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But when they know the truth, when the truth comes out, which is that we care deeply about the plight of the African citizen, that we're not only trading partners—and by the way, most nations, I think, would really like to trade with America—that we not only care deeply about the pandemic of AIDS but that we hear the cries of those who are sick and tired of corruption on the continent of Africa. And therefore, we are—we've got a new approach to foreign aid. I think people, when they know the facts, will say, "Well, this is a great country."

And the other thing is that no one likes war, and what you heard—there was kind of attachment to the word "America" with war. What they're going to find out, the word "freedom" and "America" are synonymous. That's what we believe. We believe in freedom. And we believe everybody desires freedom. And that when it's all said and done in Iraq, the world will wake up and say, "Now we understand what a free Iraq means to peace and stability."

And so I—if I conducted our foreign policy based upon polls and focus groups, we would be stumbling all over ourselves. That's not the way I do things. I base our foreign policy based upon deep-seated principles.

And this is a peroration to what's been a very, hopefully, constructive dialog for you. It has been for me. My message to the African people is, we come as a nation that believes in the future of Africa. We believe that people want to be free. We will work with those who embrace the habits of freedom, that when this Nation sees suffering, we will not turn away.

There is tremendous suffering on the continent of Africa. And we will put a strategy in place that effectively spends $15 billion over 5 years to help ease the suffering from HIV/AIDS. When we see starvation, we don't turn our back. We act. We care about the people of the continent. And there are—we've got great relations with leaders and countries on the continent of Africa, relations which will not only make—help enable people to realize their dreams but also make the world more safe.

And that is my message. And I am proud to carry the message on behalf of a great nation to a very important, great continent.

Thank you all for your time.

NOTE: The interview began at 10:30 a.m. in the Roosevelt Room at the White House. In his remarks, the President referred to President Abdoulaye Wade of Senegal; Dr. Jendayi E. Frazer, Special Assistant to the President and Senior Director for African Affairs at the National Security Council; President Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria; President Thabo Mbeki of South Africa; Abu Bakr Al Azdi, senior Al Qaida associate responsible for the May 12 bombing in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia; President Yoweri Kugata Museveni of Uganda; President Charles Taylor of Liberia; Secretary-General Kofi Annan of the United Nations; and Usama bin Laden, leader of the Al Qaida terrorist organization. Journalists referred to President Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe and Morgan Tsvangirai, leader of Zimbabwe's opposition party, Movement for Democratic Change. Journalists participating in the interview were: Dame Babou, Sud Quotidien; Charlie Cobb, AllAfrica.com; Lalou Akande, The Guardian; and Deon Lamprecht, Media 24/Naspers. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this interview.

Interview With the South African Broadcasting Corporation

July 3, 2003

Liberia

Simon Marks. Mr. President, thank you very much indeed for talking to us here today. Let me start by seeing if we can perhaps make a little bit of news.

Liberia: Many West African leaders have asked you to send U.S. peacekeeping troops to join a multinational stabilization force in Liberia. Are you going to? If so, how many and for how long?

The President. We're in the process of determining the course of action necessary to see that peace and stability reign in Liberia. And some of our military people are meeting with ECOWAS leaders today. And I haven't made a decision yet.

Mr. Marks. Are you closing in on a decision?

The President. Yes. Every day that goes by is closer to a decision. But I need—before I make decisions, I like to have facts, and I'm gathering the facts necessary to determine what is necessary, who's willing to participate.

The one thing that must happen is, Charles Taylor has got to leave. A condition for any kind of operation that stabilizes the country is for Mr. Taylor to leave the country, and hopefully, we can achieve that objective diplomatically. Colin Powell is working closely with Kofi Annan and others at the United Nations to prepare the groundwork, if possible, for Mr. Taylor's departure.

Zimbabwe

Mr. Marks. Let me switch countries, if I may, and ask you about Zimbabwe. A short while ago your Secretary of State, Colin Powell, wrote in the New York Times that "South Africa can and should play a stronger and more sustained role in resolving matters in Zimbabwe." Specifically, what would you like to see President Thabo Mbeki do in Zimbabwe that he's not already doing?

The President. Insist that there be elections. Insist that democracy rule. Insist that the conditions necessary for that country to become prosperous again are in place.

I agree with the Secretary of State. I certainly don't want to put any pressure on my friend, but Zimbabwe has not been a good case study for democracy in a very important part of the world. And we hope that not only Mr. Mbeki but other leaders convince the current leadership to promote democracy.

Mr. Marks. Do you think quiet diplomacy can work?

The President. I hope any kind of diplomacy can work. So far, diplomacy hasn't worked. That's part of the problem. You know, it's an interesting question. I guess writing an article may not be viewed as quiet diplomacy, since it was quite public. But I also have spoken out on Zimbabwe. It's a bad example.

