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Remarks by the President and Vice Premier of China Qian Qichen in Photo Opportunity

The Oval Office

4:03 A.M. EST

THE PRESIDENT: It's my honor to welcome our distinguished guest from China. China is a great country. China has got vast potential. And we've got common interests in China, and I look forward to discussing our interests. Our relationship, of course, will be a complex relationship; there will be areas where we can find agreement, such as trade; there will be some areas where we have some disagreements.

I look forward to committing to this distinguished leader that any disagreements we will have, we will conduct ourselves with mutual respect. I will be firm, and I suspect he will be firm, in our opinions, but we will do so in a respectful way. It is in our nation's best interests that we have good relations with China.

And before I introduce our distinguished guest, I do want to say how much I'm looking forward to going to China. I'll be going next fall, the government has invited me to go to Beijing. I accept the invitation, we'll work out the arrangements. But I'm really looking forward to it.

As a young man, I visited my mother and dad in China in 1975, and I look forward to my return. I can't wait to see the change, the contrast between when I was a younger fellow and now, kind of an older guy. (Laughter.) But I'm looking forward to coming to your country, sir.

Welcome.

THE VICE PREMIER: I fully agree to what President Bush just said. Indeed, China and the United States are major countries. To maintain friendly relations and cooperation between China and the United States is in the interest of Asia, the Pacific Region and the world at large.

Where we have shared interests, we can advance our relationship forward. Where we disagree, we can have very good exchange of views. Some issues can be approached in the spirit of seeking common ground, while shelving the differences.

I'm sure ways can be found to solve all the problems. I view my visit as a very successful one. Because in the exchange of letters, President Jiang and President Bush already reached common

consensus, which has laid a solid foundation for the growth of our relationship in the new century.

We are looking forward to welcoming President Bush in China in the coming fall.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you, sir.

Q What do you have to say, sir, to your visitor about the detention of an American University professor and, until recently, her husband and son, who is an American citizen? And, secondly, are you inclined to allow the sale of destroyers to Taiwan?

THE PRESIDENT: I will echo the sentiments that the Secretary of State said today about the fact that a U.S. citizen was detained without any notification. I look forward to discussing this with our honorable guest, and will do so.

We have obligations under the Taiwan Relations Act and we'll honor those obligations. No decision has been made yet as to the sale of weapons to Taiwan.

One of our guests from the Chinese press.

Q Mr. President, what are your expectations for your forthcoming trip, October, to Shanghai and Beijing?

THE PRESIDENT: I look forward to seeing the modernization that has taken place. I look forward to seeing the beautiful countryside that I remember so well.

But most of all, I look forward to getting to know the leaders of China. I think the best thing I can do is to -- the best thing our delegation will do is to be able to sit down, face to face, and have an honest dialogue.

People will find that I'm a straightforward person, that I represent my country's interests in a very straightforward way. But I will do so with respect.

Q Mr. President, is there anything that China can say or do that would influence your decision about which weapons to sell Taiwan?

THE PRESIDENT: This meeting will give me a chance to confirm the fact that I will honor our obligations under the Taiwan Relations law. I look forward to explaining that as clearly as I can to our distinguished guest. If he cares to bring up the subject and wishes to make a case, I will be glad to listen. But no decision has been made yet. And I'll do what I think is in the best interests of our relationships and in the best interests of conforming to obligations we have.

Q Mr. President, may I speak in Chinese?

THE PRESIDENT: Are you with the Chinese press, because your English is perfect.

Q Yes.

THE PRESIDENT: You speak better English than I do. (Laughter.)

Q (Speaking Chinese) -- about the gathering outside of the Falun Gong. The State Department has decided to sponsor a resolution to condemn the human rights. And for the past few years it has been failed. And I just wonder, Mr. President, what are you going to try to tell the Chinese side how to improve their human rights?

And my second question is regarding -- the Chinese seem very warm to your father, they come, delegation after delegation visiting your father. Are you going to be taught by your father regarding your China policy?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, the Chinese, I'm convinced, like my father because he married well. (Laughter.) My mother is very well respected in China, as is my dad, because they spent time there and they befriended a lot of folks who are now leaders.

It will come as no surprise to our Chinese guest that I'm a believer in religious freedom and I will make a -- state it politely and as clearly as I can that ours is a nation that respects religious freedom, ours is a nation that honors religious freedom; and that our relationship will move forward, but it will certainly be a lot easier to move forward in a constructive way when our people with whom we conduct our affairs honor religious freedom within their borders.

Q Thank you.

THE PRESIDENT: I'd like to thank the press for not violating the beeper policy. (Laughter.)

Q We didn't want to get Gordon in trouble again. (Laughter.)

THE PRESIDENT: Gordon became an international figure. (Laughter.)

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