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Dr. Condoleezza Rice Discusses the War on Terror on "60 Minutes"

Interview of National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice By Ed Bradley, CBS, “60 MINUTES”
Room 200
Dwight D. Eisenhower Executive Office Building

11:15 A.M. EST

Q Thank you for agreeing to sit down and talk to us, Dr. Rice.

DR. RICE: Nice to be with you.

Q The Bush administration's handling of the war on terror is the most talked about and controversial topic in the country these days; hearings are being held here in Washington; books are coming out criticizing the administration's handling of the war. As the National Security Advisor to the President of the United States, how do you feel about all of this?

DR. RICE: I think it's perfectly logical, Ed, that people want to know that their country, their government, is doing everything that it can to protect them from another event like September 11th. I think we have to say that it's very difficult to do in an open society, and we cannot rule out that we might have another attack - indeed, we know that there are terrorists out there every day trying to pull off another spectacular attack.

But I think it's perfectly logical that people want to know what we're doing -- and we're doing a lot. Since September 11th, we have wrapped up two-thirds of the al Qaeda leadership. The President has liberated 50 million people in Afghanistan and in Iraq. We've taken away their forward-operating bases around the world. We have worldwide cooperation with places like Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. We really have terrorism on the run. But this is going to be a long war against terrorism, as the President told the American people just a few days after September 11th.

Q Did you watch Richard Clarke's testimony last week?

DR. RICE: I watched parts of it. I had other things to do - I was meeting with Israeli officials, I was meeting with Russian officials. I had quite a bit to do that day.

Q If you didn't see it live, I'm certain that you saw it on the news reports. How did you feel when he made that apology?

DR. RICE: Well, I don't think that there is anyone who is not sorry for the terrible loss that these families endured, and, indeed, who doesn't feel the deep tragedy that the country went through on September 11th.

I do think it's important that we keep focused on who did this to us, because, after all, this was an act of war, Ed. This was an act of war unlike anything that has happened on our territory in 200 years. And al Qaeda is responsible for what happened to us. I think that there are good people in the Clinton administration and in the Bush administration who were, and still are, doing everything that they could to try and avoid any kind of catastrophic attack against the United States. But these are cold-blooded terrorists who will kill innocent life to promote their evil designs and we need to stay focused on that.

But everybody feels the great tragedy that the families endured that day and that the country endured that day.

Q But my question is, how did his apology make you feel? Did you think he was grandstanding? Did you think it was sincere?

DR. RICE: I'm not going to question what Dick Clarke was or was not feeling. I think, from my point of view, the families need to know that everybody understands the deep loss. The President went, on the first anniversary of 9/11, out to that field in Pennsylvania; he went to Ground Zero of 9/11 at the World Trade Center; he met with the families, he walked among them. I, took, walked among them and watched them talk about and listened to them talk about and acknowledge the lives of the people that they had lost. Everybody understands the deep tragedy that has happened here.

Q One final question on his apology. When he apologized he said, "I failed you, our government failed you - your government failed you." Will the families of those people who were killed hear an apology from you? Do you think that would be appropriate?

DR. RICE: The families I think have heard from this President that - and from me, and from me, personally, in some cases - in that field in Pennsylvania or at the World Trade Center - how deeply sorry everyone is for the loss that they endured. You couldn't be human and not feel the horror of that day.

We do need to stay focused on what happened to us that day. And the best thing that we can do for the memory of the victims, the best thing that we can do for the future of this country is to focus on those who did this to us. This was no less an act of war than Pearl Harbor was an act of war. We need to stay focused on what it is that we're doing.

Q When you look back at the period of time between the inauguration and September 11th, is there anything you wish that you had done differently?

DR. RICE: Ed, I really can't answer that question. We were where we were. I know what we did. I know that shortly after we came into office, I asked the counterterrorism team --which we kept in place from the Clinton administration in order to provide continuity and experience -- we asked them what policy

initiatives should we take.

We got a list of policy initiatives; we acted on those policy initiatives. We felt that we were not in a position to have a comprehensive strategy that would not just roll back al Qaeda - which had been the policy of the Clinton administration - but we needed a strategy to eliminate al Qaeda. And we put that work into motion. And, in fact, that produced a comprehensive strategy several weeks before 9/11.

But we were working on terrorism from the time that we came here. The fact is that the country was not on war footing about al Qaeda and terrorism until after September 11th . For the eight years of the Clinton administration and for the first eight months of the Bush administration, there was certainly a tremendous understanding of the great dangers of terrorism. There was an understanding that attacks had been made on our forced abroad; that attacks had been made, indeed, in the United States and that more needed to be done to try and avoid attacks in the future.

