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Interview With David Gollust of the Voice of America

July 3, 1997

NATO Expansion

Q. Mr. President, thanks for giving us your time today as you prepare for the Madrid Summit.

The administration has made it clear that it's prepared to accept only Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic in the first round of NATO expansion, but several of our allies, and maybe even a majority in NATO, have said that they would also like to see Romania and Slovenia in that initial round. Since NATO decisions are taken by consensus, we have an effective veto over a broader expansion, but there's been criticism in Europe that we're being a bit heavyhanded, maybe the bigfoot approach to handling NATO affairs. Do you accept that?

The President. No. We consulted extensively with all of our allies. Secretary Albright went to Sintra in Portugal and said what our thoughts were and listened to their thoughts before we announced our position. I personally talked with President Chirac and Chancellor Kohl and Prime Minister Blair and others about this. We would like to see NATO continue to expand. We believe NATO would be well served by having more members on its southern flank. But we believe that these three countries are the only three that are clearly ready now, in terms of the stability of their democracy and their capacity to fulfill the military requirements of membership.

Keep in mind, this is—NATO—there is a political component to this decision, and there should be, but NATO is also, first and foremost, a security alliance. And anybody who gets in as a full member must be able to meet the requirements of membership. Moreover, there are costs to be paid by the NATO members themselves that are significant to integrate new members because we have to operate in more countries. And for all these reasons, on the merits, the United States strongly believes that we should start with three.

Now, let me also back up and just go through a little history here. In January of '94, when we recommended that NATO expand—and I did that in a speech in Belgium—there was some controversy about it among the Europeans. Not all the Europeans thought it was a good idea. But eventually they came around. Interestingly enough, the French were strongly in favor of expansion, and we have been together on that.

Now, what I think is important to do is to see this as an ongoing process so that—let's just take Romania, for example, a very important country, the second largest country in Central and Eastern Europe. Would it be a good thing if Romania were in NATO? Of course, it would be. Is it a good thing that Romania has chosen democracy and has resolved its problems with Hungary and now has two Hungarians in the Romanian Cabinet? Yes, it is. This is a process that's been going on slightly less than a year.

So I think to say—we love what the Romanians are doing; we applaud it. We want them to be a part of our shared future, and the door is still open to them in a very aggressive way. That's the message we want to get out there, it seems to me, and that we will continue to work with them to see whether they can sustain this for another couple of years.

Q. Are you going to be able to offer Romania, Slovenia, some of the other countries that will not be allowed in on the first round anything more than consolation? I mean, will there be any kind of specific information given about a timetable or modalities?

The President. Well, what I would hope is that all the allies would agree that we will take another look at this in 1999. As we complete the integration of the first members into NATO, we will take another look and see if we shouldn't take some more members

in then. But in addition to that, let's not forget one thing: There is something that has already happened to increase their stability. The agreement with Russia increases their security and, even more important, their involvement in the Partnership For Peace, which is now going to be folded into this Euro-Atlantic alliance. That's a big deal for all these countries. That has been the great untold and underappreciated story of NATO, the fact that we put together this Partnership For Peace. There are two dozen countries in it. We do joint military exercises. They're involved with us in Bosnia. This is a huge deal.

So these countries are going to continue to become more secure and more involved with NATO, no matter what happens, if they're getting a clear signal, too, that this is not the last decision on membership and that it is not the last decision for a long time, that within 2 years we're going to take another look at this.

Russia

Q. You've said many times that NATO expansion is not a process that's directed against Russia. But a number of countries that were formerly part of the Soviet Union, for instance the Baltic States, are very concerned that at some point Russia might return to totalitarianism and empire building at some point. Are the concerns that they have, the Baltic States for instance, valid on this? And can you or will you do anything to put them at ease?

