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matters, such as announcing they want to destroy countries with a nuclear weapon. I mean, it is irresponsible remarks like that which cause great credibility loss with the Iranian Government and the actions of which will—are affecting the country.

Progress in Iraq/Iran

Ms. Derakhshesh. Mr. President, if I may, I want to ask you about Iraq also. Today is the fifth anniversary of the start of the Iraq war, and you had a speech on the war on terror. Are you satisfied with the political situation in Iraq in view of the improving security situation? And also, has Iran played a role in this?

The President. I am pleased, but not satisfied. I am pleased because there's a modern Constitution in Iraq. I am pleased because people have voted in Iraq. I am pleased because there's, you know—they're heading toward Provincial elections in Iraq. I'm pleased to see democracy moving. I'm not satisfied because there's more work to be done.

One of the problems we do have in Iraq is the—there's been some negative Iranian influence, such as the exportation from Iran of certain weapons that have been used by extremists to murder and to kill people. And it's been particularly unhelpful.

Now, look, I understand Iraq and Iran are going to have relations. After all, they've got a long border. But from my perspective, Iran has not been helpful in terms of helping this young democracy survive. I would think it would be in Iran's interests to have a peaceful neighbor. They had been at war at one time with Iraq. I would believe that a peaceful Iraq would be in the long-term interests of the Iranian people. And yet it's hard to have a peaceful Iraq if there are elements inside the country that are trying to use violence and murder to continue to stir up sectarian doubts and raise concerns which will cause more violence.

Iran-U.S. Relations/Iraq

Ms. Derakhshesh. There have been recent contacts between the United States and Iran over Iraq. Some dissidents inside Iran think that these might expand to other areas——

The President. Yes.

Ms. Derakhshesh. ——and they feel that this will undercut their position and that would strengthen the regime's hand. What are your thoughts on that, sir?

The President. My thought is, is that the reformers inside Iran are brave people. They've got no better friend than George W. Bush, and I ask for God's blessings on them, on their very important work. And secondly, that I would do nothing to undermine their efforts. And thirdly, that the talks between Iran—between the U.S. and Iran about Iraq are solely about Iraq, and that the message to the Iranians is: Stop importing your weapons, your sophisticated IEDs, and—or there will be consequences inside of Iraq. And when we find people transporting weapons that are aimed to harm innocent people or to arm militias that are aiming to harm innocent people, then they will be brought to justice—that there's a better way to deal inside of Iraq than the Iranians are now dealing. And so this message is nothing more than limited to Iraq.

Ms. Derakhshesh. Mr. President, thank you very much. And thanks for allowing me to do the interview, sir.

The President. Thank you; yes, ma'am.

NOTE: The interview was taped at 1:11 p.m. in the Map Room at the White House and was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on March 20.

Interview With Parichehr Farzam of Radio Farda

March 19, 2008

Nowruz/Iran

Ms. Farzam. Mr. President, thank you so much for your time in this interview with Radio Farda. On the beginning of Nowruz, the Persian New Year, what message do you wish to share with the people of Iran, especially with the Iranian women, as well as the young generation?

The President. First, that the United States of America wishes everybody a happy New Year. Secondly, that the United States—people of the United States respects the great Iranian history and culture. We have great respect for the people. And we've got problems with the Government. We have

problems with the Government because the Government has been threatening, has made decisions that—and statements that really have isolated the people of Iran.

My message to the young in Iran is that someday your society will be free, and it will be a blessed time for you. My message to the women of Iran is that the women of America share your deep desire for children to be—to grow up in a hopeful society and to live in peace.

Iran/Spread of Freedom

Ms. Farzam. Speaking of women of Iran, Mr. President, the majority of population in Iran are women. And even in the Iranian culture they are considered the foundation on which men deeply rely. Is there any plan or could there be one to promote and engage the Iranian women in the U.S. to a unified and centralized movement for a free and democratic Iran?

The President. Well, I think the people of Iran are going to have to come to the conclusion that a free country is in their interest. We, of course, support freedom movements all around the world. We're supporting a freedom movement on the Iranian border in Iraq. We are promoting and helping the Iraqis develop a free society. By the way, a free Iraq will help the Iranians see the blessings of a free society.

