



*U.S. Department of State
CNN-Interview with Secretary Colin Powell
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Interview: Powell Rejects Charges of U.S. Unilateralism

Mr. Blitzer: A short while ago, I spoke with the U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell, who is traveling with the President in Tokyo. Mr. Secretary, thanks so much for joining us. And I want to get to the President's trip to Asia in just a moment, but first a few questions about the war in Afghanistan. There is a lot of turmoil going on in Afghanistan right now, an assassination, according to the Interim leader Hamid Karzai of a cabinet minister.

Is the United States going to get involved and try to help quiet the situation?

Secretary Powell: Well, we are going to do everything we can, Wolf. As you know, embassy people were out at the airport assisting with those pilgrims that are trying to get to Mecca, and we really regret the loss of the minister. I don't know if he was killed by the mob or, as Chairman Karzai suggested, he might have been assassinated. But I think this is something that the Interim Authority can handle with the international security force people -- the international security assistance force people who are there. I don't see a need for additional U.S. troops, if that was the suggestion of your question.

Mr. Blitzer: Well, he is also suggesting that the Saudi Government extradite some individuals, some government officials, Afghan officials who may have fled to Saudi Arabia. Would the U.S. encourage the Saudis to do that?

Secretary Powell: Well, certainly if there are people who have gotten to Saudi Arabia that Chairman Karzai would like to have back in custody, and he has a basis for having them back in custody, I hope the Saudis would reciprocate.

Mr. Blitzer: As far as you know right now, is Usama bin Laden still alive?

Secretary Powell: I have no idea, Wolf. I don't know if Usama bin Laden is alive or dead, and, if he's alive, where he might be. I do not know.

Mr. Blitzer: How worried are you, though, about that simple fact that the United States Government, with its vast intelligence resources, simply doesn't know the whereabouts, or even if Usama bin Laden is alive?

Secretary Powell: Well, it is not that hard to imagine. It is not hard to have one individual hide like that. But when you're hiding like that and when you're on the run, you are not as effective as you were a few months earlier when you had a network, where you were calling people, where you had people coming to see you, and where you were controlling an organization.

Right now, he is a fugitive on the run, if he is alive, and he knows darn well that if he tries to exercise in any active way any authorities that he still thinks he has remaining, he would put himself at even greater risk. So he's on the run, and in due course he will be found and he will be brought to justice, or justice brought to him.

Mr. Blitzer: You testified earlier this week before the Senate, and you spoke about the situation as far as Iraq is concerned. I want you to listen to a brief excerpt of what you had to say: "With respect to Iraq, it's long been, for several years now, a policy of the United States Government that regime change would be in the best interest of the region, the best interest of the Iraqi people. And we are looking at a variety of options that would bring that about."

Mr. Secretary, is one of those options a full-scale military strike against Iraq?

Secretary Powell: There are lots of options, and I don't want to get into individual options. Of course, there are military options, there are diplomatic and political options, and there are combinations of these options. But I don't want to single out specific ones such as a full-scale Desert Storm type attack. The President is not in receipt of any recommendation from his advisors at this time, but all options are on the table.

We are working also aggressively within the UN to improve the sanctions regime. As the President has said, let the inspectors in. They are tied to the sanctions regime. That's why the sanctions are there.

And the Iraqis are going around trying to get support around the world. And the easiest way for them to get the support they need and see if there's a way out of this mess is to let the inspectors in to see whether or not they are developing weapons of mass destruction. Even then, though, the United States believes, the Iraqi people would still be better off with a new kind of leadership that is not trying to hide this sort of development activity on weapons of mass destruction and is not of the despotic nature that the Saddam Hussein regime is.

Mr. Blitzer: As you know, the comments of the President in his State of the Union Address branding Iraq, Iran, North Korea as an "axis of evil" has generated a lot of concern, especially among the European allies. In fact, The New York Times foreign affairs columnist Tom Friedman wrote this on Wednesday. He said, "President Bush thinks the axis of evil is Iran, Iraq and North Korea, and the Europeans think it's Donald Rumsfeld, Dick Cheney and Condi Rice."

How concerned are you about the angry European reaction?

Secretary Powell: There has been some angry European reaction, as you call it, but there has also been, I think, some clear-headed reality within Europe at the same time that it is hard not to look at a regime such as Iraq, which is developing these kinds of weapons, and is ignoring the international community.

All my European friends should be that outraged that this regime is ignoring, for ten years now, the international community's direction to it.

I think my European colleagues who are doing business with Iran should also be concerned over the fact that Iran is developing nuclear weapons and the means by which those weapons can be delivered. So that should be of great concern to them as well.

And so there is a bit of a stir in Europe, but it is stir I think we will be able to manage with consultations, with contacts of the kind I have almost every day with my European colleagues. And we will find a way to move forward that will gather the support we need.

What the President has said is: I'm calling it the way it is. He did it in a very straightforward, direct, realistic way that tends to jangle people's nerves; but once they settle down and understand that he is going to go about this in a prudent, disciplined, determined way, they realize that is what leadership is about and they begin to understand why it might make sense for them to join in whatever efforts we may be getting ready to undertake.

