

of creation of an Islamic republic backed by neighboring Iran?

The President. No, I don't fear that. I think the Iraqi people want to run their own state. They don't need to have an Iranian-backed regime. I think the Iraqi people are plenty capable of managing their own affairs.

Secondly, I fully recognize that democracy didn't flourish overnight. But I didn't expect it to. This is a country which has been ravished by a brutal dictator who murdered and tortured to stay in power. And it wasn't all that long ago that they were liberated from Saddam Hussein. So it's going to take a while.

And therefore, I've told Jerry Bremer that our Government, my Government, will be patient, as he makes progress toward improving the lives of the Iraqi people. And I say "he," it's not only Jerry Bremer and the United States; there's a lot of people that are involved with the reconstruction of Iraq. And as life returns back to normal and as we get a hold of the situation—particularly in Baghdad—of the killers and people that are wreaking havoc—in other words, as we bring security to the neighborhoods, you'll see a good, democratic government emerge.

Iran

Q. Is Iran a preoccupation for you—the ayatollahs with Al Qaida, which might be in that country attacking the United States?

The President. Well, we are concerned—we are concerned that there's Al Qaida in-

side of Iran and have made our concerns very clearly. And this will give me a chance to do so again. To the extent that they have got Al Qaida in their country, we expect them to detain them and eventually hand them over to their countries of origin. There's no preoccupation. Our main focus right now is to find Al Qaida wherever they exist and bring them to justice, and we will do that. We'll continue to do that, and we expect others to join us.

And I want to compliment the French for joining in this fight against Al Qaida. The French intelligence service have been very good to work with, and we've shared intelligence which has made France more secure and America more secure. And for that I'm grateful.

Q. Mr. President, I want to thank you very much, and I definitely wish you all the best and great success for the future.

The President. Thank you, sir. Thanks for coming.

NOTE: The interview was taped at 2:43 p.m. in the Library at the White House for later broadcast. The transcript was embargoed for release by the Office of the Press Secretary until 4:30 p.m. In his remarks, the President referred to President Jacques Chirac of France; Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) of the Palestinian Authority; former President Saddam Hussein of Iraq; and L. Paul Bremer III, Presidential Envoy to Iraq. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this interview.

Interview With Nile TV of Egypt May 29, 2003

Upcoming Visit to Egypt/Meeting With Arab Leaders

Q. Mr. President, thank you very much for talking to Egyptian television. Mr. President, you're coming to Egypt next week,

and you are meeting with President Mubarak and a number of other Arab leaders. What are you going to tell them? What role do you see the Arab countries playing in the coming stage?

The President. First, I want to thank President Mubarak for his hospitality. He has been telling me about the beauty of Sharm el-Sheikh for a long time, and now I'm going to get to see it firsthand.

Q. You will love it.

The President. I am looking forward to it.

The first thing I want to do is to make it very clear to the leaders in the neighborhood that I am intent upon working toward a two-state solution in the Middle East—two states, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace. In other words, I want them to look me in the eye so they can see that I am determined to work to make this happen.

I'm also going to remind them the United States cannot do this alone. We obviously need Israeli support. We obviously need the new Prime Minister of the Palestinian Authority's work and help. And we need countries like Egypt and Saudi Arabia and Jordan and others to work together to cut off funding for terrorist groups, to prevent the killers from moving around, to help provide security, and as a Palestinian state emerges, to support Prime Minister Abbas' regime with not only advice but, when necessary, development aid so an economy can start to grow in a Palestinian state.

President's Commitment to Peace Process

Q. Mr. President, let me follow up on that. You said you are determined to bring peace, you are committed, personally committed to the roadmap, and you are personally involved in the roadmap. That has sort of a different approach from the approach that the administration had adopted at the beginning, which was a hands-off approach, the peace process.

The question is, how long would that commitment and involvement, personal involvement, last and how deep is it?

