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President's Remarks to the Travel Pool in China

St. Regis Hotel
Beijing, People's Republic of China

[President's Visit to Asia](#)

6:12 P.M. (Local)

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you all. We started our day here going to a church service that was really uplifting. I was -- I wasn't sure what to expect, and I can tell you that the service was full of spirit, and the preacher gave a really good sermon. She was -- I'm sure you made her nervous with all the cameras and everything, but she was really good. And it was a wonderful way to start the morning.

As I mentioned to the President, as well as to you all on the steps of the church, a society that welcomes religion is a wholesome society, it's a whole society. And I felt like the church service was a affirmation of my strong belief that people should be able to worship freely, and I shared that with President Hu.

I was also pleased with our talks with both President Hu and Premier Wen. We have a complex relationship and it's a really important relationship. I mean, China is a big, growing, strong country. And it's very important for me to maintain a good working relationship with the leadership here. And we've got that. And the reason that's important is that it enables me to talk about the values that are important to America. It also enables me to talk about the interests of our workers and farmers. China is a trading partner, and we expect the trade with China to be fair. We expect our people to be treated fairly here in this important country.

And so I had a chance to talk about a variety of subjects -- intellectual property rights and the currency, access to our markets for U.S. beef. And it was a good, frank discussion.

Finally, I had a bike ride. I'd like to clarify my comments. Compared to Crawford, this trail is a great bike trail and really difficult. It is clear that I couldn't make the Chinese Olympic cycling team. But I really enjoyed it. It was a lot of fun to ride with those six young Chinese athletes. And I hope they enjoyed it, as well. It was a good experience.

There's also an important debate underway back in Washington about the way forward in Iraq. I particularly want to discuss the position that Democrat Congressman John Murtha announced this past



week. Let me start off by saying that Congressman Murtha is a fine man, a good man, who served our country with honor and distinction as a Marine in Vietnam and as a United States Congressman. He is a strong supporter of the United States military. And I know the decision to call for an immediate withdrawal of our troops by Congressman Murtha was done in a careful and thoughtful way.

I disagree with his position. An immediate withdrawal of our troops from Iraq will only strengthen the terrorists' hand in Iraq, and in the broader war on terror. That's the goal of the enemy. They want to break our will in Iraq, so that we leave and they can turn Iraq into what Afghanistan was under the Taliban, a safe haven for terror, a place where they can plot and plan attacks against America and freedom-loving countries around the world.

Our military strategy is aimed at targeting the terrorists and training the Iraqis. Iraq authorities have made clear they want us to help them. They want us to help them defeat the terrorists, and they want us to train their own security forces, which is what we're doing.

I also recognize that the Iraqi people look forward to the day when Iraqi forces can secure their country and defend their freedom. It's only natural that the Iraqi people look forward to the day when they're fully prepared to defeat this enemy. I look forward to the day when the Iraqis are fully prepared to do that.

And we're making good progress. More and more Iraqis are taking the fight to the enemy, and day-by-day, they're assuming more responsibility for their own security. And as the Iraqi security forces gain strength and experience, we can lessen our troop presence in the country without losing our capability to effectively defeat the terrorists. A reduced presence of coalition forces will clearly demonstrate to the Iraqi people that we have no ambitions to occupy their country. As I've often said, we'll stay as long as necessary, but not one day more.

Yet, leaving prematurely will have terrible consequences, for our own security and for the Iraqi people. And that's not going to happen so long as I'm the President.

This is a debate worthy of our country; it's an important debate. It does not have to be a partisan issue. Fine Democrats like Senator Joe Lieberman share the view that we must prevail in Iraq. Bipartisan majorities in the House and the Senate rejected calls for immediate withdrawal. My decisions in Iraq will continue to be guided by the sober judgment of the military commanders on the ground in Iraq. Those elected leaders in Washington who do not support our policies in Iraq have every right to voice their dissent. They also have a responsibility to provide a credible alternative. The stakes are too high, and the national interest too important, for anything otherwise.

Now I'll be glad to answer some questions, starting with Jennifer.

Q Thank you, sir. Can you talk about why you have chosen to talk more about the need for greater religious freedoms in China, than the need for greater political freedom?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, they go hand-in-hand. A society which recognizes religious freedom is a society which will recognize political freedoms, as well. China has undergone an amazing

transformation in its economy. It's a much freer economy than any time in its past. And as a result, the people are becoming more prosperous. I've always believed that a free economy will yield a freer political system.

I think about South Korea. South Korea opened its economy up and then political reforms followed. And part of a system which recognizes the right of people to express themselves is a system which also recognizes the right of people to worship freely. And in my discussions with the leadership in China, of course, I talked about both, political and religious freedom.

