

Listen, thank you all very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1 p.m. on the South Lawn at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to H.R. 3773.

Statement on the Third Anniversary of the Death of Former Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri of Lebanon

February 14, 2008

Today marks the third anniversary of the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri. The terrorist attack that killed Prime Minister Hariri, Minister Basil Fuleihan, and many other innocent victims was the spark that launched a transformation in Lebanon, as the Lebanese people demanded an end to the Syrian occupation and the restoration of their sovereignty.

Since the assassination of Prime Minister Hariri, many other Lebanese patriots have been murdered by those who seek to use violence and intimidation to derail progress toward a free, independent, and prosperous Lebanon. It is vital that the perpetrators of these attacks be brought to justice, and I, therefore, call upon the international community to redouble its support for the Special Tribunal for Lebanon. The United States support for the Government and people of Lebanon remains firm and unwavering.

Syria, Iran, and their allies must end their efforts to undermine Lebanon's legitimate Government and to interfere in its political process. The Lebanese deserve a President elected in accordance with their Constitution, without preconditions and in an environment free from fear and intimidation.

The foundation of freedom in Lebanon, which Mr. Hariri helped lay, remains strong. We will continue to support the people of Lebanon as they work to rid the country of terrorism and violence and exercise their democratic freedoms in peace.

Interview With Matt Frei of BBC World News America

February 14, 2008

President's Upcoming Visit to Africa

Mr. Frei. Mr. President, thanks for joining us. You're famous for saying that you don't believe in opinion polls.

The President. Yes.

Mr. Frei. Do you have any idea how you rate in the countries that you're going to be visiting in Africa?

The President. No, sir, I don't.

Mr. Frei. Well, I've got news for you, and it's good news. You rate pretty well, sort of in the average 80s. Is that one of the reasons why you're going there? This is one part of the world where you're still very popular.

The President. I go where needed. And, no, I'm going there because I've got a firm, heartfelt commitment to the continent of Africa—and had ever since I became President. It's in our interests, national interests that we help people who are suffering from disease and hunger and hopelessness. The only way a radical can recruit is to find somebody that's hopeless. I mean, their vision is, like, really dark and dim.

Plus, I believe to whom much is given, much is required. And America has been given a lot, and it's required of us to help those who suffer. So mine is a mercy—a mission of mercy and a mission of the cold realism of the world in which we live—based upon the realism in the world in which we live.

President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief

Mr. Frei. Your administration has given \$15 billion to treat AIDS in Africa, which is an unprecedented amount of money, and you want to double that amount yet again. This is a huge commitment, and yet the administration and you, personally, don't seem to be getting a lot of credit for it.

The President. Yes. You know, this is kind of tied to your first question about polls. Polls are nothing more than just like a poof of air. What matters is results. And ultimately, people will be able to make an objective judgment of a President and his administration and, in this case, a country's commitment.

And so all I care, really, about is the results of the programs.

I hope by now people have learned that I'm not one of these guys that really gives a darn about elite opinion. What I really care about is, are we saving lives? And in this case, we are. As I mentioned in my speech—that you kindly listened to—when I first went to sub-Saharan Africa, 50,000 people were receiving antiretrovirals; today, 1.3 million. And that's a lot in a very quick period of time. But there's still so much more suffering, and that's why I've called for a doubling of aid.

The good news is, it's not just America. As I mentioned in my speech, the G-8 nations also are supporting this very important initiative. And, you know, it's a—it's just—in other words, this isn't a paternalistic effort; this is an effort of mercy.

Mr. Frei. But it has made a huge difference, hasn't it? So why not take some credit for it?

The President. Because it's just not my nature. I really—you just got to understand about me, I'm more interested in seeing results and sharing the credit with the American people. I mean, this is not a George Bush effort. I just happen to be the leader of a nation that's willing to fund this kind of money. And so I praised Congress in my speech; I praised the American people in my speech. After all, they're the ones who are funding the effort.

Darfur

Mr. Frei. You were very tough in your speech about Darfur. And yet again, you called what's happening there genocide.

The President. Yes.

