

Interview With Foreign Print Media January 4, 2008

The President. How are you doing? Welcome. Pleasure to be with you all. Thank you.

What are the ground rules here, Dana, in terms of the American press?

White House Press Secretary Dana Perino. It's all on the record, but can't be used until after these fine folks are able to publish.

The President. Yes, so delay your stories, will you? [Laughter]

Q. It's very hospitable of you, Mr. President.

The President. A couple of things—one, I'm excited about going on the trip. I have never been to Saudi Arabia. I have never been to Bahrain. I have never been to Kuwait. I have been to Egypt. I have not been to the Palestinian Territories or Israel as a sitting President.

So this is a really good opportunity to travel and be with friends and have frank discussions about particularly three items: one, the United States commitment to the peace process; that what happened in Annapolis is the beginning of serious discussions, a serious attempt by the United States to encourage the Israelis and the Palestinians to develop a vision of what a Palestinian state will look like.

And I am very optimistic that such a vision will come into being by the time I leave office. And the reason I am is because I know the two leaders well, and I believe both are committed to a two-state solution, and both understand that in order for that state to come into being, subject to the roadmap, that there has to be more than just words; there has to be clarity in what a Palestinian state will look like.

Secondly, I'm looking forward to sitting down with friends and allies to assure them of my commitment to Middle Eastern peace and to work with them to make sure

they're committed to Middle Eastern peace; that I will remind them that we've got a three-track strategy: one is the vision; two is the implementation of the roadmap—in other words, the United States chairs a committee with the Palestinians and the Israelis to deal with roadmap issues; and three, a commitment by the United States and others to build the institutions necessary for a Palestinian democracy to thrive.

In other words, there's got to be a recognition that we need institution-building; there needs to be work. For example, the United States is very much involved in helping modernize their security forces and create a chain of command, so that when good men like President Abbas and Prime Minister Fayyad see a security situation needs to be taken care of, they can give a command and something happens, for the good of the Palestinian people. In other words, a state, in order to be credible and viable, must be able to provide security for its people.

The EU is very much involved with institution building and basically enhancing the entrepreneurial spirit of the Palestinian people, which is very strong. So I'll be visiting with Tony Blair, for example, when I'm there to see the progress he's making. My only point is, is that it's going to be very important for the nations that I visit to be active participants in not only helping the Palestinians, but recognizing that a two-state solution recognizes Israel's right to exist.

Thirdly, I will be also talking to our friends and allies about our strong commitment to regional security, that the United States is engaged and will remain engaged in the security of the region.

And so this is a trip that will be—it's going to be interesting, it will be stimulating, and it's going to be substantive. And

as I say, I'm looking forward to it, I really am.

We'll start—Joyce, why don't you crank her up here? We'll go a couple of rounds.

Lebanon

Q. Thank you again, Mr. President, for having us. Happy New Year.

The President. Thank you. It is going to be a happy New Year.

Q. Hopefully, more peace in the region.

The President. It will be a joyous New Year. [Laughter] Isn't that right, guys? Very skeptical—[laughter]. Don't be.

Q. If I can open up by asking you about Lebanon. The country is entering the second month, and the Presidency is still void over there. Who do you think is responsible for creating this situation and maintaining it? And what is your administration and maybe the French—Mr. Sarkozy, good friend of yours—doing to end this stalemate?

The President. Thank you. First of all, the United States is strongly committed to Lebanese democracy. We believe that a Lebanon that is democratic and peaceful is in the interests of world peace.

I have been very impressed by Prime Minister Siniora, by the way, as a man who's committed to the well-being of all the Lebanese people. Secondly, I am disappointed that the Presidency has not been selected and believe very much that Syrian influence is preventing the selection. Thirdly, part of my trip is to remind our friends and allies how important it is for Lebanon to succeed and how important it is for all of us to work to free that Government from foreign interference.

My position has been that the March 14th coalition, if it had mustered a majority plus one, 50 percent plus one, should be allowed to go forward with the selection of the President. We are working with not only our friends in the region who share the commitment for Lebanon to be free of foreign interference, but also the European countries.

