

Prime Minister Thaksin of Thailand is gradually emerging as a new regional leader. You have met him. You have talked to him. You see him being different from the other ASEAN leaders?

The President. Well, I certainly don't want to compare him to other leaders. I think that would be unfair. But I do see him as a very strong leader and a very capable leader. He's got a good grasp of the issues. He understands how economies work. He is not afraid to make tough decisions. He stands his ground in the face of criticism. And so I think he is a very interesting, dynamic leader.

Iraq

Mr. Yong. I think there are people in Thailand who doubt whether we made the right decision to send Thai troops to help in the reconstruction of Iraq.

The President. Yes.

Mr. Yong. With mounting casualties on the part of the American troops, there are people who doubt that it's worth the risk or not.

The President. Yes, well, I think—of course, in a free society, there are doubters. But people ought to understand that a free and peaceful Iraq is necessary for world security. A peaceful society in the midst of a part of the world that's been troubled is going to, for the long run, help—will help change the world in a positive way. And therefore, the idea of helping to rebuild a country ought to be something the Thai people accept.

You've got to understand, the people in Iraq lived under incredible tyranny and torture and rape rooms, the kinds of things the people in Thailand reject. These people were—the tyrant brutalized them and at the same time built up weapons and didn't spend the money on social services. And so not only are we making the world more secure and peaceful; we're actually making life better for people who had been brutalized by this man. And surely the people who respect human rights and decency understand the need to help.

Now, our troops are—we're in the process of hunting down these killers. And the more progress there is in Iraq, the more the terrorists get angry, because they can't stand freedom. So I look forward to making the case of the United States about why it was important to Thailand to contribute. It's important for humanitarian reasons, at the very minimum. But for the long term, it's important for peace and security.

Mr. Yong. Thank you very much for your time.

The President. I'm really looking forward to coming to your beautiful country.

NOTE: The interview was taped at 3:23 p.m. in the Library at the White House, and the transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on October 18. In his remarks, the President referred to Nurjaman Riduan Isamuddin (known as Hambali), Al Qaida's chief operational planner in Southeast Asia; and former President Saddam Hussein of Iraq. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this interview.

Interview With Malcolm Brown of Singapore's Channel NewsAsia October 14, 2003

Singapore's Role in the War on Terror

Mr. Brown. Talking about your trip specifically to Singapore, how happy are you with the measures that Singapore has taken,

specifically regarding terrorism? And what are your concerns about the residual threat in the region?

The President. First, I'm very happy with the Government of Singapore's response to terrorism. They are strong, and they are resolute. They understand the task at hand, and they understand the dangers. Prime Minister Goh and I have had some great conversations about the region. He is a very knowledgeable man. He keeps me abreast of his views of different players in the region and what's going on.

Of course we're concerned about terrorism in the region, because, after all, there's been attacks in the region. I remind our own citizens here that we're still focused on September the 11th as kind of the defining terrorist moment, but there have been a lot of attacks. And the Bali bombing is a classic example of the terrorist activities, and that happens to come in Southeast Asia. The Prime Minister and the Government are concerned, obviously, about those kind of attacks. We'll have a good discussion about it. He's got a lot to offer, a lot of advice to offer, a lot of wisdom, and I listen to it.

Role of APEC Partners in Iraq

Mr. Brown. Mr. President, have your APEC partners done enough to help the United States in Iraq?

The President. In Iraq? Well, we can always use more. And as a matter of fact, the Japanese are going to make an announcement. We're out there working hard to convince others to participate in the reconstruction effort in Iraq. It's in their interests that Iraq be free and peaceful. And the reason it is, is because the region needs democracy. The region needs an example of what can happen in a peaceful society. The region needs something alternative to a type of society which breeds terrorism. I firmly believe that Iraq will emerge to be that example and that leader.

North Korea and Iraq

Mr. Brown. Clearly, the region is also concerned about North Korea.

The President. Yes.

