



Interview on CNN's Late Edition

Secretary Colin L. Powell
Washington, DC
December 2, 2001

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, thank you so much for joining us. I know this is a hectic morning for you.

The Palestinian Authority has just issued a statement in the name of Yasser Arafat, saying that any faction, coalition or party within the Palestinian community that does not respect the decision of the Palestinian leadership will be considered beyond the law, especially those who claim responsibility for actions against Israeli civilians.

What do you make of the reaction of the Palestinians so far?

SECRETARY POWELL: Well, it's a good statement. Now we need to see action. Statements aren't enough any longer; words aren't enough any longer.

I spoke to Chairman Arafat last night, right after the first bombing in Jerusalem but before Haifa. And I made it clear to him that he had to act because not only was this a terrible attack against innocent Israelis, a terrible act of terror, but it was also an attack against him, it was an attack against his authority, it was an attack against the Palestinian leadership, and it was an attack that he could not overlook.

So he had to do it, not only because it was the right thing to do when you have this kind of murderous action, but he had to do it if he was going to remain in a position of authority and have authority over the Palestinian people and to perform his job as the leader of the Palestinian people. And this statement reflects his understanding of that position, and he responded to me in kind last night, saying that he understood that and that it was an attack against him and he expressed his condolences for the loss of Israeli life. But it was an attack against him; he was going to respond accordingly.

Words aren't enough; we now have to see action.

QUESTION: Well, when you say the United States wants action, specifically what do you want Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat to do?

SECRETARY POWELL: One, find out who else is responsible, besides those who killed themselves, for these attacks last night. Bring them to justice, arrest them and keep them in jail, not just arrest them and then they are disappeared and back in the street in a few days' time.

But, more than that, he has to go after future perpetrators. He has to go after these organizations that are training and preparing these suicide bombers and preparing for further future acts of violence. This is what he has to do. And he has to go after these organizations that are taking credit for these kinds of actions.

And as he said in his statement, he is going after those who are outside or beyond the law. He is absolutely right. You cannot have a legitimate authority, such as the Palestinian Authority, where you have people answerable to that authority acting outside any reasonable standards of law, any reasonable standards of civilized behavior.

QUESTION: So you want him to shut down specifically Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad?

SECRETARY POWELL: I think he should shut down and go after all those organizations as he has said that may be acting beyond his authority and the law that they have created within the Palestinian Authority. He has to go after them.

QUESTION: But which organizations are you specifically referring to?

SECRETARY POWELL: Well, I am referring to those responsible for these actions and those that take credit for these actions. Hamas is one. The Palestinian Islamic Jihad is another. He has to deal with these organizations.

QUESTION: Well, the Israelis say that even Arafat's own Fatah faction has been responsible for terrorist actions against --

SECRETARY POWELL: If there is evidence of a kind that is described by the Israeli side, I think he has to act on it. I think it is time for him to act. It is a moment of truth for him.

The United States is willing to help. We put down a comprehensive statement of the United States' position. We sent General Zinni, a retired Marine, to go over there to help the two sides start to move forward toward a cease-fire. Until you get this violence down, down preferably to zero, but until you get it down, you don't have a basis of confidence for the two sides to get into a cease-fire and start the confidence-building measures of the Mitchell plan and get the negotiations.

At the end of the day, we must see negotiations or else this problem will never be solved. But you won't get to those negotiations as long as you have people who are willing to commit acts of terror to keep you from getting into the Mitchell plan, who don't want to see negotiations, who are just interested in terror and violence. And that's what has to be brought --

QUESTION: As you know, the Israelis want the Palestinians to arrest hundreds, if not thousands, of what they claim who are terrorists who have been on the loose in the West Bank and Gaza. Is that what the US wants as well?