There's no doubt in my mind that the women will be leading freedom movements in Iran and elsewhere. And the role of the United States is to provide, you know, moral support without—and other support without undermining their cause.

Iraq/Iran

Ms. Farzam. Mr. President, in this fifth anniversary of the Iraq war, what impact do you think a peaceful solution on the Iranian nuclear crisis and a normalization of our relations with Iran would have on the security and political situation in Iraq and more generally in the whole Middle East?

The President. I think that success in Iraq will first of all depend upon the Iraqis' desire to reconcile their differences and to live in peace, and that's happening. It's hard work to overcome the—a dictatorship like Saddam Hussein's, but nevertheless, most Iraqis want to live in peace with their neighbor.

Secondly, a peaceful Iraq will depend upon making it clear to the Iranians to stop exporting weapons from Iran into Iraq—that arm militias and arm criminal gangs—that cause there to be harm for the innocent people.

Thirdly, it's very important for the neighborhood to understand that the United States is committed to peace and that we're not—that we won't be run out because of violence; that we believe that we're there for the right reason, which is to promote freedom and peace.

The free—you know, there's a chance that the U.S. and Iran can reconcile their differences, but the Government is going to have to make some—make different choices. And one is to verifiably suspend the enrichment of uranium, at which time there is a way forward. And the Iranian people have got to understand that the United States is going to be firm in our desire to prevent the nation from developing a nuclear weapon, but reasonable in our desire to see to it that you have civilian nuclear power without—you know, without enabling the Government to enrich.

And the problem is, is that they have not told the truth in the past. And therefore, it's very difficult for the United States and the rest of the world—or much of the rest of the world—to trust the Iranian Government when it comes to telling the truth. And so I support the Russian proposal to provide Iran with enriched uranium to go into a civilian nuclear powerplant.

There's a way forward. In other words, I don't know what the Iranian people believe about the United States, but they must believe that we have proposed a way forward that will yield to peace. And it's their Government that is resisting these changes.

Iran/Uranium Enrichment

Ms. Farzam. Mr. President, as you and your allies launched a global initiative to combat nuclear terrorism, what do you think is your most important challenge to expose and stop the secretive ambition of Iran's

Government to enrich uranium, while assuring its citizens that their happiness and prosperity and peace is a benefit within their reach?

The President. Sure, absolutely. Well, one thing is, is to reiterate my belief that the Iranians should have a civilian nuclear power program. It's in their right to have it. The problem is the Government cannot be trusted to enrich uranium because, one, they've hidden programs in the past, and they may be hiding one now, who knows; and secondly, they've declared they want to have a nuclear weapon to destroy people—some in the Middle East. And that's unacceptable to the United States, and it's unacceptable to the world.

But what is acceptable to me is to work with a nation like Russia to provide the fuel so that the plan can go forward, and which therefore makes it—you know, it shows that the Iranian Government doesn't need to learn to enrich.

My only point to the Iranian people is we want you to be able to realize your sovereign rights. The Government has been duplicitous to the world. Very few people trust your Government. And if the Government changes its behavior, there's a better way forward for the Iranian people.

Freedom in Iran

Ms. Farzam. Thank you. Mr. President, world democracy is everyone's rightful way of life. In Iran, on the other hand, there is no respect for the basic rights of Iranian citizen; there is no rule of law; and there is no, certainly, the freedom of speech. Do you believe that the people of Iran stand a chance against this regime, to bring about the positive change in anytime soon with your support?

The President. Well, I would like very much for the Iranian people to realize a society based upon rule of law and free speech and free worship of religion. There's nothing I'd like to see more than a society in which young girls can grow up to realize their dreams with a good education system.

You know, this is a—this regime, however, is one that sometimes when people express themselves in an open way, there can be serious punishment. This is a regime that says they have elections, but they get to decide who's on the ballot, which is not a free and fair election. So this is a regime and a society that's got a long way to go. But the people of Iran can be rest assured the United States, whether I'm President or the next President, will strongly support their desires to live in a free society.

Ms. Farzam. May I have, Mr. President, my last question?

The President. Yes.

Missile Defense System/Russia

Ms. Farzam. Thank you. You said many times that the U.S. missile defense system in Czech and Poland is to defend America and its European allies from attack by rogue states such as Iran. But some—this argument is still between U.S. and Russia. Are you optimistic to solve the problem?

