



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Interview on NBC's Meet the Press With Tim Russert

Secretary Colin L. Powell

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MR. RUSSERT: Joining us now is the Secretary of State. Good morning.

SECRETARY POWELL: Good morning, Tim.

MR. RUSSERT: This Tuesday or Wednesday, the United States and Great Britain will move a resolution before the United Nations which will set March 17th as a firm deadline for Saddam Hussein to cooperate fully on disarmament. Do we have the nine votes in the Security Council to pass that resolution?

SECRETARY POWELL: That's not clear yet. We'll have to wait and see when the vote is taken sometime this week. But I am encouraged by the discussions I've been having with a number of members of the Council.

There are some members of the Council among the permanent membership of the Council that are firmly against such a vote. You know France's position, certainly. But I think most of the elected ten members are making up their minds over this weekend, and I've been in close contact with them.

So I think we have a chance to get, a strong chance, and I am encouraged that we might get the nine or ten votes needed for passage of the resolution, and we'll see if somebody wants to veto it. But I will have to wait and see. We'll all have to wait and see.

MR. RUSSERT: France has already said that even if it passes, they will veto.

SECRETARY POWELL: They haven't used the word "veto" but they have certainly indicated that they would use their veto. They said they would not support such a resolution and would do everything they could to stop it.

MR. RUSSERT: What about the Chinese and Russians?

SECRETARY POWELL: The Chinese and Russians, I think, are making their own judgments on it. They haven't used the veto word, either. I think the Russians have expressed strong opposition to it and the Chinese, I'm not entirely sure what they might do. But yes, there is resistance.

MR. RUSSERT: Has President Putin of Russia told President Bush that he would not veto it?

SECRETARY POWELL: No. He has had good conversations with President Bush over the past week and I have had a number of conversations in person and on the phone, of course, with my Russian colleague, Igor Ivanov. And there are strong and different points of view, but we will see what the Russian Federation does when the vote is taken.

MR. RUSSERT: Mr. Secretary, if the resolution does not pass, or if you do get the nine or ten votes but the French veto it, will the deadline of March 17th still hold for Saddam Hussein?

SECRETARY POWELL: Well, that, of course, is a deadline that is a part of the resolution, so if the resolution doesn't pass, March 17th, as a matter for the UN, is not relevant. But at least in our own mind, and thinking in the American administration, time is running out, time has just about run out. And I think the President, in the presence of such a vote in the UN, would then make his determination as to whether it is time for us to use American force with a willing coalition that would go in.

But we are still looking at the 17th as enough time to have made a judgment that he is not complying, he is not cooperating. I mean, just look at what he said yesterday in the presence of the debate: everything's fine, I'm clean, everything's okay, get rid of all the sanctions; ignore the paper that Dr. Blix is putting out listing page after page of unresolved issues that have been unresolved for years, and Saddam Hussein just wants to ignore them all.

MR. RUSSERT: But if it doesn't pass, then the 17th is no longer operative? We could have military action before that?

SECRETARY POWELL: It depends on what the President's decision is after we have seen what happens in the UN this week.

MR. RUSSERT: The situation we're in now has been described as a failure of American diplomacy -- some say enormous, some say colossal -- and people

point to how we got where we are now. This is an article in The Washington Post. I want to give you a chance to respond:

"Months of painstaking efforts by Secretary of State Colin Powell to win international consensus for military action against Iraq have been complicated by a growing resentment over what many foreign diplomats regard as the Bush Administration's heavy-handed and bullying tactics of the last two years. 'There have been really aggressive battles that have got people's backs up,' said a diplomat who is supporting the U.S. The U.S. team often acts like thugs. People feel bullied. They can affect the way you respond when someone makes a request. Foreign officials say anger over the administration's style say that almost from the moment President Bush took office, the administration's rejection of the Kyoto Treaty with global warming, the whole policy on South Korea, North Korea and sunshine, and the ABM Treaty, and on and on and on."

Is there some validity to that?

SECRETARY POWELL: I don't think so, Tim. We came in as an administration that was strongly committed to principled stands. We took a principled stand with respect to Kyoto. Others did not agree with our stand. I understand that. Other nations went down the Kyoto route. We are finding other ways to deal with the problem of greenhouse emissions.

