

Condoleezza Rice Interview With Al Arabiya TV

Thursday, 5 October 2006, 5:08 pm
Press Release: US State Department

Interview With Randa Abu el Azem of Al Arabiya TV

Secretary Condoleezza Rice
Cairo, Egypt
October 3, 2006

QUESTION: Welcome with us, Ms. Secretary. And of course, this is your third trip to Egypt. We are wondering and many are wondering what is the mission of this visit because the agenda is full. But what specifically is the purpose of this visit?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, thank you very much. And I may first wish all of your viewers Ramadan Karim here in Egypt. I know a very special place for Ramadan.

We are here to try and understand better the complicated situation in the Middle East, to consult with our best allies in the Middle East like Egypt. I was in Saudi Arabia. I will meet later with the Gulf States plus Jordan, plus Egypt. And we have many challenges before us. We have the challenge, of course, of trying to find a way to support Mahmoud Abbas and to have the Palestinian-Israeli conflict begin to move in a positive direction. I'm terribly concerned about the situation in the Palestinian Territories. I think we will want to consult on how to strengthen the moderate Palestinian forces so that there might be re-engagement with Israel so that life can get better for the people.

We will talk about Lebanon and the full implementation of the UN Security Council resolution that ended the Lebanon conflict. We will also talk about Iraq. Egypt is now a part of the international compact for Iraq, and I think we all want to see the Iraqis come to terms with their differences. And so there are a number of issues on our agenda. But it's a full trip, and I'm looking forward to the consultation.

QUESTION: Well, actually many voices have criticized this meeting. And it's -- they've said that this is a coalition against Iran and the United States may have a step forward -- I mean a step -- a next step towards Iran whether sanctions, whether a military strike. So how do you view this criticism?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, first of all, this is not a meeting or a coalition against anyone. This is an effort to promote a more peaceful Middle East, a Middle East in which moderate forces can stand down extremist forces. This is also an effort to give some push hopefully to moving the Palestinian-Israeli process forward.

But Iran I'm sure is on everyone's mind. The nuclear issue continues to be of concern. We had hoped, and very fervently hoped, that Iran would take the plan that had been given to them, the package that had been given to them by the six parties. It was a plan that would have given Iran the civil nuclear power that it says that it wants, and would have allowed Iran to negotiate rather than confront. But it appears --

QUESTION: So what's your next move then?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, it appears that Iran is not going to do that. It's not going to suspend. And if it doesn't suspend, then Resolution 1696 is very clear, that we would move to measures under Article 41, Chapter 7 of the Security Council.

QUESTION: Military strike is not considered?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, the President keeps all of his options on the table, of course, but that's not the agenda at this point. The agenda is to get a diplomatic solution to this problem. And I still believe that there is plenty of time for a diplomatic solution. But we need Iran to do what the international community is demanding and that is to suspend its enrichment and reprocessing activities.

QUESTION: Okay. Concerning Iraq, there are two suggestions or two circulated suggestions actually. One is the division of Iraq, a sectarian division. And the other one is to limit American troops in a military zone away from the populated areas. So how do you view those suggestions?

SECRETARY RICE: Well as to the first, the idea that you would somehow divide Iraq, I've heard that from a lot of people but not from any Iraqis. Iraqis see themselves as a single country. They see themselves as Shia and Sunni and Kurds. Very often people are inter-married, tribes have all of the same -- have different people within them. So Iraqis want to be a unified country. And so that is what we're supporting.

As to the military strategy to help defeat the terrorists and the insurgents, we work daily with Prime Minister Maliki and with his defense chief and defense forces to apportion correctly American forces with Iraqi forces to take care of the security situation. But there's no doubt that more and more throughout the country Iraqi forces are in the lead. Iraqi forces are in control of numerous provinces now in Iraq.

QUESTION: So then to limit your forces, the U.S. troops in a military zone in a military area?

SECRETARY RICE: I think we have to do what it takes to get the job done, that is to help secure the Iraqi people.