SECRETARY POWELL: I don't know what the numbers are, and if it's hundreds of thousands. I think the Palestinians have to do a much better job of finding those who are planning acts of terror. And to the extent that the Israelis can provide information to the Palestinians or the Palestinians can generate that information themselves, they've got to act on that information and not just receive it and sort of look at the list. They've got to go after people who are known terrorists who are known to be planning such acts. That's the demand that the Israelis have put down, and according to what Mr. Arafat said this morning, he is making the

same demand on his own people, that these kinds of individuals who are acting beyond the law, have to be brought within the law, and that means arresting those who are planning such activities.

QUESTION: The Israelis are under -- the Israeli Government is under enormous pressure right now to respond. It may be too late. What are you specifically asking the Israeli Government to do in delaying some sort of retaliation?

SECRETARY POWELL: We haven't spoken to the Israeli Government. That will take place in the course of the morning. Prime Minister Sharon and the President will be getting together and we will hear from Mr. Sharon his assessment of the situation and I'm sure it will be a very difficult meeting but it's a meeting that we have to have.

Mr. Sharon is a freely elected leader of a democratic nation, and he will respond in a way that he thinks is appropriate. What we always say is, always consider what happens the day after and the day after that. Because, ultimately, we have to try to get to a situation where the two sides are talking about ending violence and you always have to consider the day after.

And what we see now with 14 months of Intifada and with a new leadership in Israel for the last nine or 10 months is that we have not yet begun to get the violence under control in a way that the two sides can move forward into a plan that is sitting there, waiting to be executed, that will lead us back to negotiations.

QUESTION: The former Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu spoke out last night. I want you to listen to what he said, because it comes to the question of whether Yasser Arafat can control the Palestinians himself. Listen to this:

"Arafat is not using the power that he has, the 50,000 weapons that we have given him in the Oslo Agreement, to work against terrorists. He is not using a fraction, even one of those rifles, to go after these terrorists, and that's why they're roaming around free and doing what they're doing."

SECRETARY POWELL: I agree with Mr. Netanyahu to the extent that Mr. Arafat can be doing more, and I have spoken to him about this directly. He needs to use all of the authority that he has. He needs to use the security, intelligence, and other sources available to him to get after this problem.

QUESTION: But the Palestinians respond by saying that, as long as there is an Israeli occupation and settlements and Israeli soldiers using military force, there are going to be desperate actions by desperate people. I want you to listen to what the Palestinian representative here in Washington said about that:

"It is unfair to put the blame on Yasser Arafat and on the Authority alone without looking at what the Israelis are doing to the Palestinians. The conditions that are created by Israel makes the Palestinian people very angry and very frustrated."

SECRETARY POWELL: I know that the Palestinian people are very angry and very frustrated. I know the conditions under which they are living are very difficult. There is 50 percent unemployment. I understand all of that.

But to understand all of that says, now we've got to act. And the United States has made it clear that the occupation is a problem, settlements are a problem. But we are not going to get to a solution by just trading charges and giving justifications for anger. There is no justification for using a car bomb against innocent children, young people out for a nice evening. There is no justification, no level of anger or frustration to -- can be used to justify that kind of act.

And so rather than just exchanging these arguments, what we need to do is sit down. And that is why we sent General Zinni over there with Assistant Secretary Burns, to get these people to sit down, security people to sit down and begin to take those steps that will lead us toward a cease-fire.

QUESTION: We have to take a quick break, but we will have much more of my interview with the Secretary of State Colin Powell, including his thoughts on the war in Afghanistan and the possibility that Iraq might become the next US target. Stay with us.

(Pause.)

QUESTION: Welcome back to Late Edition. Now more of my interview with the Secretary of State, Colin Powell, on the latest terror attacks in Israel and the war in Afghanistan.

All right, let's move on and talk about the implications from all of this for the US war in Afghanistan, because there are enormous implications, depending on what happens next, how the Israelis react. One Cabinet member is suggesting they should simply expel Arafat from the West Bank and Gaza.

The coalition that you have assembled has a critically important role, and there are enormous implications, aren't there, from what happens between the Israelis and Palestinians and how the US engages in its own war against terrorism?