The President. Well, it's interesting you ask that question. We intend to move forward with the—and the Czech Republic and Poland, for the good of NATO. Obviously, it'd be—make life easier if the Russians and the United States cooperated in such a missile defense. Condi Rice and Bob Gates—Secretary Gates, Secretary Rice were in Russia this past couple of days talking about the very subject, as to whether or not we can find grounds to cooperate. The missile systems, defense systems, would not be aimed at Russia; they'd be aimed at nations that would, you know, try to hold the free world hostage with a nuclear weapon.

And so it's—I'm optimistic. I'm cautiously optimistic. I don't know whether we can find common ground. But we are trying to find common ground, and that's what's—that's the first step, is to make the attempt.

Ms. Farzam. Thank you so much, Mr. President, for your time.

The President. Yes, ma'am, thank you.

NOTE: The interview was taped at 1:24 p.m. in the Map Room at the White House and was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on March 20. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this interview.

Interview With Master Sergeant Erin Roberts of the Pentagon Channel

March 19, 2008

M. Sgt. Roberts. Sir, I want to thank you for this opportunity that you've given us to talk to you.

The President. My honor.

Progress in Iraq

M. Sgt. Roberts. Today is the fifth-year anniversary of U.S. military presence in Iraq. And my first question for you would be, as Commander in Chief, what are the areas you are most focused on, and most proud of, as U.S. forces and the Iraqi forces continue to work towards stability and security in Iraq?

The President. I'm most proud of the performance of our troops. We have asked a lot of our military and the military families. We've got men and women who have been to both theaters in the war on terror, multiple times. And that's a strain, and it's hard. And I understand it is. On the other hand, our troops know it's necessary.

I am focused on making sure that we do not allow the sacrifice that has gone over the last 5 years to go in vain; that we end up making the hard decisions now, and helping the Iraqis now to develop a peaceful and free society in the heart of the Middle East, which will enable the next generation's children to grow up in a peaceful world—or the next generation to grow up in a peaceful world.

And so I'm pleased with the progress. It's been hard; it's been really hard. It's been hard on our country. It's been hard on the military, but I'm proud of the fact that the military has been so steadfast and courageous.

Wounded Military Personnel/Military Families

M. Sgt. Roberts. Speaking of the military and their families, you meet with many family members, many spouses, on a regular basis, of those that are lost and wounded in the conflicts—difficult situation, I'm sure. Could you take a moment and just tell us what it's like meeting with them and what you say to them and what they say to you?

The President. Sure. First of all, obviously, each circumstance is a little different—and you're right, I've met with a lot. Let me first start with the wounded. Generally what happens is, is that, in a place like Walter Reed or Bethesda, you know, a soldier will look at their Commander in Chief and say, "I can't wait to get back in the battle," which obviously—you know, first of all, it's just so inspiring to me, but it also—it's got to change the perspective of their family a little bit.

Secondly, with the wounded, I am obviously always conscious to make sure that these kids, these soldiers—people in uniform—get the best care. And I truly believe they are. And I love our doctors and nurses. It's unbelievable the care they get.

In terms of meeting with the families of the deceased—as you can imagine, it's very emotional. First of all, meeting the President alone can be an emotional experience, and when you put on top of that the Commander in Chief who made the decision of—that got their child in a position where he or she got killed, so, you know, the meetings can be very tearful. I'm a crier, at times. I'm not afraid to hug a mom or hug a wife or hug a husband and cry.

I try to get them to talk about their loved one. I want to learn about each individual person who sacrificed—what they were like, what their interests were—and a lot of times the families love sharing their stories with the Commander in Chief. And to a person, nearly, I have been told that, "Whatever you do, Mr. President, complete this job." Don't—and basically what they're saying is, "Don't let politics, don't let the Gallup poll, don't let a focus group cause you to make a decision that is not in the best interests of our country and our military." And I assure them that they don't have to worry about that about George W. Bush.

I tell my friends who ask me this question a lot, what—they say, "What's it like? You're the guy who made the decision to put their loved one in harm's way. They didn't come home. What's it like to meet with them?" And I say that oftentimes the comforter in chief is the person who gets comforted, because of the strength and courage and great love of country of these folks.