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Interview With Chinese Journalists

June 19, 1998

President's Trip to China

Q. Mr. President, thank you very much for giving us this opportunity to have this interview with you before you fly to China. We're representing Chinese media organizations in the United States. We're following your visit to China very closely. We wish you success in your visit.

The President. Thank you.

Q. May I ask you the first question?

The President. Sure.

Q. You will be the first American President in almost 10 years to visit China. What do you expect from your visit to China? And how important it is? What kind of impact will it have on both the United States and China and even the world as a whole? Thank you.

The President. Well, first of all, I hope that through my trip both I and the people of the United States will learn more about China—about the rich history, about the exciting events going on today, about the incredible potential for the future of the Chinese people.

Secondly, I hope through my trip that the leaders and the people of China will learn more about the United States. And specifically, I hope that through my trip we can expand the areas of cooperation between our Governments and our people. I hope we can have an open and honest and constructive discussion about the differences we have. And I hope that the trip will give energy to the positive changes going on in China and to a better partnership between our people in the future.

China-U.S. Partnership

Q. Mr. President, you and President Jiang Zemin have agreed to work together in building a constructive strategic partnership between our two great nations for the 21st century. I remember this concept, partnership, was first raised by you during a visit to Australia a few years ago.

The President. Yes.

Q. So what was your vision then, and your vision now, for this concept?

The President. Well, first of all, I think it's—let's make the big statement here. China is home to one-fourth of the world's people. It has a rapidly growing economy. It has enormous contributions to make to the world of the 21st century. And if I could just give some specific examples, I think we should be partners for stability and security in Asia. The Chinese recently led our five-party talks on the situation in South Asia as a result of the nuclear testing between—by India and Pakistan. That's just one example. The work we're doing to promote peace on the Korean Peninsula is another. The work we're doing together to try to promote stability and to restore growth to the economies of Asia is another. I think they're important issues in the security relationship between our two countries that should be a part of this partnership. I think the work we're doing around the world for nonproliferation and the progress that we've made working with China on nonproliferation of dangerous weapons is important.

I think the work we can do to fight international crime and drug trafficking is important. China borders 15 nations and has to deal with this just as we do. I think the work that we do in energy and the environment is important. I think the work we do in science and technology is important. I think our economic partnership is very important; it's important that it grow and expand in ways that are good for the Chinese people and for the American people and help to stabilize the world.

And finally, I think that it is inevitable that in the 21st century, where the economy is based on ideas—that's basically what the computer revolution is all about; that's what

information technology is all about—that we in America have to face the challenge of making sure that this economy benefits all our people, because we have various levels of education and various levels of success in dealing with that.

In China, I think you have the same challenge coming from a different direction, where the country is going through a period of significant change that I believe inevitably will lead to a more open society with more freedom of expression and more acceptance of cultural and religious diversity, because that will strengthen the country in a world where ideas dominate economic progress and political influence. The only way you can get that is to get the best from all your people. And the only way that can happen, I believe, is to observe things that we hold very dear: more freedom, more human rights, more political and civil rights.

I note with great appreciation the intention of the Chinese Government to sign the Convention on Political and Civil Rights. I think that's a great step forward.

Taiwan and the "One China" Policy

Q. Mr. President, as we all are aware, the issue of Taiwan is the most important and sensitive issue in China-U.S. relations. It is essential for a sound and a stable development of China-U.S. relations that the provisions of the three Sino-U.S. joint communiques are strictly abided by and the Taiwan issue is properly handled. The U.S. Government and yourself have made explicit the commitments that the U.S. Government pursues a "one China" policy and abides by the principles enshrined in the above-mentioned three communiques, does not support the two Chinas—or one China, one Taiwan—[*inaudible*]—of Taiwan and Taiwan's entry into the United Nations and other international organizations of sovereign states.

And Secretary of State, Madame Albright, reiterated these commitments of the U.S. Government at the press conference during her visit to China last April. So will you reaffirm these commitments during your upcoming visit to China in your discussions with President Jiang and in a public statement? How will the U.S. Government implement, in earnest, these commitments?

President Clinton. Well, first of all, the answer to your question is that I will reaffirm those commitments. Our relationships are embodied in the three communiques and the Taiwan Relations Act passed by our Congress. And our long friendship with and economic relationships with the people of Taiwan clearly must be understood by them and by the people of China within the context of the three communiques and our support for the "one China" policy.