But we would not be honest with the American people if we said that before 9/11 this country was on war footing. What the President did after 9/11 was to declare war on al Qaeda in ways that had not been done before.

Q But do you think that you or the administration made any mistakes, any misjudgments between the inauguration and 9/11?

DR. RICE: I think we did what we knew how to do. We read the threat reporting. The President was briefed by his Director of Central Intelligence, George Tenet, 46 times with items related in one way or another to al Qaeda. His response to that was to say, "I can't swat at flies anymore; I've got to have a comprehensive strategy to take this organization down."

We were discussing the threat spike that took place between June and July, to try and figure out how to respond. Now, to be fair, the threat reporting was all about attacks that might take place abroad - in the Persian Gulf, or perhaps something against Israel, or perhaps something against the G8 leader's summit that was going to take place in Genoa that summer. And we were responding to that. I called in, along with Andy Card, Dick Clarke on July 5th and I said, you know, even though none of the threat reporting really is relating to the United States, perhaps you better get the domestic agencies together and see what we need to do to button down the country. And, in fact, the FAA issued warnings as a result of that; the FBI issued warnings; INS and Customs were informed about these threats. But everything pointed to an attack abroad.

Q Let's talk for a minute about the 9/11 Commission hearings that were held last week. The commission said that when the Bush administration came into office, you spent eight months considering a new strategy to combat al Qaeda, the Taliban in Afghanistan, but took little action. The commission released findings saying, "The new administration began to develop new policies toward al Qaeda in 2001, but there is no evidence of new work on military capabilities or plans against this enemy before September 11th." Would you agree with that finding?

DR. RICE: The document to which everyone is referring, this new policy that was going to eliminate al Qaeda, that over - and first of all, Ed, it was a three to five year strategy to eliminate al Qaeda. Nobody

is claiming that we intended to invade Afghanistan and push the Taliban out of power. That wasn't on the agenda in the Clinton administration; it frankly was not on the agenda in the Bush administration until after 9/11.

But this document did task the Defense Department to develop contingencies that would give us more robust military options against the Taliban, should we not be able to force them out of power through either intelligence activities or through further diplomacy. So, in fact, there were contingency plans that were to be drawn up by the Defense Department to do precisely that.

Q So you disagree with the finding?

DR. RICE: I simply disagree that there was no desire to have military options. One of the really important things here was to have military options that would allow you to go after the Taliban's command and control, after their leadership, to go after their ground forces. And the Defense Department - actually, before the September 4th document -- was tasked to do that planning.

Q Let me take -

DR. RICE: But I'd like to emphasize one thing, Ed. This was a strategy that was a multi-year strategy. Nothing in that strategy was going to prevent 9/11 in the seven months that we were in office.

Q But why did it take eight months to come up with a new plan?

DR. RICE: Well, because there was a lot of work to do to come up with a new plan, to develop a strategy that was going to get Pakistan to change its strategic direction. Pakistan is very key in - and Pakistan had been a supporter of the Taliban. It was important to get the military to do some planning. It was important for a program to be developed that would not just support the Northern Alliance, the opposition that was in the north of the country - as a matter of fact, locked in less than 10 percent of the north of the country - we were going to develop a strategy to work also with southern tribes. These were things that were going to take time.

Now, to be fair, some of these ideas had been around since 1998 and they had not been acted on. We thought it was time to bring these ideas together in a comprehensive strategy. I think for a new administration, the seven-and-a-half months is actually not very long, and in the meantime we did everything that we knew how to do to continue pursue al Qaeda: the CIA continued its disruption activities; we continued the work with other governments; all of us were engaged in diplomatic activities - the President writing a letter to Musharraf of Pakistan. We were engaged every day on the terrorism issue, but we needed to build a new strategy that had a chance this time to eliminate al Qaeda.

Q On Thursday, the White House indicated its willingness to have you testify before the commission, as long as your testimony is in private, behind closed doors, and as long as you're not under oath. The Secretary of State, Defense, the Director of the CIA, have all testified in public, under oath, before the commission.

If you can talk to us and other news programs, why can't you talk to the commission in public and under oath?

DR. RICE: Ed, I have been with the commission to answer their questions for more than four hours - about four hours. I've -

Q In private?