And so there needs to be a clear message to the Syrians from all us that you will continue to be isolated, you will continue to be viewed as a nation that is thwarting the will of the Lebanese people. There needs to be a focused voice, and so our efforts diplomatically are to convince others that they must continue to pressure Syria so that the Lebanese process can go forward.

Sa'ad.

Iran

Q. Yes, again, Mr. President, I'd like to reiterate the remark of Joyce of thanking you for giving us this—

The President. Yes, thrilled to do it.

Q. —historic opportunity. You talked about the regional security. And back in the Gulf States, the number-one issue nowadays, in terms of security of the region, is the Iranian nuclear profile and issue. And we'd like to know your position on that now, the development of that. The region is nervously—nervous about having another war, confrontation, on the one hand; yet they are also very nervous about the Iranians possessing the nuclear weapons. And I'd like to follow up on that.

The President. Well, thank you. First of all, the NIE, the National Intelligence Estimate, ought to be viewed as a clear signal that Iran is a threat to peace, that—the NIE said the following things: One, the Iranians had a covert military nuclear weapons program, and that international pressure caused them to suspend the program.

There are three elements to a nuclear weapons program: one, the ability to enrich uranium that can be converted into the basis of a bomb; secondly, the know-how to be able to assemble that enriched material into a bomb; and third, the capacity to deliver the weapon through rocketry. As far as we know, two of those programs still are ongoing. One is the rocketry program; two, there is a civilian enrichment program. And the danger of a civilian enrichment program is, once that knowledge is gained,

that it could be easily transferred back to a covert military program. And therefore, the NIE should be a clear signal to all of us that Iran is a threat to peace. And they're a threat to peace because they have been nontransparent. They have not lived up to their obligations under the IAEA. They have not been truthful about their program.

And so one of my messages is that I, too, take the Iranian issue seriously, and that we have a plan to deal with it in a diplomatic way. It's important for the people in the region to know that while all options remain on the table, that I believe we can solve this problem diplomatically. And the way to do that is to continue to isolate Iran in the international community.

My message to the Iranian people is that there's a better way forward for you, that your Government has made decisions that have caused you to be isolated from the world, have caused there to be economic deprivation, because they refuse to be transparent and open about their enrichment programs.

And so I understand this is an issue, and it's going to be an agenda item on my travel. It's not going to be the only item, of course. The Middle Eastern peace process is something that will be on the leaders' minds. The commitment of the United States to remain active in the region will be on their minds. I'm sure that these leaders fear that the United States may become isolationist and basically throw up its hands and say, who cares what happens. I will remind them that what happens in parts of the world matters to the security of the United States of America, and that we look forward to being a constructive force and working with allies like allies should do.

And so I'm sure the subject will come up, and I'm looking forward to clarifying once again our position.

Jasim.

Bahrain

Q. Thank you, Mr. President, for this opportunity. It is a dream comes true.

The President. Thank you, sir. The American press feels the same way when they talk to me. It's a dream come true. [*Laughter*] You might want to clarify that. [*Laughter*] Some of them are very serious this morning. They're very grim, serious.

Q. It's cold outside, sir.

The President. It is cold outside.

Q. King Hamad of Bahrain has launched democratic reforms that included a new Constitution, and Bahrain now has an elected Parliament. How do you assess this experiment, especially in light of your drive to spread democracy in the region?

The President. I have complimented His Majesty on recognizing that Bahraini-style democracy, a democracy that reflects the traditions, customs of Bahrain, is a important part of dealing with real threats that we face in the world, which is extremism based upon hopelessness; and that there is a true threat to peace, and that is radicals who prey upon frustrations of people in order to convince them to become suicide bombers and to kill in the name of an ideology. And the best antidote to that is democracy.

And I applaud his efforts. And we are very active in helping nations, if they so choose to receive our help, in moving forward through the MEPI program, for example. And it is a way to help people build the institutions necessary for a—I repeat—a democracy that reflects their traditions and history of the respective countries.

And people go at different paces. And I don't expect Jeffersonian democracy to break out instantly, nor do I expect the forms of government to reflect that which we have in the United States. But I do hope that people recognize that popular sovereignty, that listening to people and responding to people, is how to build a stable and peaceful world.

