that we did this because American security interests post-9/11 were at stake. And you can't put a price tag on our security. I will tell you what I didn't imagine two years ago, and that is that you would have the kind of day that you've had today.

Throughout this region, we are starting to see the stirrings of democratic processes in Iraq, in Afghanistan, in the Palestinian territories. And we learned a very hard lesson on September 11th, and that was that the status quo in the Middle East is not sustainable. It was producing an ideology of hatred that drove -- had people drive airplanes into our buildings. We have to deal with that and build a different kind of Middle East or we're going to be fighting terrorists long beyond our lifetimes. And so the costs are worth it. The Iraqis are emerging from their own shadow of terror, and America is going to be safer for it.

**MR. BLITZER:** Should the American public brace for the number of casualties that we've seen, what, 1,400 Americans, more or less, killed in action, killed over these past two years? Is that going to continue for the foreseeable future?

**SECRETARY RICE:** I can't predict, and obviously, we mourn every death. Unfortunately, nothing of value is ever won without sacrifice. Our hope is that as the political process moves forward as it has begun to move forward today, as Iraqis take more responsibility for their own future, both politically and in security terms, that the insurgency will begin to lose some of its steam. And I think that's a reasonable hope and expectation, but I can't give you a timeline on it.

**MR. BLITZER:** In the interview the President gave the *New York Times* this week, he said that if the Iraqi Government asked the U.S. to withdraw, the U.S. will withdraw. He

said, "Yeah, absolutely. This is a sovereign government. They're on their feet. We anticipated that, by the way, on the passing of sovereignty, and had the Allawi government said, 'Out,' we would have been required to leave.

Do you anticipate the Iraqi Government, any new Iraqi Government emerging, asking the U.S. to leave?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Well, America and our forces will stay only where we're wanted. But what we've heard is that the Iraqi Government, the current one, and the people who are looking to be a part of the next one understand their own security situation, understand that we're there under UN mandate. We are doing everything we can and will accelerate the training of Iraqi security forces so that they can take control of their own future. But the Iraqis have asked for the forces under the UN mandate and I am sure that as long as they want them, we'll stay. But when they're not longer needed, we'll be very pleased to go home with the mission accomplished.

**MR. BLITZER:** Is the Syrian Government part of the problem or part of the solution as far as insurgents, foreign fighters, equipment and money pouring into Iraq?

**SECRETARY RICE:** The Syrians have not been as helpful as they should be, and we've made that very clear, that we believe that there are insurgents and insurgent-support networks that have operated out of Syria. And we've asked them to do a number of things to stop that, and we'll be continuing to pressure the Syrians to do exactly that.

**MR. BLITZER:** When you say, "pressure," what else do you want to do?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Well, we have tools. Obviously, the President ordered some sanctions under the Syrian Accountability Act a couple of months ago. The Syrians do not want to get on a track where they are in a long-term, bad relationship with the United States. And so I would hope that they would be more responsive.

**MR. BLITZER:** You're heading out to the region. You're going to be in Israel, you're going to meet with the Palestinian leadership, the new Palestinian leadership. Any plans on meeting with the Syrians?

**SECRETARY RICE:** No, I have no such plans. But I really look forward to getting to Israel and to the Palestinian territories because the parties themselves are creating conditions in which we probably have new opportunities. And I'm going out to discuss with them and to talk with them, to work with them, to see what role the United States can play in helping them to move forward.

**MR. BLITZER:** What about Iran? What's its role in Iraq right now?

**SECRETARY RICE:** The Iranians have engaged in some activities that we think are

unhelpful in Iraq. More importantly, the Iraqis believe that the Iranians have engaged in activities that are unhelpful. Iran is Iraq's neighbor and we expect there to be relations between Iran and Iraq, but they need to be transparent, neighborly relations, not relations that are aimed somehow at subverting Iraqi political processes. And so this is a discussion that a number of people are having with the Iranians.

**MR. BLITZER:** I interviewed Dr. Mohamed ElBaradei, the International Atomic Energy Agency Director General, this week. He called on the U.S., the Bush Administration, to join the Europeans in this dialogue with Iran to deal with the nuclear reactors, the nuclear weapons allegations against Iran. Is that something that you, as Secretary of State, welcome?

**SECRETARY RICE:** The Iranians know what they need to do. They know that they cannot be responsible members of the international community and pursue nuclear weapons under cover of civilian nuclear programs, something that is granted under the Nonproliferation Treaty. We've been in close contact with the Europeans as they try -- the dialogue that they're having with the Iranians -- to move the Iranians to a position where they live up to their international obligations and we'll continue to do that. But it needs to be understood that Iran has not been in compliance with its international obligations. It needs to get there.

**MR. BLITZER:** One final question. Is this a dream come true for you to be Secretary of State?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Well, it's certainly a really fantastic opportunity. I can't tell you I ever dreamed that I would be Secretary of State when I was growing up in Birmingham, Alabama. And I'm just very grateful to the President and to the American people and to all of those who think that I can do this job. And you can bet I'll work really hard. I'll do my very best.

**MR. BLITZER:** Well, good luck to you and congratulations.

**SECRETARY RICE:** Thank you.

**2005/103**

Released on January 30, 2005