



For Immediate Release
Office of the Press Secretary
March 19, 2008

Interview of the President by VOA Persian News Network

Map Room

1:11 P.M. EDT

 [White House News](#)

Q Mr. President, let me thank you first on behalf of the Voice of America, on behalf of the Persian News Network for giving us your time. We really appreciate that, sir.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you.

Q As you know, Mr. President, this is the eve of Nowruz, the Iranian New Year. What is your message to the Iranian people as they face tough economic circumstances and infringement on their freedoms?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, first, Nowruz a tan Mubarak. Secondly, that the people of the United States respects the people of Iran; that we respect the traditions of Iran, the great history of Iran. We have differences with the government, but we honor the people, and we want the people to live in a free society. We believe freedom is a right for all people and that the freer the world is, the more peaceful the world is. And so my message is, please don't be discouraged by the slogans that say America doesn't like you, because we do, and we respect you.

Q What do you say to the regime, sir -- what would you say to the regime?

THE PRESIDENT: I'd say to the regime that they made decisions that have made it very difficult for the people of Iran. In other words, the Iranian leaders, in their desire to enrich uranium -- in spite of the fact that the international community has asked them not to -- has isolated a great country; and that there's a way forward. I mean, the Iranian leaders know there's a way forward, and that is verifiably suspend your enrichment and you can have new relationship with people in the U.N. Security Council, for example.

It's just sad that the leadership is in many ways very stubborn, because the Iraqi -- the Iranian people are not realizing their true rights. And they're confusing people in Iraq, as well, about their desires. It's a tough period in history for the Iranian people, but it doesn't have to be that way.

Q On the nuclear issue, sir, is there a solution to the problem that would both satisfy the United States' concern and at the same time allow Iran to proceed with non-military nuclear energy research?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, part of the problem is that it's very hard for people to trust the Iranian government because they haven't told the full truth, and that's why the people of Iran have got to understand there are great suspicions right now, not only in the United States, but around the world. But there is a better way forward. And I thought, for example, the Russians proposed an interesting way, that says -- and I have said publicly, and the Iranian people need to know that I believe Iran has the right to have civilian nuclear power. I believe in civilian nuclear power. Iran is a sovereign country and they should have it.

The problem is we just don't trust the government because they haven't been forthcoming about their enrichment of fuels to go into the reactor, and therefore Russia has offered to provide fuel on a contractual basis and provide fuel on a consistent basis. It would help solve the problem, and that is the Iranians wouldn't need to enrich, it would have fuel for their reactor and the people would have cheaper electricity. And I support that idea.

Q Sir, would you allow enrichment inside Iran if there are guarantees and international supervision?

THE PRESIDENT: I would have to be convinced that any secret programs would be disclosed. In other words, I -- once a nation hasn't told the truth, it requires a lot of work to convince people that they'll be telling the truth in the future. And my problem is, is that the Iranian government has not been forthcoming, has not fully disclosed their programs like the IAEA asked them to. So there's a lot of distrust right now.

And the better way forward is for there to be a contractual, solid obligation to provide fuel for a nuclear reactor and then the Iranians can have their civilian nuclear power.

Q At a time when Iranians are going through very difficult economic circumstances -- there's high employment -- high unemployment, there are high prices, there are unfilled promises -- the United Nations Security Council just passed a new set of sanctions against the regime. Is the United States concerned, sir, that the regime might exploit these circumstances to whip up anti-American sentiment, and also to use those and misuse them?

THE PRESIDENT: Sure. No, I appreciate that. Of course we are. We're always concerned about the individual. I'm concerned about the mom trying to raise her child in a hopeful environment. I'm concerned about a child wanting to gain the knowledge so that he or she can realize her God-given talents. And of course we're worried about the human condition.

And any time a government is failing to meet the needs of people -- or a lot of times, not "any time," but a lot of times governments have failed to meet the needs of their people, particularly in relatively non-transparent, non-free societies they always look for somebody to blame. And I'm not surprised that the leaders would blame the United States for the problems they, themselves, have created.

So, yes, this enters my mind. On the other hand, the people of Iran must understand that the conditions exist in large part because of either management by the government or isolation because of the government's decisions on foreign policy matters -- such as announcing they want to destroy countries with a nuclear weapon. It is irresponsible remarks like that which cause great credibility loss

with the Iranian government, the actions of which are affecting the country.

Q 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 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.

Q 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, 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, 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.

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

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you; yes, ma'am.

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