

Interview With Foreign Radio Journalists in Bangkok

August 7, 2008

The President. I am in Bangkok, and one of the reasons I've come is not only to pay my respects to the Government and the people of Thailand, but also to be in a position to speak about freedom in Burma. I just had lunch with some people that are deeply concerned about the future of Burma, people that were involved in the student marches of '88, people involved with humanitarian assistance. I was regretful that my wife couldn't join us, because she's an articulate spokesman for the people of Burma; but she's on the border on this mission of saying to the Burmese people: You have friends, and you're not alone; and the United States cares about you.

So, I want to thank you for giving me the chance to answer your questions, and I'll be glad to do so now. Why don't we just go around the table?

Q. Mr. President, it's an honor to be with you, and many thanks, giving a chance to—this roundtable discussion.

The President. Thank you.

Q. My name is Thein Htike Oo, from Voice of America; Toe Zaw Latt from Democratic Voice of Burma; and Soe Win Than from BBC. We have one lady here from Radio Free Asia, May Pyone Aung.

The President. Good, thank you. Welcome.

U.S. Aid to Burma

Q. I would like to start a couple questions about the relief aid policy of United States.

The President. Yes.

Q. Recent relief operation, the Burmese regime didn't allow the U.S. Navy ship aid through the Pacific come, and international community, the U.S. obviously was really frustrated. I would like to know, if Burma faced another catastrophe or disaster, are you going to try to help, or are you going to—*[inaudible]*—Burmese regime again?

The President. Well, absolutely. But first of all, we care about the human condition, human suffering. And there's no question, there was huge human suffering when the cyclone came through. I can remember the

day it hit. I was told that this was going to be a major disaster for the people, and so I ordered our Navy ships in the area to be prepared to sail toward the Burmese area to provide aid and logistics and management. We're very good about dealing with major emergencies. And interestingly enough, we were involved with a military mission in the area, so we were prepared to send a robust package in.

Unfortunately, the Government, the military leader chose not to allow for there to be immediate help. No telling how many lives could have been saved, or how much human suffering could have been dealt with more effectively had there not been the slow response of the military dictator.

But now our aid, along with other people—other countries' aid, is beginning to move. In answer to your question, yes, our Government will respond if there's another catastrophe. And hopefully, the military people have learned a lesson: That there needs to be truthfulness at the highest levels of government. People have got to understand and listen to reality and understand that nations and people want to help when there's suffering. And so, we will respond. In the meantime, we're going to keep pushing for freedom.

Burmese Government's Acceptance of Foreign Aid

Q. During the time, a lot of Burmese people, they were expecting a sort of humanitarian intervention, even though the Burmese regime didn't allow the aid. So why it didn't happen, or what is the reason—

The President. We chose to go through the normal routes. We wanted to basically say, here's your opportunity to receive aid. I'm disappointed that the military dictator chose not to allow the aid in quickly. But I don't think it would have been helpful for the Burmese people had there been a conflict over the delivery of aid. What we don't want to do is compound a terrible situation. In other words, if we just sent in—sent people in, our military in without visas or permission from the Government, there's no telling what the reaction would have been. And so therefore, we were trying to make the problem better, not worse.

And so, yes, I—no question, there was frustration on the delays, but I felt the best way to do so was the way we ended up doing it. My only point is, is that there's—if there's another catastrophe, and let's pray there's not, but if there is, the Government will now see that they have nothing to fear by welcoming in U.S. aid and other countries' aid. They ought to welcome that.

And now the question is, how quickly can the delta region rebuild? And of course, we'd like to help on that too. We spent about \$57 million, or over \$50 million of help so far. And we do so generously. We care about the stories we hear. And we want the farmers to get seed and fertilizer so they can grow and feed their families and feed the people in their area and, hopefully, grow enough for the country.

Joint Military Exercises

Q. Now, I don't take too long. Now, the United States has proposed civil military relief exercise with the countries in this region, and recent ASEAN meeting endorsed that relief exercise, and probably next year the Philippine will host. So, they agree to cooperate relief exercise.

The President. That's good.

Q. I wonder, if the countries in this region agree to cooperate, are you going to invite this exercise to include Burmese military regime or North Korea?

The President. That's an interesting question. I don't know, I haven't thought that through yet, to be frank with you. I can't answer your question, because you're the first person who's asked me that question. I will take it back to Washington and under consideration. Interesting idea, I have no—but I can't say yes or no right now.

Q. Thank you.

The President. Thank you. Yes, very good. Yes, sir.

Q. Thank you very much, Mr. President.

The President. Toe Zaw Latt.

Burma-International Community Relations/China

Q. There's no real consensus on how to deal with Burma in international community. How will the United States try to overcome

this impasse, most recently seen at the Security Council over Burma?

