

has become a critical issue. What is your standpoint about this?

The President. Our standpoint is that we don't think that—in Aceh, for example, that the issue should be solved and can be solved militarily. It ought to be solved through peaceful negotiations.

Ms. Silalahi. And how about Papua?

The President. Same, peaceful negotiations.

Ms. Silalahi. How about American citizens that got killed in Papua?

The President. We're not happy about that, of course, and I appreciate the Government's full cooperation with our Federal Bureau of Investigation that is now seeking out the evidence to determine who the killers were.

Ms. Silalahi. Does it change your military policy towards Indonesia?

The President. No, as a matter of fact, we're going to discuss mil-to-mil relations between Indonesia. And for a while, the Congress put restrictions on it. But now the Congress has changed their attitude, and I think we can go forward with a pack-

age of mil-to-mil cooperation because of the cooperation of the Government on the killings of two U.S. citizens.

Ms. Silalahi. Thank you, Mr. President. So many questions, but——

The President. So little time?

Ms. Silalahi. So little time.

The President. Well, give your mother my best.

Ms. Silalahi. I thank you very much.

NOTE: The interview was taped at 3:37 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 President Megawati Sukarnoputri of Indonesia; Nurjaman Riduan Isamuddin (known as Hambali), Al Qaida's chief operational planner in Southeast Asia; former Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) of the Palestinian Authority; and Edwin Burgon and Rick Spier, American citizens killed in an ambush in Indonesia's Papua province on August 31, 2002. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this interview.

Interview With Laurence Oakes of Australia's Channel 9 TV October 14, 2003

President's Upcoming Visit to Australia

Mr. Oakes. Mr. President, thanks for speaking to us. What's the main purpose of your trip to Australia? Are you hoping for greater Australian contribution to the stabilization and rebuilding of Iraq?

The President. No, the main purpose is to thank the people of Australia and thank my friend John Howard for being strong in the face of terror and being understanding that we have a historic opportunity to bring peace and freedom to parts of the world that need peace and freedom. It really is the main purpose. Australia is a great country. I would define our relationship as a unique relationship. And I'm

looking forward to it. I've been there. They tell me it's kind of like Texas, which is another reason I want to go.

Mr. Oakes. I think that's right. But not everyone agrees—in Australia, agrees with you on the war. Some members of the opposition are talking about possibly protesting when you address the Parliament by wearing white armbands or turning their backs. Would that concern you?

The President. Not at all. No, it means that democracy is alive and well. It's a—I don't expect everybody to agree with us, but one thing is for certain, the Prime Minister was strong. And the Australian

military performed brilliantly; I mean brilliantly. And I've talked to a lot of our generals and commanders about how the Australians participated, and they were just—A-plus was the rating. And I think a lot of people would like to hear that from the American President, and I'm going to tell them. And if somebody feels like they want to express discontent, that's okay. That's democracy.

Iraq

Mr. Oakes. Well, what about the suggestion from your critics that while you won the war, the peace is being bungled?

The President. They're wrong. We're making great progress in Iraq. We've got a pretty steep hill to climb. After all, one, we're facing a bunch of terrorists who can't stand freedom. These thugs were in power for a while, and now they're not going to be in power anymore, and they don't like it. And they're willing to kill innocent people. Their terrorist activities—we'd rather fight them there than here.

And secondly, that life is pretty darn good compared to what it was under Saddam Hussein. People aren't going to be tortured. They're not going to be raped. They're not going to be mutilated. There are not going to be mass graves. And plus, that the infrastructure is improving. I talked to our Secretary of Commerce today. His exact—he's in Baghdad. He said, "Look," he said, "Mr. President," he said, "You're not going to believe the world here is a lot different than some in America think it is. There's a burgeoning marketplace." He met with women businessowners. I mean, there's excitement there about a free society emerging, and it's in our interests that that society be free.

Australian Detainees in Guantanamo Bay

Mr. Oakes. Sir, there are two Australian citizens being held in Guantanamo Bay.

The President. Yes.