DR. RICE: In private. I did not testify, by the way - and this is an important distinction. I went to meet with the commission, I answered their questions; I'm more than happy to spend as much time as they would like answering further questions. I've made that offer, and we're trying to make arrangements to do that.

Nothing would be better, from my point of view, than to be able to testify. I would really like to do that. But there's an important principle involved here. We have separate branches of government - the legislative branch and the executive branch. This commission, it takes its authority, derives its authority from the Congress, and it is a long-standing principle that sitting National Security Advisors do not testify before the Congress. And -

Q But there is a long list - not to cut you off, but there is a long list of presidential advisors who have testified before the Congress in public and under oath.

DR. RICE: Well, let me be very clear about this, because the people who - the only National Security Advisors, sitting National Security Advisors that to our knowledge have testified did so in matters having to do with either criminal intent or criminal allegations, or impropriety - not on matters of policy. Indeed, Brent Scowcroft and Sandy Berger and Tony Lake and Henry Kissinger have all declined to testify when matters of policy come up because it's important for the President's close, personal staff to not breach this line between the executive and the legislature.

What we do is to find means by which the Congress or its commissions can get all of the information that they want and need from the National Security Advisor. That's why my predecessors have gone, in closed session, to brief or to talk with or to answer questions; that's why I'm prepared to do that again.

But let me be very clear, Ed, I'm not going to say anything in private that I wouldn't say in public. I'm legally bound to tell the truth. I'm morally bound to tell the truth. And so I want to speak with the commission. I know that there are people who are disappointed that I can't. I know, for instance, the families are disappointed that I can't testify, and I'd like very much to meet with the families so that I can answer their questions.

Q I mean, I think unfortunately for you there are some people who feel that the administration is hiding behind this executive privilege, that there's something to hide.

DR. RICE: Ed, we have absolutely nothing to hide. I've already spent four hours with the commission.

I'll spend many more hours with the commission. And one reason that I'm speaking to the press, by the way, is that one of our constitutional protections is a free press that can ask of national officials anything that the press wishes to ask. And so it's perfectly natural for me to answer, through our free press, questions that might be on the minds of the American people.

Q If they subpoena you to testify in public, under oath, will you?

DR. RICE: Ed, I think we're not at that point. And I would certainly hope that everyone understands that this long-standing separation between the President's closest, personal advisors and the Congress has to be maintained. This is not a matter of keeping information from anyone. I'm prepared to go and talk to the commission as often and for as long as they would like.

Q But there are some people who look at this and say that this was an unprecedented event; nothing like this ever happened to this country before -- and this is an occasion where you can put that executive privilege aside; it's a big enough issue to talk in public.

DR. RICE: It is an unprecedented event. We've said that many, many times. But this commission is rightly not concentrating on what happened on the day of September 11th. This commission is concentrating on all of the policies that were counterterrorism policies, policies that did not succeed in defeating al Qaeda over a period of a decade. And this commission is rightly looking at the policies that are now being pursued in the war on terrorism.

So this is not a matter of what happened on that day, as extraordinary as it is -- as it was; this is a matter of policy. And we have yet to find an example of a National Security Advisor, sitting National Security Advisor who has been willing to testify on matters of policy.

Q In the eyes of the American public, do you think that the credibility of the Bush administration has been at all damaged by your failure to testify in public?

DR. RICE: I sincerely hope that the American people can see - and that's why I'm here talking to you - that I want the American people to know the story of what we did before 9/11 and what we're continuing to do now; I want the families to know the story; most importantly, I have an obligation to make sure that the commission knows the story. And I'm going to do everything that I can within the bounds of keeping this very important matter of privilege sacred and without violating it, I'm going to do everything I can to make sure that this story is understood; and that I'm personally willing and able to answer questions from you, in the press - one of our constitutional protections; and to answer to the commission. And as I've said, I would also be happy to sit down with the families, because I know that for them this has undoubtedly been an extremely intense period and that they may have questions that they'd like to ask.

Q But only in private with the commission?

DR. RICE: Well, I will be with them in private, because that, Ed, is the way that my predecessors have bridged this very difficult issue of getting the information to the commission and to the Congress that is needed, without violating the executive privilege.

Q Let's move on. Clarke has alleged that the Bush administration underestimated the threat from al Qaeda, didn't act as if terrorism was an imminent and urgent problem. Was it?