The President. Well, what we've got to do is continue to work with countries on the Security Council and explain to them that what matters most in life is the human condition, and that individual rights are important. And we just have a lot of work to do to convince people that the status quo in Burma—that life can be better, let me put it that way. And it's in their interest that life is better, particularly China.

China is an important country on the United Nations Security Council; they're an important country in the world; obviously, Burma's neighbor. And we—I hope that I can use my good relations with the Chinese leadership to convince them that the way forward is for there to be more civic participation, more citizen participation in the future of the country; and that the perfect way to do that is to explain to them how backward the Government was when it came to the response for the natural disaster. Hopefully, that will open up eyes.

But no question, there's a lot of diplomacy that needs to be done to convince others that people like Aung Suu San Kyi [Aung San Suu Kyi]* deserve to be free, and political prisoners ought to be free. And the reason I'm talking to you today is because I want those in prison and their families to know that we care about them and think about them.

China-U.S. Relations

Q. Do you think there will be some common ground that the United States and Chinese Government can work together?

The President. Well, I hope so. I mean, it's in the common ground, for example, that the Burmese be a peaceful country. I mean, we care about that. Whether or not the Chinese will agree that somebody like Aung Suu San Kyi [Aung San Suu Kyi]* ought to be free and ought to be the center of foreign policy like it is for us, I don't know. We just have to work it hard.

* White House correction.

***President's Upcoming Visit to China/
Meeting With Chinese Leadership***

Q. Soe Win Than from BBC. Picking up on this China relation, you are going to China today—

The President. I am soon.

Q. —you will be meeting the highest Chinese leadership tomorrow.

The President. Yes.

Q. And you said you would mention Burma to those leaders. You haven't been able to convince them until now.

The President. Right.

Q. How optimistic are you that you will be able to convince, and how are you going to go about doing this time, sir?

The President. Well, you know, look, it's—I've mentioned Burma a lot to the Chinese leadership, and it's—I've mentioned Darfur; I've mentioned Tibet; I've mentioned religious freedom inside China. So, there's a lot of subjects to discuss with the Chinese leadership. And it's just a matter of continuing to make the case. I have—I'm sure the Chinese leader's mind is going to be on the Olympics. This is a big deal for the people of China. One of the reasons I'm going is to be able to pay my respects to the people of China, and well as to be in a position where I can bring up these issues with the Chinese Government.

We'll see. I'm just—it's—to me, this is a process of continually having a consistent message, speaking to the people of Burma, letting the prisoners know we care about them, and pressing hard at the international level. I make no promises to your listeners except that we'll continue to try.

Burma-U.S. Relations

Q. Yes. One thing is the relationship with the regime. Then you have been probably the President who is more committed for the Burmese democratic movement. But the United States tough line against Burma sometimes entrenched the generals there, and some people would say that given the example of the Nargis Cyclone relief efforts, then if you have had this kind of relationship with the generals then you could be able to do more. So—

The President. Yes, it's an interesting question. I understand your point. We have

been tough, because we believe that the general has been very stubborn in not allowing certain freedoms, and we believe that's wrong. We believe that those arrested in the marches of '88 ought to be released from prison. There's about 2,000 political prisoners who are being held simply because they had a belief that was contrary to what the general thinks.

You notice I'm saying "general" because it's generally viewed as a one-man regime. I know there's others that support him.

But, yes, I have been and—because I believe that—as a matter of fact, just signed a bill that's going to continue the sanction regime, particularly when it comes to jade and precious gems.

That's an interesting question, had we had a different relationship, one, what would it say to the reformers? But also, would it have changed the number of days required to let relief in? It's hard for me to tell. What I'm concerned about is the general wasn't being given full information, that he wasn't fully aware of reality. And I don't think his reaction was because of relations with the United States; I think his reaction was—is because he was in denial to a certain extent about the realities on the ground.

But I'm constantly—look, my mission, so long as I'm the President, which is 6 more months, is to think about ways to relieve human suffering and how to help people inside Burma. And if I thought it would make—help us achieve the objective by changing the relationship with the Government, I'd give it serious consideration. But I don't necessarily agree with that premise. I wish there was a magic wand to wave; there isn't. On the other hand, the people that are listening to your radio broadcast has got to know that the President of the United States and a lot of other people in America are concerned and care about how they live and want them to be free and want them to realize the beauties of a Burmese-style democracy. And whether that happens tomorrow or not is doubtful. Nevertheless, what is important, though, if for there to be a strong voice in laying out that vision. And that's what I'll continue to do.

Yes, ma'am.

President's Lunch With Burmese Activists

Q. Mr. President, you just met a group of Burmese activists and then you share views with them on Burma's struggle. What do you see and what do you get from having lunch with them?

