

One of the things that I have worked hard to do is to—and received some criticism here in the States—is, I’ve worked hard to have a personal relationship with Vladimir Putin so that when I discuss things with him, I can find areas of agreement, but I’ve also got a relationship such that I can bring up areas of concern without rupturing relations. And it’s—you know, some have suggested, well, there’s no need to have relations with Russia. Well, I strongly disagree with that. I think it’s important for the U.S. and Russia to have relations.

War on Terror

Mr. Piltz. Sir, how satisfied are you with international burden-sharing in the war on terror?

The President. Good; it’s good. As a matter of fact, the coalitions are much bigger than anybody could have envisioned. You know, one of my concerns, however, is that, just in general, people don’t take the threat seriously. In other words, they say, “Well, there haven’t been many attacks; there’s been a few attacks; but we shouldn’t be that worried about it.” I’m deeply worried about it, and I really strongly believe the free world ought to be worried about radicals and extremists who will kill in the name of an ideology.

See, I view this as an ideological conflict between people who are willing to murder and want to spread their vision, and those of us who believe in liberty and the universality of liberty. And so my main worry is complacency over the long run. I am pleased with the cooperation at this point in time. We’ve got great relations with Germany. Obviously, if we know of a plot that may be taking place in Germany, we will share information on an instant basis, and vice versa. And that ought to be comforting to the German citizens.

Germany-U.S. Relations

Mr. Piltz. That was my next question, the state of the relationship between America and Germany. Are we back to, as your father put it, “partners in leadership”?

The President. I think we are. First of all, I had a decent relationship with Gerhard Schroeder. I never bore any—look, there was

a difference on Iraq, obviously; it was a clear difference on Iraq. But that didn’t cause me to say, well, Germany isn’t worthy as a worthy ally. Quite the contrary, I felt Germany always was a worthy ally and an important ally for the United States and an important player in Europe.

Angela Merkel comes at a different time in our relationship. She’s a woman who I—for whom I’ve got great admiration. I don’t know if you know this or not, but she and I, we speak by secure video on a regular basis. And that’s what strategic partners do, and our discussions are important discussions. She understands the issues very well. She’s the kind of person that can get a fellow to talk freely and candidly, and she speaks the same way to me. And I admire her a lot. I would say our relations are vital, and they’re strong right now. And that’s the way I intend to keep it.

Mr. Piltz. Thank you very much, sir.

The President. Glad to have you. Looking forward to coming to your great country again.

Mr. Piltz. I’ll be there too.

The President. Yes, sir. [*Laughter*]

NOTE: The interview was taped at 3:27 p.m. in the Map Room at the White House for later broadcast. In his remarks, the President referred to Chancellor Angela Merkel and former Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder of Germany; and President Vladimir Putin of Russia. The transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on June 1. A portion of this interview could not be verified because the tape was incomplete.

Interview With Andi Bejtja of Vizion Plus TV, Albania

May 31, 2007

President’s Upcoming Visit to Albania

Mr. Bejtja. Mr. President, first of all, I want to thank you for the opportunity you give to me and to Albanian public for this interview. And I have just a simple question in the beginning. What is the reason of including Albania in this European tour this time?

The President. That’s a fascinating question. First of all, I want to make sure the Albanian people understand that America

knows that you exist and that you're making difficult choices to cement your free society. I'm coming as a lover of liberty to a land where people are realizing the benefits of liberty.

Secondly, I've been impressed by your leadership. I have met your leaders at different times—

Mr. Bejtja. Impressed in what sense?

The President. In the sense that they're committed to common values with the United States, that they believe in certain freedoms, and that people ought to be given a chance to live in a free society. And so my message is that we welcome our friendship, that I'm proud of the hard work that you're doing, and I'm particularly grateful to be the first sitting President ever to come to Albania.

North Atlantic Treaty Organization

Mr. Bejtja. Yes, this is a historical visit. And Albanians hoping to get a—to receive an invitation at summit to join NATO in 2008. How realistic this Albanian expectation is, according to you?

The President. Well, my message to the Albanian Government and the Albanian people is, first of all, thank you for your interest in joining NATO. But like I said to other countries that are at this stage in the process, that there's a certain map that has to be followed, a certain way forward. There are certain obligations that have to be met. And my only advice is, work as hard as you possibly can to achieve the different benchmarks that would cause the NATO members to accept Albania.

Kosovo/United Nations Security Council

Mr. Bejtja. And let's get to the hardest point: Kosovo. I mean, in the beginning of the week, you just had a phone call from Russian President Vladimir Putin, and you agreed with him to rediscuss Kosovo future once again. And people are worried about that. Do you expect any compromise with Russians that may affect our desired plan as it stands now?

The President. Well, let me make it clear what I did say.