DR. RICE: Of course it was an urgent problem. I would like very much to know what more could have been done, given that it was an urgent problem. We were every day talking with George Tenet and with the CIA about disruption activities, particularly in that period between June and July. The DCI and I met practically every couple of weeks to review where we were on getting various elements done. We had a list of ideas that Dick Clarke and his team gave us: accelerate the efforts to arm the Predator. We did that - the Predator being the spy drone that could also fire. We put additional funding into counterterrorism for the intelligence activities that we were pursuing. We increased counterterrorism assistance to the Uzbeks, one of our key allies in the war on terrorism. We worked to get more people involved in countering terrorist financing.

We were looking for a more comprehensive plan to eliminate al Qaeda, but we weren't sitting still while that plan was developing. We were continuing to pursue the policies that the Clinton administration had pursued.

Q But even the former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Hugh Shelton, has said that the Bush administration pushed terrorism - and I'm quoting here - "farther to the back burner."

DR. RICE: I just don't agree. We did have a lot of - a lot of priorities. We did have to build a new relationship with Russia and a new relationship with China. It's a good thing that we did with Russia, because, after all, our ability to function in Central Asia was very much dependent on that good relationship with Russia. Yes, we had issues - you may remember in the early days - with the Chinese having forced down one of our planes. Yes, there were other issues. But terrorism was considered important enough and urgent enough that the President had sessions with George Tenet 46 times on that issue; that George Tenet and the rest of us were told to develop a strategy that would not just swat flies.

I don't know, Ed, how, after coming into office, inheriting policies that had been in place for at least three of the eight years of the Clinton administration, we could have done more than to continue those policies while we developed more robust policies.

Q After 9/11, Bob Woodward wrote a book, in which he had incredible access and interviewed the President of the United States. He quotes President Bush as saying that he didn't feel a sense of urgency about Osama bin Laden. Woodward wrote that "bin Laden was not the President's focus or that of his national security team." You're saying that the administration says fighting terrorism and al Qaeda has been a top priority since the beginning.

DR. RICE: I'm saying that the administration took seriously the threat - let's talk about what we did, which demonstrates -

Q I understand, but you've listed -

DR. RICE: -- which demonstrates that we took this as a priority.

Q You've listed the things that you've done, but here is the perception: the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff at that time says you've pushed it to the back burner; the former Secretary of the Treasury says it was not a priority; Mr. Clarke says it was not a priority. And, at least according to Bob Woodward, who talked with the President, he is saying that for the President it wasn't urgent, he didn't have a sense of urgency about al Qaeda. That's the perception here.

DR. RICE: Ed, I don't know what a sense of urgency, any greater than the one we had, would have caused us to do differently. We weren't going to invade Afghanistan in the first months of the Bush administration. Dick Clarke, himself, said that if the strategy that we were pursuing, that we were developing, had been completed on January 27th, it would not have stopped 9/11. What we were trying to do was to put together a strategy that might finally, over a period of time, actually eliminate al Qaeda.

Now, the Clinton administration, for a period of eight years, very intensively after the bombing attacks of 1998, worked on this problem and they were not able to eliminate al Qaeda or even to hurt al Qaeda enough that they didn't continue to launch attacks. The fact is that what we needed to do was to get a more comprehensive way to deal with this threat.

In the meantime, we continued to work under all of the authorities that were there during the Clinton administration, we continued to work under the policy that they had been pursuing, we continued to pursue al Qaeda under the old strategy. But we felt that the priority should be given to getting a new, more comprehensive way to address this threat.

Richard Clarke said that - talking about that meeting on September 12th, said the President dragged him into a room, said, "I want you to find whether Iraq did this. He never said 'make it up,' but the entire conversation left me in absolutely no doubt that George Bush wanted me to come back with a report that said Iraq did this. I said, 'Mr. President, we've done this before, we've been looking at this, we looked at it with an open mind, there's no connection.' And he came back and said, "Iraq, Saddam, find out if there's a connection,' and he said it in a very intimidating way."

What's your reaction to Clarke's description of that day?

DR. RICE: I have never seen the President say anything to people in an intimidating way to try to get a particular answer out of them. I know this President very well, and the President doesn't talk to his staff in an intimidating way to ask them to produce information that is false.

The President asked, I believe - though, none of us recall the specific conversation - the President asked a perfectly logical question -- we had just been hit and hit hard - did Iraq have anything to do with this, were they complicit in it? This was a country with which we'd been to war a couple of times, it was firing at our airplanes in the no-fly zone. It made perfectly good sense to ask about Iraq.