The President. First of all, there's a lot of courageous people that have made a decision to work hard on behalf of the rest of their citizens to achieve a free society. Secondly, that they have great hopes that the United States will continue to speak out, that the United States will not abandon our belief in the universality of freedom. Thirdly, they were—I asked—I said, if you were me, what would you do? And I got a variety of opinions. And it was fascinating to hear voices of people who have actually been on the frontlines of change.

I came away with the impression that they're very grateful to the American people for the generous support. Sometimes our generosity is not—actually ends up in the hands of the people as quickly as it should; but nevertheless, that they are—there seems to be a general awareness that the American people care. And there was a—there's a certain reality, a certain sense that there are—one of the things I came away with: There are people who may even be wearing the military uniform who understand that the status quo is not acceptable, and there needs to be a better way forward.

But a lot of the frustration was focused on a single person—the general in charge of the country, and that—there was a belief that he didn't seem to care that much about the plight of the average citizen. And so, hopefully, U.S. pressure and U.S. focus will get him to think more about the average person and care about the way the average person lives.

Burmese Democracy Movement

Q. Many critics said that our opposition itself is also very much divided, and they are not united enough against the military regime, and that—do you think that the United States can help prepare them for their future democratic Burma?

The President. Well, first of all—that was an interesting question—I didn't think they were very divided—at least the crowd I was

with. But I thought they were pretty united in their dream for a better Burma.

You know, one of the things that obviously the people involved in the democracy movement have got to think through is how do you get from here to there. In other words, it's not easy to go from a very fierce military one-man rule to democracy. And so therefore, it needs to be well thought-out. And you have a very good point, and that is, is that there is a—is there a focused roadmap to get to a better tomorrow? It's hard for me to tell just in that conversation. Obviously, that's going to be a concern for—it must be a concern for people.

One thing is for certain, is the Constitution is a sham. The rewrite of the Constitution is just a—it's not a good document; it's not a fair document. So therefore, there needs to be a constitution at some point in time that will enable Burma to be a federal state that—based upon the will of the people.

Burmese Elections

Q. Follow up on that. The military regime will hold a election in 2010, and they began preparing this month for election. And then what is U.S. stand on this election?

The President. My stand is they ought to be open and fair, and I doubt they will be. I think the Constitution is a sham constitution, and therefore—but, you know, I—this is a society that's not interested in democracy. They have proved they're not interested in democracy. If they're interested in democracy, they'd let the prisoners out of prison, for starters. The political prisoners would be a given to chance to leave and live in a free life. That's the first test, not election under a sham constitution.

And so, you know, they'll play like the election was fair and all this—to justify their behavior. And I think people like yourself ought to be speaking out that the elections, unless certain conditions are met, can't possibly be fair.

U.S. Policy on Burma

Q. We understand, and the Burmese listeners also understand, how you and the First Lady are compassionate for Burmese people, how much you strongly support to the freedom for Burma. But I wonder, place here

the new administration—will be installed, and any chance the policy changes from the United States and—

The President. I would be very surprised. I know both candidates and the—freedom for Burma is a bipartisan issue. And the Burmese people—it's not just the President that thinks about the citizens of Burma. There's a lot of people in our Congress, both Republicans and Democrats, that feel the same way. And so, I think the Burmese people are going to have a consistent friend in the United States.

China's Role in Burma Situation

Q. You're talking to the China authorities. Do you think China can play a role to make situation better in Burma?

The President. I think—oh, yes, I think China could play a different role. I do. The question is whether they want to or not. And so I'll—I will bring up the Burma—Burmese issue again to President Hu Jintao, who I like. He's an easy man to talk to. And they just got different interests at times from the United States. And so, I've got to work hard to see if I can't convince him that we share the same goals. It's not going to be easy, but I'll try to do so.

Thailand and ASEAN's Role in Burma Situation

Q. Wonder will Thailand and ASEAN in Southeast Asia—

The President. Yes, Thailand can help. ASEAN can help. They need to send a signal. Obviously, Thailand was very helpful when it came to helping with the cyclone—aftermath of the cyclone. After all, this is a staging center for a lot of our materials and other peoples'—countries' materials that came through. Yes, and they can continue to work the issue. We just got to make sure that ASEAN delivers a message that is inspiring to the people of Burma.

International Community's Role in Burma Situation

Q. Mr. President, besides sanction and travel restrictions on the generals in Burma, do you—have you ever thought of alternative strategies work on Burma—under U.S. and then with the international community?

The President. A different strategy?

Q. Yes.

The President. You mean, trying to convince—well, I think our strategy is the right strategy, the U.S. strategy. And if your question is, do I—am I trying to convince others to join us on the strategy? Well, yes. In other words, it would be better if we could all speak with one voice. And I've been in—you know, it hadn't been that hard with some countries, like the European countries, for example. But it's been difficult with some of the countries in the neighborhood here because we don't share the same goals.