And so I applaud His Majesty. I'm looking forward to bringing up the subject with the Amir of Kuwait as well. You know, women are now very active in the Kuwaiti Parliament. And I think—I feel these are constructive engagements. My friend King Abdallah of Saudi Arabia doesn't get enough credit for beginning to reform his society.

And again, I want to repeat: It is important for the American President not to insist that countries do it our way. I believe it is incumbent upon the American President to listen very carefully to the concerns of other leaders and to recognize obstacles and problems, but also remind them of this ideological struggle in which we're involved, all of us are involved; and that—I'll repeat it: Extremists prey upon hopelessness, and forms of government can create hopeless people, people who are frustrated, people who don't feel like the government is responsive to their needs.

The people that we—that kill the innocent have no positive vision. The only thing they can do is prey upon frustration—and that a way to deal with this ideological conflict is to defeat the ideology of hate with one of hope. And that's what's happening in the Middle East. It's—there's an awareness. And I'm looking forward to discussing that with the various leaders.

Yes, sir, Talat.

Saudi Arabia

Q. Yes, sir. Thank you for giving me this opportunity—and others. Sir, you're talking about the Middle East peace. I just would like to see, how do you see the role of King Abdallah in promoting the peace process and stability in the Middle East? And also, how do you evaluate the Saudi-American—comparing the terror in the region?

The President. Well, thank you. First of all, I admire King Abdallah. I admire him because he is a man who commands a lot of respect from me personally and a lot of respect in the region. When he speaks,

people listen. It's not to say that other people don't listen as well, but Saudi Arabia is geographically important, is the guardian of holy sites, and he's a well-respected man.

And so in terms of the Middle Eastern peace process, the fact that he sent his Foreign Minister to Annapolis sent a very strong message that Middle Eastern peace is going to require the participation of more than just the United States and Israel and the Palestinians, that a true peace is going to require a commitment in the neighborhood of supporting two states living side by side in peace—two democratic states living side by side in peace. So he has laid out his own initiative in the past. It commanded great respect. It is a commitment to a process. And so I value him as—I view him as invaluable in the process.

Secondly, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia recognized that murderers threaten not only other parts of the world, but threaten the Kingdom's own security. And the security forces there have done a magnificent job of using intelligence to find the few that would murder the many. I have been impressed—and any objective observer would be impressed—by Saudi Arabia's commitment to finding those people that use murder as a weapon.

And so I—to answer your question, I am satisfied with our cooperation. I'm appreciative of the efforts that the intelligence community inside Saudi has been making to deal with these extremists, some of whom conduct murder in—within the Kingdom, some of whom leave the Kingdom to conduct murder. And the King is fully aware that this is a—such a presence is a threat to his own internal securities, as well as recognizing an obligation to prevent those from going outside the country to murder.

Talha.

President's Upcoming Visit to the Middle East

Q. Thank you. Thank you again, Mr. President. Mr. President, I wanted to ask

you, your visit to the region will not include the Maghreb Arab.

The President. Will not include—

Q. The Maghreb Arab—

The President. Yes, that's right.

Q. —Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia. Those countries actually played a very important role in the peace process in the past, and I think that they are willing to do it again. And my question, Mr. President, if there is any reason for excluding the Maghreb Arab from your visit?

The President. Only because I ran out of time. It's certainly not as a result of any lack of respect or understanding that the contribution of those—of that area would be a significant contribution to achieving peace. And I appreciate very much the leadership in the King of Morocco as well as President Bouteflika. I'd like to go some time. I just—I don't want to make excuses, but I will. I've got to prepare the State of the Union Address. [*Laughter*] And so I'm leaving for a lengthy period of time and need to get back home.

And having said that, one of my great trips as a civilian—I guess you'd call me a civilian—non-President, nonpolitical figure—was when I went to Morocco. I had the great pleasure of going to Marrakesh, for example. And I'll never forget drinking crushed almond milk, and enjoyed the wonders of the desert and then was able to see snow-capped mountains shortly in the distance—in the short distance. And so it's—I threw snowballs in Morocco one time in the Atlas mountain range. So I had a wonderful experience there. Not to be kind of nostalgic, looking back, but—you know, it's interesting—for example, there are a lot of Moroccan Jews in Israel.