We have tried to cooperate with the international community on the expansion of NATO, on encouraging the expansion of the European Union. We do support the Sunshine Policy in South Korea but we believe it is important to not deceive ourselves as to the nature of the North Korean regime or what they've been doing. And we found in the first two years we were in office that that was a sound position when we discovered that the North Koreans were still developing nuclear weapons even though they were supposed not to be developing nuclear weapons.

So we have taken strong positions. We have worked hard on globalization. We have started initiatives for dealing with HIV/AIDS around the world. We have gotten the Doha trade round extended. There are many things we have done that demonstrate our commitment to international organizations, and we listen carefully to the views of our friends.

But at the same time, sometimes we can't reconcile our views with those of our friends. And when that is the case, we believe it is important for us to stand on the principle that we believe in.

MR. RUSSERT: But as you know, the U.S. image in the world is being held up to ridicule in many quarters. There are people now expressing grave reservations about the war. I remember when John Kennedy went to Berlin, hundreds of thousands of Germans screaming and cheering Kennedy in the street, and now

50 percent of Germans say that our President, President Bush, is a warmonger. What happened?

SECRETARY POWELL: I think people are not willing to face up to what we are willing to face up to, and that is that in the case of Iraq we have a dictator who, for 12 years, has denied the legitimacy of the United Nations. People are talking about us, you know, somehow affecting the United Nations in a negative way. It is Saddam Hussein who ignored the legitimacy of the United Nations for 12 years and some 16 resolutions, when finally the President of the United States, not taking unilateral action but going to the United Nations, said we must deal with this, we must not let him get away with this. And it was the President of the United States, with his diplomatic efforts and the diplomatic efforts of the entire administration team, that got Resolution 1441 passed with a 15-0 vote. That was a triumph of American diplomacy.

Unfortunately, there are some members of the Council and many people in the world who thought that 1441 was just words. It wasn't. It was a statement of principle. Saddam Hussein is guilty. We're giving him one last chance to disarm. Will he take it? And if he doesn't take, serious consequences would follow.

And everybody who voted for 1441 knew that. Well, he hasn't taken it, as evidenced just yesterday with his essentially placing demands on the UN while we're placing demands on him, and it's outrageous and it is time to take him to account. And I regret that not all nations understand that and all peoples understand that in those nations. At the same time, the United States enjoys strong support from most European nations and the President is determined that this matter has to be dealt with for the safety of the region, the safety of the world, the safety of the American people.

MR. RUSSETT: But in terms of world opinion, how was it that we have lost a battle of public relations to a tyrant like Saddam?

SECRETARY POWELL: Well, I don't know that I can fully answer that question, except that I have been in a number of crises before, and it's a matter of war and peace. Most people would prefer to be on the side of peace. I would prefer to be on the side of peace. And it is always unpopular -- I've seen it in a number of crises, whether it was going into Panama or whether it was the Gulf War -- where public opinion is against you until the time of truth comes, the moment of truth comes, when you go in and you find out what they really have been doing and you liberate a people and you bring a better life to that country for the people of that country, and then you'll see that public opinion will change.

MR. RUSSETT: The President talks about Saddam being a threat to his neighborhood, and let me show you Iraq and its neighborhood, surrounded by Iran, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Syria and Turkey. Other than Kuwait, none of those other countries have expressed publicly support for a military action

against Saddam Hussein. If he's such a threat to his neighborhood, why are those countries so silent?

SECRETARY POWELL: They have their own domestic political reasons for silence, but at the same time, we are getting the kind of support that we need in the event that military action is required.

MR. RUSSELL: From those countries?

SECRETARY POWELL: We are getting the kind of support that we will need. Now, there are some difficulties with respect to each of the countries. In Turkey, for example, the government, which is still forming, took the issue to parliament. I mean, we had intense discussions with the Turks. I met with them in Davos, in Switzerland, a few weeks ago. The Prime Minister and the new Prime Minister. I've had the Foreign Minister and the Finance Minister to Washington, to my home recently. And they went forward to their parliament. They weren't able to succeed in the first vote.

Now, I know they are forming their government now and they are committed to take that issue back to the parliament. So Turkey is supportive. Even though they have internal domestic political problems, they wish to be supportive of our effort. Other nations in the region are supporting in ways that are consistent with what they are able to do with respect to their domestic constituencies.