The President. Well again, we have tried to put them at ease in two ways. One is with their involvement in the Partnership For Peace, and the second is with the clear understanding that the door to membership would remain open on a long-term basis. And let me make a third point. The third is, when we made the agreement with Russia—the partnership with Russia is a clear signal that at least as long as this government is there and that President is there, they are not going to define their greatness in terms of their territorial dominance. Keep in mind, it was President Yeltsin that worked with us to withdraw the troops from the Baltics. So they got their—the Russian troops have left the Baltics in the tenure of my service here.

So I think time is on our side, that we can't resolve all issues today but we are moving in the right direction and we have to let a little time pass on some of these issues. And they'll settle down and resolve themselves, I think, in a positive way. Could something bad happen to change the direction? Of course, it could happen. Is it likely? I don't think so.

Senate Approval of NATO Expansion

Q. After the Madrid Summit is over, of course, I think the focus will shift back here domestically to the Senate, which will have to approve the extension of U.S. defense commitments to new NATO countries. How difficult a process will this be? Are the American people prepared to accept U.S. commitments to defend Warsaw, for instance, as they have done to, say, Paris and London?

The President. Well, I hope they will be. And I think we can prevail on that because it's not just Warsaw; keep in mind you have—I mean, not just Paris and London, we have other smaller countries in NATO right now. Iceland is a member of NATO.

So I think when you point out that no NATO country has ever been attacked, it makes it clear that actually the expansion of NATO reduces the likelihood of Americans having to go to war. It reduces the likelihood of Americans having to fight and die and also broadens the burdens of those who will help us in places like Bosnia. So for all those reasons, I think that we can persuade the American people and the United States Senate to do this.

I also think, frankly, as a practical matter, it will be a little easier to make the case for three rather than five. And if the three work well and the costs are as we expect them to be, modest and affordable, I think it will make it a lot easier to sell in a couple of years if we are in a position where we can come back and argue to expand some more.

Bosnia

Q. Mr. President, on Bosnia—of course, this was an issue at Denver a couple of weeks ago; it's going to be on the agenda in Madrid—you have got a few days less than a year now to the planned withdrawal of the NATO-led peacekeepers, and there are re-

ports that within the administration there is disagreement about the ideal, of pulling out in the middle of next year. Is it worth keeping the withdrawal date if it means that Bosnia might lurch back to bloodshed?

The President. I think it's important that we keep the date in mind at the end of this mission, because this mission, just like the one before it, can't go on forever. And I think—right now, I think it's better for us not to speculate about what happens after that. What I'm concerned about is that there is all this rather frenetic looking at what happens next June to the exclusion of looking at what happens today and tomorrow. That is, we wouldn't even have to worry about this if every day between now and next year everyone involved gave a 100 percent effort to implementing the Dayton peace accords, to doing the economic reconstruction, to setting up the common institutions, to resolving the police and the local election issues, to dealing with the war crimes issues.

And what the United States has tried to do is to get our allies there to focus on implementing Dayton in an aggressive way. And one of the things that came out of the Summit of the Eight was that each of the countries expressed some interest in being given, in effect, almost primary responsibility for each separate element of the Dayton accords.

Then, as we get along toward the end of year, we could take another look and see whether—what's the security situation going to be next June, and how can we best take care of it? But I don't think that this particular mission at this level should continue. We cannot occupy this country forever.

Q. Could we conceivably leave with the very prominent war crimes suspects still at large?

The President. Well, we had a good arrest last week. And I think that the problem, of course, with Dayton was—and this was an inevitable problem, but we were a part of it so we have to take responsibility—is that there was this agreement to set up a tribunal or to support the work of the tribunal with the explicit understanding that the work of then IFOR and its successor, SFOR, would not be used to go and do, in effect, police or military work to get these people, that they would only pick them up if they came in contact with them in the ordinary course of their business, which meant that Dayton left a gap. There was no, in effect, police group charged with the duty to go arrest the war criminals. And so we're trying to figure out how we can accelerate that process consistent with the other obligations the parties assumed at Dayton. That was a big hole in Dayton.

But even with that, that's still not an excuse for why the development aid is taking so long to get out. You know, are we supporting the local elections in every way we can? Have we all done everything we can to set up local police units that can maintain security? Are we doing everything we can to press disarmament instead of having an arms race of equality, which is not in anyone's interest?

