



THE WHITE HOUSE
PRESIDENT
GEORGE W. BUSH

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Remarks by the President in Roundtable Interview with Print Journalists

Roosevelt Room

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THE PRESIDENT: I've got a couple of opening comments, and we'll go around the table a couple of times and answer your questions.

First, I'm really looking forward to my trip. We're involved with a lot of interesting initiatives that will help the world grow toward peace and freedom, and this trip will be an opportunity to not only to talk about American values, but to talk with friends, allies, important parties about how working together we can achieve grand goals: the goals of peace, the goals of freedom, the goals of hope and prosperity.

I start off in Poland. It's my second trip to Poland since I've been the President. I'm going to Krakow; I'm going to Auschwitz. I'm going to give a speech -- which I'm still working on right now -- but it's a speech that reminds us that together we can achieve the big objective. It's a speech, really, to Europe that says that our common values are strong and that we welcome the emergence of countries like -- free countries like Poland, and as well as we must be reminded of the lessons of the past.

I'm going to Auschwitz to see firsthand one of the greatest lessons of the past -- that there's evil in this world, and that the only way to deal with the evil is together. And we did so in the past, and now there's -- you know, terrorism and killing of innocent people is evil and we've got to work together to achieve the same objectives that were achieved in the past, and that is peace and freedom.

And then I go on to St. Petersburg to not only honor the great city of St. Petersburg, their 300th anniversary, but also to have an important dialogue with Vladimir Putin. It'll be a dialogue that will really show the world that in spite of our disagreements over what happened in Iraq, that our relationship is strong and that we can move together in positive ways.

Then I go to the G8. I know the press corps is going to be -- you know, they'll be observing the G8 as a great -- you know, "will this turn into a meeting, a confrontational meeting?" The answer is absolutely not. It's an opportunity to talk with some who agreed with us on Iraq, and some who didn't, about how

we move forward. And I've laid the groundwork for the trip by talking about some great goals that wealthy nations can achieve.

One, of course, is to fight AIDS in Africa; another which is to enhance trade, so that people have a chance to rise out of poverty; and others address famine; as well as to continue to keep our focus on dealing with those terrorists who would like to hold the world -- blackmail the world, as well as to kill innocent, take innocent life.

I then go from there to the Middle East. It's going to be a significant visit. One, it says that I am committed to the peace process, that I look forward to working with the new Palestinian leadership, as well as Ariel Sharon, to make it clear to the world that we have -- as leaders, we have the intention of working together to achieve peace; that there's a commitment, a personal commitment -- not just by me, but a personal commitment by Prime Minister Abbas, as well as Prime Minister Sharon, to work together to achieve peace.

And that there are responsibilities that all of us have as leaders, not only responsibility to the new Prime Minister of the Palestinian Authority, not only the responsibility of the Israeli Prime Minister, but a responsibility for the leadership in the Arab world to fight terror, prevent killers from stopping the process from going forward.

And so the first stop will be in Sharm el-Sheikh, in Egypt. I'm really looking forward to the visit. President Mubarak has urged me, consistently urged me to come to Sharm el-Sheikh. And this is my chance to see this spectacular part of Egypt. And that's where I'm going to meet with the Arab leaders, some of the Arab leaders, to talk about shared responsibility. I want them to hear from me firsthand the commitment of the United States of America to move toward peace in the Middle East. And I want them also to hear from me firsthand that I expect them to be partners in the process.

And then I'm going to go to Jordan. Of course, I'll see the King of Jordan. I believe the King is going to be in Sharm el-Sheikh, as well. And then I'll have a bilateral meeting with the King. It will give me a chance to thank him for his strong support on the liberation of Iraq. I'm sure he'll want to talk about matters of trade with the United States, and I'll be fully prepared to do so.

And then I'll meet with the Prime Minister of both the Palestinian Authority and of Israel, and I'm looking forward to these meetings. I believe in the possibilities of peace. I trust the Prime Minister of the Palestinian Authority when he condemns terror. I believe that provides an opening for the United States and others to expend the necessary energies to move the process forward.

I will remind them that I was the first President ever to stand up and say I am for two states, living side-by-side, in peace. And I did so at the United Nations. I still have that vision, I believe it's possible. So I will talk to these two leaders about our mutual desire to move the process forward.

And then I go to Qatar, where I'll meet with General Franks and Jerry Bremer to talk about the reconstruction of Iraq. I'll also meet with Amir of Qatar and then speak to our troops, and head home. And this is a trip I'm looking forward to.

