

### *Six-Party Talks*

*Mr. Yang.* You mentioned the six-party talks. Also, six-party talks are high on your agenda during your administration for the last couple of years. With the demolition of the Yongbyon facility, the cooling tower, specifically, it makes some tangible progress, probably gave momentum before the talks. So how do you see this mechanism will go on?

*The President.* Yes.

*Mr. Yang.* What kind of messages, if you want to say, to the six-party talks?

*The President.* Well, first of all, I value our partners. The only way to solve this peacefully is for us to work together to send a common message. I thank the Chinese Government for their leadership on this issue.

I firmly believe multilateral diplomacy can work this issue better than bilateral diplomacy; secondly, that we're at a very critical moment now for the North Korean Government to make a decision as to whether or not they're going to verify what they said they would do. It's one thing to say it, but I think it's going to be very important for them to understand that we expect them to show us.

Now, there's no question the cooling tower went down. That's perfect verification; everybody saw it. But there's going to be—need to be verification on the plutonium program, the enriched uranium program and the proliferation program. And the decision is theirs. And if they make the decisions that we're comfortable with, then we move the process forward. And I certainly hope they make the right decision.

*Mr. Yang.* Thank you, Mr. President.

*The President.* Yes. I'm looking forward to going to Beijing.

*Mr. Yang.* Good wishes to you for a very pleasant visit to Beijing.

*The President.* I bet I have one. Thank you, sir.

*Mr. Yang.* Thank you very much.

NOTE: The interview was taped at 2:35 p.m. in the Map Room at the White House for later broadcast. In his remarks, the President referred to Yao Ming, center, National Basketball Association's Houston Rockets. The transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on July 31. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this interview.

### Remarks on the War on Terror

*July 31, 2008*

Good morning. This has been a month of encouraging news from Iraq. Violence is down to its lowest level since the spring of 2004, and we're now in our third consecutive month with reduced violence levels holding steady. General Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker caution that the progress is still reversible, but they report that there now appears to be a degree of durability to the gains that we have made.

A significant reason for this sustained progress is the success of the surge. Another is the increasing capability of the

Iraqi forces. Iraqi forces now have 192 combat battalions in the fight, and more than 110 of these battalions are taking the lead in combat operations against terrorists and extremists.

We saw the capability of those forces earlier this year, when the Iraqi Government launched successful military operations against Shi'a extremist groups in Basra, Amarah, and the Sadr City area of Baghdad. Because of these operations, extremists who once terrorized the citizens of these communities have been driven

from their strongholds. As a result, our Ambassador to Iraq, Ryan Crocker, was able to walk the streets of Sadr City last Wednesday. That's something that would not have been possible just a few months ago.

This week, the Iraqi Government is launching a new offensive in parts of the Diyala Province that contain some of Al Qaida's few remaining safe havens in the country. This operation is Iraqi led; our forces are playing a supporting role. And in the moments—in the months ahead, the Iraqis will continue taking the lead in more military operations across the country.

As security in Iraq has improved, the Iraqi Government has made political progress as well. The Iraqi Council of Representatives has passed several major pieces of legislation this year, and Iraqi leaders are preparing for Provincial elections. Prime Minister Maliki recently returned from a successful visit to Europe, where he held important diplomatic discussions with Chancellor Merkel, Prime Minister Berlusconi, and His Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI.

The progress in Iraq has allowed us to continue our policy of return on success. We now have brought home all five of the combat brigades and the three Marine units that were sent to Iraq as part of the surge. The last of these surge brigades returned home this month. And later this year, General Petraeus will present me his recommendations on future troop levels, including further reductions in our combat forces as conditions permit.

As part of the return on success policy, we are also reducing the length of combat tours in Iraq. Beginning tomorrow, troops deploying to Iraq will serve 12-month tours

instead of 15-month tours. This will ease the burden on our forces, and it will make life easier for our wonderful military families.

We're also making progress in our discussion with Prime Minister Maliki's Government on the—a strategic framework agreement. This agreement will serve as the foundation for America's presence in Iraq once the United Nations resolution authorizing the multinational forces there expires on December the 31st.

We remain a nation at war. Al Qaida is on the run in Iraq, but the terrorists remain dangerous, and they are determined to strike our country and our allies again. In this time of war, America is grateful to all the men and women who have stepped forward to defend us. They understand that we have no greater responsibility than to stop the terrorists before they launch yet another attack on our homeland. Every day they make great sacrifices to keep the American people safe here at home. We owe our thanks to all those who wear the uniform and their families who support them in their vital work. And the best way to honor them is to support their mission and bring them home with victory.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:04 a.m. on the Colonnade at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Gen. David H. Petraeus, USA, commanding general, Multi-National Force—Iraq; Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki of Iraq; Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany; and Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi of Italy. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

Remarks to the West Virginia Coal Association in White Sulphur Springs,  
West Virginia  
July 31, 2008

Thank you all very much. Thanks for coming. Please be seated. Thank you for your warm introduction. I have come to know your State very well. I've spent a lot of quality time here. I love its beauty, and I love its people. And I thank you for your warm greeting, and I'm proud to be here in Greenbrier.

This place has got a rich history. During the cold war, this was Congress's designated meeting place in case of an emergency in Washington. Also the site of three championship golf courses. [Laughter] You get to decide whether or not that was just a coincidence. [Laughter]

I want to talk about the energy today. No better group of people to talk about energy with than people who actually take risk to find energy. I'm—like you, I'm concerned about the price of gasoline people are paying. I know you're concerned about what it means for your workers. It's like a tax on the hard-working people here in America. So I'll spend a little time on that subject.

And I'm going to talk about the fact that this country needs a commonsense, realistic energy policy, that there's not a single solution, and that we got to work to have a comprehensive plan that takes advantage of our assets and is realistic and provides a hopeful future for our citizens.

As you know, I'm fixing to retire—[laughter]—in about 6 months. But I am going to sprint to the finish. And part of that sprint to the finish will be to continue to remind the American people that we need to be realistic and have common sense about today's energy needs and tomorrow's energy needs.

And I want to thank my friend Buck Harless for inviting me here. He's right; he came down to the Governor's mansion; came down just to take a sniff. [Laughter]

And I appreciate his friendship and your friendship. I want to thank Andrew Jordon, who is the chairman of the board of the West Virginia Coal Association. I want to thank all the other members of the board, and I want to thank you as risk takers and entrepreneurs and dreamers and doers and job providers. And I welcome your family members who are here too. Thanks for coming. It's good to be with old and young alike. [Laughter] I appreciate Bill Raney, my friend. I've known Bill a long time; he's a good guy. And, Bill, I want to thank you for being here today. You can applaud for Bill if you want.

I'm so pleased to be traveling with Congressman Nick Rahall today. I can't thank him enough. The Congress is in session. He's a—he's got a chairmanship, and yet he took time to come down to fly down on Air Force One. I can't thank you enough—it's not a bad way to travel, by the way. [Laughter] But I appreciate you coming, Nick.

I thank—want to thank the secretary of state, Betty Ireland. Betty has served this State with a lot of dignity. She came down from Charleston to encourage her old buddy—me. [Laughter] And I want to thank you for coming. I want to thank the mayor, Debbie Fogus. Madam Mayor, thank you for being here today as well; all the other State and local officials who have kindly come. But most importantly, thank you.

This is a—it's a challenging time. It's not the first time we've been through challenging times. I might remind you that in the beginning of my Presidency there were some challenging times. We had a recession, and of course, we got attacked. And yet, with good policy and by trusting the ingenuity and the enterprise of the American people, we came through those times