The President. Well, first of all, I think it's not a fair characterization to say we were hands-off—quite the contrary. I took

an assessment of what was possible and realized that it was impossible to achieve peace with Chairman Arafat. He's failed the Palestinian people in the past. My predecessor tried hard, and I watched very carefully what was tried at Camp David.

Now, having said that, I also was working with the parties to try to set the conditions necessary for the emergence of a Palestinian government with whom we could work, so we wouldn't waste time, so that actually some progress could be made.

So the people have got to know when I say something, I mean it. Hopefully by now people have learned that, that when George W. commits America to a project, we mean that, we don't have idle chit-chat, that we're serious about our intentions.

Q. So the Arabs, or the people in the region shouldn't really be worrying about voices within your administration who are opposed to serious efforts by the United States—

The President. Yes, they don't have to worry about that, because I'm going to put the effort forward.

Q. So you don't listen to them?

The President. Well, it sounds like they don't listen to me, because when I say something, I mean it. And I think President Mubarak knows that. And I'm going to refresh their memories about the kind of administration I try to run. When I say something, we actually go do it. And when I say that I'm going to be involved in the peace process, I mean I'm going to be involved in the peace process.

Now, I understand it's going to be tough and difficult, but I believe it can happen. And I want to work toward achieving two states, so that the Palestinian suffering and humiliation ends.

Egypt-U.S. Relations

Q. And Mr. President, how do you see the future of the Egyptian-American relations, the strategical relations that binded those two countries over the past two decades?

The President. Strong, I think, a good future. Listen, we have counted on Egypt, and Egypt counts on America. It's a mutually beneficial relationship. Throughout my Government, people deal with the Egyptian authorities, and I think it's in our interests, our national interest to keep a strong relationship with Egypt, and I intend to do so.

Q. Right. We are looking forward to seeing you, Mr. President, in Sharm el-Sheikh. Thank you very much for your time.

The President. It's going to be an exciting trip, and I look forward to the hospitality of the Egyptian people. And I want to assure the people of Egypt that the relationship is an important relationship between Egypt and the United States. And I want

to assure your listeners that when I come to the region, I come with peace in mind and the possibilities of peace between the Palestinians and the Israelis is real in my mind, and I'm going to work toward that objective.

NOTE: The interview was taped at 2:48 p.m. in the Library at the White House for later broadcast, and the transcript was embargoed for release by the Office of the Press Secretary until 5 p.m. In his remarks, the President referred to President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt; and Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) and Chairman Yasser Arafat of the Palestinian Authority. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this interview.

Interview With Al Arabiyya of the United Arab Emirates May 29, 2003

Upcoming Meeting With Arab Leaders

Q. Thanks again. We really appreciate it, Mr. President. Sir, you will be discussing with the Arab leaders in Egypt their responsibilities toward the peace process. What are your expectations, practically speaking, from leaders such as President Mubarak and Crown Prince Abdullah?

The President. Well, first of all, one, the willingness to join with the United States and other nations to cut off funding to terrorist organizations that can't stand the thought of peace. In other words, we all have got to work together to make security real, not only for Israel but for the Palestinian people. And that's my expectations from them.

What I hope to achieve is to be able to look at these leaders in the eye and say, "I believe peace is possible, and I'm going to work to peace." And this isn't just a visit in which you won't hear from me again. I believe peace is necessary and possible.

I told a lot of the leaders that after the Iraq situation, that I would work toward peace in the Middle East. I'm the kind of person who does what he says he's going to do, and now I'm working to achieve that. And I think it's possible.

Upcoming Meeting With Israeli and Palestinian Authority Leaders

Q. Sir, you are known for your straight talk—some could even say, blunt talk. [Laughter] Are you going to use that approach in Aqaba with Prime Minister Abbas and Prime Minister Sharon? Are you going to hold them accountable for their commitments? And how far are you willing to go in this regard?

The President. I am going to hold people accountable for their commitments. And the good news is, is that Prime Minister Sharon knows that. I have had very straightforward conversations with him. I think it's in Israel's best interests that there be two states living side by side in peace.