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got to talk about free trade and open trade. We cannot—you know, we must advance the agenda of the WTO.

There is a great opportunity to discuss ways to enhance prosperity. And I might remind everybody that this war on terror continues. There's a lot of wonderful leaders that will be in the room who have dedicated themselves to the proposition that we must deal with terror now or be dealing with it in more violent forms later. And President Arroyo is such a leader. So I'm looking forward to having a very frank discussion and a good discussion with APEC. I think APEC is relevant, and I think this meeting will help make it more relevant.

Mr. Nebrida. Mr. President, thank you so much.

The President. Thank you, sir.

Mr. Nebrida. Thank you for this opportunity to be with you, and it's indeed an honor and privilege.

The President. My honor, too. You're welcome. Thank you, sir.

NOTE: The interview was taped at 3:17 p.m. in the Library at the White House, and the transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on October 18. In his remarks, the President referred to President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo of the Philippines. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this interview.

Interview With Thepchai Yong of Thailand's Nation TV

October 14, 2003

Thailand-U.S. Relations

Mr. Yong. Mr. President, I understand that during your visit to Bangkok you'll be announcing that your administration will designate Thailand as a major non-NATO ally. What does it mean to Thailand and to Thai-American relations?

The President. First of all, you're a pretty darn good reporter. Secondly, it's probably best that I not reveal what the Prime Minister and I are going to talk about until after we talk about it.

However, having said that, Thailand and the United States are very close friends. The level of cooperation has been really strong, particularly in matters of common interests. We have a common interest to make sure our countries are secure from terrorism. As you know, the Thai Government very capably—I emphasize ''capably''—brought to justice Mr. Hambali, the planner of the Bali bombings in Indonesia, the killer of hundreds of innocent lives. And I really—and it was a piece of really good work. My only point is that we value our relationship and friendship on this key matter.

Of course, I'll be talking economics as well. Our non-NATO ally status is something I want to speak to privately first with the Prime Minister and not on your TV screen, if you don't mind, but it's a very good question. [*Laughter*]

President's Upcoming Visit to Thailand/ Demonstrations

Mr. Yong. Some of the public opinion in Thailand, like in your country, doesn't always support what the Government does.

The President. Yes.

Mr. Yong. You may admire Thaksin, the Prime Minister, for being supportive of the antiterror campaign. But there are people in Thailand who are not happy with that, against the war in Iraq and, again, your policy of preemption. And there are people who plan to stage a demonstration to demand that you be arrested during your visit in Bangkok. How do you respond to these critics?

The President. [*Laughter*] Well, I'm—first of all, a society which allows for people to express themselves is the kind of society I admire. I don't expect everybody to agree with my policies, and I appreciate the fact that they are able to express themselves. I'm not so sure I agree with their desire to have me arrested.

Look, some people disagree with my decision to take action against a thug who had been torturing his own people. We've discovered mass graves with hundreds of people that had been buried there, but it's also a man who used chemical weapons. And the United Nations—I didn't act alone. The critics must understand that I was acting in concert with the U.N., who for 10 years—which for years had said, ''Disarm.'' And finally, I went to the U.N. and said, ''Wait a minute. This is time to—let's take care of this man one way or the other, and give him a chance

to disarm.'' And he didn't. So I said, ''There ought to be serious consequences for not disarming,'' and we acted.

I'm going to tell you something, people have got to understand I'm not going to forget the lessons of September the 11th, 2001. These are coldblooded killers that received their support from different governments, and this Nation will act to protect our people, and just like I hope the people of Thailand would expect the Prime Minister to act to protect the people in Thailand.

Prime Minister Thaksin Chinnawat of Thailand

Mr. Yong. There is an increased recognition among South Asian countries that Prime Minister Thaksin of Thailand is gradually emerging as a new regional leader. You have met him. You have talked to him. You see him being different from the other ASEAN leaders?

The President. Well, I certainly don't want to compare him to other leaders. I think that would be unfair. But I do see him as a very strong leader and a very capable leader. He's got a good grasp of the issues. He understands how economies work. He is not afraid to make tough decisions. He stands his ground in the face of criticism. And so I think he is a very interesting, dynamic leader.

Iraq

Mr. Yong. I think there are people in Thailand who doubt whether we made the right decision to send Thai troops to help in the reconstruction of Iraq.

The President. Yes.

Mr. Yong. With mounting casualties on the part of the American troops, there are people who doubt that it's worth the risk or not.

The President. Yes, well, I think—of course, in a free society, there are doubters. But people ought to understand that a free and peaceful Iraq is necessary for world security. A peaceful society in the midst of a part of the world that's been troubled is going to, for the long run, help—will help change the world in a positive way. And therefore, the idea of helping to rebuild a country ought to be something the Thai people accept.

You've got to understand, the people in Iraq lived under incredible tyranny and torture and rape rooms, the kinds of things the people in Thailand reject. These people were—the tyrant brutalized them and at the same time built up weapons and didn't spend the money on social services. And so not only are we making the world more secure and peaceful; we're actually making life better for people who had been brutalized by this man. And surely the people who respect human rights and decency understand the need to help.

Now, our troops are—we're in the process of hunting down these killers. And the more progress there is in Iraq, the more the terrorists get angry, because they can't stand freedom. So I look forward to making the case of the United States about why it was important to Thailand to contribute. It's important for humanitarian reasons, at the very minimum. But for the long term, it's important for peace and security.

Mr. Yong. Thank you very much for your time.

The President. I'm really looking forward to coming to your beautiful country.

NOTE: The interview was taped at 3:23 p.m. in the Library at the White House, and the transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on October 18. In his remarks, the President referred to Nurjaman Riduan Isamuddin (known as Hambali), Al Qaida's chief operational planner in Southeast Asia. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this interview.

Interview With Malcolm Brown of Channel News Asia

October 14, 2003

Singapore's Role in the War on Terror

Mr. Brown. Talking about your trip specifically to Singapore, how happy are you with the measures that Singapore has taken, specifically regarding terrorism? And what are your concerns about the residual threat in the region?

The President. First, I'm very happy with the Government of Singapore's response to terrorism. They are strong, and they are resolute. They understand the task at hand, and they understand the dangers. Prime Minister