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**THE WHITE HOUSE**

PRESIDENT GEORGE W. BUSH

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## **Dr. Condoleezza Rice Discusses the Roadmap for Peace in the Middle East**

Interview of National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice by John King, CNN

The InterContinental Garden Reef Resort

Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt

6:12 P.M. (L)

Q Dr. Rice, thank you for joining us. I want to begin, there's a sense of optimism at the meetings here in Sharm el-Sheikh today, but I'm wondering if you're worried at all about a potential problem down the road? Many of the Arab leaders the President met with today say that the administration wants to push Yasser Arafat out of the picture completely too soon. And in their view, if there is to be an agreement, that he will have to be there at the end to sign it and to sell it to the Palestinians. Is that a problem?

DR. RICE: Clearly, this is a difficult process and it's going to be a long process and there will be bumps in the road, we understand that. But we got a very important start under new conditions today. And the new conditions include, of course, the end of the war in Iraq, but also the appointment of Prime Minister Abbas, who is the first Prime Minister of the Palestinian Authority. He was here today, he was representing the Palestinian people. He had a great delegation with him of people who are committed to creating democratic institutions in the Palestinian Authority, in fighting terrorism, in having institutions that are accountable and transparent.

I can't help but believe that if he is able to deliver for the Palestinian people -- and everyone should do what they can to help him do so -- that he will have the support of his people.

Q Yet, Yasser Arafat blocked a meeting between Prime Minister Abbas and Prime Minister Sharon at one point. Are you worried that without the support of these Arab leaders that there will not be enough pressure on Arafat to stay out of the way, to not cause trouble, to not interject himself at key moments and either slow or destroy the process?

DR. RICE: I have to assume that everybody -- most especially the leaders in the neighborhood who want this process to go forward -- will simply not allow anyone to block it for personal reasons.

The important thing here is the Palestinian people. The Palestinian people probably have the best chance in quite a long time now to try and make some progress. The Israelis have said that they will begin to open

closures, that they will try to improve the mobility and the daily lives of the Palestinian people, that they will increase revenue transfers to the Palestinian Authority. They released some important political prisoners today. We have a new atmosphere of optimism.

Now, no one should doubt the difficult times ahead, the difficult issues ahead, the fact that there will be bumps in the road. But all of that said, this is a time for optimism and the Arab leaders who were here today expressed their optimism, expressed their support for the Palestinian Authority under the leadership of Prime Minister Abbas.

Q The President addressed some of the skepticism the Arab leaders had about whether he was willing to pressure Israel by saying quite bluntly in his opening statement this morning: Israel must deal with the settlements, Israel must create a Palestine that is working and workable, a contiguous area of land.

We are told that Prime Minister Sharon at the three-way meeting is prepared to publicly commit to dismantling some of the illegal settlements. How many and how fast?

DR. RICE: Well, I think we'll wait until tomorrow, when we meet tomorrow to see what statements come from the leaders. But what the President was here to do today and what he will do tomorrow is to call upon all of the leaders to do what they can do to improve the prospects for peace.

Sometimes there's a tendency in the Middle East to look over your shoulder and say, well, what is he doing to help with peace? The President has a different approach. He's asking everyone to take on their individual responsibilities, each party, to advance the process of peace. He did that today with the Arab leaders, he'll do that tomorrow with Prime Minister Abbas and Prime Minister Sharon. I think we're making very good progress.

Q I assume, though, you would not be having a three-way summit to move the process along if it would be immediately deflated without getting a strong statement from Prime Minister Sharon. Are you convinced he will say something that is progressive in the sense of backing away on the settlements?

DR. RICE: Well, he has already been saying some very important things over the last couple of days, to say that the time has come to divide this land with the Palestinians was important; to start to say to the Israelis it's probably time now to consider painful concessions.

The Israeli Prime Minister has always said that when he had a partner for peace, when he had someone who was really willing to fight terror and to remove the scourge of terror, that he would be ready to make the difficult choices that Israel must make. And I believe that we're getting to those conditions.

