



Interview With Jonathan Karl of ABC's World News Tonight

Secretary Condoleezza Rice

Kabul, Afghanistan

March 17, 2005

(1:40 p.m. EST)

MR. KARL: Thank you for taking the time for this interview.

President Musharraf recently said that about eight to ten months ago they came very close to getting Usama bin Laden. What was he talking about?

SECRETARY RICE: I don't know the specific circumstances to which you are referring. I read the report as well.

We are going to continue the hunt for Usama bin Laden, and I think there will probably be times when we're closer and times when we're further away; but the point is that his world has gotten smaller. He can't operate in Afghanistan. He's having more and more trouble -- al-Qaida is, operating along the northwest frontier because the Pakistanis are now fighting there in ways that they were not.

And it is also important not just to focus on Usama bin Laden, but of course on the field generals that have been put out of commission, like Khalid Sheikh Mohammed and Abu Zabaida and others. So, this is a network, it's an organization that has to be brought down, its financing has to be cut off, whose territory has to be made smaller for operations. Eventually, I'm quite certain that we will get Usama bin Laden; but my own view is that until we do, there's really no point in talking about whether we have or have not come close to getting him.

MR. KARL: So does it not matter much any more if you already have caught these field generals? Does it matter?

SECRETARY RICE: Of course it matters. But I remember, Jon, very early on when the President made that first speech to the Congress, that we talked about the fact that we shouldn't use Usama bin Laden's name too much; and I think it was only used once in that speech because we wanted to make the point that while of course he is an important symbol of the organization -- in fact, at some point probably had a lead operational role -- that what we wanted to do was to make al-Qaida ineffective: the organization, its networks, its tentacles into different parts of the world.

And if you look at today, as opposed to more than three years ago, you have a worldwide net of intelligence and law enforcement that is breaking up al-Qaida in many, many countries of the world. So it's not that we wouldn't want to get Usama bin Laden -- I really look forward to the day when that phone call comes; but it does mean that there is more work to be done than just the capture of Usama bin Laden.

MR. KARL: So you agree with President Musharraf when he says the trail hasn't grown cold?

SECRETARY RICE: Jon, I don't -- I don't really know how to judge that. The intelligence operation, our allies, like Pakistan, are constantly in search of him. But the point here is that as much as we continue to focus on the hunt for Usama bin Laden, the territories in which he can operate, the ability to communicate with his field generals, with his organization, has been severely diminished; and I think we need to focus on that.

MR. KARL: Congress has authorized you to increase the reward for bin Laden and other high-value targets to \$50 million; it's currently \$25 million. Will you do that?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, we're certainly considering whether it would be an effective thing to do. But I think the point to remember is that we have no shortage of assets looking for him. We have no shortage of contacts for people who know that we are looking for him. And so of course we'll consider the question of the reward, but how we structure the search for him is probably pretty important.

MR. KARL: And you now have more advertisements out. Has this been effective? Do you have new leads as a result of these actions?

SECRETARY RICE: I really can't comment on the day-to-day of this (inaudible), but we have put more advertisements out. There are places where they're using radio that they have not used it before. There's a kind of intensification of some of the efforts concerning this. But it is not that we haven't been intense in the hunt for the last three-plus years.

The fact is that it is not that hard to hide in some of these places. I just flew over the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan; and even though I, myself, have spent a lot of time in Colorado, I was impressed by the height of those mountains. And you can imagine that if people get into those mountains in some of those places, it might be difficult.

But it is also difficult from places like that to communicate and to run an operation. So the territory is getting smaller. And the Pakistanis are a lot of the reason that the territory is getting smaller, and the fact that Afghanistan is now a strong ally in the war on terrorism, with the Afghan National Army part of the hunt, gives us confidence that this organization is being hurt, and hurt badly.

MR. KARL: President Musharraf had promised that he would get out of his military uniform, step down as the leader of the army in December. He did not do so. Is that going to cost him in terms of his relationship with the United States?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, we've had discussions with the Pakistanis -- in fact I've had discussions since I've been here in Pakistan -- about the importance of a democratic path for Pakistan, that whatever else happens, however important and central our relationship is, the President also cares about the progress of democracy in Pakistan.

There are good signs here. There is a burgeoning free press. I think people's individual liberties are flourishing. The President has been -- President Musharraf has been very aggressive in trying to rid Pakistan of some of the extremist elements that were growing up here as a result of the connections earlier on to Afghanistan. He's also launched an educational reforms; that's an extremely important element. And if you look at where this country was on September 11, you have to say that it was a country that was on the verge of extremism being heavily and deeply rooted in Pakistan; and much of that is now being addressed.

So yes, we are very concerned and have made it clear to our allies here in Pakistan that we expect to see democracy continue -- that democracy progress here. But it is also important to look at (inaudible).

