

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.

U.S. Visa Policy

Mr. Petrov. Mr. President, we are good enough to fight with you; why aren't we good enough to have a visa-free entry into the United States? Are we that dangerous?

The President. That's a great question. Listen, you're not the first person who has ever asked a question in that form. I want your people to know that I understand there is a contradiction; that on the one hand, you're a strong ally, and yet other allies of the United States are treated differently. And this is a tough issue, because it has to go through our Congress.

And I'm working very carefully with governments, as well as with our Congress, to come up with a solution that is satisfactory. I'm sorry it's taken so long, and I know it's created frustrations. And there is an inherent contradiction, and I can't deny that. The only thing I can do is pledge to make the system work better. We're involved in a very serious immigration debate here in America, as well, that's somewhat related to this issue, and hopefully we can get a lot of these issues taken care of this summer.

War on Terror in Iraq

Mr. Petrov. On Iraq, Bulgarian civilians and soldiers died there, so it may be right and just to ask you, do you admit any mistakes in Iraq?

The President. Well, the first thing I want to say is, to the Bulgarian mother or father or wife or husband, my deepest sympathies go to your loved one. I deal with the pain of death here in America. One of my jobs as the person who made the decision to put our troops there, of course, is to try to comfort those who have lost a loved one. And it's, frankly, the most painful aspect of the job, knowing my decision caused a child to be lost to a family.

And so what I tell those parents, and I'd like to share the same thing with the Bulgarian families, is, one, the cause was necessary and noble for peace; two, that I'm committed to helping this Iraqi Government succeed, and I think the people will look back 50 years from now and say, "Oh, I understand now why they were doing what they were doing," because democracies and liberties help yield peace; thirdly, that I won't

let politics get in the way of making important decisions to help achieve the mission. In other words, we won't let their loved one die in vain. You can look back on any war and determine whether or not certain tactics could be changed, but the strategic decision, removing Saddam Hussein, was the right decision.

Russia-U.S. Relations/Missile Defense System

Mr. Petrov. Your competition with Russia elsewhere but also in our region is getting hotter. Where is Bulgaria in all that? Are we on our own in the superpowers' game?

The President. First of all—you know, it's interesting. I guess the press tries to build up a major competition with Russia. I don't view it that way.

Mr. Petrov. Why?

The President. Well, I think, first of all, the cold war is over. I don't view Russia as an enemy. And I've got a good relationship with Vladimir Putin, and I intend to keep it that way. Now, that doesn't mean I agree with him on every issue, and he certainly doesn't agree with me. The latest flare up, of course, is whether or not we should be working with our allies to develop a missile shield. And to that end, I sent Bob Gates, our Secretary of Defense, to see Vladimir Putin, and I sent him a message. And then I told it to him recently myself. I said, we have nothing to hide; as a matter of fact, if you would like to join, we would like to welcome—we welcome you. You're not the enemy.

We're not trying to isolate Russia. What we're attempting to do is protect ourselves and friends and allies against a rogue regime with a missile. That's a realistic possibility. I said, why don't you send your generals or send your people to the United States, and we will show you our systems. We'll be fully transparent.

So I will work—I think it is important for the citizens of Bulgaria to know that they've got a great friend in the United States. But I am also working hard to make sure that we're—to prevent any escalation of rhetoric. I don't think there's a military threat toward Bulgaria, but if there were, you would have a friend to help you.

Secondly, I think it's important for the people of Bulgaria to know that if I think Russia is wrong, I've got the kind of relationship where I can explain it very clearly, and not afraid to do so, by the way. But there are areas where we can work together with Russia too.

Bulgarian Nurses Held in Libya

Mr. Petrov. You've already supported the Bulgarian nurses jailed in Libya. Do you still support them? Do you think it will be a positive outcome?

The President. I do, I hope so, certainly. This has got to be painful not only to the families of the Bulgarian nurses but to the people of Bulgaria. I called the President a while back and told him that we're very much committed to helping to not only support the nurses but to free the nurses. And that's the position of the United States. We've sent that message very clearly to the Libyan Government. As I understand it, Tony Blair was working the issue the other day as well. We're very—we're committed, and would hope that this—the tragic case, it's a painful case, would be solved quickly, in a way that's satisfactory to the Bulgarian people.

President's Upcoming Visit to Bulgaria

Mr. Petrov. Mr. President, if we conclude, once again, could you say to the citizens of Bulgaria, summing up, what kind of face will you present to them? We know you value convictions and values, but can you admit also making mistakes?

The President. I mean, if you're trying to say, did I make a mistake routing Al Qaida out of Afghanistan, the answer is, absolutely not. Getting rid of Saddam Hussein was the right thing to do. You've got to understand, my decisionmaking is based, of course, first and foremost on the best interests of the United States. And we got attacked. Nearly 3,000 of our citizens died, and it affected my thinking. I will continue to make decisions to help secure our country.

But you'll see a guy come to Bulgaria who is grateful for the hospitality, grateful for the friendship, someone who brings the great spirit of America. Listen, I represent a great country because our people are great. Our people are hard-working, decent, honorable,

compassionate people, who care deeply about freedom and liberty. I'm really proud to be their President.

Mr. Petrov. Mr. President, thank you very much for this interview.

The President. Honored to be with you. Looking forward to coming.

Mr. Petrov. Thank you very much.

The President. My pleasure.

NOTE: The interview was taped at 3:45 p.m. in the Map Room at the White House for later broadcast. In his remarks, the President referred to President Vladimir Putin of Russia; President Georgi Parvanov of Bulgaria; and Prime Minister Tony Blair of the United Kingdom. The transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on June 1.

Remarks Following a Briefing on Comprehensive Immigration Reform

June 1, 2007

First, I thank you very much for your hard work on a comprehensive immigration bill and your concern about our country. And the two go hand in hand. I believe that now is the time to address the issue of immigration. I think it's in our national security interests, and I think it's in the interest of making sure America never loses sight of who we are.

This is a difficult issue for a lot of folks. I understand that. But because it's difficult probably means we need to work doubly hard to get it done. And now is the time to get it done. No matter how difficult it may seem for some politically, I strongly believe it's in this Nation's interest for people here in Washington to show courage and resolve and pass a comprehensive immigration reform.

My administration is deeply involved in this issue. I feel passionate about the issue. I believe it's in this country's interest to solve the problem. I believe it's in our interest when we find a system that is broken to fix it, and the immigration system today is broken. And I've asked Michael and Carlos Gutierrez to work the issue on the Hill, and these men are doing good work. They understand the issue. They understand the bill, and they understand they need to work with the Republicans and Democrats to get the job done.