QUESTION: Bob Woodward's last book, he mentioned that you knew beforehand, like two months before September 11 and you had warnings and you did not react to it. So what's your comment?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, I think that now this has been put to rest because this was brought to the attention of the 9/11 Commission. My understanding is George Tenet said no such thing. Of course, we knew in that period in July that there were lots of potential warnings that there might be an attack. Most of the warnings, by the way, all of them warned that there would be an attack overseas. But we reacted and reacted very quickly. The problem is that we did not have information that what was about to happen, that there would be the hijacking of planes and that people would fly them into buildings. But we did what we could. The most important thing is that we now know considerably more in the war on terror about how to stop such attacks. And we have to work with our allies, we have to work with all of our means to make sure that such an attack never happens again.

QUESTION: Now moving in Egypt, recently President Mubarak and the NGP announced a few amendments of the constitution. How do you view the political reform in Egypt? Is it going in the path that you were hoping that it would go?

And also, there are many voices blaming or, I mean, accusing the United States of supporting Gamal Mubarak as the next President especially that the Vice President seat is empty. So how do you view both?

SECRETARY RICE: Well first that Egypt will choose its next President and it's up to Egyptians. Americans have no view as to who should be the next President of Egypt. What we do believe is that it should be a continuation or perhaps an acceleration of the process of competitive presidential elections. That was a real step forward for Egypt.

And yes, there have been some disappointments particularly in the Parliamentary elections. We have continued to advocate for an open political system, for a system in which the press is free, for a system in which opposition is free to form. That is, I think, the future of Egypt because this is a country that should lead democratic reform in this region. And we will continue to advocate for that.

QUESTION: Now concerning the Arab countries where the Arab foreign ministers went to the UN and to the UN council to -- I mean to put the peace -- reform again with the peace (inaudible) with the UN instead of the current situation. You never really stated how do you view this.

SECRETARY RICE: Well, we feel that the Security Council is not really the right venue to try and direct or monitor the negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians. This is a matter for negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians. They should have the support not just of the Security Council but, for instance, of the modern Arab states who have a major role to play, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan. They should have the support of the Quartet, which is the international system's mechanism for supporting the Roadmap and peace between Israelis and Palestinians.

So it's not the absence of mechanisms that is the problem. We just need the political will now to find a way that the Palestinians can find a government that can live up to the international commitment the Palestinians have taken and can then engage the Israelis so that we can get back on track on the Roadmap.

QUESTION: We have to mention Darfur, of course, and the situation of the United States versus Sudan and the Sudani Government. How are you going to react? What is your next move especially with the Sudanese Government refusing international forces?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, the Security Council has spoken on this matter. The situation in Darfur is one that cannot be allowed to stand. We want a peace agreement in Darfur and, in fact, have worked very hard to bring the rebels and the government together. And there was an agreement and that agreement should be supported and indeed extended. But the African Union forces, which have done an excellent job thus far as far as they can are overmatched for the situation and people are dying and women are being raped and humanitarian assistance cannot get to people.

It is the responsibility of the Sudanese Government to protect the people of Darfur. And if it cannot, which it is not doing, it is the responsibility of the international community to provide UN security forces, UN Security Council forces that can provide that kind of protection.

QUESTION: If I may ask this question about Lebanon with the Lebanese -- I mean some (inaudible) voices have come out lately saying that war can erupt or may erupt again in three to four months. So how do you view this fragile situation in Lebanon?

SECRETARY RICE: Oh it is indeed fragile, but it is a far better situation than we had a few months ago, a couple of months ago. We have to support the Lebanese Government as it extends its authority throughout the country. We have to support the Lebanese armed forces as they are reformed and strengthened. We have to make sure that Resolution 1701 is fully implemented, that Hezbollah does not become a state within a state again. These are the things that will prevent an outbreak of war again.

QUESTION: Madame Secretary, thank you very much for your interview. I'm hoping to see you and have a longer interview next time.

SECRETARY RICE: Thank you very much.

QUESTION: Thank you, and I wish you a nice day in Egypt.

SECRETARY RICE: Thank you.

2006/890

Released on October 3, 2006

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