Caren.

Q Do you feel that you got the commitments that you sought from President Hu on issues like currency reform and trade? And also, are you concerned about a crackdown reported on Chinese dissidents ahead of your visit?

THE PRESIDENT: I'm always concerned about somebody who is trying to express themselves in the public square, express their opinion, being cracked down by a state. And it's -- again, in my discussions with President Hu, I talked about a variety of concerns, one, that the NGOs here in China ought to be treated fairly; secondly, that we have given the Chinese government a list of dissidents that we believe are improperly imprisoned.

I talked about the Dalai Lama. I thought it would be wise for the Chinese government to invite the Dalai Lama so he can tell them exactly what he told me in the White House the other day, that he has no desire for an independent Tibet. I talked about the Catholic Church, the need for this government to invite leaders from the Vatican to come and discuss religious freedoms in China. So we discussed a lot of areas of concern about the condition of the dissidents and people who want to express themselves.

In terms of the currency, this government made a decision last July to reform their currency. It was a structural reform, and I applaud that. I also reminded the leaders that we've seen some movement, but not much, in the currency valuation. And I explained to them as clearly as I could that the value of the Chinese currency is very important for manufacturers and farmers and workers in the United States.

In terms of intellectual property rights, that's been a concern that many have expressed to me in our country, and wanted me to express to the leadership in China. And I made it clear that if you've got a vibrant economy, and people feel uncomfortable about the piracy of product, that it's going to affect the economy in the long run. And they recognize that. As a matter of fact, Premier Wen went through a list of crackdowns this government has taken on intellectual property rights.

I talked about market access, the need to make sure that we've got access to Chinese markets like they've got to ours. And that's a very important subject in America, as you know, and it's one that I relayed to both President Hu and Premier Wen. I applauded the fact that through hard work, that we came up with a good textile agreement, which was important. I was pleased to see that the Chinese government ordered Boeing aircraft.

The relationship, however, is one that it's got to be close enough that we can -- need to consistently

remind our Chinese friends that structural reform is really what the United States government is talking about with China.

Let's see -- Bill Roberts.

Q Thank you, Mr. President.

THE PRESIDENT: Yes.

Q It used to be that it was said that politics stopped at the water's edge. On this trip, clearly, the debate over Iraq has followed you. Were you at all disappointed by that? And why do you think it is that the Iraq debate in the last week has been so intense?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, I'm not surprised that people are talking about Iraq. Iraq is a vital issue for the United States of America. And it's -- we're at war, and people, of course, have got strong opinions about war. On the trip here, by the way, I was most pleased that many of the leaders at the APEC conference understood the stakes in Iraq, that a democracy in the heart of the Middle East will make the entire world more peaceful.

It's -- this is a worthy debate, and I'm going to repeat something I've said before. People should feel comfortable about expressing their opinions about Iraq. I heard somebody say, well, maybe so-and-so is not patriotic because they disagree with my position. I totally reject that thought. This is not an issue of who's patriot and who's not patriotic. It's an issue of an honest, open debate about the way forward in Iraq.

I am confident we will succeed in Iraq. I'm confident that the Iraqi forces will be trained; I am confident the political process will slowly, but surely, marginalize those that are trying to stop the march of democracy. And I also know that we have got to make sure that Iraq does not become a safe haven for terrorists. It's very important for -- during this debate to listen to the words of Zawahiri, who's the number-two man of al Qaeda, where he has made it very clear that his intention, and the intention of his henchman, Zarqawi, is to drive us out of Iraq before we have completed the mission.

And there's a reason why he wants us out of Iraq; because he wants Iraq to be a safe haven. He wants to be able to find a place where he and his forces can plot and plan against the United States of America. They were -- the al Qaeda, the enemy was able to do just that in Afghanistan. They plotted and planned a monstrous attack on the United States of America. And that attack of September the 11th is a lesson we should never forget.

Secondly, a democracy in Iraq is going to send a clear example of what is possible to other reformers in the region. There are people in Iran that are interested in freedom. And when Iraq succeeds, the people in Iran will see what is possible; that it's possible to have a government that actually listens to the people and responds to the needs of the people. A free Iraq will send a clear example to the Palestinians of what is possible in the Middle East. I believe there will be a Palestinian state that is democratic in nature and at peace with its neighbor, Israel. Lebanon is an example of a society which is shedding itself of a -- of its neighbor, Syria, and it's strengthening its democracy.

You know, it's interesting here in the Far East that we have this discussion about Iraq, and it's an appropriate place to think about the stakes in Iraq, because, after all, Japan was our sworn enemy. And after World War II, the Japanese adopted a Japanese-style democracy, which yielded a peaceful partner, an ally. It's amazing to think that in 60 years Japan has gone from enemy to ally in keeping the peace. The spread of democracies here in the Far East have made this part of the world a peaceful region.