Q. And in Morocco also.

The President. What?

Q. And in Morocco.

The President. Yes, and in Morocco, which provides the King an interesting opportunity to be a healer and a unifier. And I believe he's committed to that. So I view these three countries as important, and I

am—wish I could have gone, but I was unable to do so.

Middle East Peace Process

Q. I want to ask you about the peace process. You voiced confidence that there might be a deal before the end of your second term. However, previous attempts to broker such a peace between Palestinians and Israelis have not succeeded. President Clinton, when he tried with Camp David, the intifada broke. And today, with the situation on the ground, with Syria and Iran not being fully engaged in the process, what makes you more confident that this might really go through?

The President. First of all, the Annapolis meeting was able to happen because of a lot of work we had done prior to the meeting with the parties. Step one is for there to be a recognition that the two-state solution was necessary for the security of both peoples. There had to be a philosophical change of attitude. People had to recognize that two states was the vision necessary for Israel to feel secure and for the Palestinians to feel hopeful.

Secondly, leadership had to emerge on both sides that was committed to the two-state solution and leadership that was committed to recognizing that extremists are trying to undermine that solution and must be dealt with, particularly the Palestinian leadership. President Abbas understands that there are people, sometimes inspired by foreign government, that will do everything in their power to stop the advance of a democracy. He is committed to dealing with that. Sometimes you've got to make sure, though, that the commitment is coupled with the capacity to deal with it, and that's one of the concerns that we're helping them deal with.

Thirdly, in order for there to be lasting peace, there has to be a regional commitment. In other words, the Palestinian leadership as well as the Israeli leadership has to know that when they negotiate a vision,

it will be supported by people in the region. One of the failures of the past is that people attempted to lay out a state—lay out the vision of a state, and yet there wasn't regional support, which made the political—the politics on the ground much more difficult for the leadership. And so I—those three issues have been addressed in the runup to Annapolis.

Finally, this really is a leadership issue that we're talking about. There has to be a firm commitment by the leaders involved to do—to make hard decisions. The United States can help, and I will help, and the State Department under Condi Rice's leadership will help, and the National Security under Hadley's leadership will help. We will help them make hard decisions. But these decisions must be made by the leadership in order for there to be lasting peace. And when those decisions are made, they must be supported by the region. And so I think those ingredients are now in place, and I'm optimistic that it will get done by the time I leave office, and more importantly, so is President Abbas and Prime Minister Olmert.

Now, what's going to happen is, is that there will be moments—there will be issues over settlements or Katyusha rocket attacks. These are going to be opportunities for those who don't want the vision to go forward to keep the process mired. We have a way to deal with that, and that is through a trilateral—the roadmap group to deal with these issues. My job is to remind people that laying out a substantive, real vision around which people of good faith can rally is instrumental to peace.

Now, keep in mind, when we define the state, it will be implemented subject to the roadmap. That's why the roadmap—the trilateral committee on the roadmap is important. And so there's going to be a lot of work to be done. And it's being done now. Institution-building is being done; security force modernization and reform is being done. The entrepreneurial spirit, which is strong amongst the Palestinians, can be

tapped into. It's hard to get capital to invest, however, unless there is certainty—or more certainty about security and a vision.

And so we're working a three-pronged strategy, and I believe all three of those prongs have come together in such a way as to give me confidence this deal can be done by the time I leave office.

Guantanamo Bay Detainees/Iran

Q. Mr. President, allow me to communicate to you a Kuwaiti sort of question or hope or plea. Needless to say that Kuwait is a true ally of the United States. There is so much gratitude for the role the United States played in the liberation of Kuwait back in 1991. Kuwait was the only launching pad for Operation Iraqi Freedom. When push came to shove, we were true allies.

