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**“Regional Challenges Facing U.S. Policy in the Middle East”**

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Since we’ve just started a second presidential term, we’ve already heard a lot of things that are different than in the first term, though it’s only a question of weeks, we do see a different tone and maybe it’s going to develop into a different approach on the Middle East. So, today I’m going to try to talk about policy issues and do a tour around the region of the Middle East where we are facing crises or long-term challenges.

We have two special relationships in the region with Israel and Saudi Arabia based on totally different things, but nevertheless special relationships. We have allied relations with a number of other countries and we are now facing a number of crises. Iran appears to be building a nuclear weapons program. In Iraq, the aftermath of the war did not seem to be well planned and we find ourselves in a somewhat of a mess in Iraq. The Israeli/Palestinian conflict, there’s been fighting for four years. With the death of Yasser Arafat, we maybe have an opportunity to move things forward because there’s a different kind of Palestinian leadership. And of course, there is the whole issue of, understanding different cultures, the role of Islam. Why is this area of the world producing so many terrorists, at this particular moment in history and how do we, the United States, where we have vital interests, and quite a number of Americans living there: business people, or teachers, or archeologists. While every president, says that I’m not going to let the Middle East bog me down, nevertheless, the Middle East always bogs them down. It takes an inordinate amount of time and effort, and in the end, middle east policy, above all other policies, is made in the Oval Office. Nothing can get done in the Middle East without the President himself, being involved, and the president speaking out and using his political capital to make policy and to move things forward. So, let’s begin with **Iran**.

Iran is a country that we used to have a close relationship with. We deposed a leader in Iran, but after that with the Shah of Iran, we had a very close relationship. Israel and Iran were our two special relationships in those days. We were not sensitive and most of the world was not, but I think we were the least sensitive, to see that there

was something boiling under the surface in Iran. In 1979, there was a revolution in Iran and the Shah was kicked out of country, and as we know, the Islamic Revolution, and that revolution, like all revolutions, had its excesses. In most places where there are revolutions, there is a counter-revolution that often, in history, soothes out the mistakes of the revolution and calms things down and tries to lead toward normalcy. The Iranians did not have an opportunity for that counter-revolution because you will remember a fellow called Saddam Hussein invaded Iran and he thought that war would last for a few weeks or a few months at the most. In fact, the Iran War lasted for eight years. Iran is mainly run by leaders who know little about the West. They are primarily clerical figures. There is huge gap of misunderstanding between the current Iranian Regime and the United States. The Clerics don't understand us and we don't understand the Clerics. Our communication with Iran goes through the Swiss Embassy and may go through sometimes the Europeans who have relations with Iran. But nevertheless, Iran does support certain groups that we, the United States, call terrorist organizations, such as Islamic Jihad among others. They support them with money and training and occasionally military equipment. But what is bothering us now is Iran's potential for developing a nuclear weapon. This administration, as others before it, is determined after Pakistan and India, which came as a surprise to us when both countries tested weapons and clearly have nuclear weapons, that Iran does not become a third country in that region to have a nuclear weapon. This is problematic because I happened to be in Iran in 1998 at the time that Pakistan tested its weapon, and of course, it was a big story.

So how do we deal with Iran? The US President has made Iran a centerpiece of his foreign policy goals, that under no circumstances will we permit Iran to develop a nuclear weapon. But we have seen some changes. In the first term, the President was confrontational with Iran, put Iran in the Axis of Evil, in one of his State of the Union speeches. More or less belittled the effort by the French, the Germans, and the British. But, of course, that particular policy didn't take into consideration the notion that, why should the Iranians make concessions to Britain, France and Germany who were not threatening a potential military action against Iran. Only the United States was. So, how could the Europeans possibly get Iran to agree to give up something that was important to them as a deterrent, as a source of prestige and pride, as a national prerogative, that they have the right to do it, when in fact the Europeans had little to offer in response. As

you know, since the President got reelected and inaugurated in January, he made a trip to Europe to try to mend fences with the Europeans and there were much discussions. The President came back, apparently convinced that the Europeans had a point. Iran could not simply agree to give up its nuclear options without getting anything in return and without having some reassurance that the U.S. was not to try to change the regime, that we were keeping our eye on the ball, and that is not to have a nuclear weapon, and that there would be some incentives for Iran to stop their nuclear weapons program, if in fact it is a weapons program. So the President agreed to be part, even at a distance, of the European effort, and the President agreed that the U.S. will not reject the Iranian wish to apply for membership in the World Trade Organization. They have to abide by all kinds of reforms, transparency, and good behavior if they want to be part of the World Trade Organization, which of course would be of great advantage to them economically.