Let me answer some questions. Why don't we start here?

Q Thank you, Mr. President. Mr. President, obviously, your vision and your principles are quite commendable. The trouble is that so many people still have suspicions, they are afraid. Why do you think people remain suspicious and afraid of either your staying power, sir, or whether, you know -- well, please go ahead and then I'll ask my --

THE PRESIDENT: No, I understand your question. Oftentimes, we live in a processed world -- you know, people focus on the process and not results. What I'm going to say to people who are suspicious of our motives: let's work together to achieve positive results. And I fully understand, for example, the Middle East. It's a suspicious world, there are suspicions of motives.

And until people see the emergence of a Palestinian state, there will be suspicions; until I can prove for the average Palestinian citizen, there will be suspicions. And so I fully understand the skepticism. I mean, after all, we're dealing in a world where there's a lot of heartbreak, a lot of death, a lot of sorrow, a lack of hope. And until there is noticeable change, there is going to be suspicions.

I've got great confidence in what America stands for. I have said to our country and to the world many times that in order for there to be peace, there must be freedom. And I believe that a free Palestinian Authority and a free Palestinian people will yield to peace in that part of the world. Therefore, we're striving toward the development of such a state. And until people begin to see, however, the results of that vision, people will be skeptical.

And the only thing I can do is to continue to speak out as clearly as I can about the values which motivate our foreign policy and motivate me personally, and work hard to achieve results, tangible results. And when people see results, when the people see that the Iraqi people are more free and that their economy begins to develop; when people see that the Iraqi people have control of their own oil, for the benefit of the Iraqi people, then some of the suspicions will be turned aside.

I'll never win the hearts of the terrorists. Nor am I trying to. Because the terrorists have got one thing in mind: murder to stop peace. And it stands in stark contrast to what I believe, which is freedom to bring peace.

So, you know, there are some, I would never try to win their hearts and minds over, that are absolutely bent upon stopping not only what the United States is trying to do, but a lot of other nations, as well. So my answer to your question is I understand skepticism, I understand the attitudes of some, but I refuse to be stopped in my desire to rally the world toward achieving positive results for each individual.

I have said many times that freedom and human dignity is not America's gift to the world, it is the Almighty God's gift to each and every individual. And I firmly believe that. And it's that principle which motivates my desire to see to it that the Palestinian mother or father can raise their child in a comfortable environment, knowing that their child can have a good education and the possibility of a peaceful life.

And I feel the same way about the Israeli citizen who grows up, a child who grows up in an

environment where they can go to the market with their mother or father and get blown away. We must stop that kind of violence and provide hope for people.

Q Mr. President, a follow-up on the skepticism. Of course there is a lot of concern in the area, over and above the hope, because of your strong commitment. So what do you think will happen if the rush for the settlements continue? And how would it affect your vision of having a Palestinian state with borders and with land, a viable Palestinian state?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, I believe that's important that there be a viable Palestinian state. I mean, it is the vision. I believe a viable Palestinian state with the institutions necessary for democracy and freedom to prevail, the institutions bigger than the occupants of the offices which they hold is very important to gain the confidence not only of the neighborhood, the confidence of the Israelis, the confidence of other Arab nations, but the confidence of the free world, as well.

So I believe the emergence of a Palestinian state is very important. I have consistently said that the Israelis are going to have to deal with the settlement issue, and that there is a part of the process is going to be a focus on the settlements. I fully understand that settlement expansion is not in concert with the development of a state. And we will deal with that.

And I will also remind everybody, however, that the process -- in order for the process to go forward, in order for there to be confidence of all parties, there must be an absolute determined effort to fight off terror, to not allow the few to destroy the process. I believe we can make progress, otherwise I wouldn't be going.

Q Yes. Well, since I'm French, I'll ask you a French question.

THE PRESIDENT: In French or in American? (Laughter.)

Q Well, I'll try to do it in American. (Laughter.) A number of American high officials have repeatedly said that France would have to pay the price for its opposition to your policy in Iraq. So far, we didn't see much as far as reprisals are concerned. Have you forgiven France?

THE PRESIDENT: I look forward to working with France to achieve common objectives. Listen, let me be realistic. There is a sense of frustration and disappointment amongst the American people toward the French decision. That's realistic. People didn't understand the decisions by the French leadership to thwart the desire for the American -- the American desire and the desire of others to work on security and freedom, security for our countries and freedom in Iraq.