Mr. Brown. You've described Saddam Hussein as a madman and a danger, and he was deposed by force. You've also said that you loathe Kim Chong-il, and he has a known nuclear program. Why this disparity?

The President. Because, first of all, remember in Iraq, we spent 11 years' or so worth of resolutions and discussions and diplomacy trying to convince Saddam Hussein to disarm. He chose not to. I believe we can solve the issue on the North Korean—with the North Korean issue on the Korean Peninsula peacefully.

As a matter of fact, we're making great strides toward that. You might remember, up until recent history, the whole issue is the United States and North Korea. And the Government signed an agreement with North Korea, and they didn't tell the truth. So I've decided to come with a new strategy, and that is, rather than just the United States being the interlocutor with North Korea, we convince others in the neighborhood, like the Chinese and the Russians and the Japanese and the South Koreans. And we're moving along. This will be a major part of our discussions in APEC, to keep this group together, to speak with one voice, and that is, to Kim Chong-il, "Get rid of your nuclear ambitions. No nuclear weapons on the Korean Peninsula." It's in all our interests we do so.

And we're making progress. Now he's hearing at least five voices, not just one. And I believe this can be solved peacefully. Force is the last resort for the United States, not the first resort. It's the last option, and I'm very hopeful that we can make good progress on this issue.

China's Space Program

Mr. Brown. On China, how do you see their space program? Is it a threat to the U.S.?

The President. No, it's an interesting development. I don't necessarily see it as a

threat. I think it's a country that's now beginning to emerge as a sophisticated country, and it's got great potential. And I think it's interesting. I hope that they are able to make discoveries in space, like we did, that will—the technology that will come out of that will help mankind. No, I don't view it as a threat.

New Zealand-U.S. Relations

Mr. Brown. Finally, on a regional trade issue, with New Zealand, you'll meet Prime Minister Helen Clark on the sidelines, I understand, at APEC. Why does Australia have negotiations on a FTA [free trade agreement], and New Zealand doesn't? Is it to do with their nuclear policy?

The President. No, not really. I mean, we haven't gotten started with New Zealand. The nuclear policy, obviously, makes it difficult for us to have a military alliance, but we're friends with the New Zealands. We respect the New Zealand people. But Australia is farther along the road when it comes to trade discussions. Prime Min-

ister Howard and I discussed trade at my ranch in Crawford. We hope to get it done by the end of this year. The people of New Zealand shouldn't read anything into it other than, we just haven't gotten started. And I respect the people of New Zealand. I respect that great country.

Mr. Brown. I'm going to have to call it a day. That's all.

The President. I think you did a fine job.

NOTE: The interview was taped at 3:30 p.m. in the Library at the White House, and the transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on October 18. In his remarks, the President referred to Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong of Singapore; former President Saddam Hussein of Iraq; Chairman Kim Chong-il of North Korea; and Prime Minister John Howard of Australia. Mr. Brown referred to Prime Minister Helen Clark of New Zealand. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this interview.

Interview With Rosianna Silalahi of Indonesia's SCTV October 14, 2003

Indonesia's Role in the War on Terror

Ms. Silalahi. Mr. President, thank you for your time. What specifically do you want to do by Megawati—President Megawati—in fighting terrorism? What—[inaudible]—some assistance to your country?

The President. First of all, President Megawati has responded to the war on terror, and I appreciate that. She's responded in a way that I think the people of her country ought to be proud—your country ought to be proud. Terrorism is such—it's such a stain. It's a horrible thing that people have to live with. The terrorists want to create fear. That's what they want to

do. They want to kill innocent life to create fear.

And the Bali bombing was a terrible moment for Indonesia and obviously those who lost life. But President Megawati refuses to stand in fear of the terrorists. What I want her to do is to continue to work closely with the United States and others, to share intelligence, find money as it floats around, and to bring people to justice.

Information Sharing on Hambali

Ms. Silalahi. How do you expect President Megawati or Indonesia to cooperate with the United States if we don't have a chance to question Hambali one on one?