



Interview on CNN's NewsNight with Aaron Brown Show

Secretary Colin L. Powell

Islamabad, Pakistan
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MR. BROWN: Mr. Secretary, President Musharraf has obviously been a good friend of the United States since 9/11. How sensitive does the United States have to be to his political situation in the things it asks of him?

SECRETARY POWELL: We are sensitive to his political situation and you're quite right he has been a good friend of the United States. He's been a good friend as we participate in the war against terrorists, and he has a terrorist threat here in Pakistan. We had a terrorist threat in Afghanistan. And after 9/11, he elected to move away from the Taliban and join with the civilized world in going after the terrorists. And he did it against forces within his society that weren't really supportive of that kind of action, so we've tried to be very considerate of political needs of the Pakistani leadership. We have been forthcoming with financial assistance, with debt relief and normalizing our relationship in a way that hadn't been the case prior to 9/11.

MR. BROWN: Are there things you would like from him now?

SECRETARY POWELL: We want to see him continue try to root out the Al Qaeda and Taliban elements that are along the border in the tribal areas and they're working on that. In fact, they had a significant action recently and there was some loss of life on the side of the Pakistanis and my heart goes out to their families. But these young men were fighting terrorists who were essentially a hostile presence in this country.

We are very pleased with the comprehensive dialogue that has been decided upon between Pakistan and India that the two Presidents announced in early January. And we hope that the Prime Minister of India and the President of Pakistan will continue to pursue all the eight baskets in that comprehensive dialog. It's off to a good start. This could be an historic opportunity and both Prime Minister Vajpayee and President Musharraf deserve great credit for taking this important historic step forward. And we will support them in every way that we can. But this is work they have to do with each other.

MR. BROWN: Do you worry that he is in fact limited in what he can do by the domestic political pressures upon him, that there is in Pakistani society a fair amount of support for Islamic fundamentalism and extremism?

SECRETARY POWELL: There's no doubt about that. And I think a case can be made that this is an Islamic state and Islam is a religion that is followed by the citizens of Pakistan. But when Islam becomes fundamentalism to the point that one believes it is acceptable to take the life of innocent people or to participate in terrorist actions, this is not just a deviant interpretation of Islam, it goes against the basic tenets of Islam. So I hope that over time, as he goes after terrorists, it might be here in Pakistan or as he joins us in the war on terrorism around the world, in other parts of the world, the Pakistani people will understand he's moving in the right direction.

MR. BROWN: You are just here from Afghanistan. Is the Karzai government, in your view, expanding its area of influence? It's a horribly complicated country to manage, to govern.

SECRETARY POWELL: It is a very complicated country and they are expanding their influence slowly. It takes time and they have to do it really the Afghan way. It's a lot of discussion and moving of people around. What we're starting to connect the country too with the new road that's in place between Kabul and Kandahar, which will be completed to Herat sometime by the end of the year, we hope, or early in 2005. We're starting to connect the country in a physical way with roads, with concentration on providing tax revenue from the regional governors back to the central government.

And what will really help to pull this all together, to start to unify this country is an election, the kind of election they're getting ready for now. I visited a registration site earlier this morning where women were registering to vote. 28% of those who registered so far are women, and in a province such as Herat, out in the west, 46% of those who have registered to vote are women. So with elections for a President and with elections for a new legislature, you're essentially giving a mandate to that President and a mandate to that legislature that says we want to be pulled together, drawn together, into a country that now is resting politically on a constitution that we have approved and with leaders that we have voted for. And I think this will help break down some of the regional distinctions that have existed in this society.

MR. BROWN: This is apropos of Afghanistan and Iraq I think. Do Americans have to be a little careful about their own expectations of what realistically can emerge? What these democracies, if we get there, can look like?

SECRETARY POWELL: I think we have to be very, very realistic. It's not going to be the Founding Fathers in Philadelphia in 1776 then later when we finished the work on our constitution. It's going to take time. It's going to take a lot of education. People have to get used to what democracy means and what it's all about. To get used to the fact that even though a majority may have most people in their legislature, the rights of minorities have to be preserved and there has to be compromise and consensus, so its going to take time.