However, that's not going to influence my policy. My decision is to go and to say the French government: let us work together for a Europe which is whole, free and at peace; a Europe in which countries are allowed to be friends of the United States, and at the same time participate in institutions such as the European Union; that rivalry will end up weakening our efforts to jointly deal with issues like security and peace and AIDS and trade.

So, no, I will have a good discussion with Jacques Chirac and I'm looking forward to going to the G8 -- not only talking to Jacques Chirac, I'll talk with others who have not necessarily agreed with our Iraq policy. We've got a lot of work to do. And I've got work to do to convince the skeptics in France that the intentions of the United States are positive. And the French leadership has got work to do to convince the American people that they are concerned about the security of our country. And I will look forward to conducting that work with Jacques Chirac.

Q Mr. President, please allow me in genuine Texan style to grab the bull by the horns.

THE PRESIDENT: Okay. (Laughter.)

Q It's quite obvious that your personal relations with Mr. Putin are much more developed, much more warm than the relations between Russia and the United States.

THE PRESIDENT: That's interesting.

Q At least there is no Jackson-Vanik amendment between George and Vladimir.

THE PRESIDENT: That's right. (Laughter.)

Q And this situation --

THE PRESIDENT: We need to get rid of the Jackson-Vanik amendment, I want you to know. Make sure the Russian people know that.

Q And this difference between your personal relations and the relations between our countries creates negative feelings in the Russian public opinion and among Russian elites. And that's why I think it somehow hinders President Bush for his -- in his quest for further democratization and westernization of Russia.

My question is, what do you want to undertake to upgrade the Russian-American relations to the same level as your personal relations with Mr. Putin, including, of course, the Jackson-Vanik amendment, which became in Russia, unfortunately, the litmus paper of our relations?

THE PRESIDENT: Right.

Q And by the way, our Russian Jews are a little bit indignant that they are replaced by the American chicken. And instead of, let my people go, now they say, let our chicken come. (Laughter.) And we don't understand in Russia how the genuine American eagle can defeat an artificial American chicken. (Laughter.)

THE PRESIDENT: Well, first of all, at least we're arguing about chickens and not about whether or not we've got enough missiles pointed at each other.

Q Yes. (Laughter.) By the way, Mr. President, before you start answering my question, you can already do something in improving our relations. I brought two books. If you sign them, you will improve the relations. It is for my --

THE PRESIDENT: Okay. I'm certainly not going to try to influence your story. (Laughter.)

Q Oh, no, no -- (laughter) -- for my presidential library, which has all the signed books and pictures of all American Presidents, beginning with Eisenhower and, of course, your highly esteemed father.

THE PRESIDENT: You don't look that old. (Laughter.)

Q Well, I'm 75.

THE PRESIDENT: Okay, well, you're a young 75. Thank you, sir, for your question.

First of all, Vladimir Putin and I do have a good relationship. And that is an important beginning in order to make sure the relationship is positive throughout our respective governments. If we had a poisonous relationship, it would be awfully difficult to convince others in our governments to work closely together. And so that's a positive beginning.

Secondly, I did take note that the Moscow Treaty was overwhelmingly approved by both houses in the Duma. That's a positive sign. As a matter of fact, if you think back, people -- if you put this in historical context, this treaty is pretty darn good progress early in our respective administrations. I mean, it happened quickly, which is a positive sign. In other words, Vladimir and I made the decision that we'll work together to create better conditions and make the world a more peaceful place.

One way to enhance relations between our governments is to have a meaningful and real strategic dialogue throughout our entire government on key matters, so that the participants in both our governments recognize that we are willing to not only share information, but to deal with issues before they become problems, and to work together in a collaborative way to show the world that we can handle and deal with some of the large issues, such as proliferation, for example.

So, therefore, we've got Spence Abraham, our Secretary of Energy, working very closely with his counterpart. Secretary Veneman has got a task force set up to work very -- Agriculture Secretary -- to work very closely with her counterpart not only on chickens, but on other issues dealing with our farm communities.

This dialogue, this kind of strategic framework was initiated at my request -- and I think at Vladimir's request, as well -- but, Condi, when she went over to Russia, began the setting in place this capacity for our two governments to relate on a variety of issues in a consistent way.

