

Secretary Rice Interview With Maria Bartiromo on CNBC's Closing Bell

Contributed by Administrator
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Secretary Condoleezza Rice
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QUESTION: Secretary Rice, good to have you with us. Thanks for joining us.

SECRETARY RICE: Thank you. Nice to be with you, Maria.

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QUESTION: Out of all of the countries posing threats to America right now, including Russia, Iran, Korea, China, which do you feel is the most dangerous?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, I would say that -- Russia I don't consider even in that category. Let me be very clear, we have our differences with Russia and some of those differences produce conflict, but by no means is this the Soviet Union. We have far more areas of cooperation with Russia than we have areas of conflict.

But when I look at Russia, I think that there's a very good reason to have a good relationship with Russia and it's to deal, for instance, with one of the other countries on your list, Iran. This is a relationship that is, I think, increasingly difficult and a country that is increasingly dangerous. Its support of terrorism around the world in places like -- supporting Hezbollah in Lebanon, supporting very radical elements of Hamas in the Gaza Strip in the Palestinian territories, what Iran is doing in the south of Iraq, where it is supporting and arming militias that are then threatening our force presence in Iraq.

If you look at Iran's pursuit of the technologies that would lead to a nuclear weapon despite Chapter 7, the most serious Security Council resolution you can have -- two Chapter 7 resolutions against Iran -- they continue to pursue these policies, not to mention the crackdown on their own population that has caught up some Iranian Americans, one woman who was just going home to visit her elderly mother. So this is a very dangerous state with very dangerous policies. And we need the help and support and intense efforts of the international community to deal with Iran.

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QUESTION: Are free elections always the way to go, though? I mean, you look at free elections in the Middle East. Hamas won. I mean, if we were to see free elections in Lebanon, we know who would win. If you were to see free elections in Venezuela, Saudi Arabia, do we really want to be going down this path of free elections everywhere when fundamentalists and extremists could be leading?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, we did see free elections in Lebanon and Faud Siniora and the March 14th coalition won. Sure, free elections are the only way that people can express themselves. And it can't be the policy of the U.S. Government that we don't want free elections in places that we might not like the outcome. Yes, Hamas won. But with that came certain responsibilities of governing that Hamas has demonstrated it isn't capable of carrying out. And that probably means that the Palestinian people have a clearer idea about what their political options are than if we had not supported the idea of free elections.

I understand that there are places where Islamists seem to be stronger, but the reason that that is the case is that politics has been going on in all of these countries; it's just that the space for healthy politics, the space for moderate forces to grow, has not been there. The only way that you're going to do that is to open up the political system, allow people to express themselves, have freer press. Sometimes you're going to get outcomes that you're not very fond of, but the -- in the absence of free elections you're just going to continue to stifle and smother healthy forces and you're going to continue to have a freedom deficit, which is going to fuel extremism.

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