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Interview of the President by Paris Match Magazine

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Q You'll be walking on Omaha Beach in Normandy, France. Does that mean that you're not angry at us anymore?

THE PRESIDENT: I've never been angry at the French. France has been a long-time ally, and I -- look, I made a difficult decision and not everybody agreed with it. But I understand that. And now is the time to work together to promote the values we believe in, which is human rights and human dignity and rule of law and freedom and justice.

And Omaha Beach is a symbol of working together to uphold the values that unite us. It's an interesting time in history to be going to Omaha Beach.

Q For 200 years, America and France have walked hand-in-hand, sharing the same values you are speaking about. Last year, for the first time we were not allies. What went wrong?

THE PRESIDENT: I don't -- you need to talk to the French leadership.

Q Speaking of the French leadership --

THE PRESIDENT: For whom I have great respect.

Q Yes. But Jacques Chirac was a good friend of your father. He was one of the first -- I think the first President to congratulate you in person on your election day.

THE PRESIDENT: Right here, that's right.

Q Yes. He also was the first in New York after 9/11, the first foreign leader to fly over the ruins of the World Trade Center. I mean, it's -- for the French people, people don't understand what happened between the two of you.

THE PRESIDENT: I just think he just didn't agree with upholding the Security Council resolution that said: disarm, prove you disarm or face serious consequences. He voted -- France voted for that resolution, as did the United States. It was the "face serious consequences" part. And friends can disagree. I've got -- I've had friends all my life who I call friends, who didn't agree with every decision I made. And Jacques made it perfectly clear to me, he didn't believe the use of military force was necessary. And we discussed it as friends would discuss it.

Q Does that mean now that the French President will be invited in Crawford in the near future?

THE PRESIDENT: If he wants to come and see some cows, he's welcome to come out there and see some cows. (Laughter.)

Q You're now asking the United Nations to help you find a solution to the Iraqi crisis. Is it --

THE PRESIDENT: No -- may I stop you? May I? No, we're going to the United Nations again to pass a resolution which supports a new government to which full sovereignty has been transferred.

You know, after World War II a lot of people didn't think Germany could be free and democratic; nor Japan. And there were people that just didn't believe it was true. Fortunately, there were optimists and people who adhered to their principles and value systems, based upon rule of law and democracy, justice. And they had the day; they ruled the day, fortunately, their opinions did. So that now some of our strongest allies in the war are Germany and Japan. No, it's never too late to believe people can be free.

Q But it's obviously more difficult than you expected.

THE PRESIDENT: Well, some parts are and some parts aren't. I thought, going in, there would be mass refugee flows, mass starvation, oil fields would be blown up. None of that happened. What did happen was, is that we moved so quickly through the country --

Q But, I'm speaking about --

THE PRESIDENT: Let me finish. We moved so quickly through the country that many of the former Saddam loyalists just melted into the countryside and have come back to try to stop the advance of freedom.

And the other thing that's happened is foreign fighters are in Iraq, who are convincing suiciders to kill innocent Iraqis. And it's tough, it's hard work. But we will prevail, because people want to be free, and that's important. And that's why it's necessary for the world to come together at this point, to be able to help the Iraqi people form their government -- not an American government, not something that looks like America, but something uniquely Iraqi. And that's what we're doing.

Q The whole world remembers you addressing the firemen in the ruins of the World Trade Center. You were healing the wounds and uniting the world at that time. Today, your message through the megaphone doesn't reach the world. Don't you feel isolated?

THE PRESIDENT: No, I feel very comfortable with what I'm doing.

Q Yes, but all the nations --

THE PRESIDENT: Let me finish my -- you ask a question, I give you the answers. And then if you want to ask another question, you're allowed to do so.

I believe that the United States must continue to work with other nations. And there are a lot of nations working in Afghanistan and in Iraq to not only deal with terror -- the immediate affects of terror -- and that is, finding people before they hurt somebody again -- but also to spread freedom. Free societies are peaceful societies, free societies are hopeful societies. And there's a lot of nations working to get her to do so.

I also believe that the United States must work to feed the hungry. We're the most generous nation on the face of the Earth when it comes to feeding hungry people, or fighting the pandemic of HIV/AIDS in Africa, for example. I've asked our Congress, and the Congress has passed \$15 billion over five years to help fight that pandemic. And we are a nation that is tough when we have to be tough to protect our security, and compassionate when it comes to the suffering of others. And, hopefully, people will see the results of that -- of the generosity of the American people.

Now, your follow up question.

Q Talking about the photo of torture and abused prisoners. The First Lady said, this is unbearable. The moral leadership of a President is his highest power of all. Do you feel responsible in any way for this moral failure in Iraq?

THE PRESIDENT: First of all, I feel responsible for letting the world see that we will deal with this in a transparent way, that people will see that justice will be delivered. And what I regret most of all is that the great honor of our

country has been stained by the actions of a few people, the first of whom is going to jail, or has been tried and convicted, and will be sentenced. Please correct that -- I'm not going to deem the sentences; been tried and convicted, in an open way, for people to see, which stands in stark contrast to a tyrannical society in which prison abuse would never even come forth in the first place. And the contrast is going to be instructive for people in the world to see.

And Laura is just like me. We both reacted the same way. It was a stain on our honor.

Q Do you still feel that stain on your honor today?

THE PRESIDENT: Of course. I mean, this is -- you know, America is a great and generous and decent country. And the behavior of a few, you know, does not reflect the true nature of the men and women who wear our uniform -- overseas or at home -- or the character of the American people.

