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Interview of the President by Dutch TV Nos

The Map Room

9:48 A.M. EDT

Q Mr. President, thank you very much for giving us the opportunity to talk to you. You're going to Europe, commemorating 60 years of liberation in Europe. You could have gone to many countries, why did you choose to go to Holland?

THE PRESIDENT: First of all, Holland was a stalwart, and the people of Holland were brave and courageous when it came to resisting tyranny. And a lot of people paid a heavy price for standing for freedom in the face of fascism. As well, many Americans lost their lives on Dutch soil. And it's an opportunity to praise those who fought, honor those who died, and remind people that there's more work to be done to make the world more free.

Q About that, more work to be done, do you see any similarities about what happened 60 years ago, the Americans, among others, liberating Europe, and what you are doing now, in the Middle East, for example?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, it's a different situation, but there is evil in the world. There's always been evil. I believe that those who kill in the name of a great religion are evil people; people who are willing to destroy innocent life or bury people in mass graves, or starve people to death are evil. And I think the free world must confront evil. The last choice is to use the military. On the other hand, sometimes you have to.

And as you know, I made a difficult decision. Some in Europe didn't agree, some in Holland didn't agree, and I can understand that. But now we have an obligation, and a duty, it seems like to me, to work together to help others become free. Freedom is universal -- freedom shouldn't be just -- people shouldn't view freedom as only the purview of Americans or the Dutch or Europeans. Everybody deserves to be free.

Q But the interesting thing is, Mr. President, that we all agree, also in Europe, about your goals -- democracy, freedom, safety in the world.

THE PRESIDENT: Sure.

Q Does it frustrate you sometimes that -- for example, in The Netherlands they did a poll before you are coming now that vast part of the population does not agree with the way you're handling world affairs, for example.

THE PRESIDENT: Well, you know --

Q Is it frustrating?

THE PRESIDENT: No, it doesn't. I mean, I --

Q It must be a little, though.

THE PRESIDENT: No, it doesn't; it doesn't frustrate me. I make decisions on what I think is right. That's what leaders do. The other day in a press conference I was asked about polls here in America. I said, a leader who tries to lead based upon polls is like a dog chasing his tail. That's not how you lead. No, I feel comfortable with the decisions I've made.

Q Is it maybe, then, a communication problem?

THE PRESIDENT: I don't know, I don't follow the Dutch media, don't know what's being said in Holland.

Q Well, when people are being asked about you, or America, they admire, again, your goals, but when you talk about -- for example -- about the war on terror, and you see freedom and democracy, the Dutch see that, as well, but they also see, for example, prisoner abuse in Abu Ghraib prison; or Guantanamo Bay, where prisoners are being held without charge; or the Americans who do not want their soldiers in The Hague for the tribunal, to be accountable.

THE PRESIDENT: Well, we have different --

Q So they see that problem.

THE PRESIDENT: Well, first of all, all Americans, including me, reject Abu Ghraib. That was an aberration. That's not what America stands for. And if people are concerned about the tactics, I understand that. But the goal is peace. And now is the time to work together to achieve peace.

Q How do you want to do that? What do you want to tell the Dutch people?

THE PRESIDENT: Let me finish. But you asked me, do I worry about polls -- I don't, that's not what leaders do. Leaders who sit around and read polls all the time are leaders that don't lead.

Q But the Dutch people are interested in --

THE PRESIDENT: Let me finish, please. And I have an obligation to lead. And we're making progress. You saw eight-and-a-half million people voted in Iraq. They defied the terrorists, they defied the suicide bombers, because they desire to be free. And now we have an obligation to work to help that country develop into a democracy, because the lesson of Europe, of working together as democracies, has yielded peace.

You know, 60 years ago, people would sit around and wonder whether or not peace was possible. And as a result of the good work of many in Holland and around Europe, and the United States working collaborative, the world is a peaceful place. And that's what we have a chance to do today. And

that's why I thank the Dutch government, for helping train Iraqis, for example, helping Iraq become stable. And it's in our long-term interest that that happen.

Q One last question about something completely different.

THE PRESIDENT: Sure.

Q You're the President in the United States known for coming up for moral values, moral issues, also; Terri Schiavo, for example. The Dutch government is completely on the other side of the spectrum when it comes to abortion or euthanasia, gay marriages, drugs even. Politicians from your party weren't even -- Americans don't go -- don't want to go to the direction of Holland. Do you share that concern?

THE PRESIDENT: No, I -- first of all, Holland is a free country. It's a country where the people get to decide the policy. The government just reflects the will of the people. That's what democracies are all about. And that's what -- that's why we should continue to work for common interest to support government of the people, not government that dictates to people. And so if that's what the people of Holland want, that's what the government should reflect.

Q No special message from the President of America?

THE PRESIDENT: No. I mean, people are allowed to make -- I have a different view, and many Americans have a different view. I've always worked to promote a culture of life. I think that a civil society is one that protects the most vulnerable among us. But you asked me whether or not I have a message for the people of Holland. The message is: keep free, be free, support democracy and liberty, not only within your country, but continue to work with free nations to help people be free around the world, and the world will be a more peaceful place.

Q One final question if I may, please.

THE PRESIDENT: Sure, sure.

Q I think maybe Europeans feel that you're also their President, but they do not get to vote for you. How do you feel that responsibility?

THE PRESIDENT: I really -- I appreciate that. I'm perplexed by that attitude, because Europeans have got very good leaders.

Q But your decisions influence our lives.

THE PRESIDENT: Well, sometimes they do, and sometimes European decisions influence American lives. But the best way to influence the world is to work together in a collaborative spirit. And I appreciate the leadership in The Netherlands. I get along very well with the leadership. And I am -- my pledge is to continue to work as closely as we possibly can.

Listen, there's going to be differences of opinion. You mentioned the International Criminal Court -- we're not going to join it. And there's a reason why we're not going to join it: We don't want our soldiers being brought up in front of unelected judges. But that doesn't mean that we're not going to hold people to account, which we're doing now in America. And nor does it mean that even though we may disagree on the court, that we can't work for other big goals in the world.

Again, on my second trip to Europe since I've been the President, I'm going to continue to emphasize my desire to work with others to achieve peace.

Q Okay, Mr. President.

THE PRESIDENT: Welcome.

Q Thank you again.

THE PRESIDENT: Thanks for coming.

Q And enjoy your stay in The Netherlands.

THE PRESIDENT: I'm looking forward to it.

END 9:56 A.M. EDT

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