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## Interview of the President by Estonian TV

The Map Room

2:23 P.M. EDT

Q Thank you very much, Mr. President, for joining our viewers. Mr. President, do you understand and accept the reasons and explanations that two Baltic presidents are not attending the celebrations in Moscow, 9th May?

THE PRESIDENT: Yes, absolutely. First of all, I can understand the decision by your President and the President of Lithuania, as well as the President of Latvia. These are difficult decisions because -- and they reflect the difficult times. And I honor those decisions. But I understand.

There's a lot of Americans who came -- whose families were in the Baltics. And this is a bittersweet moment for them when you think about it. On the one hand, our country helped defeat fascism, and upon the defeat of fascism, they saw their homelands be taken over by a repressive ideology. And so I fully understand, and matter of fact, understood it to the point where I brought it up to President Putin when I saw him in Slovakia, and just said, you got to understand this is going to create some sensitivities among our friends, among America's friends -- Estonia and Lithuania and Latvia.

Q It's quite strange situation now. The war is over for 60 years, and it's not still over. Whose fault is it --

THE PRESIDENT: No, I appreciate that. Look, it's -- I think it's time to move beyond fault and focus on the future. Now, that's easy for me to say because I didn't have any family members that were repressed or families divided. I didn't have to live under the yoke of communism. But I do believe that time will help heal the wounds.

And, listen, the Baltics are doing great. Their economies are growing. They're getting stronger. Freedom is working. People are able to express themselves in the public square. Independent media can come and interview the President in the White House. I mean, it is a -- these are exciting times. But I readily understand why it takes time to heal the wounds of the past.

Q Democracy and the human rights situation in Russia is quite worrying. Are you going to discuss this item during your visit to Moscow?

THE PRESIDENT: Oh, of course. I have -- first of all, I've got a relationship with President Putin that enables me to be able to have a frank discussion. He gave an interesting speech the other day -- the press tend to focus on the comment about the Soviet times, and of course, that obviously riled emotions in the Baltics. I understand that. But he also went on to talk about democracy. I thought it was interesting that he spent a lot of time on his big speech to the nation on democracy. I believe Russia's interests lie to her west. I believe that Russia, by embracing the values that we share, will be able to deal with the many problems that she has. Russia has got enormous problems.

And so, yes, of course, I'll talk to President Putin about that. And I will do so in a cooperative way, in a cooperative spirit. This is not an antagonistic relationship. And I don't think you want the relationship to be antagonistic. After all, Russia is your neighbor. I think you would want your friend, the United States, to be in a position where I can go in and have a constructive, direct dialogue. And I think one people -- one thing people have learned about me is I'm a pretty direct person; I say what's on my mind -- I try to do so diplomatically. But, yes, I will. And I do so for the interests of the United States, and for our friends, and for the world.

Q Mr. President, I can't let you go from here without a question of terrorism.

THE PRESIDENT: Sure.

Q Latest surveys show that the numbers of terrorism are increasing, not decreasing.

THE PRESIDENT: Yes.

Q Why is that?

THE PRESIDENT: Well --

Q You have made a lot of efforts.

THE PRESIDENT: Yes, that's why. If we weren't trying to find the enemy and bring him to justice, the world would look relatively peaceful. But we're on the offense. And so when you engage the enemy, when you try to bring them to justice, they don't like to be brought to justice.

I've always told the American people here, it's best to find them where they try to hide so that we don't have to deal with them here at home. And so part of the reasons why activity is up is because we're chasing them down. As a matter of fact, today, a big news report came out that I would say one of the top al Qaeda leaders, a person very close to Osama bin Laden, was brought to justice in Pakistan by the Pak government, with our help -- but, nevertheless, the Pak government did the hard work

-- Abu Faraj Al-Libbi. That's a very important part of defeating the al Qaeda.

But, no, we'll stay on the offense. And we'll be relentless and tireless in doing so. The best way to defeat terrorism in the long run, though, is

by spreading freedom, is by giving people a chance to live in a free society.

Q How long it takes to curb, finally?

THE PRESIDENT: Yes, that's a good question. However long -- it takes as long as necessary. I just don't know. I don't have a -- I can't give you a timetable. But whatever it takes, so long as I'm the President and there's a threat to the United States of America and to our people -- you see, a lot of people in Europe, for them, September the 11th was a date, a passing moment. No question they expressed deep sympathy, for which the United States is grateful. But for us, it was a change of attitude. It was a change of foreign policy. And I told the people when I ran for office the second time, I said, if you put me in office every day I'm in office, I'll be relentless in chasing down the enemy. And so -- for however long it takes.

It takes a while for freedom to take hold. I know that. Look at Iraq. Iraq is going from a tyranny to a free society. And it's not easy. But they're getting there. This country is beginning to -- it's getting on its feet. The security forces are beginning to work better. The terrorists are more desperate. But that free society will be an important part of sending a message to others. And free societies are peaceful societies. And that's the great example of Estonia, for which the United States is grateful, and we're proud to call you friend.

Q Thank you very much, Mr. President.

THE PRESIDENT: My honor.

Q Very much, indeed.

THE PRESIDENT: Thanks for coming.

END 2:30 P.M. EDT

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