Now, I agree with Vladimir, we need to get rid of Jackson-Vanik, and have talked to our -- some of the folks on the Hill to deal with this issue. And I would like to get rid of Jackson-Vanik. I think it's an important symbol to say to the Russian people: the past is over; now we move forward in a positive

relationship.

Yes, sir.

Q Mr. President, a very quick question. What role, if any, you foresee for international organizations like the U.N. or NATO in the future, for instance, in the war against terrorism, and any other international conflict?

THE PRESIDENT: Yes, good question. NATO -- I see a robust role for NATO, which says that NATO must reform herself. NATO has got to be a military collaboration that is modern, that can move quickly, that's got the newest weapons. I will speak to NATO when I go to Poland, it's part of my speech in Krakow. And it's -- I'm a strong advocate of NATO. As you know, I, with Warsaw, talked about the expansion of NATO, which, thankfully, came to fruition and had been ratified -- the expansion has been ratified in our United States Senate, overwhelmingly so.

NATO is now -- its vision is beyond the old days of when the Soviet Union posed a threat to Europe. NATO is now willing to take on new assignments, all aimed at creating the same conditions of the past, in other words, a peaceful and free world. And that's why NATO is now in Afghanistan. I welcome that.

NATO will play a supportive role for Poland in Iraq. I want to thank the Polish people for their -- and the government -- for sending, I believe, 8,000 or 9,000 troops to run a sector in Iraq. And NATO has agreed to help in that sector, help the Polish troops. I think that -- my point to you is NATO is becoming more modern, and a more modern NATO is going to be very useful for dealing with the true threats that we face in the 21st century.

In terms of the United Nations, it's going to be important for all of us to work to keep the United Nations a strong and viable institution. And I think a useful dialogue at some point in time will be how to make sure the United Nations has adapted to the threats we face.

Obviously, it was a frustrating experience to have gone to the United Nations and spent a lot of time and a lot of debate on whether or not United Nations resolutions should be upheld. I believe they should. I believe in this world, when you say something, you'd better mean it. And I gave the speech, as you might remember, on September the 12th, 2002, in the United Nations, the day after the anniversary of the attacks on our country. And I said to the United Nations: you have passed resolution after resolution after resolution -- I think is said it 12 times -- and my point was, do you mean it?

And my answer in a rhetorical -- if that's a rhetorical question, my answer to you is, I hope they mean it, because I want the United Nations to be an effective body. However, its effectiveness is undermined when they say something and nothing happens. And, therefore, we've got to, all of us who care about the United Nations must figure out how to make it effective in the future.

Q Mr. President, if you would permit me a couple of detailed questions.

THE PRESIDENT: Sure. Do I need to write these down, because my memory is getting somewhat --

(laughter.)

Q I'm getting that, too. (Laughter.)

Sir, on the issue of Iraq, it looks like a messy situation. Security is not established. Are you worried about a lengthy American-British occupation of Iraq? And on the Palestinian issue --

THE PRESIDENT: Let me answer that one first.

Q Then will you permit me the Palestinian question?

THE PRESIDENT: Yes. And that you admitted you've got a flawed memory like I do. (Laughter.)

First of all, you made a broad statement, "the security situation," as if all of Iraq is -- there's lawlessness in all of Iraq. That's simply not the case. A lot of Iraq is improving from the pre-war conditions. And that's important to know.

Now, there's no question that there's lawlessness inside of Baghdad, for example, and regions north of Baghdad. And we are dealing with that. And we will deal with that for the sake of the Iraqi people, who want most -- first and foremost, to have a secure life, food on the table, lights in their house, running water, sewage that works. They want the conditions of life that everybody yearns for, which is a comfortable lifestyle so their families can be secure. They want to work. And we're making progress on all fronts.

I fully understand the degree of difficulty, and it's created by the fact that these people have been enslaved by a torturous ruler for many, many years. And, therefore, I don't expect the conditions to improve automatically after 70 days. And it's going to take a while.

And, therefore, to answer your question -- I don't view it as an occupation, by the way. I view it as a group of nations. You said "British and Americans" -- there are many, many nations who are involved in the contribution of help so that the Iraqi people are able to establish their own government and have comfortable lives and can be a free society. And it's going to take a while.

And I remind you that it's like the writing of the Constitution. America, after our revolution, did not write its Constitution overnight. As a matter of fact, it probably took, what, 11 years or so. From the Articles of Confederation to the United States Constitution took 11 years. We live in a world now where everything has to happen yesterday.

Q Thirteen.