MR. RUSSELL: Your testimony before the United Nations has now been directly challenged by members at the United Nations. This is what the head of the International Atomic Energy Agency, Mohamed ElBaradei, said, that, "In recent months, the administration and Britain have alleged Iraq illegally sought high-strength aluminum tubes for a centrifuge-based uranium enrichment program and had sought uranium from Niger." He said experts had concluded the tubes were for a rocket engine program, as Iraq had said, and that documents used to allege the connection between Iraq and Niger were fabricated. Overall, he concluded there is no evidence that Iraq has revived a nuclear weapons program.

Mr. ElBaradei saying that you and the President misled the world on the aluminum tubes and that the documents, in terms of Niger and Iraq, were fabricated. Those are very serious charges.

SECRETARY POWELL: Well, with respect to the aluminum tubes, we still believe the case is out. The CIA has done a great deal of analysis on those tubes. They are not persuaded they were just for rockets. And, in fact, another nation this week, a European nation, came forward with some additional information that still, I think, leaves it an open question as to what the purpose of those tubes was.

With respect to the uranium, it was the information that we had. We provided it. If that information is inaccurate, fine. We're continuing to examine this issue. And as Dr. ElBaradei said, it's still an open issue to be looked at.

But we have to be a little careful about nuclear weapons programs. We saw the IAEA almost give Iraq a clean bill of health in the early '90s, only to discover that they had a robust nuclear weapons program that they had not discovered. And if you just look at Iran this week, right now, the IAEA is discovering, as a result of information and intelligence made available, that Iran has a far more robust program for the development of nuclear weapons than the IAEA thought.

So while I respect Dr. ElBaradei's opinion, he's a very dedicated international civil servant, I think we have to keep an open book on this as more information comes forward.

MR. RUSSERT: Another rationale provided by the administration for action against Saddam is his connection to al-Qaida. Tom Friedman, in The New York Times, wrote this:

"I am also very troubled by the way Bush officials have tried to justify this war on the grounds that Saddam is allied with Usama bin Laden, or will be soon. There is simply no proof of that, and every time I hear them repeat it, I think of the Gulf of Tonkin resolution from the Vietnam times. You don't take the country to war on the wings of a lie."

SECRETARY POWELL: I don't think it's a lie. I think there is information and evidence that there are connections. We have talked about Mr. al-Zarqawi and some of the people who are in Baghdad who are linked with al-Qaida and Usama bin Laden and who were there with the certain knowledge of the Iraqi regime. We have seen connections and we are continuing to pursue those connections.

We are not resting our whole case on this linkage. We are resting our case for the necessity perhaps of going to war on the fact that Saddam Hussein has developed weapons of mass destruction, has them in his possession, and for 12 years he has violated the will of the international community. It is the international community that has been violated here, not Saddam Hussein. He is the one who has stuck his finger in the eye of the international community. He is the one who has been deceiving and telling the lies all these years. And the fact that there is also an al-Qaida connection, I think certainly adds to the case, but we are not resting the whole case on that connection.

MR. RUSSERT: And for us to succeed in terms of our policy towards Iraq, one, Iraq must be disarmed of weapons of mass destruction; and Saddam Hussein must go?

SECRETARY POWELL: I think the region would be a lot better off, and certainly the Iraqi people would be a lot better off, if Saddam Hussein were no longer

there. We have said clearly, though, that within the UN context it was getting rid of the weapons of mass destruction. It was the previous administration, President Clinton's Administration, and the American Congress in 1998 that made it an American position that regime change seemed to be the only way to get rid of the weapons of mass destruction and to get Saddam Hussein out of the place so that the Iraqi people would no longer suffer under that kind of leadership.

What we have said is: Can the regime change itself? Can there be a changed regime, if it was the full force and pressure, political pressure of the UN and the threat of force? And what we have seen so far is that regime has not yet indicated it would change itself, and time is running out. And when that time elapses, then the regime must be changed.

MR. RUSSERT: But if Saddam Hussein came forward on a deathbed conversion and said, all right, I give it all up, take it all, I'm completely disarmed, complete cooperation, he could then stay?