Now, back in Kuwait, as your visit is approaching, the Kuwaitis are actually wondering if there will be an end to the four Kuwaiti detainees in Guantanamo. There are four of them. To the best of our knowledge, all paperwork has been done; all security assurances have been—

The President. To be transferred back to—

Q. To Kuwait.

The President. —from Guantanamo to Kuwait. We'll look at it. Our strategy, by the way, is to transfer as many Guantanamo detainees back to their countries of origin as possible, subject to the no torture agreement.

Q. The security assurances and the paperwork—

The President. Security assurances, right, as well as the assurances that the people will be treated humanely. I just will have to look into this.

Q. That will be great news, Mr. President, actually.

The President. Okay, we'll look into it.

Q. If this is broken, that—the paperwork is done—

The President. I understand. Well, some of the detainees are going to need to be tried in our court system. The crimes were such that we believe they ought to be brought to justice in a U.S. court system, which is—it's having a little trouble getting started because we've had a few court challenges for our court system. The whole purpose of the exercise was to send people home and try those who remain. And I just have to check on the four.

Q. That's very kind of you. If I may follow up on that earlier question—

The President. Please.

Q. —which is, also—I'm here actually to reflect on some sort of a conspiratorial thinking back in the region. You know that's a region—

The President. Has that ever happened? [*Laughter*]

Q. —whose middle name is actually “conspiracy”—that everything seems to be going for the mullahs' regimes in Iran, over the past 20 years of the United States strategy. The United States had eliminated the northern ideological enemy of Iran, U.S.S.R.; the eastern sectarian enemy of Iran, Taliban regime; the old-time foe, Saddam Hussein, in the west, without having—for the Iranians to resume the 8-long war—8-year-long war—and everything seems to be going their way. And yet, at the same time, here we are. As true allies, we want to have sort of a clear strategy of what exactly are we to adopt with our main ally, the United States of America—

The President. I appreciate that.

Q. —in terms of the confrontation of the threat for peace that is coming from Iran.

The President. What you've just described is one way to look at it. I look—let me look at it a different way, that now on the Iranian borderst exists a democracy, with a Constitution that is the most modern Constitution written in the Middle East; a democracy that is beginning to grow in confidence; a democracy that will recognize the rights of all citizens within its border;

a democracy that will be responsive to the people, which stands in stark contrast to the system of government in Tehran that's not a democracy; it is in many ways a theocracy.

Secondly, there is a—within Iran, there is—I mean, Iraq, there's a different attitude of the Shi'a. There's a quietus school; there's a school that says religion definitely has a part in society, but religion isn't going to run government, which is a—it's just an interesting way to view the neighborhood. Secondly, Afghanistan is now a democracy, a functioning democracy. Are these easy situations? No, they're difficult situations. Democracy takes a while to grow and flourish. But nevertheless, there is a competing form of government in Afghanistan, a different kind of form of government in Afghanistan.

Thirdly, Russia is very much engaged in the region. Russia has been helpful with Iran. Russia has supported the U.N. Security Council resolutions. Russia put forth an interesting proposal, which I've supported, that said, if you want to have a civilian nuclear program, you say your program is civilian in nature, there's no need for you to enrich because we'll provide the fuel for you. In other words, Russia has basically taken that argument away from the Iranians that said, we are—have the sovereign right to have a civilian nuclear program, and they said, fine.

This, by the way, I have said publicly. Of course they have a sovereign right to have a civilian nuclear program. The problem is, because this nation did not level with the IAEA, they are to be not trusted with the capacity to enrich, because once you learn to enrich, you could easily transfer that to a covert military program.

And so I view the situation differently, and I will be—I'm looking forward to talking to the Amir about it. What he'll want to know is whether or not we take the Iranian threat seriously. That's what he's going to want to know. And as my first answer to the question was, it should be

clear to you, I do. And secondly, he's going to want to know, do we have a strategy to deal with it? And I'll be glad to lay out again the strategy to deal with it. And thirdly, he'll want to know whether or not the United States is going to remain active in the region, will we be working with friends and allies on developing a security plan? And the answer to that question is, absolutely, we will be. That's one of the main purposes of the trip, to talk about U.S. commitment to the region.

Jasim.