SECRETARY POWELL: We are all concerned about what's happening in the Middle East between the Israelis and the Palestinians. But at the same time, we're united in going after al-Qaida and Usama bin Laden and the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, and I don't sense that there is any fracturing of the coalition as a result of the events of the last 24 hours in the Middle East. So I think we can deal with this.

Right now in Afghanistan, we are making every effort to bring Usama bin Laden to justice or justice to him, to rip up the al-Qaida network in Afghanistan and in all the other countries that it resides in. It isn't going to be enough just to do it in Afghanistan. There are some 50 countries that we have to work on, and we're having success. More and more arrests are taking place. We are learning more and more about al-Qaida. And we also have to bring the Taliban regime to justice.

I am pleased that our operations are going well in Afghanistan. It is starting to slow down a little bit because the southern part of Afghanistan is a little tougher. But we will be successful. And I am also pleased that the political process is moving in Bonn to create a new provisional government that will reflect all of the Afghan people.

QUESTION: When do you believe the last remaining Taliban stronghold in Kandahar will fall?

SECRETARY POWELL: I can't. I'm not a fortune teller, but --

QUESTION: But is it days or weeks?

SECRETARY POWELL: I don't know. It is under enormous pressure. The Taliban is under enormous pressure in Kandahar. Some of the southern tribes are now rising up. And I think they are in great difficulty. But I can't tell you whether that battle will be over in days or weeks. But I think it is just a matter of time. I think it is ordained right now that the Taliban will fail throughout the

country.

QUESTION: And Mullah Mohammed Omar, the leader of the Taliban, you assume he is still in the Kandahar area?

SECRETARY POWELL: I assume he is still in Afghanistan, and we expect and suspect he is in the Kandahar area.

QUESTION: What about Usama bin Laden? There were reports that he was up near Tora Bora in the northeastern part of Afghanistan near Jalalabad.

SECRETARY POWELL: We think he is still in Afghanistan, and that seems to be a likely location for him, and he is running out of places that he can be. But there are always reports of sightings and spottings, some of which may be accurate, some of which are not accurate.

QUESTION: You still would prefer to capture him dead rather than alive?

SECRETARY POWELL: We would prefer to bring him to justice or justice to him.

QUESTION: One or the other. All right, what about the talks in Bonn? There seemed to be a snag over the issue of a security force, a peacekeeping force. Where does the United States specifically stand on the issue of who should come in, if anyone, to try to make sure the situation in a post-Taliban era is stable?

SECRETARY POWELL: Well, there are always snags in talks such as these. But I'm rather encouraged by what's happened in the last 24 hours. There seems to be an understanding among the parties in Bonn that they do have to come up with a provisional government that could go back to Kabul and set themselves up and begin the rebuilding process and receipt of humanitarian aid.

With respect to what kind of international peacekeeping force might go in, let's wait and see what the provisional government says. We also have to wait and see what our commander, General Tommy Franks, thinks is appropriate. And I am pleased that so many nations in the coalition have offered international peacekeeping forces at some point in the future when they are needed.

I don't think this will be a major role or hardly a role at all for the United States combat forces on the ground. We will always have some command and control and logistic responsibilities to help an international peacekeeping force go in, but I don't see US combat troops remaining in Afghanistan for the purpose of peacekeeping or nation building.

QUESTION: The Northern Alliance, which is aligned with the United States right now, the rebels who are in control of much of Afghanistan right now, they say that they have -- they're willing to work together with the other factions. Haroon Amin spoke out on this. He is the representative here in Washington. Listen to what he said earlier in the week.

"Our aim is not to monopolize power or hoard power but to engage with others in establishing a broad-based government in Afghanistan."

Do you believe them?

SECRETARY POWELL: Yes, and it's a good statement. And that statement, we have seen executed on over the last several days.

