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INTERVIEW

Deputy Secretary of State Richard L. Armitage
On CNN's Paula Zahn Now

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(4:00 p.m. EDT)

MS. ZAHN: Mr. Armitage, always good to see you. Thanks so much for joining us tonight.

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: Well, thank you. I don't know if I should be thrilled playing opposite the Friends final episode, but I'm glad to be with you.

MS. ZAHN: Well, thank you for reminding all the viewing audience of that, sir.

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: Just having fun with you.

MS. ZAHN: For starters, are you glad the President apologized today?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: I think it's very appropriate, obviously, and the fact that he expressed his emotion in such a heartfelt way, I think, will help a lot to sort of mend some of the humiliation the detainees felt.

MS. ZAHN: In spite of the President's apology, though, how much backlash have you seen diplomatically as a result of this prison crisis?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: I've actually seen a fair amount, but a lot of it in Europe because, for many of our European friends, what they saw on those horrible pictures is tantamount to torture, and there are very strong views about that. In the Arab world, there is general dismay and disgust, but in some places we were not real popular to start with. So I think I'm actually seeing a European reaction quite strong -- quite a bit stronger.

MS. ZAHN: Are you confident, though, that you will see any appreciable change in the lack of public support those -- that sector of the population has for America at this point?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: I think it's quite clear that we have a lot of work to do and we're in a bit of a hole. Successfully completing our mission in Iraq will help to get out of that hole. I think what happened in New York with Secretary Powell and the Quartet members

has helped a bit, and particularly the reaction to that in the Arab world has been quite good. And, finally, today, President Bush and King Abdallah of Jordan met and I think made very positive comments. And so I think we've -- we're starting to climb out.

MS. ZAHN: When you say we're in a bit of a hole, describe to us on an arc where you think we are.

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: Well, look, don't you think it's a blinding glimpse of the obvious to say we're in a bit of a hole? We've had some difficulties in Iraq. I think we're rounding the corner on that. We've had these disgusting pictures which have horrified all of us and filled us all just with the worst possible feelings. And, particularly, I think our feelings are so strong because, generally, U.S. soldiers, servicemen, men and women, are so fantastic and such good advertisements.

I can't grade it or put a dipstick against the size of the hole. We're in one. We're starting to climb out.

MS. ZAHN: Can you confirm for us -- excuse me, sir. Can you confirm for us tonight the report that Secretary Rumsfeld and other members of the Pentagon resisted efforts from the State Department to confront the problems surrounding this detainee scandal?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: Well, it's not a secret that the whole Administration has had many discussions about the whole detainee situation. It's not my business to talk about what the Secretary or anyone else in this Department -- what advice we gave to the President or anyone else. That's information that should be kept *in camera*.

MS. ZAHN: Well, the President said today that Secretary Rumsfeld should have put him in the loop and made him aware of these prison pictures. At what point was the State Department made aware of them?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: We had had talks with the ICRC. This has been made clear by our friends in Geneva. And we have, as an Administration, had acted on some of the information they had given us. I don't know the exact date and time that we became aware of some allegations from the ICRC, but it was some time ago.

MS. ZAHN: Some time ago? As far back as January?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: Oh, I'm not talking about the pictures and things of that nature. I'm talking about general situations of detention.

I think the ICRC has said today that for some time -- I don't think they put a date on it, I can't -- they've been talking to various parts of this Administration and they acknowledge themselves that some of their recommendations have been acted upon.

MS. ZAHN: When did you see the pictures for the first time?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: When you did.

MS. ZAHN: Do you have any explanation for why it took that long for you to have access to those pictures?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: Well, I'm not sure that a State Department official definitely needed access to the pictures. I had heard that there was this possibility a week or so before the pictures came forward. But no, and I don't think any of us could have imagined what was on them.

MS. ZAHN: There are also calls today for Secretary Rumsfeld's resignation or impeachment. Do you believe that the Secretary can weather this crisis?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: Absolutely. The only call that really matters is the one the President makes, and he has expressed full confidence in Secretary Rumsfeld. We've got a war going on. He's been a fine Secretary, and I think we'll let it rest at that.

MS. ZAHN: The State Department was supposed to release its Annual Human Rights Report yesterday. It was delayed. Would it have been hypocritical to release that report at a time and criticize other countries' human rights abuses when our own abuses were staring this country right in the face?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: Well, I was the one who made the decision to delay the release of that report because I didn't think that report could even be heard. I could make just the other opposite observation: that in a country such as ours, even though we've had this terrible tragedy, that there is a transparent procedure to make sure justice is done and that we correct the wrongs. And I think that speaks well about human rights in our country.

MS. ZAHN: You said you feared the report wouldn't be heard --

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: Heard.

MS. ZAHN: Heard. Is that as a result of what perceived hypocrisy there might have been?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: Well, I wasn't looking so much at the hypocrisy. I was looking at the very correct and understandable noise level that was surrounding the whole issue. And I didn't think we'd be heard at all, and so I made the decision to delay it a week and we'll do it the first couple days of next week.

MS. ZAHN: You had said in a speech back in March that on June 30th, "the Iraqi interim government will assume full sovereignty." But then, two weeks ago, your Under Secretary of State Marc Grossman told Congress that the new government would only have limited sovereignty.

Why the change?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: Well, I think sovereignty is sovereignty, but let's be clear. If you have a caretaker government, one that is going to be in place for seven months, which is what is envisioned starting 1 July, then it's quite obvious that that government won't be making long-term decisions for the nation of Iraq; that will await a legitimately democratically elected government.

All of us, to some extent, who are sovereign nations limit ourselves in our sovereignty. We do it through laws. We do it through international conventions. So I think the definition was a little fuzzy. They'll be fully sovereign, but there are some self-limiting aspects of sovereignty that all nations engage in.

MS. ZAHN: Final question about your boss tonight. *GQ Magazine* reporting that your boss, Secretary Powell, is tired and wants out. Characterize for us how he feels about his job right now.

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: Ms. Zahn, I've got a lot of energy. I get up early, I go to bed late -- and he runs me ragged. So if he's tired, he hasn't shown it to me. He's proud to serve. He'll be proud to continue to serve this President.

MS. ZAHN: But tired and happy aren't mutually exclusive things, are they, sir?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: No, when you --

MS. ZAHN: He could be happy at his job.

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: I think he's perfectly happy doing what he's done, the 35 years in the military and doing what he did even in the private sector, which is serving the American people.

MS. ZAHN: Mr. Armitage, thanks for joining us, and thanks for not watching *Friends* at this hour. Appreciate your time.

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: Thank you, Ms. Zahn.

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