THE PRESIDENT: What?

MR. FLEISCHER: Thirteen.

THE PRESIDENT: Thirteen years. My man corrected, I'm sorry. He won't be correcting me much longer. (Laughter.) He'll be a pundit. (Laughter.) Don't worry, he will be correcting me, but on TV. Get him on your TV show. (Laughter.)

Anyway, 13 years, as my man corrected me.

The process will take a while. I am in touch with Jerry Bremer. I mentioned to you that I will see him when I go over to Qatar. We get a report all the time. And we are making progress, slowly but surely. And that's -- and it makes sense, given the conditions.

And it's important we succeed. And so, therefore, our coalition of a lot of countries will stay the course, until such time as the Iraqi people -- the life is improved and the Iraqi people would be in a position to, you know, run themselves. Freedom is going to be a beautiful thing in this part of the world. It's a very powerful sentiment that I believe all people feel.

And, therefore, one of our ambitions and one of our values is to create the conditions necessary for the Iraqi people to run their own government. And you'll see over time here that they'll be getting -- a group of people will be coming together to write a constitution. And you know, it'll be a constitution written by the Iraqis, for the Iraqis and of the Iraqis. And we believe that's possible.

Now, look, I recognize there are some in the world who say, Iraq can't run themselves. I refuse to condemn people. I mean, "They need a dictatorship in order for the country to survive." Forget it, I don't believe that. It's just not in my make-up, that's just not what I think. I think people -- I think the Iraqi people are plenty competent about running themselves. It's just going to take a while to go from a society in which one person dominated and killed and murdered people in order to stay in power.

I mean, we've discovered an unbelievable amount of graves. And by the way, we've discovered weapons manufacturing facilities that were condemned by the United Nations; biological laboratories described by our Secretary of State to the whole world, that were not supposed to be there, in direct violation of the U.N. resolution, have been discovered.

Q Thank you, sir.

THE PRESIDENT: Thanks for giving me a chance to say that, so the American press, in particular, could hear it. Off the record, of course. (Laughter.)

Q Sir, on the Palestinian issue, what if the government of Mr. Abbas really becomes unable -- no matter how much it puts up an effort to produce -- eliminating these operations, the suicide bombings -- what if he fails? Is this a failure of the peace process, of the road map? Would you then give it up? And then can you afford, really, sir, to pressure Mr. Ariel Sharon in a pre-reelection stage? Can you really do that?

THE PRESIDENT: Of course I can. I don't know about -- listen, if I were afraid of making the decisions necessary -- for political reasons to move the process forward, I wouldn't be going. I believe peace is

possible, and I believe that I have a responsibilities, now that the conditions are such, to move the process forward.

And what are those conditions? Well, there's a new Palestinian leader who is openly, firmly committed to fighting terror. And I believe he can be successful, particularly when the Arab world helps him. I believe the conditions are such that people are so sick and tired of a hopeless situation in that part of the world that together we can defeat the forces of terror and dismantle the forces of terror.

That's not to say that a suicider could slip through, and it's possible, but we will not allow the evil designs of a few to stop the process that can provide such hope for a lot of people. So I believe, with the right effort and the right focus and the leadership, not only of the United States and Israel and the Palestinian Authority, but the leadership of Egypt and Saudi Arabia and other nations of concern, Jordan, that we can defeat terror, the forces of terror that would like to stop the process.

Yes, ma'am.

Q Okay. Mr. President, you mentioned today that you want to have commitment from the parties about the peace process. Do you want to have, like, concrete steps? Are you going to ask them for concrete steps, like what?

THE PRESIDENT: Well --

Q And --

THE PRESIDENT: Pardon me, sorry to interrupt you. Go ahead.

Q Yes. And then in Sharm el Sheikh, what do you want -- what do you look to get from the Arabs? And you are meeting with President Mubarak also. Would it include something bilateral

or --

THE PRESIDENT: Sure.

Q And what kind?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, listen, President Mubarak and I have had a lot of meetings and a lot of conversations. And I'm confident that he will bring up bilateral relations. As you know, we've got a very strong commitment to Egypt, particularly a funding commitment. And we want to look forward to a -- I will talk to him about economic reforms. And there's no telling what he'll talk to me about. We've got such a good relationship that he doesn't need to pre-clear it with anybody. He can say what's on his mind. I'll be glad to visit with him about it.

