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Rice says freeing Guantanamo prisoners a cautious process

BARRY SCHWEID
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The United States will move cautiously in releasing terror suspects in the Guantanamo, Cuba, prison to guard against freeing those who might strike again, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said Tuesday.

"This is a delicate balance," Rice said in an Associated Press interview. She said that in a handful of cases of released prisoners, "we met them again on the battlefield."

At the same time, Rice said the Bush administration wants to send certain prisoners back to their home countries if it can be determined that they truly do not pose a danger. "If there is a case to release them, we don't just want to permanently imprison people either," she said.

The Pentagon has conducted military tribunals to review the circumstances of each Guantanamo detainee's capture and determine the person was properly held. It says that of the roughly 200 already released, at least a dozen have returned to the battlefield. More than 300 additional cases are still being reviewed.

Touching on another subject, Syria's pledge to withdraw all remaining troops and intelligence agents from Lebanon, Rice said, "You always need to be on guard, because words and deeds don't always match with the Syrians."

And on U.S. intelligence lapses, she declined to say whether anyone should be fired following a presidential commission's harsh criticism of U.S. spy agencies' findings before the war with Iraq.

"That's not my call," Rice declared.

"There are no guarantees where intelligence is concerned, particularly when you are dealing with opaque and difficult societies like the ones that tend to want weapons of mass destruction," she said.

On Iraq, Rice rejected the idea that continuing attacks on U.S.-led forces were due to the troops' presence in the country two years after Saddam Hussein's regime was toppled.

The notion that attackers' were motivated only by anger at the United States "just isn't right," Rice said.

As democracy spreads in Iraq, she said, "you will see more and more, these are very violent people. They are very ruthless people. They are clearly able to wreak chaos but they actually don't have a political platform."

On still another front, Rice credited Pakistan with making a shift of "150 degrees" from almost four years ago when it was one of three countries that recognized the Taliban regime in Afghanistan and Pakistan and India were on the verge of open conflict.

"It's really night and day," she said. "The Musharraf government has done a lot," Rice said in tribute to Gen. Pervez Musharraf, the country's leader.