Let me give you one reason why. There's a lot of starving people in sub-Sahara Africa; yet, Zimbabwe used to be able to grow more than it needed, to help deal with the starvation. We're a nation that is interested in helping people that are starving. We're going to spend a billion dollars this year on programs to help the hungry. It would be really helpful if Zimbabwe's economy was such that they would become a breadbasket again, a capacity to grow more food that's needed so that we could help—they could help deal with the hunger. And yet, the country is in such that, you know, in such a condition that the agricultural sector of its economy is in shambles right now.

HIV/AIDS Initiative/Debt Relief

Mr. Marks. On HIV, you surprised many in Washington by the vigor with which you've embraced the battle to combat HIV/AIDS. Some say you could do even more by more enthusiastically embracing debt relief for Africa. You favor it enthusiastically for Iraq; why not more enthusiastically for Africa?

The President. Well, let me start with the HIV program. I mean, enthusiasm is to the tune of $15 billion—that's pretty darn enthusiastic—to deal with the pandemic. And I also have agreed to increase the direct developmental aid grants from the United States by 50 percent. However, we expect countries, whether they be in Africa or anywhere else, that are applying for this money to embrace the habits of a free country, like transparency, anticorruption, making sure the people are educated and receive health care. So we're doing a lot in America.

There is a program in place for debt relief. And I would like to see that program implemented in full. I also called for the World Bank to give more grants rather than loans. And so our program across the board is compassionate, in my judgment, because we care about Africa and we care about the people of Africa.

Nelson Mandela

Mr. Marks. And as you head to Africa, you are obviously aware that there are a large number of people on the continent who disagree with many of your policies, particularly your decision to move into Iraq, some of them very prominent personalities. When a statesman like former South African President Nelson Mandela says the very personal things about you that he has said in the past and continues to say even this week, that's got to hurt.

The President. No. I did the right thing. My job is to make sure America is secure. And if some don't like the tactics, that's the nature of a free world, where people can express their opinion.

I admire Nelson Mandela. As a matter of fact, my administration was the one that gave him the Medal of Freedom because of his courage and bravery. I just happen to disagree with him on his view of how best to secure America.

But you can be rest assured that if I think America is threatened, I will act. And you know, I understand criticism. I mean, look, but I'm not the kind of person that runs around trying to take a poll to determine what to do. If I believe it's necessary for my country, I will act.

I also believe it's necessary, when we see people enslaved, to work on behalf of their freedom, because this country believes that freedom is the desire of every human heart. And one of the great benefits of our action in Iraq is not only going to make America more secure, but it's going to make the Iraqi people more free. And you know, these mass graves we're finding is just the tip of the iceberg about what these poor people had to suffer at the hands of Saddam Hussein. And it's that kind of suffering that troubles me. And I believe the use of—proper use of power by America will make the world more peaceful, America more secure, and as importantly, people more free.

Mr. Marks. Mr. President, bon voyage.

The President. Thank you, sir.

NOTE: The interview was taped at 1:17 p.m. in the Map Room at the White House for later broadcast. In his remarks, the President referred to President Charles Taylor of Liberia; Secretary-General Kofi Annan of the United Nations; President Thabo Mbeki of South Africa; and former President Saddam Hussein of Iraq. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this interview.

Interview With the Voice of America

July 3, 2003

Liberia

Vincent Makori. Mr. President, if the U.S. was to send a peacekeeping force to Liberia, what role will it play and what limitations will you have?

The President. I haven't made up my mind, Vincent, whether we are going to send a so-called peacekeeping force. I have made up my mind there needs to be stability in Liberia, and one of the conditions for a peaceful and stable Liberia is for Mr. Charles Taylor to leave the country.

And so we're working the issue now. And I say "we," it's my—of course, the Secretary of State, the very capable Colin Powell, is working with Kofi Annan, who is also working with others on the continent to facilitate that type of move.

As well, there was a meeting today with ECOWAS leadership as to what the nature of a so-called peacekeeping force might look like. And that's very important information for me, the decisionmaker on this issue, to understand what the recommendations might be. I have yet to get those recommendations, but I expect I will in the next couple of days.

Mr. Makori. Mr. President, you have asked Mr. Charles Taylor to step down for the sake of peace. What will be your response to him if he does not heed your advice?

The President. Oh, I think we'll have to wait, Vincent, on that. You know, I suspect he will, and so therefore, I'm an optimistic person. I'm not going to take "no" for an answer. My hope is—it's not only my voice. It's the voice of a lot of others saying the same thing, and I think it's very important for us to be positive about having a good outcome.

Mr. Makori. And given the historical ties between the United States and Liberia, does the U.S. have a moral obligation to intervene in Liberia?

The President. Well, there's no question there is a—it is a unique relationship between Liberia and the United States, and I suspect that's why we're—I don't suspect; I know—that's why we're very much engaged in the discussions about how to bring a peaceful and secure Liberia to be. I mean, it's—yes, there is a unique history between the United States and Liberia.

Democracy in Africa

Mr. Makori. Mr. President, because all this boils down to leadership, what is the best thing the U.S. can do to discourage despotic and dictatorial rulerships in Africa and promote democracy, true democracy?