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What is my greatest regret? I may not be able to say yet. I really wanted, with all my heart, to finish the Oslo peace process, because I believe that if Israel and the Palestinians could be reconciled, first the State of Israel would be secure, which is very important to me personally and, I think, to the American people; secondly, the Palestinians would be in control of their own destiny; third, a peace with Syria would follow shortly; and fourth, the Middle East would not only be stable, which is good for America's interests, and not just because of the oil but the forces of progress and prosperity—progress and reconciliation, excuse me—would be stronger in all countries, including Iran. And I felt that I really think this is a sort of linchpin which could lead to a wave of positive developments all across the region. And I think that's very important.

Most of the people in the Middle East are young; there are all these kids out there. What are they going to—are they going to be raised to believe their faith requires them to hate the Israelis and the Americans and anybody else that's not part of their faith and politics? Are they going to be perpetually poor, even if they have a fairly decent education? Are we going to see that whole region being integrated into a global system and these children having a whole different future, in which they're reconciled with their neighbors in Israel and deeply involved in the world in a positive way? Are they going to be using the Internet to talk to terrorist cells about chemical and biological weapons, or are they going to be using the Internet to figure out how to grow new businesses and have new opportunities and build new futures for their families and their children? So if it doesn't happen, I'll be profoundly disappointed, but I'll never regret a minute I spent on it because I think it's very important for the future.

I have never bought the thesis—on an inevitable collision course with the Islamic societies, or that the 21st century had to be dominated by terrorists with highly sophisticated weapons, fueled by broad popular resentment from people who are both disenfranchised and poor. I don't think it has to be that way, and I think if we could really make a big dent in this problem, it would give confidence to the forces of reason and progress throughout the region.

NOTE: The interview was taped at 12:40 a.m. aboard Air Force One en route from Kona, HI, to Bandar Seri Begawan, Brunei. The transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on November 16. In his remarks, the President referred to Green Party Presidential candidate Ralph Nader; Republican Presidential candidate Gov. George W. Bush; Chairman Yasser Arafat of the Palestinian Authority; Prime Minister Ehud Barak of Israel; President Kim Dae-jung of South Korea; and Chairman Kim Chong-il of North Korea. A reporter referred to Florida Secretary of State Katherine Harris. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this interview.

Exchange With Reporters Prior to Discussions With Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori of Japan in Bandar Seri Begawan

November 16, 2000

APEC Summit

Q. Mr. President, are you disappointed at the lack of consensus on free trade at APEC?

The President. I might have more to say about that before we go. Don't be too discouraged.

2000 Presidential Election

Q. How about the Florida court ruling, sir?

The President. I'm over here, so I'm not sure what it means. It's obviously going to have to be interpreted now, since the two sides have a different reading on it.

Q. How about the secretary of state denying the hand recount?

The President. I'm over here doing this work; I don't think I should get involved in that. The American people deserve a full and fair count, and I hope the process will produce it. And they're over there debating it in the appropriate way. I shouldn't be involved in that.

Q. Should Gore and Bush meet?

The President. What?

Q. Should Gore and Bush meet?

The President. I don't think I should be involved in that.

NOTE: The exchange began at 2:20 p.m. at the Royal Brunei Golf Club. In his remarks, the President referred to Republican Presidential candidate Gov. George W. Bush. A reporter referred to Florida Secretary of State Katherine Harris. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this exchange.

Exchange With Reporters Prior to Discussions With President Jiang Zemin of China in Bandar Seri Begawan

November 16, 2000

2000 Presidential Election

Q. President Clinton, do you feel the chaos in Florida makes it difficult for the U.S. to criticize other countries' elections?

The President. Well, first of all, they're having their—let's wait and see how it's resolved here. I think that there will be a lot of pressure to improve the form and ballots and the methods in voting and have more clear standards around the country. But I think as long as this thing is resolved in a way that people perceive as fair and having counted everybody's vote who lawfully went to the polls to vote—I think that it shouldn't be surprising if over 100 million people vote and the result is close—it takes a while to resolve. It depends on whether the people perceive it's fair when it's over.

China-U.S. Relations

Q. Mr. President, what message do you have for your successor on U.S.-China relations?

The President. That I believe we have made some real progress in developing a mature, honest, and open relationship that is basically quite positive. And I'm very pleased that the Congress approved the permanent normal trading relations and that China's going into the World Trade Organization. I'm very pleased that the work we've done together on nonproliferation and a host of other items, and I think we should continue to build on this relationship. I think it's very important for the United States. And I hope that we'll continue to be active across a whole broad range of issues, including through this organization, to build a common economic future. That would be my message.

You probably want to know more about it than my successor will.

NOTE: The exchange began at 5:53 p.m. in the Rose Garden at the Orchid Garden Hotel. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this exchange.

Joint Statement by President Bill Clinton and Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong on a United States-Singapore Free Trade Agreement

November 16, 2000

The United States of America (USA) and Singapore have agreed to start negotiations on a bilateral Free Trade Agreement (FTA).

USA and Singapore are both firm supporters of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), and are committed to APEC's Bogor Goals of free and open trade and investment by 2010 for industrialized economies and 2020 for developing economies.

The USA and Singapore reaffirm their strong commitment to the multilateral trading system and the launch of a New Round in 2001.

The FTA will be modeled after the US-Jordan FTA.