Q That morning when -- now I'm going to go to more positive -- I mean positive news -- when you learned that --

THE PRESIDENT: It's positive news. You're giving me a chance.

Q -- they had arrested Saddam, was this the best moment of your presidency?

THE PRESIDENT: It was a big moment in my presidency. No, I wouldn't say it's the best moment. The best moment happened when -- you know, when I meet people who do heroic things, whether it's to help somebody who hurts or whether it's a generous citizen who lifts up the spirit of a person. And I fully realize that those thousands of acts of kindness lift up the whole spirit of the country. Those are the best moments.

The capture of Saddam was a satisfying moment; it wasn't the best moment. It was satisfying because it was part of our mission, was to free the people from this brutal dictator.

I'll tell you a great moment in my presidency -- not the best, but a good moment. The other day seven people came in to see me. They had had their right hands cut off by Saddam Hussein. These were merchants in Baghdad -- or in Iraq; I think most of them lived in Baghdad -- small businessmen. And the currency in Iraq had begun to devalue, and Saddam Hussein needed a scapegoat. And so he chose these merchants, who he claimed were manipulating the currency, and he had their hands cut off for doing so. And then they had an X carved in their foreheads.

An American film maker made a documentary of this, reminding people of the brutality of Saddam Hussein, how he just would whimsically torture or maim people. And a guy in Houston, a man in Houston who works in the television business, has a foundation, saw the documentary, put the money up and flew these seven men to give them new hands, the latest technologies.

And they came to the Oval Office to see me. It was an incredibly touching moment. They were so grateful to the United States and the free world for liberating their country from Saddam Hussein, and incredibly grateful to the generosity of these individual Americans who decided to do something about their plight. Now, those are the kind of great moments I love.

Q Six months, though, after the capture of Saddam, each day brings the terrible news of American soldiers killed in action. Why the Iraqis are turning their guns against their liberators?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, because there are some who can't stand the thought of being -- can't stand the thought of freedom emerging in their country. In other words, they understand what free societies will do. A free society will change the habits and raise the aspirations and hopes. There are foreign fighters who come into Iraq to make this a front in the war on terror because they want to stop the advance of freedom.

A free society is how you solve the long-term issue of terror. In other words, hopelessness breeds fanaticism and terrorism. Freedom helps defeat hopelessness.

Q If you were an Iraqi, would you understand that -- would you feel the occupation as a burden?

THE PRESIDENT: Yes.

Q Could you understand that?

THE PRESIDENT: Of course, I can.

Q I mean, being --

THE PRESIDENT: I say it all -- I say it all the time publicly. Yes, I wouldn't want to be occupied.

Q So you cannot say that these are people -- you cannot say that all these people are terrorists and --

THE PRESIDENT: No. I agree. Not all of them are. But I am convinced --

Q Even the ones that, you know, takes --

THE PRESIDENT: The suiciders -- and some of them aren't. And they don't like to be occupied, and neither would I, and neither would anybody. That's why we're handing over sovereignty. Full sovereignty will be transferred here very shortly. I mean, you're talking -- I'm not sure when your magazine is coming out.

Q Next Thursday.

THE PRESIDENT: Well, full sovereignty will happen on June 30th. You'll begin to see the government to whom full sovereignty will be passed.

Q The names of people?

THE PRESIDENT: I think so, yes. Absolutely. Not only the names of people, but there will be -- shortly thereafter, a U.N. Security Council resolution that will embrace the new government. And that's important. But I fully understand people not wanting to be occupied. I wouldn't either.

Q Could you understand -- your political action is inspired by God, you say a number of times --

THE PRESIDENT: I said what?

Q Is inspired by God, I mean, your --

THE PRESIDENT: My political action? I've never said that.

Q You've never said that? I mean, I'm not quoting you.

THE PRESIDENT: No, I've never said that.

Q I said, in general, you relate to God as a --

THE PRESIDENT: You said, my political action is caused by God, I think.

Q No, no, no, no, I said your political action is inspired by God.

THE PRESIDENT: No, my political action is -- my life is inspired by God.

Q But this has a political consequence when you speak about freedom, the notion of freedom, you relate it to God.

THE PRESIDENT: Oh, I see what you're saying. What I say is, I say that freedom is not America's gift to the world. In other words, I'm making it clear to people that freedom is more universal than a country. Freedom is more universal than man. See, I believe freedom is the Almighty's gift to everybody in the world. And the reason I say that is because I don't want people to think that there is such thing as -- that we want the world to look like America. I understand it's not going to. But freedom is universal. Freedom is applied here. Freedom is applied in France. Freedom is a part of -- will be a part of a new Iraq.

Q Do you ever worry about the judgment your daughters might make years from now --

THE PRESIDENT: No.

Q -- as they reflect on your current actions?

THE PRESIDENT: No. I don't worry about the judgments my daughters are going to make. They're adults. They'll be able to make their own decisions. The only thing I can do with my daughters is tell them I love every day, which I try to do.

Q At the moment, the relationship with France is getting better.

THE PRESIDENT: I hope so.

Q Yes. I really do, too. How did you react when the Cannes Film Festival jury gave the award, the Palme d'Or to Michael Moore's movie?

THE PRESIDENT: I didn't pay any attention to it.

Q Thanks.

THE PRESIDENT: I didn't. Thank you.

Q Thank you very much.

THE PRESIDENT: Good luck to you.

Q Thank you.

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