But President Bush, all of us, reject the idea that it is not possible to do such things in the Muslim world. That's not the case. We see it happening in the Muslim world. We see it in Turkey, we see it in other Muslim nations. And why shouldn't it be possible in Iraq and in Afghanistan?

MR. BROWN: Tragically this week it seems is going to be defined by the horrible attacks in Spain and the repercussions of those attacks. So let me get your take on that. How much, if at all, do you see this as a setback in the efforts of the American war on terror?

SECRETARY POWELL: Once again I like to, all the civilized nations of the world, no one is immune. We don't know who is responsible for this attack – whether it was E.T.A. or whether it was Al Qaeda or some other fundamentalist organization.

But I hope rather than everybody saying 'Oh dear, we better pull back from the war on terror.' I hope all the nations in Europe and other nations around the world will say 'This is such a horrible, horrible incident, that now is the time to redouble our efforts and go after terrorists.'

You can't walk away from this challenge. You can't say it isn't going to affect me. You cant say let's not take any actions that a terrorist might not like, like say participating in the coalition in Iraq or doing other things that are right because you are afraid of what the terrorist reaction might be. This is time to fight terrorism, not to walk away or be terrified by terrorism.

MR. BROWN: We have done some reporting in talking to counter-terrorism people, and one of the concerns they expressed about Iraq is that in trying to solve one problem, WMD, it has created a Pandora's Box on another front. It's sort of a bad way to look at Newton's Law, I guess. Do you at all share the concern that in trying to deal with Saddam and trying to deal with WMD, we have created or worsened or complicated the terrorist problem?

SECRETARY POWELL: I can't accept that because Al Qaeda was around before we went after Saddam Hussein. Al Qaeda was using Afghanistan as a home. Al Qaeda had essentially kidnapped a country. And in that county of Afghanistan, Al Qaeda, Osama bin Laden was planning terrorist attacks, not just again the United States, but against anything that was against his own weird, his own horrible, view of the world.

And so to think that Iraq is the cause of terrorism or to expand terrorist actions around the world, I think is a misreading of the situation. And we just didn't go after weapons of mass destruction, we went after weapons of mass destruction, we went after the capability of that regime to develop such weapons, and we went after an individual who had the intention of having such weapons and we thought he did have them in stockpiles. We haven't found those stockpiles, but that doesn't take away from the fact that he had the capability, he had the intention and if ever relieved from sanctions, he would have gone right back to it.

But more than that, we removed a dictator and a regime that filled mass graves, that had violated the rights of its citizens, that was in league with terrorists. And so he's gone, and now the debates we're having is how best to put Iraq in the democratic footing to move forward. Terrorism is not caused by our invasion and our liberation of Iraq.

MR. BROWN: And finally Sir, do you have concerns that in all of this discussion of Iraq, what's happened in Spain and the rest, that American credibility around the world -- not simply yours but the country's -- has taken a hit?

SECRETARY POWELL: Well some people say that, I don't think so. I think that as we move forward and as we put in place a democratic government in Baghdad, and we help the Iraqis put in place this government, as we see continued progress in Afghanistan, any temporary hit against our credibility will be overcome.

I mean people look at Afghanistan and say, 'Well what have you accomplished there?' Look what we have accomplished. Since my last visit two years ago: stable currency, an economy that is starting to function, three million Afghan refugees have left refugee camps in Pakistan and Iran. To go where? To go home to Afghanistan. And we created the conditions to allow these people to find hope back in their own country. That's nothing that I am ever going to shrink from. That is a real accomplishment. We have helped them create a constitution. We are helping them go toward elections. Yes, there is still a problem in the southeast portion of the country with the Taliban and with Al Qaeda. But let's deal with it. Lets fight it. But let's recognize the enormous accomplishments we have seen in Afghanistan over the last couple of years.

I was there earlier today. Buildings are going up. People are all over the street. Traffic is of a like that I never saw before in my previous visit. And so we should take some pride in what we have accomplished, even though difficult times are ahead. The work is not yet done. Lets be proud of what we did in Afghanistan. And we will be proud in due course, everyone will see it, that what we have done in Iraq. It was the right thing to do and history will judge it was the right thing to do.

MR. BROWN: We're enormously appreciative of your time.

SECRETARY POWELL: Thank you Aaron

MR. BROWN: Thank you sir very much.

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