And all of our decisions going forward will be made within that framework, so I will clearly make that statement when I'm in China to the Chinese leaders.

Human Rights, Nonproliferation, and the World Trade Organization

Q. Mr. President, my question is how could the two countries work together to address the differences on such issues as human rights, nonproliferation, and China's accession to WTO and trade imbalance? Thank you.

President Clinton. Let's take them one at a time. In the human rights area, I think one of the things that we hope we'll have is a resumption of our dialog between the two countries on human rights. I hope we will have some sort of an NGO forum on human rights. We have talked a lot with—I have talked with President Jiang and our people have talked with representatives in the Chinese Government about the prospect of having a long, cooperative project on the rule of law and how it applies in commerce, how it applies to free speech and free exercise of political rights, religious rights, and things of that kind, and what relevance—how those things would work in the context of Chinese society. And I hope we will continue to work together on the rule of law and those issues.

On nonproliferation, frankly, I think it's worth pointing out that, in some ways, that's been the area where we've had the greatest success. China, in the last few years, has become a member of the Nonproliferation Treaty, the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, the Chemical Weapons Convention. China has accepted the guidelines of the Missile

Technology Control Regime. China has frozen—worked with us to freeze the North Korean nuclear program. China has agreed not to give assistance to the Iranian program or to support nonsafeguarded nuclear facilities, such as those in Pakistan.

So there are some things we can do together to take this even further in the area of proliferation, and I think we will on this visit. I hope we will. But that is an area where we understand each other, and we have a good way of working together and where we've got a lot of progress under our belt.

On the WTO, I very much would like to see China in the WTO because of its—not just the population of the country but the size of the economy and the fact that it's growing. The WTO, like any organization, has to have certain rules and conditions of membership, and we're trying to work out the details of that.

Obviously, we in the United States would like to have some greater access to the Chinese market, to have more exports. We are by far your largest importer, and we welcome that. Our economy is strong; we've been very fortunate; and we appreciate that, and we are happy to participate in supporting China's growth by purchasing many products from China. But we seek no special favors in the Chinese market. The important thing about the World Trade Organization is that countries which enter, in effect, agree not to prefer one country over another, so the United States seeks no special favors in the Chinese market, but we would hope to get some greater access.

But I think beyond that, it's important that China become a member of the WTO, and I hope that can be done.

President's Policy on China

Q. Mr. President, some people in this country keep criticizing your China policy. So under such circumstances, how will you go ahead with China policy, and what are you going to do with the bills and the resolutions against China on Capitol Hill? Thank you.

The President. Well, I think first, of all it's important for the Chinese people to understand that in our system there are some people who criticize everything I do. [*Laughter*] If I walked out of the White House and I spread my arms and I proved I could fly—[*laughter*]—some people would claim that I had done something wrong. [*Laughter*] So it's part of democracy. So a lot of this criticism is a part of it.

One of our Founding Fathers, Benjamin Franklin, said a wise thing once. He said, our enemies are our friends—he said, our critics are our friends, because they show us our faults. So it's important when people criticize you to listen to their criticism, because sometimes they're right. You know, none of us are correct in every decision we make.

So, with that background, however, I have to say in this case, I think my critics are wrong. And I believe most Americans agree with me. I believe most Americans want a constructive partnership with the Government and the people of China. I believe most Americans understand that we have differences now and 100 years from now we will have some differences, because we are different people with different cultures and different systems and different backgrounds.

And I think the important thing for the Congress is to recognize that over the long run we must choose engagement with China, not isolation from China, not estrangement from China. And then once you make that decision, then the question is, how can you expand the areas of cooperation where we can agree; how shall we manage our disagreements; and how can we learn from one another so that we can build a more peaceful, more prosperous, more open world? Even my harshest critics would have to admit that President Jiang and I have had wonderful, stimulating, and very honest discussions about our differences. It seems to me that the idea that we should have less contact with China—with the Chinese Government and with the Chinese people—is just wrong.

And I think most people agree with me. So I will continue to stick up for what I believe in, and I will do my best to defeat any legislation in the Congress that would undermine the ability of the Government of the United States to pursue the interests of the United States and the interests of the American people in developing a partnership with China and the Chinese people.

Science and Technology Cooperation

Q. My question is how do you assess the 20-year old cooperations in science and technology between China and the United States? And what's the prospect for further cooperation in the years to come and what we'll do with the remaining U.S. sanctions against China?