There were a series of meetings and basically the report came out for engagement, that the U.S. has to offer incentives, has to be part of the process, that there have to be a basket of things to be discussed, but at the same time that the International Community, including the U.S., had to remain tough with Iran on issues of supporting groups that resort to violence and reject Israeli/Palestinian peace process. So, there were many options in this particular report. Maybe at some point, we release Iranian assets, that is still being held in American banks, we will have something that we might call non-belligerency toward Iran, that we are not going threaten Iran with a military action if they give up the nuclear weapons option, and that we are not going to try to overturn the regimen or to change the regime. At this moment, over only a matter of four or five weeks, there has been a real shift in the White House on policy toward Iran. If the U.S., Iran, with the Europeans in between, can work out a set of bargains and deals, I'll give you this, you give me that, tit for tat, it may be possible; first to diffuse tension; secondly build confidence that the process can work and that all the parties in the process, the U.S. and Iran primarily, are sincere and genuine and don't have ulterior remember, and thirdly; to cop up with a set of incremental steps whereby Iran gives up its nuclear option, they get some economic gains and maybe over time the Iranians will agree to have an official dialogue with the United States and put all the outstanding issues on the table. That is ultimately inevitable, but when it will happen is a real

question because the Iran the, so far, feel we don't respect them, that they can't trust us, that we want to overturn them, and so they had refused -- President Clinton made a number of gestures. They have refused year after year to engage in an official dialogue with the United States. Until that happens, we're going to have some tension and misunderstanding. I suspect once we sit down and start to talk, that it will be possible to find common ground.

If we turn that to Iran's big neighbor, smaller than Iran, but nevertheless, a large country, **Iraq**, we have a dilemma in Iraq, because our military presence there is an irritant to the population. We don't know if we are causing more problems by being there than if we were somehow over the horizon or change the way we deploy in Iraq. Obviously the U.S. is not going to leave Iraq until the Iraqi police and Armed Services are better trained, better equipped, and more able to provide security within Iraq, as every country must have. But in the meantime, how do we back away, get out of the cities, change our behavior, to protect American forces, to save Iraqi lives, and to demonstrate that the U.S. is not a belligerent party, but that we really do intend to leave totally. From the day the statue fell, I use that as a marker, we could use any other day, the U.S. made many mistakes, and it's very hard for the sole super power, where everybody is watching us, where we're big, we appear to be threatening, we don't know how to do urban warfare, we don't speak the language, we don't know how to pick up the cultural cues. We made many mistakes. Why weren't the Iraqi's dancing in the streets and welcoming us. After all, we overthrew the Stalinist regime of Saddam Hussein. I think most Iraqis are glad that horrible regime is gone, but they're not glad about what has happened them since. Let me share with you my perception about why.

First, the majority of the Iraqi's have largely learned to live with the *status quo* of Saddam Hussein's regime. Second, the regime was weakening, containment was working, and there were fewer arrests. People had enough to eat. They had the minimum standard of living. It wasn't good, the standard of living, because the sanctions did hurt, but they had a minimum standard. They had electricity. The phones worked. They could get gasoline for their cars. They had a status quo that wasn't good, but one that they learned how to live with. After the regime was toppled, they didn't have anything and they didn't have an address for their grievances. There was no electricity for months on end. The phones are still not working well. There was no

available authority for them to go to have their complaints. The U.S. was occupying the country, making all the decisions for them, and what you call the Green Zone, and what we always hear about the Green Zone, which is the big palace, the former palace of Saddam Hussein, in the middle downtown Baghdad and it's miles because they've taken lots of neighborhoods to make a security perimeter. They found themselves unemployed. The police and the 400,000 man Army were disbanded. People didn't have their salaries and their pensions. This applies to the 400,000, who were regular Army. The real bad guys in Iraq, were in the intelligence services and the special security services around Saddam Hussein himself. So, 400,000 people went home from the Army without an income. The police, the same thing. 52,000 people who ran the bureaucracy, meaning the government offices in Iraq, were basically fired because they were Baathist's. It's true in a lot of places that joining the government, party, was your ticket to a job, to getting a car, to getting housing, etc. Suddenly there was a massive unemployment, masses of people with nothing to do. The schools were not functioning. As I said, the hospitals and clinics were not functioning and suddenly there was terrible.

Most Iraqi's were happy to go and vote in what was a free and fair election. The only thing that matters is that the Iraqi people see this election as legitimate. And they did. The majority of Iraqi's saw this election as legitimate. And what happened? They took their destiny back into Iraqi hands. They were no longer ruled by the coalition, the Americans or anybody else. They took their destiny back in their own hands by electing a National Assembly and they're trying to form a government now and that National Assembly has only one purpose, and that is to write a constitution that will be put to referendum before the end of this year, but lead to genuine real parliamentary elections, the forming of parties, and so on. It's an optimistic scenario. It may not happen this year. Things may get postponed, but what is certainly true is that the majority of Iraqi's are determined to get to that place. What are the main policy options? How do we help them without overwhelming or dominating them or meddling in what must be their political reconciliation and building a consensus and having a dialogue among Iraqis? This is a huge question. Whether you were for the war or against the war is not the point. There was a war. But the aftermath of that war didn't have to be this way. In Washington the other night in one of our roundtables, National Security Roundtables, we had a Lieutenant Colonel, currently serving at the Pentagon who served in Iraq on