Mr. Oakes. What's going to happen to them? And what do you say to people in

Australia who think they should be either charged or released?

The President. Well, we would be glad to work with the Government on the issue. And if John wants to discuss it, I'm more than happy to discuss it. We're working with a variety of countries that have got people in Guantanamo Bay. These are people picked up on the battlefield. We're trying to learn more about them to make sure we fully understand—

Mr. Oakes. Are they being tortured?

The President. No, of course. We don't torture people in America. And people who make that claim just don't know anything about our country.

Australia-U.S. Free Trade Agreement

Mr. Oakes. Another issue between the two countries is the—possibly the free trade agreement.

The President. Yes, sir.

Mr. Oakes. Do you think you will get it, and will you be using this to push it along?

The President. Yes. I told John that we'd like to get a free trade agreement done by the end of this year, and I think it's a good opportunity to say that again. And he and I won't sit down and negotiate the fine points. That's what we've got fine staffs to do, but at our level we can encourage the negotiators to move along. Let's get it done. Let's resolve our differences. Australia is an important friend, an important economy, and I think trade is in our national interests.

War on Terror

Mr. Oakes. Australians have spent this week at memorial services for the victims of the Bali bombing. Can you hold out any hope for them that this—that the war on terrorism is actually getting somewhere?

The President. Yes, Hambali is no longer a problem. He's the guy that organized the Bali bombing. He won't be bombing anybody anymore. That's a positive step.

First of all, I understand what it means to be in a country that grieves over the senseless death of innocent life. And the Australians suffered a mighty blow. And the—matter of fact, the other day I was in Kentucky, you know, politics for a guy running for Governor. And a mother—a fine looking couple walked up, a mom and dad, said, “You’ve got to know, our daughter died in Bali,” and tears in his eyes. And I gave him a big hug. And he said, “Mr. President, whatever you do, don’t stop, so it doesn’t happen again.”

The best way to deal with terror is to be on the offensive and to find these people and bring them to justice. That’s why Australia is such an important partner, equal partner, in the war on terror. John Howard gets it. He understands. The Prime Minister knows that we’ve got to be tough and at the same time create the conditions where there’s an alternative to terrorism, and that’s freedom and peace.

Mr. Oakes. One final question.

The President. Sure.

*Australian, British, and U.S. Leaders’
Popularity*

Mr. Oakes. You’re in trouble politically, if you believe the polls.

The President. Why do you say that?

Mr. Oakes. The polls show you dropping in popularity.

The President. Well, actually, there’s a poll that showed me going up yesterday. Not to be on the defensive, but go ahead. [Laughter]

Mr. Oakes. Well, I was going to ask why you think you and Tony Blair seem to have lost support, but John Howard hasn’t?

The President. Well, it must be his charisma. [Laughter] I don’t know. Actually, I’m in pretty good shape politically. I really am. I didn’t mean to sound defensive.

Mr. Oakes. No, sir.

The President. I am. Politicians, by the way, who pay attention to the polls are doomed to be kind of chasing—trying to chase opinion. What you need to do is lead, set the tone. And I’ve taken some tough decisions. And I will look forward to making the case that the decisions I have taken will make America more secure, make the world more peaceful, and make this country more prosperous. And so I’m upbeat about it. And as to why Howard is maintaining his popularity and—he married well, and he’s smart.

Mr. Oakes. Sir, thank you. And I look forward to seeing you in Australia.

The President. Yes, sir. Looking forward to it. Thanks.

NOTE: The interview was taped at 3:44 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 John Howard of Australia; former President Saddam Hussein of Iraq; Secretary of Commerce Donald L. Evans; Nurjaman Riduan Isamuddin (known as Hambali), Al Qaida’s chief operational planner in Southeast Asia; and Kentucky gubernatorial candidate Ernie Fletcher. Mr. Oakes referred to Prime Minister Tony Blair of the United Kingdom. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this interview.

*The President’s Radio Address
October 18, 2003*

Good morning. During the decades of Saddam Hussein’s oppression and misrule,

all Iraqis suffered, including children.