



For Immediate Release
Office of the Vice President
June 22, 2006

Interview of the Vice President by John King, CNN

The Vice President's Residence

8:59 A.M. EDT

Q Mr. Vice President, thank you for your time, a lot of ground to cover so let's get right to it.

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Okay, John.

Q The Democrats will put on the floor of the Senate today a proposal -- they don't have the votes -- but they say this administration's policy in Iraq has failed. And the leading Democratic proposal would say, let's have a partial withdrawal -- they call it a redeployment -- and then require the administration to put forward a plan. Now, they say this is not cut and run, it's not retreat, but they say three years and three months later, it is time for the administration to tell the Iraqi government you cannot have this indefinite American security blanket. You need to do a better job of preparing your own people to take over security, what's wrong with that?



THE VICE PRESIDENT: Well, it's wrong in many respects, John. First of all, they're wrong. We are making significant progress. We've had major success on the political front in terms of three national elections last year by the Iraqis. They've stood up a brand new government under a new constitution for the first time ever. We've got a quarter of a million Iraqis now in uniform, equipped, trained, in the fight. So there has been significant progress made with respect to what's going on in Iraq.

What the Democrats are suggesting basically you can call it withdrawal, you can call it redeployment, whatever you want to call it, basically it's -- in effect, validates the terrorist strategy. You got to remember that the Osama bin Laden types, the al Qaeda types, the Zarqawi types that have been active in Iraq are betting that ultimately they can break the United States' will. There's no way they can defeat us militarily. But their whole strategy -- if you look at what bin Laden has been saying for 10 years -- is they believe they can, in fact, force us to quit, that ultimately we'll get tired of the fight, that we don't have the stomach for a long, tough battle, and that we'll pack it in and go home.

If we were to do that, it would be devastating from the standpoint of the global war on terror. It would affect what happens in Afghanistan. It would make it difficult for us to persuade the Iranians to give up

their aspirations for nuclear weapons. It would threaten the stability of regimes like Musharraf in Pakistan and the Saudis in Saudi Arabia. It is -- absolutely the worst possible thing we could do at this point would be to validate and encourage the terrorists by doing exactly what they want us to do, which is to leave.

Q You say -- excuse me for interrupting you -- you say validating and encouraging the terrorists, the Democrats say they're tired of validating what they view as a failed policy. And as you know some Democrats want to go even further. Senator Kerry wants to have a complete withdrawal within a year or so.

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Right.

Q Jack Murtha, an old friend of yours, with whom you have sparred recently in the House, he says, look, when President Reagan realized the policy in Beirut was failing, he withdrew the troops. Call it cut and run if you will. When President Clinton realized the policy in Somalia was failing, he withdrew the troops. Again, some might say cut and run. He says this war is costing \$8 billion a month, \$300 million a day, there's no end in sight. And forgive me, but he says, you don't have a plan, so let's not have more kids killed.

THE VICE PRESIDENT: He's wrong. I like Jack Murtha. He's a friend. We did a lot of business together in the past when I was Secretary of Defense and he was chairman of defense appropriations sub-committee. But the instances he cites, Beirut in '83, Somalia in '93 is what bin Laden cited back in 1997 and '98. He made speeches where he, in effect, argued that the Americans didn't have the stomach for a fight, that ultimately the terrorists would win, al Qaeda would win. And he's cited as evidence of that, what happened in Beirut in 1983 and Somalia in 1993. That's my point.

The fact of the matter is that we are in a global conflict. It's not just about Iraq. It's -- we've seen attacks around the world from New York and Washington, all the way around the Jakarta and Indonesia over the course of the last five years. Our strategy that we adopted after 9/11 of progressively going after the terrorists, going after states that sponsor terror, taking the fight to the enemy has been crucial in terms of our being able to defend the United States. I think one of the reasons we have not been struck again in five years -- and nobody can promise we won't -- but it's because we've taken the fight to them.

And if Jack Murtha is successful in persuading the country that somehow we should withdraw now from Iraq, then you have to ask what happens to all of those people who've signed up with the United States, who are on our side in this fight against the radical extremist Islamic types of bin Laden and al Qaeda. What happens to the 12 million Iraqis who went to the polls last December and voted in spite of the assassins and the car bombers? What happens to the quarter of a million Iraqis who've gotten into the fight to take on the terrorists? The worst possible thing we could do is what the Democrats are suggesting. And no matter how you carve it, you can call it anything you want, but basically it is packing it in, going home, persuading and convincing and validating the theory that the Americans don't have the stomach for this fight.