But I will tell you, Ed, when we went to Camp David to plan our response to the al Qaeda attack; it was a map of Afghanistan that was rolled out on the table. It was Afghanistan that became the focus of the

American response. And Iraq was put aside, with the exception of worrying about whether Iraq might try and take advantage of us in some way. The President focused our energies and our attention on winning in Afghanistan and expelling the Taliban and thereby expelling al Qaeda.

Q But the appearance here, because there are other examples of countries with state sponsored terrorism - Iran, Libya, Syria - he didn't ask him about that; he asked just about Iraq. The perception is, people listening to what Clarke had to say, is that the President was preoccupied with Iraq.

DR. RICE: Given our relationship with Iraq, which was probably the most actively hostile relationship in which we were involved, given that they were firing at our airplanes every day, given that, I think that it's a perfectly logical question. But I was with the President a great deal in those first days after 9/11, and I'll tell you what was on his mind. What was on his mind was to avoid a follow-on attack. What was on his mind was how to reassure the American people. He was talking many times a day with the economics advisor, Larry Lindsey, about how to get Wall Street back up and running so the financial system wouldn't collapse. He was concerned about how to get airplanes flying again and was talking constantly to Norm Mineta about how to get Reagan Airport operating again.

Those were the things that were on the President's mind. And when we look to retaliation, yes, we asked the question, given that this is a global war on terrorism, should we look at other threats? But I can tell you that when we met at Camp David not a single one of the President's principal advisors suggested that he do anything more than go after Afghanistan, and that's what we did.

Q Al Qaeda has become a decentralized collection of regional networks, said to be working autonomously. Does that make them more dangerous today?

DR. RICE: They're very dangerous. I still believe that we have done a lot to hurt this organization. We've been able, through our international partners, to cut off a lot of their support and their funding; we've killed two-thirds of their known leadership, and, of course, that takes the field generals out of business, which is very important.; we have managed to take away territory that they most want to use - territory like Afghanistan, they can't function in Sudan, they obviously can't function in places like Libya -- they're being pursued in Saudi Arabia and Pakistan with an aggressiveness that was not there prior to 9/11.

And the President has also understood that this is a wide war, not a narrow war, on terrorism. And that when we succeed in building a stable and democratic Iraq, we will have given a real blow to terrorism. And that's why, Ed, Zarqawi, who is an al Qaeda affiliate, has been writing letters about how they cannot afford to lose in Iraq. The terrorists understand that Iraq is a central front in the war on terrorism.

Q We've had this war on terrorism since - concentrated since 9/11. But it's been reported that if you look at the 30 months since 9/11, there have been more attacks by al Qaeda than in the 30 months prior to 9/11. So what effect does this taking out two-thirds of the leadership have?

DR. RICE: We are being attacked by them because they know that we're at war with them. And they're going to continue to attack until we defeat them.

Q But here's what I'm saying - you had a 30-month period leading up 9/11 in which you had fewer attacks than the 30 months afterwards, when you have this war against them.

DR. RICE: Ed, I think that's the wrong way to look at it, with all due respect. I think you have to look back to the '80s, and most certainly the '90s, when what was happening is the terrorist attacks were getting bolder, they were getting more imaginative, they were getting more daring.

So you have the attack in '93 against the World Trade Center. You then have the attack in 1998, against the American embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. Then you have the attack against the Cole. Then you have 9/11, which is a spectacular and devastating attack that, by the way, was aimed at decapitating us. That was an act of war, going after the Pentagon and going after, perhaps, the Capitol or the White House. These attacks were getting bolder and they were getting more daring, and that's because the terrorists were getting a sense of inevitability of their victory. We were not aggressively going after them. They believed that they were going to win. They saw us cut and run in Somalia. They go all the way back to the fact that the Marines left Beirut after the bombing of the barracks. They believed that if we took casualties we would not respond. And what they've been surprised by is the fact that this has this time has been a launching of an all-out war against them.

And, yes, they're going to continue to try to attack, they're going to succeed sometimes; but they are going to be defeated. And as the President said, you cannot fight this war on the defensive. We can't sit back here and try to defend the United States, or we will not be the country, the open country that we know and love. So we are on the attack against them. They know that this is all-out war, and they're pulling out the stops.

Q Is the Bush presidency, or the Bush legacy, at stake here?

DR. RICE: This President doesn't care about his legacy. What he cares about is keeping this country safe and secure. We are safer today than we were on September 10th. We're not yet safe. We've got a lot of work to do. We've got a lot of work to do in homeland security. We've got a lot of work to do against the terrorists abroad. This is a war and it's going to take time. But all of the -

Q But you say we're safer - don't you expect another attack on this country?