What is becoming clear is that the Northern Alliance recognizes that in order for there to be stability and peace in Afghanistan and a representative government in Kabul, all segments have to be represented and it can't just be a Northern Alliance dominated provisional government. And there have been some ups and downs in this and different statements come out hither and yon. But as of this morning, the reports I have are rather encouraging from Bonn. But we're not there yet. The UN has tabled a specific plan of how many people should be in this provisional government and it's a good plan and we need to put names in along with these positions and then get this government established and sent back to Kabul so they can begin their work.

QUESTION: Have you asked the Northern Alliance troops not to go into Kandahar in the south, given the ethnic makeup of the Northern Alliance, Uzbek, Tajik, as opposed to the Pashtun majority in Kandahar?

SECRETARY POWELL: I have not made such a request to them. I don't know if any of my other colleagues have been in touch with them on this, but I don't think so.

QUESTION: Okay, let's talk about Iraq. As you know, a tough statement from President Bush earlier in the week warning Saddam Hussein of consequences. Let's play that sound bite and get your reaction.

"In order to prove to the world he is not developing weapons of mass destruction, he ought to let the inspectors back in. Yes?"

"If he does not do that, sir, what will be the consequences? If he does not do that, what will be the consequences?"

"That's up for him -- he'll find out."

He'll find out?

SECRETARY POWELL: It's a good, strong statement, and it's consistent with everything the United States has been saying for a long time. The President ended that statement with a rather strong point, that there are consequences for continued noncompliance with the requirements of the international community as reflected in UN resolutions. He ought to let the inspectors back in.

This past week, we had some success in the Security Council with the unanimous vote for a new sanctions regime that continues to reinforce the point that the inspectors should be allowed back in to do their work and establish whether he is or is not developing weapons of mass destruction. We suspect he still is. And he claims he is not. He threw the inspectors out in 1998, and the international community says, no. And President Bush said in that statement, they have to be let back in.

With respect to, "He'll find out," the President retains all of his options. And in this campaign against terrorism, in the first phase, as the President has said all along, we are focusing in Afghanistan, al-Qaida, Usama bin Laden, the Taliban. And there will be future phases as we go after terrorism around the world, as we go after those countries that harbor terrorism, or those countries that develop weapons of mass destruction that can be used by terrorists.

And so we will keep a close eye on Iraq. The President has made no decisions, and the President's advisors, those of us who bear the responsibility for giving advice to the President, myself, Secretary Rumsfeld, the Vice President of course, Dr. Rice, we

have not individually nor collectively presented a recommendation to the President yet with respect to Iraq.

QUESTION: So all options are still very much on the table?

SECRETARY POWELL: All options are very much open. The President has not given away any of his authority to act in a way he believes is appropriate.

Beyond the inspectors, the United States also has a policy -- this is separate from the UN policy -- that we believe a regime change would be good for the Iraqi people, good for the region. And we are trying to find ways to make the Iraqi opposition more effective in this regard. And of course we continue to patrol the no-fly zones to keep Saddam Hussein contained.

QUESTION: Well, on that point, Senator Joe Lieberman offered a recommendation to the Bush Administration earlier in the week. Listen to what he said.

"It's not time for us to go to war in Iraq. But it is time for us to begin to support the Iraqi opposition. And they are strong, and they have strength within Iraq. And they can play the same role that the Northern Alliance played in Afghanistan."

Can they?

SECRETARY POWELL: Well, we do support the Iraqi opposition. It is not clear yet that they can perform the same kind of role. We're talking about two different countries, two different situations, and two different kinds of military forces. The Northern Alliance was a force that was in being, that owned a part of Afghanistan and was a competent military force but needed the support of American air power. The Iraqi opposition does not yet rise to that level.

But the President has all of his options available to him. But he has not made any decisions. Remember, he said, in phase one we're going to focus on Afghanistan. There is a lot of commentary and a lot of ideas, such as those of Senator Lieberman, about what might be done and the President is considering all of his options and all of the ideas.