Mr. Frei. Is enough being done by your administration to stop that?

The President. I think we are, yes. You know, I had to make a seminal decision, and that is whether or not I would commit troops into—U.S. troops into Darfur. And I was pretty well backed off of it by a lot of folks here in America that care deeply about the issue. And so once you make that decision, then you have to rely upon an international organization like the United Nations to provide the oomph, the necessary manpower.

And in my speech today, I did call it genocide again; I think we're the only nation that

has done so. Secondly, I did remind people that we're sanctioning leaders, that we have targeted Sudanese companies and individuals, including a rebel leader who have yet to be constructive in the peace process. We're beginning to get a sense that these sanctions are affecting behavior. We're trying to ask others, by the way, to do the same thing, some of whom are reluctant, some who aren't. And then finally, I pledged that we'll help move troops in. And as I also said—you might remind your listeners—that I'm frustrated by the pace.

U.S. Role in Darfur

Mr. Frei. I'll get onto that in a minute, but, I mean, "genocide" is such a loaded—it's such an important word. And you have committed troops, American troops, around the world in other cases, Iraq, most famously, Afghanistan. Why not in this case?

The President. Well, that's a good question. I mean, we're committing equipment, training, help, movement. I think a lot of the folks were concerned about America into another Muslim country. Some of the relief groups here just didn't think the strategy would be as effective as it was. I mean, I actually, believe it or not, listen to people's opinions and chose to make this decision. It's a decision that I'm now living with, and it's a decision that requires us to continue to rally the conscience of the world and get people to focus on the issue.

You know, you're right. I mean, we sent marines into Liberia, for example, to help stabilize the country there. And Liberia's on my itinerary, where I'll meet with the first woman elected President in Africa's history. But I just made the decision I made.

Steven Spielberg/2008 Beijing Olympics/China's Role in Darfur

Mr. Frei. Yesterday Steven Spielberg, the Hollywood director, pulled out of the Beijing Olympics over Darfur. He said the Chinese aren't doing enough to stop the killing in Darfur.

The President. Yes.

Mr. Frei. Do you applaud his move?

The President. That's up to him. I'm going to the Olympics. I view the Olympics as a sporting event. On the other hand, I

have a little different platform than Steven Spielberg, so I get to talk to President Hu Jintao. And I do remind him that he can do more to relieve the suffering in Darfur.

There's a lot of issues that I suspect people are going to opine about during the Olympics. I mean, you got the Dalai Lama crowd; you've got global warming folks; you've got Darfur. And I just—I am not going to go and use the Olympics as an opportunity to express my opinions to the Chinese people in a public way because I do it all the time with the President. I mean, so people are going to be able to choose—pick and choose how they view the Olympics.

U.S. Foreign Policy/War on Terror

Mr. Frei. The Chinese Government has been saying, in part in response to this, that America is trapped in cold war thinking.

The President. Well, I think that's just a brush-back pitch, as we say in baseball. It's a—America is trapped in this notion that we care about human life; we respect human dignity—and that's not a trap; that's a belief—and that many of us in this country recognize that the human condition matters to our own national security.

See, I happen to believe we're in an ideological struggle. And those who murder the innocent to achieve political objectives are evil people, but they have an ideology. And the only way you can recruit for that ideology is to find hopeless folks.

I mean, who wants to join an ideology that say, women don't have rights; you can't express yourself freely; religious beliefs are—the only religious belief you can hold is the one we tell you; and, oh, by the way, it's great; you can be a suicider. Hopeless people are the ones who get attracted by that point of view. And therefore, it's in the world's interest, from a national security perspective, to deal with hopelessness.

And it happens to be in our moral interest. I repeat to you: I believe to whom much is given, much is required. It happens to be a religious notion, but it should be a universal notion as well. And I believe America's soul is enriched, our spirit is enhanced when we help people who suffer.

Rwanda/Darfur

Mr. Frei. I mentioned the genocide thing also because your predecessor, President Clinton, said that the one thing—one of the key things that keeps him up at night is that he didn't do enough over Rwanda to stop the killing there. Is it possible that Darfur might become your Rwanda?