Bahrain-U.S. Relations

Q. Bahrain and the United States are now benefiting from the free trade agreement—

The President. Yes.

Q. —they signed in 2004. Are there any new initiatives to reinforce economic and military cooperation? And how true are the reports which are saying that the United States will abandon its base in Bahrain?

The President. Well, I can handle that one right now: They're not true. You're right about the conspiracy theory. [*Laughter*] He's asking whether we're going to pull the 5th Fleet out of Bahrain, and the answer is no. And if that's a concern of His Majesty, it won't take long for me to allay his concerns. As a matter of fact, I'm looking forward to not only dealing with the Bahraini officials and His Majesty, of course, but to talk to our troops there in Bahrain. I'm looking forward to thanking them for their service to the country, which ought to be a very powerful signal that the answer is no.

Bahrain is a very hospitable place for our Navy and other Armed Forces, and that in itself is a—should be a signal to people that we view Bahrain as a stable, strong country, which is all part of tracking investment. You asked about how do you enhance trade. Well, one way you enhance trade is to make sure that capital is—capital looks for secure places. Capital doesn't like

to invest and have a high-risk component based upon instability. So that in itself ought to—that signal in itself ought to facilitate division of a free trade agreement.

Talat.

Energy

Q. Yes, sir. Sir, you're talking about civilian nuclear, and you don't have any objection for that if it's going to be under the supervision of the international arena. DCC recently approached to have a civilian nuclear facility for water desalinization for power. What is your stand on that?

The President. It's a—very interesting, Talat. First of all, desalinization requires an enormous amount of power. And the best power source for desalinization, to make it more economical, is nuclear power.

Secondly, I believe if the world is serious about dealing with global warming, emissions, then the best way to deal with it is for us to power up through nuclear power. And so therefore, I'm a advocate for nuclear power, with proper safeguards to make sure that untrustworthy nations, nations that will not subject themselves to IAEA scrutiny, are called to account. So I would support nuclear power for the sake of desalinization.

People say: "Well, you're awash with oil. Why do you need nuclear power?" Well, nuclear power is environmentally sound, and nuclear power is really the best way to deal with issues such as desalinization. If I were in the Middle East and worried about water, which is a valuable resource, I too would be looking for economic ways to desalinate the water. I think it's a smart policy.

Q. Thank you, sir.

The President. Final question. It's been an interesting session.

Q. Thank you.

The President. You're trying to—one more question, Joyce. Quick. If I give you, then I have to go around again. [*Laughter*]

Situation in Darfur

Q. Thank you, Mr. President. You will visit Egypt, sir, which has recently deployed troops in Darfur—

The President. Yes.

Q. —part of the hybrid force. You also signed a bill against Sudan, which it seems from my point of view again to affect the people—the Sudanese people, but not the Government. My question, Mr. President: If Darfur would be part of your agenda when you meet with President Mubarak?

The President. Absolutely. First, I'll thank him for sending troops. Secondly, I'm going to correct you on the sanctions. The sanctions were aimed at individuals within the Sudanese regime, people that were obstructing the peace process—including a rebel leader. They were aimed at the elite and companies owned by the elite, as opposed to the Sudanese people.

In order for there to be the peace that we all want—now, this is dealing with Darfur—and as you know, the situation is very complicated because we're not only dealing with Darfur, we're dealing with the north-south agreement as well—in order to—well, let me do north-south very quickly. We have been working with the southern leaders to get them to participate in the Government of Khartoum, so long as the Government of Khartoum is forthcoming with their agreements, such as the sharing of oil revenues.

Secondly, we have insisted that both parties not be provocative when it comes to military incursions upon an ill-defined border.

Thirdly, we're providing aid to the people of southern Sudan. And it's interesting; one of the really interesting things about America is, total strangers are going to help total strangers all the time. And there's a lot of church and faith-based groups involved in southern Sudan trying to improve the lot of people living there—in other words, the great humanitarian outreach that takes place.

