

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:15 p.m. in Ziguanhe Hall at the Zhongnanhai. In his remarks, he referred to Minister of Foreign Affairs Yang Jiechi of China. Premier Wen spoke in Chinese, and his remarks were translated by an interpreter.

Interview With Bob Costas of NBC Sports in Beijing

August 11, 2008

2008 Beijing Olympics

Mr. Costas. All right, Al, we thank you. In a few minutes we'll have more of the women's team qualifying from Sunday afternoon here in Beijing. But now, live, we're joined by President George W. Bush, who has been at these games since the opening ceremony. You saw the opening ceremony. You've seen Michael Phelps and company at the pool. You went to beach volleyball, the USA's win over China in basketball last night. What are your impressions so far?

The President. First of all, I think the Chinese are being great hosts. The venues are fantastic. And our team's fired up, and so am I. I'm excited to be here. It's such a thrill to watch our men and women compete.

U.S. Olympic Men's Basketball Team

Mr. Costas. You met with the ballplayers before the basketball game last night.

The President. I did. [Laughter]

Mr. Costas. What was their response to you?

The President. Their response was—well, first of all, obviously these are great stars. And their response was, "Thanks for coming; we are really, really honored to represent America." And I was impressed by them. And of course, they go out and put on a great performance.

China-U.S. Relations

Mr. Costas. And winning 101 to 70. All right, our time here is limited. We'll get to as much as we can.

The President. Okay.

Mr. Costas. The opening ceremonies were glorious. There's much to admire about China's people, China's culture, and its

present accomplishments. But this remains an authoritarian state—

The President. That's true.

Mr. Costas. —with an abysmal human rights record. In the long run, is China's rise irreconcilable with America's interests?

The President. No. In the long run, America better remain engaged with China and understand that we can have a cooperative and constructive, yet candid, relationship. It's really important for future Presidents to understand the relationship between China and the region, and it's important to make sure that America is engaged with China, even though we may have some disagreements.

China-U.S. Relations/U.S. Foreign Policy

Mr. Costas. You met with President Hu Jintao, not just at the opening ceremony—

The President. Right.

Mr. Costas. —but privately since then. Did you press him on the full array of American concerns: human rights; press freedom; Tibet; China's support of rogue regimes like Sudan and Myanmar?

The President. Yes—and North Korea and Iran.

Mr. Costas. It was all on the table?

The President. Oh, absolutely, every time—every time. And you got to understand something, Bob, I don't need the Olympics to advance America's agenda. I've met with Hu Jintao a lot since I have been the President. And, yes, I had a full range—hey, listen, we agree with them on a lot of things, and we disagree with them on things. And that's the way the relationship is going to be. It needs to be, as I mentioned, constructive and cooperative.

U.S. Foreign Policy

Mr. Costas. This past week you restated America's fundamental differences with China.

The President. Yes.

Mr. Costas. But given China's growing strength and America's own problems, realistically how much leverage and influence does the U.S. have here?

The President. First of all, I don't see America having problems. I see America as a nation that is a world leader, that has got

great values. And leverage is—I don't think you should look at the relationship as one of leverage. I think you ought to look at the relationship of one of constructive engagement where you can find common areas, like North Korea and Iran, but also be in a position where they respect you enough to listen to your views on religious freedom and political liberty.

2008 Beijing Olympics/China

Mr. Costas. If these Olympics are as successful as they are shaping up to be, most people believe this only further legitimizes the ruling party in the minds on most Chinese—

The President. Yes.

Mr. Costas. —citizens. And even absent true liberty as we understand it, the lives of hundreds of millions of Chinese people are much better than they once were. Therefore, what's the party's incentive to reform?

The President. Well, first of all, if you're a religious person, you understand that once religion takes hold in a society, it can't be stopped. And secondly, I think it—the Olympics are going to serve as a chance for people to come and see China the way it is and let the Chinese see the world and interface and have the opportunity to converse with people from around the world. And this is a very positive development, in my view, for peace.

And who knows what—how China is going to progress? They've been through some very difficult political times—the Cultural Revolution, where the leadership actually created violent anarchy as the society turned on itself. All I can tell you is, is that it's important for the United States to be active in this part of the world with all countries and to stay engaged with China.