Yes, I mean, first of all, we have a road map which talks about specific things people need to do. The most constructive thing that the Arab nations can do is to stop funding terrorism to the extent that -- is

to stop the funding of terrorism, make sure you get that right -- is the work to cut off monies to terrorists whose design it is to stop any peace process. And that's important. To me, that's the most fundamental task.

Secondly, as conditions improve, it would be very helpful if those in the neighborhood provide financial resources to help the economy of a new Palestinian state begin to grow. It's going to be very difficult for a Palestinian state to emerge unless there's economic activity.

I recently met with the finance minister of the Palestinian Authority, was very impressed by his grasp of finances; by the fact that he believes that in order for there to be confidence amongst the Palestinians and confidence in the world that they've got to fight corruption. Listen, stories used to emerge out of the -- in the old days, of the Palestinian Authority that much of the aid went to enhance a few, as opposed to the people. And I don't stand for that -- at least from American perspective. We're not going to let corrupt elites take aid that's supposed to go help the people.

And so when the institutions evolve and confidence emerges that the develop aid will go to help the Palestinian people, which I want it to do, that will be a useful role for the Arab world. And I look forward to working with them on it. But the main thing is for them to see me and my commitment to the process. And it's one thing to read about it in stories, it's another thing to look a person in the eye and tell them, let's work together. And that's what I'm looking forward to doing.

I've got very good relations with President Mubarak and Crown Prince Abdallah and the King of Jordan, Gulf Coast countries. I've worked very closely with them. And a lot of them ask me, well, are you going to move forward now that there's a new Palestinian Authority, a leader of the Palestinian Authority, somebody that -- you see, the old leader of the Palestinian Authority is somebody who had a chance to lead and didn't. He has been in power a long time and the life of the Palestinian people have gotten worse, not better. I remember what happened at Camp David during the tenure of my predecessor. It was a good lesson.

So I've always said, we need to be able to work with somebody who is committed to peace. And I believe the new Prime Minister is committed to peace. And, therefore, I want to share that with the leaders.

Q Sir, can you assure that the other party is committed without reservations?

THE PRESIDENT: The Israelis? Yes, I believe --

Q Without reservations. It's a big problem to the Palestinians now.

THE PRESIDENT: Well, there's a reservation, and there should be a reservation of all parties, and that is the reservation of security. In other words, people aren't going to go forward with a process unless there is a full commitment to enhance the security of all people. And remember, terrorist killers not only affect the security of the Israelis, they affect the security of the Palestinian people. You can't have a Palestinian state if people continue to blow up the process.

And, therefore, it's in all our interest to work together on security. And I'm convinced that as the area becomes more secure, as the institutions necessary for a democracy to emerge, that we'll have a positive partner in Israel. I believe that. I believe they want peace. Most Israelis understand two states side-by-side in peace is in their national interest.

And so I think the ingredients for peace are very possible. But you say, are there conditions. You bet. There's conditions, of course. And the conditions are to work together to stop the killers from stopping the process. And I share that condition, too. And I suspect a lot of the Arab leaders share that condition, as well, because they fully understand the consequences of terrorist groups of taking innocent life.

Yes, sir.

MR. FLEISCHER: Make this the last question.

THE PRESIDENT: I'll answer shorter.

Q All right. So, 30 years ago --

THE PRESIDENT: Somebody very important very important is waiting.

Q Okay. Thirty years ago, the G7 or G8 --

THE PRESIDENT: Oh, it's only Condi. Well, I take it back. (Laughter.)

DR. RICE: You're TV people.

THE PRESIDENT: That's later. Later.

Q Thirty years ago, the G7 or G8 summit was set up to coordinate the big powers --

THE PRESIDENT: It wasn't 30 years ago, was it? Twenty --

Q Twenty-five, or --

THE PRESIDENT: Whatever.

Q He'll know. (Laughter.)

MR. FLEISCHER: Twenty-seven point two. (Laughter.)

Q Well done. They were set up to coordinate the big powers, the economic strategists.

THE PRESIDENT: Yes.

Q Given the risk of deflation, will there be such a concerted plan in Evian? Or will it be everyone for himself, with the U.S. capitalizing on the slide of the dollar?

THE PRESIDENT: Yes, that's a great question. It is very important that we do spend time talking about our respective economies. It is essential that the G8 meeting -- remember why it was first started, because much of it -- many of the grand goals that we have, together, are very difficult to achieve if the economies, our respective economies, aren't strong.