My goal is democracy. Their goal is stability and—at times. And that's not necessarily the—I'm for stability too. Don't get me wrong. But I'd like to see the system move toward a free society. I want to see these prisoners released. I want to see people treated better. I've got a friend who helps deal with the rape victims along the border. These women are being raped—she says, systematically raped by the military as part of their campaign of fear. That stuff has got to end in order for me to feel comfortable with any other policy toward Burma.

And that's a—this is a priority. In other words, there's—and others have different priorities. And so therefore, it's hard to find common ground, but we'll continue to try to do so.

Okay, last—yes. Then I got to go to the games. [*Laughter*] I'm cheering the American Olympic team.

U.S. Foreign Policy in Asia

Q. I'm going tonight too, sir. You have the conviction and idea to bring freedom and democracy to Burma, but some people would say that the United States doesn't have much strategic interest in Burma, unlike Afghanistan. Where does Burma fit in, sir?

The President. I think so long as there's human suffering like there is here in Burma, then this will be of strategic importance to the United States. Look, no question, we've got a lot of issues on our platter, but I think about Burma a lot. Maybe one reason why is my wife was such a activist on the subject.

But nevertheless, I gave a speech today in Thailand that talked about how America is, in many ways, a Pacific nation, and that I think—I know the center of gravity of a

lot of policy is shifting to the Far East. And therefore, Burma, the Burmese issue is—will be an integral part of any Far Eastern policy. And no question, America's strategic interests lie in a lot of places, but they lie here as well. And so long as this issue festers, then it will have the attention of the American policymakers.

Thank you all for your time. Very good job.

Q. Thank you very much.

NOTE: The interview began at 1:38 p.m. at the U.S. Ambassador to Burma's residence. In his remarks, the President referred to Senior Gen. Than Shwe, Chairman, State Peace and Development Council of Burma; Aung San Suu Kyi, leader of the National League of Democracy in Burma; and President Hu Jintao of China. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this interview.

Statement on the 10th Anniversary of Terrorist Attacks Against U.S. Embassies in Africa

August 7, 2008

Today marks the tenth anniversary of the Al Qaida terrorist attacks against U.S. Embassies in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, and Nairobi, Kenya. In Dar es Salaam, the terrorists killed 11 people and wounded more than 85 others; the blast in Nairobi killed 218 people and injured approximately 5,000. We remember today those who lost their lives or were injured in the attacks, their families, and their loved ones.

The attacks in East Africa are brutal examples of Al Qaida's tactics in its war against innocent people worldwide, carried out in the heart of two African capitals without regard to the race, creed, or nationality of the victims. This has been Al Qaida's method for more than a decade, indiscriminately attacking civilians throughout the world. The attacks in Kenya and Tanzania remind us that Al Qaida and its terrorist affiliates continue to want to attack the United States and our allies. This anniversary reinforces the need to confront the terrorists, to work with our allies to bring them to justice, and to prevent such attacks from happening again.

Remarks at a Dedication Ceremony for the United States Embassy in Beijing, China

August 8, 2008

Thank you, sir. Thank you, Mr. President. [Laughter] It is quite an honor to be introduced by your dad. This has got to be a historic moment: father and son, two Presidents, opening up an Embassy. I suspect it's the first, although I must confess, I haven't done a lot of research into the itinerary of the Adams boys. [Laughter]

My dad was a fabulous President. And I tell people one reason why was not only did he know what he was doing, he was a fabulous father.

Mr. Ambassador, honored guests, Laura and I, my brother and my sister, are proud to be here with our dad as we open and dedicate this new Embassy.

No doubt, this is an impressive complex. To me it speaks of the importance of our relations with China. It reflects the solid foundation underpinning our relations. It is a commitment to strengthen that foundation for years to come.

I thank all those who designed and built the Embassy and all those who work here to advance the interests and values of our great Nation. Dad and I are honored that Councilor Dai has joined us, and Minister Xie; Ambassador Zhou, who, by the way, opened a new Chinese Embassy in Washington, DC, designed by I.M. Pei a couple weeks ago.

We appreciate our friend Anne Johnson being here, director of the Art in Embassies Program. Dr. Kissinger, thanks for coming.

It takes a special band to open the Embassy—out of west Texas—Odessa, Texas, for that matter—the Gatlin boys are with us today. I thank the Red Poppies. Thank you for your talent.

And finally, I want to pay tribute to Sandy Randt, who has done a fabulous job as our Ambassador to China. Sandy, thank you and—[applause].

We're proud to be here with those citizens of ours who work at the Embassy, and we say thanks to the Chinese nationals who make our Embassy go as well.