QUESTION: Are you convinced that, in the three years there have been no UN weapons inspection teams inside Iraq, that Saddam Hussein and his government have continued their pursuit of weapons of mass destruction?

SECRETARY POWELL: We have no reason to believe that they have not continued that pursuit or they have abandoned their intent and desire to obtain such systems.

QUESTION: Do you think they are moving forward with it?

SECRETARY POWELL: We think they are trying. How far forward they have been able to move is a little less clear. And there are different kinds of weapons of mass destruction. The one that is the greatest concern to me is what might be happening with respect to biological weapons, because it is much harder to detect that kind of activity.

QUESTION: And in the past, as you know, the Iraqis have used gas warfare against the Iranians.

SECRETARY POWELL: They have used chemical weapons, gas, against the Iranians and they used them against their own people. And so this is the message I give to all of our moderate Arab friends in the region and the international community: What he is doing is a greater threat to the region than it is to the United States, and what we are doing to contain him is a benefit to the region, not just to the United States. And that is why, I think, we have been able to keep this coalition together and make that case to them.

QUESTION: As you know, some former government officials and perhaps some within the government are saying there are some strong signs that the Iraqis were connected to the September 11 terrorist attack, specifically the meetings in Prague between Mohammed Atta, the suspected ringleader, and Iraqi intelligence, an Iraqi intelligence agent.

As far as you're concerned, was there a connection there?

SECRETARY POWELL: Certainly, these meetings took place. But there has not yet been a body of evidence come forward that suggests we can make the kind of connection that is suggested, that it had something to do with September 11. But we have not stopped trying to find any connection that might exist between any country and what happened on September 11.

QUESTION: So you are still open-minded on that?

SECRETARY POWELL: Absolutely.

QUESTION: One final issue. The Attorney General John Ashcroft has raised a lot of questions about some of the measures he has imposed, detainees, military tribunals. You were asked about the detainees earlier in the week, and I want to give you a chance to respond, because some critics have suggested perhaps there is some daylight between you and the Attorney General on this issue.

Listen to what you said earlier in the week:

"I hope that, in the very near future, as these investigations continue and as questions are answered and clarified, we will be able to get this list of detainees down."

QUESTION: Is there any difference? Do you disagree with the Attorney General?

SECRETARY POWELL: No. Why would you even suggest there is a difference? The Attorney General is doing what is appropriate in this time of emergency, of doing everything we can to secure our society. And a number of people have been detained as the investigations go through or are conducted. And if there is not a reason to keep detaining people, of course they will be released.

QUESTION: But you support the whole operation?

SECRETARY POWELL: Yes. The Attorney General, under the direction of the President and at the will of the American people, is casting a wide net to see if there are any other cells and individuals within the country that may be connected to 9/11 or might be planning other attacks. So a number of people have been detained. But we are a nation of justice; we are a nation of laws. And as these people are looked at and investigated and information gathered from them, if there is no basis to detain them, of course they will be released. And I am sure that's general Ashcroft's position and the President's.

QUESTION: Now, you're heading overseas this week?

SECRETARY POWELL: Yes.

QUESTION: And the major purpose of your trip?

SECRETARY POWELL: Well, I'm going to 10 countries in eight days, and lots of major purposes. One, to participate in a conference in Bucharest with 54 other nations in the Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe, and to make a statement on terrorism there. I will be visiting in Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. I will also make a stop in Turkey, and a meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Belgium, and then on to Moscow for a day-and-a-half to visit with Foreign Minister Ivanov and President Putin to push forward the US-Russia agenda and specifically the strategic framework part of that agenda. And then I'm coming back through Germany, France and England to brief my colleagues on the way out of Europe.

QUESTION: Aren't you happy you left the private sector for government work?

SECRETARY POWELL: Oh, I love to travel. (Laughter.)

QUESTION: Good luck, and have a safe trip.

SECRETARY POWELL: Thank you, Wolf.

Released on December 2, 2001