

Interview on CNN with Kevin Flower

Secretary Condoleezza Rice

Baghdad, Iraq

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QUESTION: Madame Secretary, there have been warnings in the past from the CIA and other intelligence officials that continued U.S. military presence here in Iraq could potentially contribute to the spread of terrorism within the region and globally. Is that what we've seen with the bombings in Jordan this past week?

SECRETARY RICE: All of these places experienced terrorism long before the liberation of Iraq, and the idea that somehow because the Iraqis have now been liberated and are fighting a very tough terrorist problem here that you -- that somehow terrorism is gaining from what has happened in Iraq, I think is very short-sighted.

If you really believe that terrorism is gaining from the political process that's taking hold in Iraq, from the participation of Iraqis in their political process, the prospect of an Iraq that is democratic and stable and a pillar of a different kind of Middle East, then you only have to read what Zarqawi says about that prospect, you only have to read the posters that they put up everywhere to keep Iraqis from voting.

What Zarqawi and his kind are most afraid of is that democratic forces will take hold in Iraq. And when they threatened in January, 8.5 million Iraqis went out to vote anyway. And when they threatened in October, 10 million Iraqis went out to vote anyway. And they're threatening in December, and Iraqis are going to vote. And it shows that the terrorists are not winning. They were here in this region in force long before the liberation of Iraq. Because we are now confronting them, of course they are coming out and they're fighting.

But they have to be defeated -- not just their networks, but also the ideology of hatred that fuels them. And a different kind of Middle East is the only way to defeat that ideology of hatred.

QUESTION: In the short term, though, has Iraq become -- with the insurgency here, has it become a training ground for insurgents to operate in other places? I mean, is there a short-term danger here of more events like this happening?

SECRETARY RICE: I think the short-term problem is that Iraqis are being killed by -- innocent Iraqis are being killed by these terrorists. That's the short-term problem. And the answer to that is for the political process to continue and for Iraqi security forces to become more capable.

But any government of the United States that looks only at a short term is not doing its job; it isn't fulfilling what the United States must do, which is to look at how we're going to actually establish a permanent peace, a peace in which we don't worry about the continued presence of terrorists who we can try to defend against. But the more we try to defend the United States of America, for instance, from terrorism, the more we realize that they only have to be right once. We have to be right 100 percent of the time. So we have no choice but to go after the underlying circumstances that produced this ideology of hatred.

And I know it's a long struggle and I know it's a difficult struggle and we mourn every sacrifice that has been taken because of this struggle, but if we don't go at the root cause of this, if we don't create -- help the people of the Middle East create a different kind of Middle East, then we are going to be fighting terrorists for many, many, many years to come.

QUESTION: And finally, you mentioned the political process. How concerned is the Administration that the December elections could bring in to place a government that does not really share the interests, the American interests, for Iraq and for the region?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, everything that I see is that the people who are participating in the political process have different variations on essentially the same theme, which is that they would like to see an Iraq that is free and that is democratic, where individual rights are respected. That's what their constitution enshrines and that was an inclusive process of writing that constitution. Now, the kinds of things over which there are disagreements -- how federal will the system be, what will be the rules of those federal -- of that federalism -- those are the kinds of decisions that have been left to the next national assembly, which should be more representative than the current national assembly because Sunnis will participate much, much more.

I think the Iraqis are demonstrating that they want what everyone wants, and we really believe that it's the universal appeal of freedom and liberty, and the ability to choose those who govern you, the ability to educate your children -- boys and girls, to worship as you please. All of that's enshrined in the Iraqi Constitution. And that seems to me to be the center of gravity of where most Iraqis are.

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