Again, it's a long road ahead. The President came here to start the process, but we believe we have a chance to make real progress.

Q There's also been skepticism that the President would stay engaged on a personal level. We got a picture today of him driving a golf cart, driving the leaders to their statements. Is that a metaphor? Is there any doubt, or can you erase the lingering doubt, perhaps, among some that this President when there's a bump in the road will say, whoa, and back away?

DR. RICE: Well, this President will not back away. This is a President who's known for his determination, who's known for keeping his word -- when he says that he's going to do something, he does it and he does it

with great determination.

Now, I don't want to say that driving a cart was a metaphor. (Laughter.) All I know is that we looked up and he was driving the cart. But he had wonderful, personal interaction with these leaders today. They had an hour-and-a-half meeting with only interpreters in the room. They then broke for a very brief period of time to take the family picture, if you will, and then returned to lunch with just one note-taker there. So they've had a lot of interaction.

And this is on top of the fact that the President has built these relationships over time. He's had President Mubarak to Washington, the Crown Prince to Crawford. He's had King Abdullah to Washington several times. So these are relationships -- and also King Hamid, of Bahrain -- so these are relationships that have been building. But today, to meet together, with Prime Minister Abbas, was a new step forward in the relationship. And it's important because the Arab nations are going to have to be as committed to this process as the Israelis, the Palestinians and the rest of the international community.

Q There was talk of naming Assistant Secretary of State John Wolf to head to the region as a special envoy, or to coordinate the efforts immediately after the summit. There was also talk at the White House of you, Dr. Rice, taking a more prominent role down the road. Can you address that for us?

DR. RICE: Well, we will tomorrow talk about arrangements that we may make to keep this process moving forward. But let me be very clear: the Secretary of State and I work very closely together on these matters; and, of course, in my role as National Security Advisor, I'm very often involved in presidential initiatives -- there's nothing new about that, I've been doing that since the beginning.

But the Secretary and I have been able, I believe, to serve the President well by doing our respective roles and doing them well.

Q I want to touch very quickly on a couple of other issues that have come up on this trip. The President met with Crown Prince Abdallah of Saudi Arabia today to discuss the investigation in the Riyadh bombings. Did the administration learn anything new about the suspects, about al Qaeda, about terrorist financing; anything that perhaps the American people should know about this investigation?

DR. RICE: Well, the President had the opportunity to congratulate the Saudis on some of the breakthroughs that they've made in the Riyadh bombing, arrests that they've made and the like. And they continued their conversation on cooperation, on the fight for terror.

The Saudis did say that they are looking at some new legislation that might allow them to consolidate some of their control over their charities. Obviously, it's an important -- it would be an important step forward and we're looking forward to hearing more about it.

Q And, lastly, President Putin said today that Russia would continue helping Iran build its nuclear facilities. The President had met with the President of Russia on this issue. Is that a sign that the President is not going to get what he wants from the Russians?

DR. RICE: Well, we would of course, like to be certain that everybody understands that the Iranians, under cover of civilian nuclear programs, may be, in fact, doing other things -- including nuclear weapons programs.

The clear indication from both President -- from President Putin and President Bush when we were in St.

Petersburg is that the Russians understand well the potential danger of an Iranian nuclear weapons program. That understanding has been helped by suspicious activities that the IAEA uncovered during their recent visit to Iran.

President Putin has assured the President that he understands those dangers. As he said in the press conference, our positions are closer than they may seem.

Russia and its civilian nuclear program we continue to discuss that, we continue to discuss ways that we can safeguard against the transfer of any of that technology or knowledge to the nuclear weapons program. But they are both concerned about the Iranian nuclear program. They have both said that they're concerned about the nuclear program in Iran. And the good thing is that we believe the Russians have had very important conversations with the Iranians about those concerns.

Q We're at time, we need to stop there. Thank you very much.

DR. RICE: Thank you very much.

END 6:22 P.M. (L)