Mr. Blitzer: Some of the European leaders are not happy with what they see as a go-it-alone, unilateral U.S. approach. Joschka Fischer, the Foreign Minister of Germany, said this. He said, "An alliance partnership among free democrats can't be reduced to submission. Alliance partners are not satellites. All European foreign ministers see it that way. That is why the phrase 'axis of evil' leads nowhere."

And Chris Patten, the European Union's Commissioner for External Affairs, a friend of yours, said on Thursday, "My answer is not that the unilateralist urge is wicked, but that it is ultimately ineffective and self-defeating."

Those are pretty strong words from allies of the United States.

Secretary Powell: Strong words. Joschka and I have talked a couple of times this week, and I have the greatest respect for Chris Patten and the others who have spoken out, and my other colleague in Paris, Hubert Vedrine, the Foreign Minister of France. But I think we need to just slow down a little bit. What unilateral action have we taken that is causing them to get so upset? The President made a statement in his speech, a clear statement identifying nations that deserve to be labeled as evil because of the nature of their regimes, and now we are in discussion with our allies. So what unilateral action have we taken that has them all so shocked?

We are in the process of examining all our options -- within the UN, within the context of the conversations that the President has with heads of state and government on a regular basis, within the context of all the consultations that I have with Hubert Vedrine, with Joschka Fischer. And in due course I will have a chance to talk to Chris Patten and Javier Solana of the European Union. So we are in touch with them; it is just that they get a little upset when the President speaks with such clarity and such direction. But that is what leadership is about. I am sure as we go forward, as we discuss these matters with them, I hope we will see some of this excitement calm down a bit.

Our policy with respect to North Korea remains one of hoping they will engage. We haven't taken that off the table. We have asked North Korea, "Come, let's talk -- any time, any place, without any preconditions. We're waiting." Does that mean we can't identify the nature of that regime for what it is -- evil? It is evil. Not the people of North Korea, but the regime itself and the way it has conducted its business for the last 50 years.

Because we are waiting for the inspectors to get into Iraq, we should ignore the nature of that regime? My European colleagues should be pounding on Iraq as quickly as they pound on us when the President makes a strong, principled speech.

With respect to Iran, some good things have been happening there, but some not so good things have been happening. And so I think the President's characterization was an accurate one, and perhaps some of the condemnatory language we have been hearing should be directed toward these nations, as opposed to the President's very powerful and clear and honest statement.

Mr. Blitzer: One other point about Iraq before we move on. Ken Adeleman, a former Pentagon official in the Reagan Administration, wrote in The Washington Post this weekend his assessment, insisting that a U.S. military invasion, a strike against Iraq, would be relatively simple. He said, "I believe demolishing Saddam Hussein's military power and liberating Iraq would be a cakewalk. Let me give simple, responsible reasons: (1) it was a cakewalk last time; (2) they've become much weaker; (3) we've become much stronger; and (4) now we're playing for keeps."

Do you agree with Ken Adeleman's assessment?

Secretary Powell: Well, I'm a great admirer of Ken Adeleman, and we were brothers-in-arms, so to speak, in the Reagan years. But I think I will let the United States military leadership determine what kind of an operation it would be and let them, rather than journalists and pundits, determine what will be a cakewalk or not a cakewalk.

Mr. Blitzer: As far as the President's upcoming trip to China is concerned, it is obviously very, very important. But I want to remind our viewers around the world what the President said as a candidate in 1999 about the U.S.-China relationship. Listen to this clip: "China is a competitor, not a strategic partner. We must deal with China without ill will, but without illusions."

Is that statement still applicable today?

Secretary Powell: I think it fits the circumstances. We are not using either "competitor" or "strategic partner." I think we have to not try to capture this very complex relationship with a single sound bite. The President's position toward China is very clear: Let's cooperate in areas where we can cooperate; where there are differences, let's talk about them; and when there are serious differences, where we have a fundamental disagreement, we will let you know the nature of that fundamental disagreement and see if we can do something about that.

And I think that our relationship with China has been improving steadily ever since the President took office. Everybody thought it was going to be a major crisis when we had the incident with the reconnaissance plane that was run into by the Chinese fighter plane. But we came through that because both countries realized we have bigger equities to work with.

China is now a member of the World Trading Organization. We have a growing trading relationship with China. We are concerned about religious freedom in China, and the President will be discussing this with President Jiang Zemin. We are concerned about individual rights. We are concerned about proliferation of weapons. We will discuss all of these items with the Chinese, but we will do it straight up, eyeball-to-eyeball, and at the same time, we will work on those areas where there is good cooperation with respect to economic activity and trade relations, although there is more that we need to do with trade relations as well, especially in the field of agriculture.

So it is a complex relationship and we no longer try to reduce it to a simple sound bite because it doesn't do justice to the complexity of the relationship and, frankly, the way in which the relationship is moving forward in such a positive direction.