DR. RICE: We are still safer today because we have an umbrella of intelligence and law enforcement worldwide. When the President sits in the Oval every morning, he gets reports from intelligence services all around the world. Our allies in places like Pakistan are fighting in places that they never even went into - up in Waziristan, this lawless part of Pakistan where al Qaeda has a safe haven.

So we are safer, but not yet safe. And we're going to have to continue to pursue this war aggressively. The one thing that we have to be very careful about as a country is to not lose sight of one of the things that hurt us most, was not knowing and not having light on what was going on inside the country with al Qaeda. There's been a lot written about the fact that the CIA and the FBI were not sharing information. Well, in large part, they were by tradition and culture and legally not able to share and collect intelligence information in the way that might have helped to keep us safe. The Patriot Act,

which the President has now gotten through Congress, is doing precisely that. So we've a lot more tools now than we had before. But no one should think that this war on terrorism is by any means over.

Q One final question. Is al Qaeda more dangerous today than it was on September 11th?

DR. RICE: Al Qaeda is not more dangerous today than it was on September 11th, but you don't have to make that choice. Al Qaeda is dangerous. And we're going to have to pursue them and we're going to have to defeat them, and we're going to have to change the context in which they operate by working to develop a different kind of Middle East, in which you don't have ideologies of hatred; in which people fly airplanes into buildings.

This is going to be a long war. It is a comprehensive war. It is not going to be enough to win in Afghanistan, to even kill bin Laden and to return to law enforcement. They declared war -

Q So capturing or killing al Zawahiri doesn't -

DR. RICE: Will not end this war. What will end this war is a sustained effort, over a long time, in which the United States mobilizes all of its means, its military means, its law enforcement means, its means of taking away economic support -- takes all of those measures and pursues them on a daily basis; and in which we are not, as a country, afraid to go after them where they live. We are not going to be able to sit back here and fight this war on the defense.

* * * * *

Q The decision - the decision to go to war with Iraq. Nearly 600 American soldiers have died, thousands of Iraqi civilians have been killed and continue to die due to guerilla violence and terrorist attacks. Given the fact that no weapons of mass destruction have been found and there's no proof that Saddam Hussein was linked to 9/11 or al Qaeda, the country is split about why we're even in Iraq and if we're fighting the right war.

DR. RICE: The war on terrorism is a broad war, not a narrow war. And Iraq, one of the most dangerous regimes - I think the most dangerous regime in the world's most dangerous region in the Middle East - is a big reason, or was, under Saddam Hussein a big reason for instability in the region, for threats to the United States; he was firing at our aircraft practically every day as we tried to keep his forces under control; he had used weapons of mass destruction; he had the intent and was still developing the capability to do so. Saddam Hussein's regime was very dangerous. And now that Iraq has been liberated and that Iraq has a chance to be a stable democracy, the world is a lot safer and the war on terrorism is well-served by the victory in Iraq.

Q Are you prepared if they say, we don't want a democracy in Iraq?

DR. RICE: Everything that has happened so far shows that they want a democracy in Iraq. They're learning to compromise, they're learning to negotiate with each other - Shia and Sunnis and Kurds and others. They've put together a really terrific interim document called the Transitional Administrative

Law that is, by far, the most liberal document, from the point of view of protection of human and democratic rights, rights of women, freedom of religion. They're off to a very good start, but it's going to take a very long time.

And, Ed, when Iraq is democratic, you're going to have one of t lynchpins of a very different kind of Middle East. And after what happened to us on September 11th, I think all Americans would agree that we've got to have a different kind of Middle East, because it was the center of gravity from which al Qaeda came.

Q If you will, may I ask you just one follow up to that? You do expect a vote in Iraq, yes?

DR. RICE: We will have elections. There will be elections in Iraq.

Q And if the result of those elections the Iraqi people say, we want an Islamic republic, not a democracy?

DR. RICE: Ed, there is simply nothing that suggests that the Iraqi people want anything but what most people in the world want - and that is the freedom to say what they think, the freedom to send their girls and boys to school, the ability on basis of conscience to carry out religious practice. This is a sophisticated society, and everything demonstrates so far that what they want is to be perhaps the first really great democracy in the Middle East.

Q Dr. Rice, thank you very much.

DR. RICE: Thank you very much.

END 11:51 A.M. EST

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