The President. I don't think so. I hope—I certainly hope not. I mean, Rwanda was, I think, 900,000 people in a very quick period of time of just wholesale slaughter. And I appreciate President Clinton's compassion and concern. And I'm comfortable with making a decision that I think is the best decision and comfortable with the notion that once that decision is made, we're keeping the world's focus as best as we can on that, amongst other issues.

Zimbabwe/South Africa

Mr. Frei. You also had some very strong language today about Zimbabwe—

The President. Yes, I did.

Mr. Frei. —which is an issue that certain—Britain and the United States care deeply about. Again, this has been going on for years. What can be done to stop the crisis in Zimbabwe?

The President. Yes, I—first is call the—is to speak to the conscience of the world and remind people the facts. I mean, Zimbabwe was the breadbasket of southern Africa, and today, it's in line for food aid. Zimbabwe was a—is now a place where people are repressed because of their beliefs. And you're right; there is not a lot of outcry. And it's a frustrating—look, not everything is perfect in this world, and it just requires constant focus.

And one way to do it is for the American President to speak out or the British Prime Minister to speak out. And, as you know, I mentioned South Africa. I have great respect for the people of South Africa. I just happen to believe their Government can do more to enhance a free society in their region. Yes, it's just—there's a lot of frustrations in this world, and there's a lot of hope in this world as well.

President's Legacy

Mr. Frei. You're nearing the end of your second term and, I guess, one can call it legacy time. Whatever you do and say about Africa, there's only one country, really, that the wider world will associate with you, and that equation is, Bush equals Iraq.

The President. Yes.

Mr. Frei. Are you happy about that?

The President. Well, I mean, that's what the current elite would like everybody to think about, and that's fine. I think history will have a—when history marches on, there will be a little more objective look about the totality of this administration.

Of course, our change in the way we did aid in Africa is substantial and different, and lives will have been saved. Dealing with liberating 25 million in Afghanistan is part of what I hope people think of when they look at my Presidency. Being the first President to propose a two-state solution on Israel and Palestine—I mean, there's a lot of other issues. And I'm happy with Iraq. The right—the decision to move Saddam Hussein was right, and this democracy is now taking root. And I'm confident that if America does not become isolationist and allow the terrorists to take back over, Iraq will succeed.

U.S. Troop Levels in Iraq

Mr. Frei. Are you—do you regret, rather, I should say, that you didn't listen to your—some of your commanders earlier to send more troops to Iraq to achieve the kind of results that we're seeing now to some extent?

The President. You know, my commanders didn't tell me that early. My commanders said, we got the right level of troops. You know, wars—it's easy to second—the tactical decisions of war, and I fully understand and expect that to happen. All I can do is base decisions on the considered judgment of the experts. And I did. And I take full responsibility for every military decision that's been made in Iraq.

But I'm pleased with what's happening now. And the world is beginning to recognize that the decision to send more troops—was a pretty tough decision at the time—is providing enough security for the politics to take place. And this morning—you're the first reporter I've been able to describe these con-

versations to, but I did speak to the Prime Minister, the Speaker, and two Deputy Speakers to congratulate them on a series of substantial legislative achievements that are beginning to say to the world and, more importantly, the Iraqi people, reconciliation is happening, and the legislative body is beginning to function, which is good news.

U.S. Surveillance Reform Legislation and Interrogation Techniques

Mr. Frei. The Senate yesterday passed a bill outlawing waterboarding. You, I believe, have said that you will veto that bill. Does that not send the wrong signal to the rest of the world?

The President. No, look, that's not the reason I'm vetoing the bill. The reason I'm vetoing the bill—first of all, we have said that whatever we do is for legal—will be legal. Secondly, they are imposing a set of standards on our intelligence communities, in terms of interrogating prisoners, that our people will think will be ineffective.

And to the critics, I ask them this: When we, within the law, interrogate and get information that protects ourselves and possibly others and other nations—to prevent attacks—which attack would they had hoped that we wouldn't have prevented? And so the United States will act within the law, and we'll make sure our professionals have the tools necessary to do their job within the law.