two different tours, and like others before him, he talked about his experience. I asked him, did anybody ever, when you first went into Iraq, from the senior military or the civilian leadership of the Pentagon, give you one piece of paper that said, here are the absolute things you must know about the culture of Iraq, of what you -- what are the do's and what are the don'ts. To this day, never. There was no training. No cultural sensitization, if I can say that. Not enough interpreters. So there are things that we, in terms of our policy, have to do to adjust, both politically and the way our forces behave. In order to behave differently, they need information, they need training, and they need somebody deep inside our government to understand that some mistakes were made. They have to recognize that we are putting the American success in Iraq in jeopardy alongside the lives of many Americans and many Iraqis if we don't adjust the way we behave and adjust it to the situation in which we find ourselves.

Now we have situation in **Lebanon** with the tragedy of the Prime Minister Hariri's assassination, is speeding up the Syrian exit. But there are some breezes in the Middle East: in Egypt, in Lebanon, in Palestine. Some breezes, not winds, not storms, but breezes of change, of democratization, of people going to the streets to ask to participate and to have their aspirations taken seriously. Maybe it had something to do with the Iraq war. Maybe it has something to do with the U.S. president calling for democracy in this part of the world. But my view is that it had to do with something a bit different. It had to do with the advent of satellite television, Al Jazeera, Al Arabia, and all of the other Arabic channels, satellite stations, which became a substitute for politics and suddenly peoples of the Middle East could see and hear things they could never see and hear before because all the other media in their countries is owned by the government and strictly censored and controlled. Suddenly, you have all these debates, people screaming and yelling and talking to each other. You have pictures from around the world and it's a whole new world view on satellite television. There is also this huge demographic bubble. Many of those young people can't get a Visa to the U.S. and 99% of them can't afford to come here anyway. They're looking somewhere to get a good education. In short, poor education, scarce housing, and no hope of getting a job. Autocratic regimes that prevented economic reform because they think it threatens them or they don't understand it. Maybe the most important thing is these satellite TVs now that show them what's going on in the rest of the world, how people are living, and

you discover in our own system that nobody cares about you as a young person and your aspirations. This is the dilemma the U.S. faces. Before 9/11, the U.S. thought having a friendly leader, who would cooperate with the U.S. on strategic issues meaning military and intelligence and who would keep his people quiet at any price, was stability. We discovered, to our horror, after 9/11, that this far from stability. That somewhere boiling under the surface, are alienated, angry young people.

On the regime side, we have now so many different kinds of autocratic regimens: dictators who are preparing their sons, monarchs who are preparing their sons. Dictators who claim they were elected. But in reality in the Arab world today, you only have one leader who truly represents the majority of his people: Abu Mazen. The Egyptian President, a few weeks ago, said he would allow multiple candidates to run for president. He's been president for 24 years. I am sure what President Mubarak said was a big shock to the system. So, he's going to try it too, and that's a good thing. But that's not democracy. We have a long and hard and difficult road in terms of American interests in the Middle East and I will conclude with this. We don't understand globalization in America. We're so big. We're so rich. We have the oceans on both sides of us. We don't really understand that what happens in the whole world, all over the world, impacts on our lives. Everything we do, impacts on the rest of the world because we have the dubious distinction of being the sole super power. So, we in America, are going to learn to deal with new threats. There's no conventional threat to the United States. So what are the threats that face us?:

Economics, absolutely, our deficit, the fact that our health care system, public education are not in an acceptable shape, the same applies to domestic issues, which are national security issues. Another threat is disease. If the Chinese had not come clean about SARS and the World Health Organization and all the countries had not worked to stop it, we'd be talking about SARS, not about the Middle East. We might next year be talking about bird flu, if it isn't controlled or narcotics, energy security, global warming. The problem is, that though we are the sole superpower, the strongest, the biggest, the mightiest that history has ever known, there's not one of those transnational threats that we, the United States, can deal with by ourselves; we can't. 9/11 happened to us. We need to deal with the 70% under the age of 25 to give them hope, to give them education, to help the regimes that rule them without their participation in the decisions

change, to give them opportunities to fulfill their potential and their aspirations. Those used to be called “soft issues”. Joe Nye at Harvard wrote a book about the importance of this soft power. That’s not soft power anymore. It is strategic issues. Future international security and global stability depends on dealing with soft power issues. It’s a long term project. But that’s where the future lies. And all of you, especially the students, are going to have millions of new opportunities in careers that we never heard of because this is a whole new field. Transnational threats, multi-lateral approaches, and dealing with the soft power issues as a strategic priority for dealing with the challenges facing the United States, the Middle East, and the World. Thank you.

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