And so the stakes are enormously high in Iraq, and I can understand why there's a debate. And I suspect there's going to be a debate for a long time coming in Iraq, as there should be. This is a serious matter of national concern.

Let's see -- Suzanne.

Q If I could follow up on your comments on Congressman Murtha. You said that he was a fine man and that he probably made this in a thoughtful manner. Congressman Murtha has also used the fact that neither you, nor the Vice President has served in combat as part of his criticism of Iraq policy, as well as the administration's campaign to defend it. Do you believe that that is relevant to the debate? And is there any concern that the attacks on either side are becoming overly personal?

THE PRESIDENT: I don't think the Vice President's service is relevant in this debate. And I would hope all of us in this debate talk about the policy and have an honest, open debate about whether or not it makes sense to immediately withdraw our troops. My position is very clear: It does not make sense. It will make America less secure. Iraq is a battlefield in the war on terror, and it's vital that we succeed in this particular battle in the war on terror.

And our strategy is proceeding. There's a political strategy, and as I said the other day, I said a couple of times, the progress in Iraq is amazing when you think -- the political progress. I mean, they've gone from tyranny to the election of a transitional national government, to the ratification of a constitution. And they're about to have elections again. And all this took place in two-and-a-half years. When you compare it to our own history, our road was quite bumpy getting to a constitution. And so the progress is strong.

The other progress that's being made is the training of the Iraqi forces. And more and more of the forces are more capable of taking the fight to the enemy. And as that happens, and as our commanders on the ground inform me that Iraq's security can be maintained by Iraqi troops, we will adjust accordingly.

Let's see -- Mike.

Q Thank you very much, Mr. President. If I might follow up Jennifer's question. When you expressed to President Hu the importance of people being able to worship freely, did he express any interest in helping people of various faiths do that? Did he make any commitment to you for improvements? And, Mr. President, how repressed or restricted do you believe Christians are right now in this country?

THE PRESIDENT: It's a really interesting question. You know, Dr. Luis Palau was with me, and we spent time in the limousine on the way to the church talking about his views of Christianity here in China. He believes there are about a hundred million Christians, and that they are -- they're worshipping in a way that is able to call upon the Almighty to help them through their lives. And that's the spirit I found in the church.

President Hu is a thoughtful fellow. He listened to what I had to say. And I thought it was very interesting in his comments that he talked about human rights. Those who watch China closely would say that maybe a decade ago a leader wouldn't have uttered those comments. He talked about democracy. And so to answer your question, he took it on board in a very thoughtful manner.

Herman, last question.

Q Respectfully, sir -- and you know we're always respectful -- (laughter) --

THE PRESIDENT: Most of the time.

Q -- in your statement this morning with President Hu, you seemed a little off your game. You seemed to hurry through your statement and there was a lack of enthusiasm --

THE PRESIDENT: When? Here, right now?

Q No, this morning, with President Hu. Was something bothering you? Were you tired?

THE PRESIDENT: Have you ever heard of jet lag?

Q Yes, sir.

THE PRESIDENT: Well, good. That answers your question.

Q There was nothing he said, I mean in the meeting?

THE PRESIDENT: No, not at all. Listen, the relationship with China is a good, vibrant, strong relationship. And we have frank discussions, and that's what you want at my level of government. You want to be able to sit down with somebody, and say, look, here are my concerns.

I always say that the relationship between America and China is an important relationship. This is a booming economy. This is a -- China is a big presence in Asia. And it's very vital for the United States to have a relationship where I can sit down and say, look, the trade -- the trade policy must take into consideration your currency, must take into consideration our desire to sell you beef, must take into consideration intellectual property rights. And I can do that in such a way that he doesn't say, I'm tired of listening to you. It's a -- it's an important relationship.

We have -- we're working together with North Korea. The leader in North Korea has -- must abandon his nuclear weapons programs in a verifiable fashion. The Chinese understand that and have accepted that position. The fact that China and the United States can work on this issue as equal partners is important for the stability of this region and the world.

In other words, my point to you is, is that we've got a very vibrant relationship. I don't know what I sounded like during my discussion. As you know, I don't spend a lot of time analyzing myself, and obviously, you do. But --

Q We have a lot of time on our hands, Mr. President. (Laughter.)

THE PRESIDENT: Yes, you do. (Laughter.) But I am pleased that I am in a -- I am in a position to be able to explain to President Hu, as clearly as I can, my concerns and my appreciation for different aspects of our relationship.

Thank you all, very much.

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