Q Well, you disagree with the Democrats' plan, but they are stepping into a political environment in

which the American people -- clearly, some have anger, some have dissatisfaction, some have doubts about this war and the administration's plan for this war. Fifty-four percent of the American people say it's a mistake; 55 percent say things are going badly in Iraq; 53 percent in our polling say the American people actually support a timetable. Why is it that the administration has failed to articulate to the American people then? The American people don't think you have a plan, sir.

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Well, they're wrong. We do have a plan. It's there for anybody who wants to take a look at it. The Democrats have repeatedly made this charge. It's simply not the case. There is a good plan in place. We are making significant progress, but this is a long-term fight. I think there are a lot of people out there --

Q Let me -- let me jump in. One other point here, is it wrong -- you say it's wrong to publicly set a timetable.

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Yes.

Q And I understand the argument for that. You'd cue off -- tee the terrorists off to what you're going to do.

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Absolutely.

Q Has the Iraqi government been told privately you need to meet certain bench marks, training your troops, improving security by a date certain because the American people are not going to pay for this forever?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: No, I think they know full well that we are expecting them to take on more and more responsibility. It's one of the reasons the President went to Baghdad recently. In all of our conversations with them, they know what we're trying to do, and they've stepped up to that task and that responsibility. The fact of the matter is, obviously, we've lost a lot of people, which you wish you hadn't lost anybody. But the heavy casualties are being taken by the Iraqis. There are a lot more Iraqis being -- becoming casualties in this conflict at present because they are now in the fight.

Again, I come back to the basic proposition: What happens in the global war on terror if the United States bails out in Iraq? And that's exactly what withdrawal is. You're going to take your troops out before the conflict is over with. You're not going to complete the mission -- if we follow the Democrats' advice. And in fact, we will have set up a situation in which the al Qaeda types can win.

They have a plan to establish a caliphate that stretches from Spain all the way around to Indonesia, to kick the Americans out of the Middle East, to destroy Israel, to take down most of those regimes in that part of the world. And they will do anything they can to achieve that objective. But ultimately what they're betting on is that we don't have the stomach for the fight, and we cannot afford to validate that strategy. We can win. We are winning, but we've got to stay at it.

Q In the political debate over the war, even your friends say that you have given the Democrats a

couple of doozies by saying early on "we would be greeted as liberators," by saying about a year ago, "the insurgency was in its last throes." I know factually you have said you stand by those statements based on the circumstances at the time. You're not new to this game. You've been in national politics for 30 something years. In the political environment, do you wish you could take those words back?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: No, I think that, in fact, we are making very significant progress. There's no doubt in my mind but we're going to win. We will prevail in Iraq. We will prevail in Afghanistan. And I think the evidence is there for anybody who wants to look at it.

With respect to the overall course of the campaign, I think it's been very successful. With respect to this question of liberation, we have, indeed, liberated 50 million people -- 25 million in Afghanistan from the rule of the Taliban; 25 million in Iraq from the rule of Saddam Hussein, two of the worst regimes in modern times, a very, very significant achievement. But we have to stay the course.

It does not make any sense for people to think that somehow we can retreat behind our oceans, leave the Middle East, walk away from Iraq, and we'll be safe and secure here at home. 9/11 put the lie to that. We lost 3,000 people that day. Nineteen people, armed terrorists armed with box cutters came into the United States and did enormous damage to us. If we pull out, they'll follow us. It doesn't matter where we go. This is a global conflict. We've seen them attack in London and Madrid and Casablanca and Istanbul and Mombassa and East Africa. They've been on a global basis involved in this conflict, and it will continue whether we complete the job or not in Iraq. Only it'll get worse. Iraq will become a safe haven for terrorists. They'll use it in order to launch attacks against our friends and allies in that part of the world.

Q You acknowledged this past week that the administration and you personally underestimated the strength of the insurgency.

THE VICE PRESIDENT: I --

Q As you know even friends of the administration, supporters of this war have criticized the administration saying not enough troops were sent in at the beginning. You have a unique perspective on it. You were the Defense Secretary in the first Gulf War.

