

to Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder of Germany; former President Saddam Hussein of Iraq; and Prime Minister Ayad Allawi of the Iraqi Interim Government. He also referred to Provincial Reconstruction Teams, a component of NATO's International Security Assistance Force operating in Afghanistan. The interviewer referred to Prime Minister Tony Blair of the United Kingdom. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this interview.

Interview With Slovak State Television

February 18, 2005

President's Upcoming Visit to the Slovak Republic

Q. Mr. President, I assume that your trip to Europe, after your reelection, was very well tailored, and we can imagine why you go to Brussels and to Germany. But there are lots of—lots of speculation about why you decided to go to Bratislava. So what was behind this decision? And what will be your message for Slovaks and people in our region?

The President. Thanks. I've been trying to think about when this thought got in my mind. I think—I have to credit your Prime Minister, who, in the Oval Office, said, "You need to come to our country." And I thought about it, and I think I told Condi Rice then, when she was my National Security Adviser, before I named her Secretary of State, that would be a great idea.

I'd like to come, and I'm thankful for the invitation, because I want to say to the world, "Freedom is a beautiful thing, and here is a country that is working hard to promote democracy." The spirit of your Prime Minister, talking about overcoming the difficulties to become a free society, is—was just wonderful.

I've always felt like countries like the Slovak Republic are very important for the world to know more about, and—because, as you know, I'm a big believer in liberty, and this is a country which is succeeding. And it's not—there's bumps in the road. It's difficult, but it's successful.

So I'm looking forward to coming. It's going to be one of the highlights of the trip; it really is.

Iraq/Europe-U.S. Relations

Q. You have, obviously, a very good relationship with Slovak Government and the other governments of so-called new Europe. But the public does not always necessarily agree with our Government and with American policy. And you, many time, stress that you want to have a very good relationship with the whole Europe. So what is your strategy to improve the relationship with the nations, with the citizens?

The President. That's a good point. Well, first of all, nobody likes war. And basically what you're referring to is my decision to go into Iraq. And I can understand why citizens, particularly if they didn't feel threatened by Saddam Hussein, would say, "We don't like war, and we don't agree with what George Bush decided." And I know that.

But now they've got to see what's happening in Iraq. Eight million people voted in the face of terror. I mean, there's a free country. And so what's going to be very important for me is to connect that free country emerging with peace for their children and grandchildren. In other words, there has to be a connection in order for people to say, "Well, now I understand what, you know, what the policy means." It's a—and so one of the reasons—that's what I'll speak about not only—I mean, in Europe, it's very important to make that connection.

It's—ours is a—mine is a mission and a trip that says, "We share values, human rights and human dignity and rule of law and minority rights and respect for women." And therefore, it's those values that should unite our voices when it comes to spreading those values in parts of the world that are troubled parts of the world, Iran or Syria or, as you saw recently, in Lebanon. I'm convinced that as democracy—and particularly, Israel and the Palestinian Territories—as democracy takes hold there, the people of the Slovak Republic will see, "Gosh, I'm beginning to understand what President Bush was trying to do."

U.S. Visa Policy

Q. United States and you, personally, helped to fulfill the vision of free, democratic, and united Europe. But there is something missing from this picture, and people

feel that they're treated like second-class Europeans because of visa.

The President. Oh. [Laughter]

Q. And I'm sure you will hear about the visa very often, not only in Slovakia but also in European Union.

The President. Sure.

Q. I know your Government has many other priorities, maybe much, much bigger priorities. But can I count on your leadership, Mr. President, on this issue?

The President. No, I've heard about the visa issue.

Q. No?

The President. No, I have—yes. I mean, yes, I've heard about the visa issue. In other words, what I was saying, “No, this is not a minor issue.” This is an issue that our friends have brought up quite frequently. And we're trying to work it through. There's an old policy in place that needs to be renewed and reviewed, given the new realities of the Slovak Republic or Poland or the Czech Republic or wherever. And so I've told Condi Rice, “Let's just make sure our visa policy is fair and balanced.”

Q. So we can count on your help?

The President. I'm not sure you can count on the results, but you can count on my interest.

Russia

Q. Mr. President, you are going to meet President Putin in Bratislava.

The President. Yes.

Q. And in Washington, many people are concerned about corrosion of democracy in Russia. And you, in a summit in Chile, you also raised the issue of Russia's curb on democracy. So how much you are concerned about this issue of Russia?

The President. Well, I have a good relationship with President Putin. And the reason—and that's important, because that then will give me a chance to say in private—ask him why he's been making some of the decisions he's been making. I mean, he's done some things that has concerned people. And I—it's going to be—I want him to be able to have a chance to say he's done it for this reason or done that, so I can explain to him as best I can—in a friendly way, of course—that Western values are—you know, are

based upon transparency and rule of law, the right for the people to express themselves, checks and balances in Government. In other words, not one part of the Government is so powerful they can overwhelm all the rest of the Government. And I'm looking forward to doing that right there in your beautiful country.