SECRETARY POWELL: That deal has been out there for 12 years. That deal has been out there since 1441 was passed in early November. It was clear that 1441 said Saddam Hussein is guilty, there are consequences for this guilt; now, one last chance. What we are interested in is getting rid of the weapons of mass destruction. One last chance. Let's see all the people who were involved in these programs, for them to be interviewed, interviewed without threat, out of the country. Let's see all the documents. Let's see all the equipment. Let's see all the facilities.

He could have done this the day after by bringing forward all that material, all the documents. These folks are master documenters. They are bureaucrats. They have records. And as Dr. Blix has said and as he has put out in the document released Friday, they simply have not answered questions, vital questions, about what happened to anthrax, what happened to botulinum toxin. They have not answered these questions for the last 10 to 12 years. And it is not acceptable now to keep asking the questions and not getting the answers.

MR. RUSSERT: But if we commence military action, that operation would not be successful unless Saddam is killed or captured?

SECRETARY POWELL: At this point, if military action is required, it's because the regime has not changed itself, it is not complying with the demands of the international community, and therefore the regime has to be changed.

MR. RUSSERT: And no one would emerge as an alternative to Saddam until they knew that he was dead or captured?

SECRETARY POWELL: Well, I can't speculate what somebody might or might not do, but it seems to me once the regime is changed, I know that there are many Iraqis, both inside the country and outside the country, who are standing

ready to help the Iraqi people toward a better life, a life where the oil treasure of Iraq, the wealth that that country has, will be used to benefit its people, not to threaten its neighbors, not to keep dictators in power, and not to essentially waste its wealth on weapons of mass destruction.

MR. RUSSERT: This week, before Congress, you said that we would be in Iraq for some time.

SECRETARY POWELL: Yes.

MR. RUSSERT: During the campaign, in the presidential debate, the President was emphatic about nation-building. Let's just listen to this quickly: "Well, I don't think our troops ought to be used for what's called nation-building."

Isn't that exactly what we'd have to do in Iraq?

SECRETARY POWELL: In Iraq, I think what we would have to do, if military action is required, is to remove this regime and, as quickly as possible, get international organizations involved, get the international community totally involved. We would have to make sure that we maintained stability and that the country didn't break up. We'd be there for a while and we would help with the nation-building. There's no question about that.

But we hope that the Iraqis can build their own nation under new leadership and with the wealth that comes to them in the form of \$20 billion a year in revenue.

MR. RUSSERT: Many people across the country still step back and say, "Mr. Secretary, why would we invade a country that has not yet attacked us?" What's the answer?

SECRETARY POWELL: I think 9/11 changes the calculus that one uses for this. Saddam Hussein has been a threat to the region and we believe that his development of weapons of mass destruction and his intent toward his neighbors and the hostility he holds toward us; and in the post-9/11 period, where you have this potential nexus between weapons of mass destruction and terrorist organizations, non-state actors who are trying to get such weapons, suggests that this kind of threat has to be dealt with. And he has been in violation not only of, you know, our desire to see him be disarmed and get rid of these weapons of mass destruction, he's been in violation of international obligations for 12 years.

And so this is a case where we believe the international community should act to protect itself, and, in protecting itself, protect the United States and protect the neighbors of Iraq.

MR. RUSSERT: Do you think it will be war?

SECRETARY POWELL: I don't know, Tim. I think the window is closing rapidly. I think if we do not see a rather remarkable and unexpected change after what

Saddam Hussein said yesterday -- I'm not expecting -- then I think the probably of war is rapidly increasing.

MR. RUSSERT: Are we prepared for all the risks and ramifications, the insurrection in the Arab street, the potential difficulties in Pakistan, the environmental hazards, the refugees, and on and on and on, when we open that bottle?

SECRETARY POWELL: All of those issues have been examined and looked at, and we are making all of the contingency plans one might expect. And we are also looking at the real possibility that after such an action there will be very positive consequences that flow from a military victory, which there will be, positive consequences that suggest that we now have a country willing to live in peace with its neighbors, that is disarmed of its weapons of mass destruction, and a dictator that does not cause the kind of turmoil in the region that Saddam Hussein has caused in that region for the last 29 years.

MR. RUSSERT: Mr. Secretary, we thank you for joining us and sharing your views.

SECRETARY POWELL: Thank you.

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