We do have an agreement in the parties now to set up common institutions. Are they going to be set up quickly enough so that the benefits of them will be felt by the Serbs and the Croats and the Muslims in time to keep them moving together and going together? I mean, these people butchered each other for 4 years; you've got to work real hard to give them common interest to live together and work together.

And there is a difference in not going back to war, which I don't think any of them really want to do, the ordinary people I mean, and having a vested interest in continuing to pursue the peace. We've done a good job, I think, of getting them to the point where they don't want to go back to the way it was. We have to do more to get them to try to build a better peace.

Q. Thanks again for your time, Mr. President.

The President. Thank you.

NOTE: The interview began at 12:23 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, the President referred to President Jacques Chirac of France; Chancellor Helmut Kohl of Germany; Prime Minister Tony Blair of the United Kingdom; and President Boris Yeltsin of Russia. This item was not received in time for publication in the appropriate issue.

Statement on the Landing of the *Mars Pathfinder* Spacecraft

July 4, 1997

On this important day, the American people celebrate another exciting milestone in our Nation's long heritage of progress, discovery, and exploration: the first landing on the surface of Mars in over 20 years.

Our return to Mars today marks the beginning of a new era in the Nation's space exploration program. The *Mars Pathfinder* is the first of a series of probes we are sending to Mars over the next decade. The information we gather on our neighbor planet will help us better understand our own world and perhaps provide further clues on the origins of our solar system. This mission also underscores our new way of doing business at the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA). We were able to accomplish this mission in one-third the time and at a fraction of the cost of the first *Viking* mission to Mars.

I congratulate the *Mars Pathfinder* team at NASA and the Jet Propulsion Laboratory for their pioneering vision and spirit in accomplishing this remarkable feat. Their success in developing the *Pathfinder* mission is a testament to the ingenuity and ''can do'' attitude of the American people.

The President's Radio Address

July 5, 1997

Good morning. We come together this weekend to celebrate Independence Day, our 221 years of freedom and the fundamental values that unite us as one America: All of us should have an equal chance to succeed, and all of us have the same obligation to work hard, to be law-abiding citizens, to give something back to our community, to earn in our generation the freedom our Founders established.

These are the values that have guided our efforts to end welfare as we know it. Today I want to talk to you about the progress we have made over the last 4½ years, the changes now underway, and what we must do—all of us—to make sure that welfare reform honors those values, too.

For 4½ years, my administration has been committed to putting an end to the old welfare system that trapped too many families in a cycle of despair. Working with the States, we first launched welfare reform experiments in 43 States that emphasize work and personal responsibility.

Then last summer, I signed historic legislation that revolutionized welfare into a system that supports families and children but demands work from those who are able to perform it. It was a dramatic step, but we knew the time was right to put an end to a system that was broken beyond repair. As of July 1st, just a few days ago, welfare reform has taken effect in all 50 States. This week the old welfare system came to an end. Now a new system based on work is taking its place. This system demands responsibility but not only from the people who are now required to work but also from every American.

We knew last August that the new welfare reform law was not a guarantee but a bold experiment. So far, it's working. I'm pleased to announce that today there are 3 million fewer people on welfare than there were the day I took office, a remarkable 1.2 million fewer since I signed welfare reform into law. This is the largest decrease in the welfare rolls in history, giving us the lowest percentage of our population on welfare since 1970.

We have begun to put an end to the culture of dependency and to elevate our values of family, work, and responsibility. But we have only begun. Now we must continue to work together to meet our goal of moving a million more people from welfare to work by the year 2000.

Since I took office, the economy has added 12½ million new jobs, and many economists believe we will continue to produce the jobs we need to meet our challenge. But even so, it won't be easy because many of the people who remain on welfare have never worked before; still others live in poor communities without enough jobs. So if we expect people to work, we need to make sure there's work for them to go to. And we need to make sure that those with no previous work experience, without present connections to mainstream America, get both the preparation and the support they need to succeed.