Situation in Georgia

Mr. Costas. Moving away from China for just a second, during the opening ceremony, we saw you conferring with Vladimir Putin.

The President. Yes.

Mr. Costas. We now know you were talking about the conflict that had erupted that day—

The President. That's true.

Mr. Costas. —between Russia and Georgia. Now, Georgia is a former Soviet republic that is sympathetic to the West—

The President. Yes.

Mr. Costas. —and that is attempting to embody many Western values. But just as you need China, you need Russia strategically around the globe.

The President. Yes.

Mr. Costas. You got to walk a fine line. What did you say to Putin?

The President. I said this violence is unacceptable. I not only said it to Vladimir Putin, I said it to the President of the country, Dmitry Medvedev. And my administration has been engaged with both sides in this, trying to get a cease-fire, and saying that the status quo ante of—for all troops should be August 6th. And, look, I expressed my grave concern about the disproportionate response of Russia and that we strongly condemn bombing outside of South Ossetia.

It was just interesting to me that here we are trying to promote peace and harmony, and we're witnessing a conflict take place.

Mr. Costas. Right, no Olympic truce in this case.

The President. There wasn't. And I was very firm with Vladimir Putin—and he and I have got a good relationship—just like I was firm with the Russian President. And hopefully, this will get resolved peacefully. There needs to be a international mediation there for the South Ossetia issue.

Darfur

Mr. Costas. A couple more quick things.

The President. Sure.

Mr. Costas. China is a nation that warmly received Umar al-Bashir of Sudan, who has since been indicted by the International Court on charges of genocide.

The President. Yes.

Mr. Costas. Then this past week, they revoke the visa of Joey Cheek, an exemplary Olympian who had planned to come here not to directly protest China's Government, but to call attention to the humanitarian—

The President. Yes.

Mr. Costas. —crisis in Darfur.

The President. Yes.

Mr. Costas. What's your reaction?

The President. My reaction is, I'm sorry Joey Cheek didn't come; he's a good man. Joey Cheek has just got to know that I took the Sudanese message for him. My attitude is, is if you got relations with Mr. Bashir, think about helping us solve the humanitarian crisis in Darfur. That was my message to the Chinese Government.

China-U.S. Relations/Freedom Agenda

Mr. Costas. As you attempt to press these points with them, do you find Hu Jintao not just warm toward you personally, but is he receptive? Do you sense any movement?

The President. It's hard to tell. I mean, it's—all I can tell you is, is that it is best to be in the position where a leader will listen to you. Hey, I went to church here, and I'm sure the cynics say, "Well, you know, it was just a state-sponsored church." On the other hand—and that's true. On the other hand, it gave me a chance to say to the Chinese people, religion won't hurt you; you ought to welcome religious people. And it gave me a chance to say to the Government, why don't you register the underground churches and give them a chance to flourish? And he listened politely. And I can't read his mind, but I do know that every time I met with him, I pressed the point.

President's Visit to China

Mr. Costas. Your father has longstanding connections to China. He was an envoy here even before we established an official ambassador's position, during the 1970s, and he is here with you on this trip. So there's a connection, a family connection.

The President. Absolutely. Yes, there's a great connection. You know, I can remember riding my bike around Beijing in 1975, and it is—

Mr. Costas. Only bikes then, just about.

The President. —unbelievable how far this has changed. I mean, it is—and he feels the same way. And we were honored yesterday when the President, Hu Jintao, invited my dad and me and Laura and my sister and my daughter, my brother, for dinner. It was a—lunch. It was just a great gesture of kindness.

Bob, it's very important for the American people to know that coming here gave me

a chance, obviously, to root for our team, and you've captured that, but it's also—coming here is a sign of respect for the Chinese people. And this is a big, important nation. We'll have our differences; we'll have our agreements. But in order to find common ground and to move the world toward peace, it is important for this country to show respect for the people of the country.

Major League Baseball

Mr. Costas. Briefly, one more sports question.

The President. Sure.

Mr. Costas. You have been outspoken—your past connections to baseball—you used a State of the Union speech to do it, to talk about performance-enhancing drugs in sports. Marion Jones recently petitioned you for clemency.