The President. The remaining U.S. sanctions?

Q. Yes.

The President. Well, first of all, let's talk about the 20-year cooperation in science and technology. This has actually been one of the most successful areas of our relationship. And I think most people in the United States don't know much about it. And I would be surprised if many people in China knew a lot about it.

But we have really had a remarkable record here. Our cooperation in science and technology, among other things, has led to discoveries which will help us to preserve the biodiversity of the planet, which is very important for the environment in the years ahead, as these economies grow. It has led to work in the area of seismology, which has increased the ability of both countries to predict and deal with extreme weather developments and other developments. China and the United States have both experienced earthquakes; we've both had other severe weather developments. Our cooperation has helped us to deal with that.

We've actually had a lot of progress in medical areas that help us to deal with cancer problems. And our joint work most recently discovered the important role of folic acid in dealing with a health condition called spina bifida, which is a profound problem for some children in the United States, which I think is very important.

So I think if you look to the future, when more and more scientific discoveries are being made every day, when very soon the mysteries of the human gene itself will be unlocked, when most experts predict that the 21st century's major breakthroughs will come in areas of biology, I think that this is something we should emphasize more and more, and because the potential benefits to all our people, and indeed to other people around the world, are enormous.

On the question of the sanctions—since 1989—the sanctions are in several categories. One category of sanctions has already been lifted on nuclear transfers because of the nuclear cooperation agreement signed between the United States and China. There are some others which have—which are dealt with on a case-by-case basis—for example, when you send up our commercial satellites on your rockets. And so all the others, I think, have to be dealt with in the context of specific negotiations within the framework of our law.

Shanghai

Q. Mr. President, almost a quarter century ago, in 1972, the well-known Sino-U.S. joint communique was issued in Shanghai. So, during your trip to Shanghai this time, what will be on your major agenda, and what important message are you going to bring to the people of Shanghai? Thank you.

The President. Well, first of all, I just want to see it—[*laughter*]—because everyone in the world—we read constantly about the explosive growth of Shanghai, the vibrant life of the city, and how it sort of represents the future of China's economy. I want to meet there with people who are making the future of China. I'm going to meet with some young entrepreneurs. I'm going to meet with some grassroots active citizens from various walks of life. I'm going to meet with the United States and Chinese business leaders. And I'm very much looking forward to that.

But my message will be that the creation of opportunity and a better life is something that both of us want—both countries want and our peoples want. And insofar as we possibly can, we should attempt to define a common future where everyone has a chance to live up to the fullest of their capacities and to live by their imagination. And I'm very excited about going and I think it will be quite successful.

Advice to Youth

Q. Mr. President, here you have a newspaper called USA Today; in China, we have a China news daily, which is China Tomorrow. So, my question is, you are one of the youngest leaders of the world, what do you have to say to the youths of China? And also,

how will your visit to China this time promote exchanges of the young peoples of two countries?

The President. The first point I want to make is that the decisions we make today will affect young people more than any other group, because they have more of their lives in front of them. The young people of China and the young people of my country will live most of their lives in a new century. If medical advances continue, some of the youngest children, the ones being born today, may well live to see the 22nd century. [*Laughter*]

And I think—therefore is very important that these young people not only educate themselves for the work they will do but also learn as much as they can about other countries—people of different racial and ethnic backgrounds, people who have different faiths than they do, people who live in different systems; and that they seek to become not only responsible citizens of China, but people of the world; that they seek to understand the world—never for the purpose of, if you will, escaping their own culture and background, but to deepen their understanding.

I find the more I learn about other people in the world, the more I understand my own people, my own background. And in the world of the 21st century we will be given the opportunity to reconcile the differences among people by respecting those differences, but making common cause. And we will have the means to do it through technology, through travel, through open markets and economic endeavor, through respect for individuals' integrity and rights and freedom.

But we also see in other countries the hazards of the future, in the terrible ethnic and racial and religious conflicts in Bosnia and Kosovo, in the Middle East, in Rwanda, and Africa. And what we have to do is to find a way to move toward a greater harmony in which we can preserve the coherence of families and societies and cultures, in which we can all have honest differences, but in which we find common bonds of humanity that take the world to a higher plane. That is what the young people of the world should be thinking about. How can they do better than their parents and grandparents in moving the cause of humanity forward?

And again I say, it is not necessary for any of us to reject our heritage. China has, of all the societies, perhaps the oldest and richest culture in history. It's not necessary at all to reject that. We can become more loyal to our roots, if you will, but we have to become, all of us, people of the world as well as people of our countries and cultures.