Mr. Blitzer: And just to nail down the situation with North Korea, despite North Korea's being a member of what the President calls the "axis of evil," the United States is still prepared to

have a dialogue with North Korea in coordination with South Korea's so-called sunshine policy, right?

Secretary Powell: The President has said repeatedly, before his State of the Union Address and since his State of the Union Address, that we do want to have a dialogue with Korea. We support what the South Koreans have been doing. They have been reaching out. They have been trying to engage the North Koreans.

We also will keep within the Framework Agreement that we signed with the North Koreans in 1994, providing them with energy sources in the future. We provide humanitarian aid in the form of food to the North Koreans, and we note that the North Koreans are staying within the missile terrorist moratorium that they said they would stay in a few years ago.

So there are things to work with here. But at the same time, the President will not look away from the nature of that regime and just compliment them on these other somewhat positive elements in the relationship with respect to the Framework Agreement of 1994 and the moratorium. They are still developing weapons that they plan to sell to other irresponsible nations, and I think we have to call them to account. They are a despotic regime. And that is not just my opinion; it's an absolute statement of fact. Anybody can see it. So we are inviting it to come out, to end its isolation, and to find a way to engage with the South, to engage with us, to engage with other nations, and start to build a better life for the Korean people.

That's all the President wants. He wants a better life for the people of North Korea. He would like them to start to enjoy the fruits of their labor the way the people of South Korea have. And that is going to be the positive message he will deliver in South Korea next week.

Mr. Blitzer: Mr. Secretary, while I you, on the situation between the Israelis and the Palestinians is deteriorating, seemingly on a daily basis. Whatever happened to General Zinni, Anthony Zinni, your special Middle East envoy, staying in the region until there's a cease-fire, until there's an end to this violence?

Secretary Powell: General Zinni is there to help put in place a security arrangement where both sides will do everything they can to bring a cease-fire into being. We sent him in twice, we brought him out. He is available. He is ready to go back in when circumstances warrant..

I have given a set of conditions to the Palestinian side, things that we need to see movement on, or there is no point right now in sending General Zinni back. We need to see people arrested. We need to see more done with respect to reducing the violence. And when the violence goes down, I think we will have a situation where General Zinni can go back in, use that quieter period to put in place a security arrangement that will keep it quiet, get us into the Tenet work plan, get us into the Mitchell peace plan, and move forward.

The situation right now is not good, just as you say, Wolf. It's unstable. And we have a car bomb, and then that's responded to with a strike by the Israelis, and that's responded to with another bombing of some kind or another, and we get nowhere. Neither side will prevail in this test of arms. And the sooner we can get quiet and a cease-fire, the sooner we can be on our way to negotiations which will provide a solution under the terms of UN Resolutions 242 and 338.

Mr. Blitzer: Finally, Mr. Secretary, the comments you made on that MTV interview about condom use generated some concern among conservatives here in the United States, although

your views were endorsed by the White House Press Secretary Ari Fleischer speaking on behalf of the President.

Any second thoughts, though, about how phrased your comments, given the concern, if not outrage, some conservatives have expressed here?

Secretary Powell: Absolutely not. I was talking to a worldwide audience of 17 to 25 year-olds. I was on 33 MTV channels talking to 375 million households around the world. And the question came to me with respect to sexually active youngsters. I'm a great believer in abstinence programs. My wife and I participated in the founding of such programs. We funded them. With my America's Promise activity, we preach this kind of message of abstinence to young people.

The United States policy with respect to this issue starts with abstinence, then faithfulness, but then condoms, for the simple reason that people are sexually active around the world, and HIV/AIDS is not just a disease; it is a disease and it is a pandemic that is destroying the lives of millions of people around the world, especially in sub-Saharan Africa. And we have to do everything we can to teach people that if they are going to be sexually active, they have to protect themselves. People will disagree as to how effective condoms are; we believe they are effective and we do have government programs that provide them.

And so we have a comprehensive program that begins with abstinence. So I have no apology for the way in which I answered the question, and the reason that Mr. Fleischer embraced that position is because it was part of our overall comprehensive policy. I co-chair the President's Cabinet-level task force with Secretary of Health and Human Services Tommy Thompson on HIV/AIDS. Why the Secretary of State and the Secretary of Health and Human Services? Because it is not just a domestic problem; it's a worldwide problem that affects our national security. And we can't blind ourselves to it or hide behind old shibboleths.

And when I said that we've got to get rid of conservative views, I wasn't talking about political conservative views, capital "C". I was talking about small "c." In many undeveloped nations, people don't want to talk about it. They hide behind old cultural mores and tribal shibboleths. We have to get rid of that so that we can educate youngsters to protect themselves, educate youngsters why they should abstain, why they should be faithful. But if they are going to be sexually active, we have got to educate them how to protect themselves. And one way to do that is with condoms, and for me to have said anything else would have been irresponsible. And as my daughter told me when I was getting ready for MTV, "Dad, don't try to snow these kids."

Mr. Blitzer: Your daughter gave you some good advice, as usual. Mr. Secretary, thanks so much for joining us. Have a safe journey. Good luck in Asia.

Secretary Powell: Thanks, Wolf.

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