Darfur—in order for there to be the peace that we all want in Darfur, there has to be, one, a united rebel group willing to sit down at the table with Khartoum in good faith. And one of the reasons I put the sanctions on individuals in Sudan—we did have sanctions prior to that, general sanctions, but these ones you're referring to are targeted at folks—is because there was a lack of effort by the Government on truly trying to promote the peace process. I recognize, however, that there has to be a more united effort by the rebel groups. In other words, the rebel groups cannot take advantage of—continue to take advantage of this notion that they can do what they want without being serious about the peace. And so the United States is sending a dual message: one, to the Government of Khartoum; and two, to the rebels.

When we first got going in the process, by the way, there was three major rebel groups, which made it easier to convince people to come to the table. Now there are 20; the groups are beginning to split. And so we support the U.N. process, coupled with the AU: one, to get troops in there as quickly as possible to be able to help the folks who are living in these dispersed camps have a normal life. And the United States, by the way, when you talk about direct humanitarian aid, has provided more direct humanitarian aid than any country in the world by far because we care about the human condition, we care about people's lives.

Secondly, that we support the U.N. efforts to get the rebels to the table. There was one attempt in Libya, as you know, recently, and our efforts are to support Jan Eliasson—he was the former Ambassador for Sweden here—as he works to bring cohesion so that there's a cohesive unit of rebels to negotiate with the Government.

And so I'm—I have been frustrated, frankly, with the pace of the United Nations and the AU to get troops in there because, as I say, my concern is about the

individual that's out in the remote regions of Darfur, maybe going hungry, definitely worried about violence. But I would repeat to you that in order to solve this problem, there has to be cohesion amongst the rebels and a genuine, real peace process where people sit down seriously—to seriously discuss a better way forward. And the United States will participate. We have participated by sanctioning, to send the signal that we expect the Government to participate seriously. And we're also—by the way, as I told you, we sanctioned a rebel leader—trying to send the same message. It's a terrible situation and one that we hope can be resolved as quickly as possible.

With that, I want to thank you all. Looking forward to seeing you again.

Q. Thank you, same here.

The President. Enjoyed it.

NOTE: The interview was taped at 10:25 a.m. in the Roosevelt Room at the White House. In his remarks, the President referred to Prime Minister Ehud Olmert of Israel; President Mahmoud Abbas and Prime Minister Salam Fayyad of the Palestinian Authority; former Prime Minister Tony Blair of the United Kingdom, Quartet Representative in the Middle East; Prime Minister Fuad Siniora of Lebanon; King Hamad bin Isa al-Khalifa of Bahrain; Amir Sabah al-Ahmad al-Jabir al-Sabah of Kuwait; Minister of Foreign Affairs Saud al-Faysal bin Abd al-Aziz Al Saud of Saudi Arabia; King Mohamed VI of Morocco; President Abdelaziz Bouteflika of Algeria; President Mohamed Hosni Mubarak of Egypt; and United Nations Secretary-General's Special Envoy for Darfur Jan Eliasson. A reporter referred to President Nicolas Sarkozy of France. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this interview.

Remarks Following a Meeting With the President's Working Group on Financial Markets

January 4, 2008

I just had a fascinating and productive meeting with the President's Working Group on Financial Markets, chaired by Secretary Paulson. I want to thank the members for working diligently to monitor our capital market system, our financial system. And while there is some uncertainty, the report is, is that the financial markets are strong and solid. And I want to thank you for being diligent.

This economy of ours is on a solid foundation, but we can't take economic growth for granted. And there are signs that will cause us to be ever more diligent and to make sure that good policies come out of Washington. For example, we've had 52 straight months of job creation, but job growth slowed last month. The core inflation is low, but U.S. consumers are paying

more for gasoline and for food. The consumer spending is strong, yet the values on many of the homes in America are beginning to decline and—which leads me to say to the American people: For those of you who are paying more and are worried about your home, we understand that. That's why we have an aggressive policy to help creditworthy people stay in their homes.

The Congress and the President have got to work together when they come back to, one, make sure taxes remain low. If there are—if the foundation is strong yet indicators are mixed, the worst thing that Congress could do is raise taxes on the American people and on American businesses. Secondly, we have got to understand that if we are worried about gasoline prices, we