Now, I recognize some say that these terrorists really aren't that big a threat to the United States anymore. I fully disagree. And I think the President must give these professionals, within the law, the necessary tools to protect us. So we're having a debate not only on how you interrogate people; we're having a debate in America on whether or not we ought to be listening to terrorists making phone calls in the United States. And the answer is, darn right we ought to be.

War on Terror/Guantanamo Bay Detainees

Mr. Frei. But given Guantanamo Bay, given also Abu Ghraib, given renditions, does this not send the wrong signal to the world?

The President. It should send the signal that America is going to respect law but is going to take actions necessary to protect

ourselves and find information that may protect others. Unless, of course, people say, “Well, there’s no threat. They’re just making up the threat. These people aren’t problematic.” But I don’t see how you can say that in Great Britain, after people came and blew up bombs in subways. I suspect the families of those victims understand the nature of killers.

And so what people got to understand is, we’ll make decisions based upon law. We’re a nation of law. Take Guantanamo—look, I’d like it to be empty. On the other hand, there’s some people there that need to be tried. And there will be a trial, and they’ll have their day in court, unlike what they did to other people.

No, there’s great concern about—and I can understand this—that these people be given rights, but they’re not willing to grant the same rights to others. They’ll murder, but you got to understand, they’re getting rights. And I’m comfortable with the decisions we’ve made, and I’m comfortable with recognizing this is still a dangerous world.

U.S. Foreign Policy

Mr. Frei. Can you honestly say, Mr. President, that today, America still occupies the moral high ground?

The President. Absolutely. Absolutely. We believe in human rights and human dignity. We believe in the human condition. We believe in freedom. And we’re willing to take the lead; we’re willing to ask nations to do hard things; we’re willing to accept responsibilities. And, yes, no question in my mind, this is a nation that’s a force for good. And history will judge the decisions made during this period of time as necessary decisions. And I firmly believe that we are laying the foundation for peace.

People have written off the Middle East—it’s impossible to have—change the conditions there; let’s just ignore it, or let’s promote stability, which was part of the foreign policy of the past. I chose a different course. Stability didn’t work. Stability created the conditions that were ripe for these terrorists to emerge and recruit. I happen to believe free societies provide hope. And I would hope that people in Europe, for example, understand that freedom has led to peace—and

ought to be supporting the freedom movements and not shy away from the responsibility of the comfortable to help those who long for freedom.

And it’s hard work. It’s really hard work, and it doesn’t happen instantly. You know, we live in a world—like, in all due respect to 24-hour news, we live in a world where everything is, like, instant. But the work we’re doing is—it takes patience, but most importantly, it takes faith in the universality of freedom that exists in every heart.

And so, yes, I’m not only happy to defend decisions; I’m confident that they will lead to a better tomorrow.

Mr. Frei. Mr. President, I gather we’ve run out of time. Thanks for doing this.

The President. Thank you, sir. You bet.

Mr. Frei. Thank you.

NOTE: The interview was taped at 11:12 a.m. in the Library at the White House for later broadcast. In his remarks, the President referred to President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of Liberia; Prime Minister Gordon Brown of the United Kingdom; Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki of Iraq; and Speaker Mahmud al-Mashhadani, First Deputy Speaker Khalid al-Atiya, and Second Deputy Speaker Arif Tayfur of the Iraqi House of Representatives. He also referred to H.R. 2082. The transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on February 15.

Interview With Foreign Radio Journalists *February 14, 2008*

The President. Thank you all. Just a couple of comments. I’m very much looking forward to the trip. This will be my second trip to the continent of Africa, my wife’s fifth trip. The reason why I’m looking forward to it is I want the people on the continent of Africa to know that the American people care deeply about the human condition; that when we see suffering, it troubles our conscience, and we want to help. I believe to whom much is given, much is required. A lot has been given to America, and therefore, a lot is required of us to deal with human misery in the form of hunger and disease and hopelessness.

And so this is going to be a trip that I bring the good will of American people, with