You just heard me talk about a hopeful Palestinian state will require trade and commerce. And if the wealthier nations aren't generating cash flow and the capacity to be able to trade with other countries, then it's going to be difficult to achieve our goals.

And so, absolutely, I will tell them that here at home we are -- have got sound monetary and fiscal policies. After all, I just signed a tax bill yesterday that will cut the taxes by \$350 billion, which will help energize growth here in America. I will reiterate our strong dollar policy. I will talk to -- listen to their plans and initiatives to reform their economies.

I had a very good discussion with Prime Minister Koizumi of Japan about economic matters. We want the Japanese economy to be strong. As a matter of fact, we want the European economies to be strong. We want there to be vibrant growth. It is more likely somebody in America will be able to find a job if our closest trading partners have got vibrant economies.

So we need to spend a lot of time on this subject. And I will remind them that we have a great opportunity on the next round of the World Trade Organization to advance a free trade agenda, which I believe will make it more likely people in our respective countries can work. But it will make it more likely that nations will be able to rise out of poverty. And so, yes, it's a very good question. And we will focus on the economy.

Q Just a follow-up, if I may.

THE PRESIDENT: Yes --

Q You got rid of the policy that --

THE PRESIDENT: I'm a patient man. (Laughter.)

Q -- reprises against the French --

THE PRESIDENT: My whole family laughed when they heard that. (Laughter.) Go ahead.

Q You didn't exactly answer the question.

THE PRESIDENT: Especially my daughters. (Laughter.)

I answered the question. I look forward to --

Q The reprisals on the French.

THE PRESIDENT: No, I answered it. You see -- what do you mean, didn't exactly answer the question? You've got my answer on your tape machine.

Q So were reprisals?

THE PRESIDENT: No, you've got my answer on the tape machine. It's an old trick they use in the American press corps, too -- "You didn't answer my question." What are you talking about? I spent 15 minutes answering your question. You might not like the answer but, nevertheless, I did answer it, absolutely answered it. And I loved the question. (Laughter.) I look forward to working with the French.

Q Mr. President, do you visualize Russia as a member of the World Trade Organization, and in the future, the member of the NATO?

THE PRESIDENT: I think that the question on NATO is a question that will be answered over time. But first things first. Let's deal with the framework we've now set up, which is a great advance, and a tribute to Vladimir Putin's leadership, and our NATO leader's desire to have a unique relationship with Russia.

In terms of the WTO, it is in our national interest that Russia join the WTO. And Russia is going to have to make some internal decisions as to whether or not they're willing to conform to the guidelines of the WTO. But we -- I strongly support Russia's admission in the WTO.

Final question.

Q Yes, sir. Thank you. Do you see the issue of restitution of Jewish property as a problem in Polish-American relations? And will you talk about this in --

THE PRESIDENT: You know, it has not made it to -- it hasn't made it to my desk. And so, therefore, if it is a problem, it is a problem that hasn't been brought to my attention. In other words, a lot of Polish Americans have yet to express themselves to the point where it has become an issue here in the White House.

I think it's very important -- let me speak to the broader issue of Jewish relations around the world. It is very important for all of us to reject anti-Semitism wherever it is found, just like it's very important for us to reject those who condemn Islam. Our nation is one that believes in freedom of religion, and we respect and tolerate people's religious faiths, no matter what their faith.

And so my greater concern about Judaism and Europe is that society resist and thwart a culture which would tolerate any kind of anti-religious fervor, anti-Semitism, or an anti-Islamic bent. In other words,

one of the things I did I thought was most important was right after September 11th, went to a Islamic center here. I wanted to send a signal that the evil people who hijacked a great religion should not condemn that religion. In other words, Americans shouldn't hold Islam accountable for the deaths.

And so one of the things we believe here in America is religious tolerance. And I will continue to speak out on religious tolerances in a clear fashion.

As I said, I'm going to Auschwitz for a reason. I want to go -- I want to see Auschwitz. I've studied a lot of history. I've been told it's a powerful experience. But I also want to send a clear signal that all of us must work together to make sure that kind of evil never happens again to anybody.

At any rate, I'm looking forward to going. I want to thank you all for your interest. Very good interview. Pass those books over here.

Q Mr. President?

THE PRESIDENT: Yes.

Q What do you think about a third presidential term in the United States?

THE PRESIDENT: Against it. (Laughter.) I'm only supportive of a second term these days. (Laughter.)

END 10:55 A.M. EDT

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