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Yes.

Q You're the Vice President now. In the first Gulf War, it was the Powell Doctrine: If you're going to put U.S. troops at risk, do so in overwhelming numbers with overwhelming force so that there is no doubt. Secretary Rumsfeld prefers the leaner force, a more mobile force. As history looks at this, is one early lesson that the Powell Doctrine trumps the Rumsfeld Doctrine?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: I don't think so. I think you've got to look at each individual circumstance and figure out what makes sense in terms of the kinds of forces you need to bring to bear, what your enemy is capable of, what your goals and objectives are. I think you have to be very careful about generalizing from one conflict to the next.

Q I want to move on to some other issues. One of the key issues facing the world right now and the Bush administration is North Korea. It has a missile on the launch pad. Apparently our intelligence suggests it may test that missile any day now. Former Defense Secretary Bill Perry, who served in a Democratic administration, writes an op-ed in today's Washington Post saying, Mr. President, take it out. Launch a military strike, take that missile out. You will destroy not only the missile, he says, but a launch pad that is capable of launching nuclear weapons. Why not?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Well, I think that -- I appreciate Bill's advice.

Q I bet you do. (Laughter.)

THE VICE PRESIDENT: And I think that at this stage we are addressing the issue in a proper fashion. And I think, obviously, if you're going to launch strikes at another nation, you'd better be prepared to not just fire one shot. And the fact of the matter is I think the issue is being addressed appropriately.

Q Do we know what's on that missile? Is it a satellite? Is it a warhead? Is it a test?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: We don't know. That's -- one of the concerns is that this is a regime that's not transparent, that we believe has developed nuclear weapons, and now has put a missile on a launch pad without telling anybody what it's all about. Is it to put a satellite in orbit or a simple test flight?

They will obviously generate concern on the part of their neighbors and the United States to the extent that they continue to operate this way. As the President has made clear, this is not the kind of behavior we'd like to see, given the fact that the North Koreans do have a nuclear program and have refused to come clean about it.

Q What do we know about their capabilities? Some have said this new longer-range missile could reach Guam, perhaps Alaska. Others say, no, it might be able to reach Los Angeles, and there are some who think maybe even right here, Washington, D.C. What do we know?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Well, we -- this is the first test of this particular type No Dong II missile. We believe it does have a third stage added to it now, but, again, we don't know what the payload is.

I think it's also fair to say that the North Korean missile capabilities are fairly rudimentary. I mean, they've been building Scuds and so forth over the years, but their test flights in the past haven't been notably successful. But we are watching it with interest and following it very closely.

Q I want to ask a quick question about another international standoff, which is Iran's nuclear program. The President in Europe yesterday said, Iran should hurry up with its response. It shouldn't wait months. It should get an answer in days, or weeks, at the most.

As you consider that confrontation, many experts have said your options are limited because of the way the Iranians have built their nuclear program. Many think that it is invulnerable, if you will, that it is protected from military strikes. I know the President has said, diplomacy first, it would be the Security

Council next, if the Iranians don't accept this proposal on the table. But when you look at the contingency planning, are you confident that, if it came to it, the United States has a capable military option of taking out that program?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: As the President has emphasized, John, we are pursuing the diplomatic option. We think that's the right way to go. But he has also made it clear that nothing has been taken off the table, and I'll leave it at that.

Q I want to bring you to some domestic issues here at home. I have spent a fair amount of time in recent months in court with your former chief of staff, Lewis "Scooter" Libby, who, of course, is charged in the CIA leak investigation. One of the things that his defense has introduced as evidence is this -- it's a copy of this New York Times article that started all this, by Ambassador Joe Wilson -- and these scribbles are allegedly yours. Is that a fact?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: John, I am not going to comment on the case. It's -- I may be called as a witness. Scooter Libby, obviously, one of the finest men I've ever known -- he's entitled to the presumption of innocence. And I have not made any comments on the case up until now, and I won't.

Q Let me ask you one question, one more question about that then. You said you may be called as a witness. The President urged everyone very early on to cooperate in this investigation, does that mean that if you are called as a witness that the administration would under no circumstances cite any privileges, either to shield you from testifying about certain issues or protect certain documents, or anything?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Well, you're getting into hypothetical now, and I'm not able to answer that. We have cooperated fully with the investigation from day one.