The President. Yes.

Mr. Costas. She's serving time because of involvement in the BALCO case—one-time Olympic hero; we know many Olympians, and in your favorite sport and mine, baseball, big names—Barry Bonds, Roger Clemens. What's your feeling about this? And how much do you, as an American, trust the integrity of the sports you watch?

The President. Yes, well, you know, let's just talk about baseball. Obviously, one of the great things about baseball is we can compare the records of the players of the fifties to the sixties and the seventies and, obviously, the 1990s. And it is very important for there to be a—for the sport to be clean so that the great continuity and the history of baseball is real. And secondly, we don't want adults sending mixed messages to children that it's okay to shoot up drugs in order to become a star, because it's not okay.

2008 Beijing Olympics

Mr. Costas. You going to go to a few more events before you leave?

The President. I'm going to swimming here—if you'd ever let me off this set. [Laughter]

Mr. Costas. All right. You are dismissed.

The President. Thank you, sir.

Mr. Costas. Thank you, Mr. President.

NOTE: The interview began at 8:55 a.m. at the International Broadcasting Center. In his remarks,

the President referred to President Hu Jintao of China; President Dmitry A. Medvedev and Prime Minister Vladimir Putin of Russia; former U.S. Olympic athlete Joey Cheek; and President Umar Hassan Ahmad al-Bashir of Sudan. He also referred to his sister, Dorothy Bush Koch; his daughter Barbara P. Bush; and his brother Marvin P. Bush. Bob Costas referred to Alan "Al" Michaels, reporter, NBC Sports; former U.S. Olympic athlete Marion Jones-Thompson; and former Major League Baseball players Barry Bonds and Roger Clemens.

Remarks on the Situation in Georgia *August 11, 2008*

I just met with my national security team to discuss the situation in Georgia.

I am deeply concerned by reports that Russian troops have moved beyond the zone of conflict, attacked the Georgian town of Gori, and are threatening Georgia's capital of Tbilisi. There's evidence that Russian forces may soon begin bombing the civilian airport in the capital city.

If these reports are accurate, these Russian actions would represent a dramatic and brutal escalation of the conflict in Georgia. And these actions would be inconsistent with assurances we have received from Russia that its objectives were limited to restoring the status quo in South Ossetia that existed before fighting began on August the 6th.

It now appears that an effort may be underway to depose Russia's [Georgia's] * duly elected Government. Russia has invaded a sovereign neighboring state and threatens a democratic government elected by its people. Such an action is unacceptable in the 21st century.

The Georgian Government has accepted the elements of a peace agreement that the Russian Government previously said it would be willing to accept: an immediate cease-fire; the withdrawal of forces from the zone of conflict; a return to the military status quo as of August 6th; and a commitment to refrain from using force. There are representatives of the European Union and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe currently in Moscow seeking Russia's agreement to this peace plan.

* White House correction.

Russia's Government must respect Georgia's territorial integrity and sovereignty. The Russian Government must reverse the course it appears to be on and accept this peace agreement as a first step toward resolving this conflict.

Russia's actions this week have raised serious questions about its intentions in Georgia and the region. These actions have substantially damaged Russia's standing in the world, and these actions jeopardize Russians' relations—Russia's relations with the United States and Europe. It is time for Russia to be true to its word and to act to end this crisis.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:21 p.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

Remarks to the Coalition for Affordable American Energy *August 12, 2008*

I want to thank members of the Coalition for Affordable American Energy for joining me today. We just had a very interesting and informative discussion. I heard from businesses, large and small. They—these folks are representing a lot of workers, people who are really concerned about the energy situation here in America, a lot of people wondering why their Government is not doing something about the supply of crude oil.

One of the things that came out in this discussion was, there's a lot of folks in our country who understand we could be doing something about the high price of gasoline, and we're not. Obviously, we need to be wise about conservation, but we've got to be wise about increasing the supply of oil here in America. If you're concerned about the price of gasoline, one way to affect that price of gasoline is to increase oil supplies.

And one of these things these workers know that I fully understand as well, I'd rather our consumers be buying gasoline made from oil here in America than gasoline from oil being made overseas. We want our dollars, to the extent possible, to be here at home, staying here at home.