China-U.S. Relations

Q. Mr. President, my question is how the Sino-U.S. relations, in the light of your coming visit to China, will affect the regional and world situation, especially in the wake of the nuclear tests by India and Pakistan and in view of the evolving Asian financial crisis?

The President. Well, the first point I would make is that it should convince everyone in China and everyone in the United States that our cooperation is more important than ever before, because no form of endeavor guarantees success. And in any system there will always be crises and problems and challenges. There is no—we're all human beings; there is no perfect problem-free way of organizing people and organizing our affairs.

Therefore, if you look at what has happened in Indonesia, if you look at the challenges faced by other nations in Asia, if you look at Japan, the second largest economy in the world, struggling now with several years of low growth or stagnation and the present crisis, a financial crisis, I would say that the number one message is we have to work together on this.

If you look at the security issues, the fact that the matter on the Korean Peninsula is still unresolved, the much larger potential for difficulty on the Indian subcontinent between India and Pakistan, and, I might say, the enormous potential for positive interaction if the misunderstandings and the difficulties between India and Pakistan can be resolved, and if China and India could reach an understanding about their security concerns over the long run, the potential for benefit to the Chinese people of having over one billion people on the Indian subcontinent working with them instead of wondering whether they're in strategic conflict with them—this is enormous.

So for the United States—obviously we have no territorial ambitions in Asia whatever, but we have a great stake in the future of Asia. I can't imagine that any of these great challenges can be resolved unless the United States and China work together.

President's Trip to China

Q. Yes, sir. I am from China—[*inaudible*]—which is the largest TV network in China. We have viewers of one billion. On behalf of them, I would like to express our warm welcome to you for your state visit to China.

President Clinton. Thank you.

Q. Would you please take this opportunity to say a few words to them, and what kind of message you will bring for them. Thank you.

The President. Well, my message is that the American people wish the Chinese people well. We want to know more about the China of today and the China of yesterday, and we want to be a big part of the China of tomorrow; that we are a people that in our relatively short history of 220-plus years, have accomplished some things that we're very proud of. And we believe in our system of democracy and individual rights and liberties, from free speech to religious liberty. And we believe that the International Declaration of Human Rights, which the United Nations embraces, has something to give people everywhere.

But we also respect the culture and the heritage of the people of China, and we are prepared for a long-term, strategic, constructive partnership. We want to expand our areas of cooperation. We want more Americans to visit China. We want more Chinese people to visit America. We want more American students to study in China, and we want more Chinese students to study in America. We want to find ways to resolve the differences between us.

And most of all, we want to be part of constructing a world in the 21st century where nations are proud of their culture and their heritage and their history, but where the borders are more open to new ideas and new cooperation. And that's what I hope will come out of this trip.

You know, the United States at many times in our country's past has felt a special affinity to China. And we've had many Americans who have lived in China, doing religious work, doing charitable work, doing business work. We have been allies in war. We have done a lot of things together. And I think there is a greater feeling for the Chinese people in the hearts of Americans than perhaps many Chinese realize. And I hope that this trip will help us to continue to go forward in a new and better way.

And so I hope the Chinese people will be glad that I'm coming, and I hope we'll be able to have a constructive trip that, as I said, looks to the future, expands cooperation, and finds a very open and honest way of expressing our differences, and exchanges ideas about what could help both countries deal with the challenges we face.

Q. Thank you very much, Mr. President.

The President. Thank you. I enjoyed this.

NOTE: The interview began at 3:10 p.m. in the Roosevelt Room at the White House and was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on June 19 but was embargoed for release until 6 p.m., June 21. In his remarks, the President referred to President Jiang Zemin of China. This item was not received in time for publication in the appropriate issue.

Interview With CBS News, Cox Newspapers, and McClatchy Newspapers

June 19, 1998

President's Trip to China

Q. We've been talking among ourselves, so we'll just jump right into it. Just real quickly—one poll question. In a CBS/New York Times poll, some data that we put together shows that 59 percent of the American public believes you should go on this trip. But 35 percent say they—only 35 say they approve of your policy toward China. What do you hope to accomplish on this trip to pull that 35 closer to the 59 or higher?

The President. Well, I think one of the things I hope to accomplish is I hope that as a result of the trip, the American people will learn more about China, and the Chinese people will learn more about America.