MR. KARL: But in terms of -- pure democracy may have taken a step back here. Musharraf has hung on to his power and control of the military.

SECRETARY RICE: Well, we expect that there will be a democratic path leading to elections in Pakistan, and we will continue to make that point. It is also a good thing that you are -- you have a press that is freer than it has been in recent years, and it is a very good thing that extremism in education is being addressed here. Because ultimately, you can have the trappings of democracy; but if you do not have an educational system that supports people who are well educated, people who are given opportunities, and people who are not taught ideologies of intolerance and hatred, then it's going to be very difficult to make democracy work.

MR. KARL: North Korea has said they will not go back to the six-party talks unless you apologize for calling them an "outpost of tyranny." So, are you going to apologize or take back those remarks?

SECRETARY RICE: The North Koreans are determined to change the subject from what North Korea is doing, and we're not going to let them change the subject. I'm not going to get into a debate on semantics with the North Koreans. The North Koreans need to return to the six-party talks. It's the only way that they can find a way to enter the international community of states. It's the only way that they can realize the full benefits of integration into the international system of economic assistance, of ways to get out of the terrible situation in which the North Korean people find themselves where we talk every year about problems of starvation and malnutrition in North Korea. It's the only way that they are going to be able to convince their neighbors that they are devoted to a peaceful and secure environment.

And there's a lot on the table for the North Koreans. They've been told, for instance, that if they are willing to make the strategic choice and give up their nuclear weapons programs, they could have security assurances on a multilateral basis. They've been told that people are ready to deal with their energy needs, which are very severe. Even without the six-party talks, the United States has been a major food donor because we don't want to penalize the people of North Korea. So there's a lot at stake here for the North Koreans, and they really should come back to the talks and stop trying to change the subject.

MR. KARL: But you stand by your statement that Korea is an outpost of tyranny?

SECRETARY RICE: I think everybody knows what life looks like in North Korea, and I think everybody knows what kind of system rules in North Korea. And so, as I said, I'm not going to let the North Koreans change the subject.

MR. KARL: Also today, in Afghanistan, we learned officially that the elections -- the parliamentary elections have again been delayed. You know the State Department report that talked about North Korea being on the verge of being turning -- I mean, sorry, Afghanistan being on the verge of turning into a narcotic state. What do you think that -- talked about what a great example Afghanistan is but there are some bumps in the road?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, of course there are bumps in the road in a place that three and a half years ago was ruled by the Taliban, one of the worst regimes in modern -- certainly in the 20th century, one of the worst regimes. But sometimes we just have to step back and give people credit for how much they have already achieved. It's very easy, sitting in a mature democracy like the United States to forget the bumps in the road of our own democracy early on, and the fact that it takes time to build some of these institutions.

President Karzai said, and I was also told at the Independent Electoral Commission, that there are some technical matters that they need to take care of in order to be able to hold elections. They have to do at least some kind of population count. There were some questions about boundaries. And they're working through those, and they have an independent electoral commission that said they're not quite ready for elections; they would like to have them in September.

Nobody mentioned the word "election" in Afghanistan three and a half years ago. And so, yes, I believe that they will hold elections. It is important, and I made the point to them that it is important that they hold them on time in September if that's what they have announced, because the Afghan people are impatient to have their elections and I think the Afghan Government is also desirous of completing the governmental framework in Afghanistan by getting a parliament seated.

As for the narcotics problem, yes, it's a serious problem in Afghanistan. We have, with the Afghans and the British and other partners, developed a strategy that will depend a good deal on interdiction and law enforcement, but also on public education about poppy and also alternative livelihoods for those who decide not to grow poppy. It's a long struggle to deal with the narcotics problem that has been a narcotics problem in Afghanistan for a long time. But I was impressed with the commitment of the Government, the willingness to talk openly and transparently about the problem, and to say to the Afghan people that responsible citizens in a new democratic Afghanistan will not grow poppy.

MR. KARL: A very quick last question you can answer with a yes or a no.

Everybody's asked you if you were going to run for President. You've answered that many, many times. Nobody's asked you if you would consider being on the ticket as a Vice President.

SECRETARY RICE: Jon, I don't want to be elected to anything. I really -- I've been telling people -- I don't think I ever ran for class president at any time in the time that I was in school.

My desire is to do the very best job that I can do as Secretary of State. This is a great time. We have a lot of challenges. If we do this well, the United States use of diplomacy effectively in this time when there's so much change in the world -- and I think we have a chance to do -- to leave a better world for generations, much the way that the people who responded at the end of World War II left a better world for generations. And so that's what I'm going to concentrate on, and then either Stanford or the NFL.

MR. KARL: And we can ask that question again in a couple of years.

(Laughter.)

MR. KARL: Madame Secretary, thank you very much.

SECRETARY RICE: Thank you.

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