Listen, I think this is going to be my 12th meeting with President Putin. It's an important relationship that we'll continue to nurture and work.

Iraq/Europe-U.S. Relations

Q. You mentioned the war in Iraq and relationship. What is your personal lesson how this war in Iraq changed relationship between United States and Europe and built relation with Eastern Europe?

The President. Yes, I appreciate that very much. First of all, war is a terrible thing. And a lot of Europe supported the decision to enforce the United Nations' resolutions. Remember, this wasn't a U.S.—you know, this came about as a result of the United Nations passing 1441, which said—and by the way, the 16th resolution to Mr. Saddam Hussein that said, “Disarm, disclose, or face serious consequences.” He chose not to do either, so he faced serious consequences. And a lot of Europe supported the decision to go and have him face serious consequences because the international body, the United Nations, needed to be credible when it spoke.

But people need to see why the actions and why a free Iraq will make them safer. In other words, there has to be a connection. And the Eastern Europeans were great friends on this subject, and it's interesting. They understand what it means to live under tyranny. They know what it means to have secret police. And they began to smell that great freedom that comes, and then all of a sudden, democracies began to emerge. And what a fantastic example for the world, and Europe benefits with countries like the Slovak Republic a part of NATO or the European Union. I mean, these are very important lessons for people to see, that you cannot take freedom for granted, and freedom is hard, and democracy is hard work.

But it is inspiring to see what's taking place in the Slovak Republic. My message to the

Slovak people is, “Thank you for doing what you’re doing. Thank you for your courage. And freedom is a beautiful thing, and you’re showing it right here.”

Q. Thank you very much, Mr. President.
The President. God bless. Thank you.

NOTE: The interview was taped at 10:57 a.m. in the Map Room at the White House for later broadcast. In his remarks, the President referred to Prime Minister Mikulas Dzurinda of Slovakia; former President Saddam Hussein of Iraq; and President Vladimir Putin of Russia. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this interview.

Interview With Russian ITAR-TASS

February 18, 2005

Russia-U.S. Relations

Q. Thank you very much, Mr. President, for this, again, unique opportunity to talk with you.

The President. Thank you, sir.

Q. You first time met with President Putin in Slovenia, and now in Slovakia is going to be—[laughter]—your 12th meeting. What kind—do you think we need now? Do we need a fresh start? And what do you expect for this meeting?

The President. You know, it’s interesting. First of all, we don’t need a fresh start in my personal relationship with Vladimir Putin. We’re friends, and that’s important. It’s important so that we can—he and I can have good talks, and we can understand each other and understand the decisionmaking process.

Vladimir makes a lot of decisions. And I make a lot of decisions. And I like to talk about—him about, “Well, why did you do this?” or “Why did you do that?” And I suspect he likes to ask me the same questions.

Secondly, we’ve got the framework for a good strategic relationship, which is important. I think this relationship can be invigorated. The campaign came, and in American public life, I mean—whether it be foreign policy or domestic policy, often you kind of shut down when the campaign comes. People weren’t really sure who was going to be the next President for a while. It turned out to be me, thankfully. But—and so this is a chance to reinvigorate. I wouldn’t say fresh—

fresh start is okay. I’d call it reinvigorate. We’ve got the framework, and it gives us a chance to move it forward. There’s a lot we need to do, a lot we need to work together on.

60th Anniversary of V-E Day

Q. V-Day in Moscow—in May—

The President. Yes.

Q. —60 years ago, World War II was ended. Your father was a pilot, was a hero of Second War.

The President. Yes.

Q. What—the best—the people who can—to those who won the war. What can you say to the patriots? You are invited to Moscow for the—

The President. I’m coming. Oh, yes, I want to make sure everybody understands I’m coming. My answer is, is that, thank you for your sacrifice. The Russian veterans—the people of Russia went through an unbelievable period of time of sacrifice. The stories of courage and bravery against the onslaught of the Nazis was really fantastic. I mean, it was a great lesson for bravery.

And same in our country—they call it the “Greatest Generation”; that’s what they call the World War II people because they sacrificed. And it still—this world still requires sacrifice in different ways. But there’s still needed sacrifice to make sure there’s peace. And I’m looking forward to the celebrations.

Q. The wartime alliance, do you have lessons for us now? We have again the common enemy.

The President. Yes. No, we do. And that’s another thing Vladimir and I will talk about. He sees clearly the common enemy. He’s a—and he knows you got to be tough to—and resolute and strong. And we will talk about that common enemy that is still active. The enemy—there’s a set of beliefs they believe in, and I believe the best way to defeat those beliefs is by spreading freedom and democracy. Free societies don’t like to fight. Free societies spend more time listening to their people and the demands of their people as opposed to being able to fight and spread—in this case fighting an ideology that is an ideology of hatred as this—as your good country full—fully understands.