Mr. Bejtja. Because everybody is worried about that.

The President. Yes, they ought to be worried about it. It's a difficult issue. But they ought not to be worried about my position. My position is that we support the Ahtisaari plan, and that's the instructions that I have given to Secretary of State Rice, who totally agrees with me. And those will be the instructions we give to the United Nations.

And so I don't know who characterized my phone call with Vladimir Putin, but as I told him on the phone, look, we don't want to—we would hope to avoid a major conflict in the area, but we feel strongly that the Ahtisaari plan is the right way to go; it's the right way to move forward. And that's the U.S. position.

Mr. Bejtja. So in case of a Russian veto next month at Security Council, does U.S. have plan B for Kosovo?

The President. Well, plan A is to try to make plan A work.

Mr. Bejtja. Yes, but is the plan A—

The President. I know, but you're asking me to think hypothetically. It happens, by the way, with the United States press too. They say, "If something doesn't happen"—my job is make it happen in the first place. So we're working to try to convince all members of the U.N. Security Council to support the Ahtisaari plan, and we're out making our case as to why it makes sense and why this will make—yield peace. We would also hope that the EU would continue and NATO would continue to work with Serbia, to give them a way forward as well, that there be an opportunity for them to become participants in some of the European structures and, in this case, in NATO's case, an opportunity, perhaps, to join NATO and have U.S. as a partner.

President's Decisionmaking/U.S. Foreign Policy

Mr. Bejtja. Let me put another question. I mean, to be honest, it's very easy in the region to find pro-American governments, but it's not as easy to find so-called pro-American nations, or better saying, pro-American public or people. Does U.S. have any strategy to reverse this trend, to make U.S. policy more effective in long term?

The President. Well, first of all, it's like—people ask me the question about popularity,

whether it be overseas or at home. You can't make decisions and try to be—and want to be popular. You make decisions because you want to be right. I make decisions for what's best for the United States of America. Sometimes that makes me popular; sometimes it doesn't.

But popularity comes and goes, but certain principles should never leave. And I believe firmly the United States must confront tyranny and disease and hunger. And I believe the United States must secure our homeland from further attack, and I will take the actions necessary to do so. I hope others understand why. I would like for people to understand the decisionmaking I've done. I want people to respect my country and to like the American people, and most people do like the American people. Sometimes they like the American President, and sometimes they don't. But popularity is—I would ask the question, are you still going to make decisions based upon solid principles? And the answer is, absolutely.

President's Upcoming Visit to Albania

Mr. Bejtja. Yes. And let me ask one childish question, because it is your first time in Albania and everyone is wondering, what does come to your mind when you heard the word, Albania?

The President. Beautiful coastline; interesting history; Muslim people who can live at peace, that's what comes to mind. I'm excited to go. I must confess that I also thought about the dark days of communism, when the society was a closed society. I'm looking forward—I met many Albanians who are excited to be living in an open society. And I can't wait to come to your country. I've heard great things about it, and it's going to be an exciting trip for me and Laura.

Mr. Bejtja. Thank you very much, Mr. President, and welcome.

The President. Yes, sir, thanks.

NOTE: The interview was taped at 3:37 p.m. in the Map Room at the White House for later broadcast. The transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on June 1.

Interview With Vassilev Petrov of Bulgarian National Television

May 31, 2007

President's Upcoming Visit to Bulgaria

Mr. Petrov. Mr. President, whom do you want the Bulgarians to meet, a demanding leader of a superpower, an ally, a friend, somebody feared or loved?

The President. I want them to meet a guy—that's a great question. I want them to meet a person who, one, respects the people of Bulgaria and appreciates Bulgarian contributions to the world; a person who understands how difficult the transition from one form of government to democracy is; and a person who represents a nation of decent, compassionate people.

You know, I tell people sometimes—in America they always respect the Presidency, and sometimes they like the President. And I made some tough decisions, you know, and I understand that. But I represent a country that really cares deeply about the human condition, and I bring a spirit of friendship to Bulgaria and its people.

Bulgaria-U.S. Relations

Mr. Petrov. Bulgaria is an ally; it's hosting three joint military bases. What will Bulgaria get in return?

The President. Well, first of all, you've got a good friend. And I don't think friends really kind of measure decisionmaking on a quid pro quo basis. In other words, relationships, they're evolving and they're growing. I presume Bulgaria made the decisions, first and foremost, for the basing because it was in her best interests. In other words, sovereign nations say, well, this is in my interests.

Secondly, look, there are some security issues, obviously. One of the great things about a relationship with the United States is we keep our word, or we should keep our word. And we'll keep our word as long as I'm President; I promise you. And I would hope that the citizens would get a sense of comfort through the relationship with the United States and other nations that are involved with these great defensive alliance.