Q Let me ask you another question. Your daughter recently wrote a book in which she discussed her role in your campaign but, also, her decision, some time ago in her life, to come to you and Mrs. Cheney and disclose that she was a lesbian. And she has issues with the Republican Party on the issue of same sex marriage, and she wrote this, "If the Republican Party fails to come around on this issue -- same-sex marriage -- I believe it will find itself on the wrong side of history, and on a sharp decline into irrelevance."

Do you agree with your daughter Mary on that?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: I've got great love and affection for my daughter, obviously. I think it's a very good book, and I'd recommend people read it.

Q I'm going to make another attempt at it. The President urged the Senate to vote on this constitutional amendment. Senator Frist, a leader in the party, someone who may run for the presidency, brought this amendment up, is that a mistake?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: I made my views known a long time ago, John, that I think that the fact that

the states have traditionally been the ones that regulate marriage is a procedure that I think is the right way to go. I think that it ought to be a state matter, a state function. That's not new to anybody. The President sets policy for the administration, and I support the President.

Q As you know, you had a recent dust-up with Senator Specter, the chairman -- the Republican chairman of the Senate judiciary committee, who wanted to have hearings, wanted to bring the phone companies in to see how and when they had cooperated with this domestic eavesdropping program. And he says you were working behind the scenes, meddling -- in his words -- to try to get other members of the committee to put the lid on that, to not force the phone companies to come up and testify publicly. Did you do that, sir?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: I wouldn't call it meddling. I am the President of the Senate. The fact is, I'm actually paid by the Senate. That's where my paycheck comes from. I often talk with my Senate colleagues about legislation, and that's exactly what I did in this case.

Arlen Specter is a good man. I've known him a long time, and I think he is an effective chairman of the committee. But if we disagree, there is absolutely no reason why I shouldn't, on behalf of the administration, express administration policy to the members of that committee. And that's what I did.

Q I want to close by asking you a few question about yourself and your image, and one of them flows from that. As you know, some of your old friends say, where is the Dick Cheney, the sarcastic Dick Cheney, the practical joker Dick Cheney. And your critics say, Dick Cheney has become this dark, nefarious force in the administration that believes in secrecy at all price, that believes congressional oversight is a nuisance. True?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Well, I don't think I've changed any. I think I have been very consistent over time. I think, partly, it's important to remember how significant 9/11 was. And we are now engaged in a constant effort, obviously, to protect the nation against further attack.

That means we need good intelligence. It means there have to be national security secrets. It means we need to be able to go after and capture or kill those people who are trying to kill Americans. That's not a pleasant business. It's a very serious business. And I suppose people sometimes look at my demeanor and say, well, he's the Darth Vader of the administration.

I guess, the other thing that's working here, John, is I'm not running for anything. My career will end, politically, with this administration. I have the freedom and the luxury, as does the President, of doing what we think is right for the country. And the advice I give and the positions I take on issues are based upon that fundamental proposition.

We're doing what we're doing in Iraq in terms of here in the U.S., with the terrorist surveillance program and so forth, because we think these are essential policies for the nation to follow. We're not trying to improve our standing in the polls. We're not out there trying to win votes for ourselves. Neither one of us will ever be a candidate again. We're doing what we think is right, and I'm very comfortable with that.

Q You're also a human being, though. Your poll ratings are lower than the President's. You have an image that, I think it's fair to say, is not positive with the majority of the American people. That doesn't trouble you at all?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: There is a great sense of freedom when, in fact, you don't have to worry about the polls. We don't worry about the polls. They go up, the polls go down. The fact of the matter is, we're doing what we think is best for the nation. And that's what the American people elected us to do.

I think, ultimately, in the final analysis, the history will judge this President as a very successful, very effective leader, and I'm proud to be part of his team.

Q You are unique in that you're the Vice President, the first Vice President in quite some time, who is not seeking the presidency in a second term. Let's make a little news, do you have a favorite for '08?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: No. Republican. I won't go beyond that. We may get involved eventually, but for now, there are a lot of great candidates thinking about it, and I think it's going to be a wide open race. And I think it's very healthy.

Q Mr. Vice President, thank you for your time.

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Thank you, John.

END 9:15 A.M. EDT

Return to this article at:

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2006/06/20060622-8.html>



CLICK HERE TO PRINT