

**Interview: Vice President Dick Cheney discusses a possible war with Iraq**

9235 words

16 March 2003

NBC News: Meet the Press

English

(c) Copyright 2003, National Broadcasting Company, Inc. All Rights Reserved.

MR. RUSSERT: Mr. Vice President, welcome to MEET THE PRESS.

VICE PRES. DICK CHENEY: Good morning, Tim.

MR. RUSSERT: How close are we to war?

VICE PRES. CHENEY: Well, I think we are still in the final stages of diplomacy, obviously. That's one of the main reasons for the president's meeting today with the British and Spanish prime ministers in the Azores. But there's no question but what we're close to the end, if you will, of the diplomatic efforts. We have done virtually everything we can with respect to trying to organize a second resolution in the U.N. Security Council. And, clearly, the president is going to have to make a very, very difficult and important decision here in the next few days.

MR. RUSSERT: What could Saddam Hussein do to stop war?

VICE PRES. CHENEY: Well, the difficulty here is it's--he's clearly rejected, up till now, all efforts, time after time after time. And we have had 12 years and some 17 resolutions now. Each step along the way he had the opportunity to do what he was called upon to do by the U.N. Security Council. Each time he has rejected it. I'm not sure now, no matter what he said, that anyone would believe him. We have, Tim, been down this effort now for six months at the U.N. with the enactment of 1441. We asked for a declaration of all of his WMD come clean. He refused to do that. He's, again, continued to do everything he could to thwart the inspectors.

I'm hard-put to specify what it is he could do with credibility at this stage that would alter the outcome. He's always had the option of coming clean, of complying with the resolution, of giving up all of his weapons of mass destruction, of making his scientists available without fear of retribution, turning over the anthrax, and the VX nerve agent, and the sarin, and of the other capabilities he has developed, and he has consistently refused. And if he were to sit here today and say, "OK, now I'll do it," I'm not sure anybody would think that had credibility.

MR. RUSSERT: If he did come forward and say, you know, "The British laid out six benchmarks. I have decided to turn a new leaf. Here's the VX, here's the mustard gas, here's the anthrax, here's all the records. I will go on television, denounce weapons of mass destruction, you can take any scientists you want out of Iraq, all I ask is that I can stay here in power."

VICE PRES. CHENEY: Well, I think we are at the point where--it's hard for me to conceive of him doing that. And pure speculation that he might do such a thing. And, of course, the problem we have is what we have seen in the past is that even on those occasions after the '91 Gulf War when we did strip him of certain capabilities, when the inspectors were able to go in through the work of defectors, for example, and destroy significant capabilities that he had acquired, and that as soon as they were gone, he was right back in business again.

And I think that would be the fear here, that even if he were tomorrow to give everything up, if he stays in power, we have to assume that as soon as the world is looking the other way and preoccupied with other issues, he will be back again rebuilding his BW and CW capabilities, and once again reconstituting his nuclear program. He has pursued nuclear weapons for over 20 years. Done absolutely everything he could to try to acquire that capability and if he were to cough up whatever he has in that regard now, even if it was complete and total, we have to assume tomorrow he would be right back in business again.

MR. RUSSERT: So bottom line, he would have to disarm completely and leave the country?

VICE PRES. CHENEY: I think that would be the only acceptable outcome I can think of at this point, but obviously, we can continue to try to work through the United Nations and work diplomacy to try to arrive at an acceptable

outcome. To date, we haven't been successful.

MR. RUSSERT: Many Americans and many people around the world are asking one question: Why is it acceptable for the United States to lead a military attack against a nation that has not attacked the United States? What's your answer?

VICE PRES. CHENEY: Tim, we have, I think admittedly, a new and unique set of circumstances we're trying to deal with here. If you think back to the way we were organized in the last century, the 20th century, to deal with threats to the United States, or to our friends and allies, we had to deal with large states, significant military forces, intercontinental ballistic missiles, the kinds of threats we dealt with throughout the period of the Cold War. All of that changed on September 11 of a year and a half ago. Since that time, we've had to deal with the proposition that truly deadly weapons could be delivered to the United States by a handful of terrorists. We saw on 9/11 19 men hijack aircraft with airline tickets and box cutters, kill 3,000 Americans in a couple of hours. That attack would pale into insignificance compared to what could happen, for example, if they had had a nuclear weapon and detonated it in the middle of one of our cities, or if they had unleashed weapons of mass destruction, biological weapons of some kind, smallpox or anthrax, on a major attack on the United States. That's a whole different proposition for us to think about, how we deal with that.

And at the front of our concerns as we try to deal with these issues is the proposition that the al-Qaeda organization is absolutely determined to do everything they can to acquire chemical, biological and nuclear weapons. We found ample evidence of that in the camps and the tunnels and the caves in Afghanistan. We see evidence of it in the interrogations that we have been able to do now on many of the al-Qaeda members that have been captured. We know that they have done everything they could to acquire those capabilities over the years, and we also are confident that if they ever do acquire that kind of capability, there's no doubt they'll use it. There's absolutely nothing to restrain them from doing that.

If you look back at our strategies that we used in the 20th century, specifically, say vis-a-vis the Soviet Union during the Cold War, we had a policy of containment, alliances, NATO in particular very successful at containing the Soviet Union, a policy of deterrence we could hold at risk, those things that they valued with our ballistic missiles and we were able to forestall a conflict throughout that whole period of time; enormously successful policy.

But then you look at the proposition of a handful of terrorists operating in a part of the world where they find sanctuary and safe haven in a rogue state or in an area that's not even really governed by anybody, developing these capabilities to use against the United States. And how do you apply containment to that situation? How do you deter a terrorist when there's nothing they value that they're prepared to defend, when they're prepared even to sacrifice their own lives in the effort to kill Americans and there's no piece of real estate that they value highly enough so that a concept of deterrence works.

We have to think new thoughts about how we deal with that threat, and so when we look at the kind of strategy we want to pursue, we do a number of things. We, obviously, want to defend the homeland, so we spend an enormous amount of time and effort trying to make it a tougher target, but we know defense isn't enough. You've got to have good offense, and we've gone aggressively after the terrorists wherever we can find them. We worked the financial circuits and the intelligence and law enforcement efforts. We've had great success there recently; Khalid Shaikh Mohammed and others.

But we also have to address the question of where might these terrorists acquire weapons of mass destruction, chemical weapons, biological weapons, nuclear weapons? And Saddam Hussein becomes a prime suspect in that regard because of his past track record and because we know he has, in fact, developed these kinds of capabilities, chemical and biological weapons. We know he's used chemical weapons. We know he's reconstituted these programs since the Gulf War. We know he's out trying once again to produce nuclear weapons and we know that he has a long-standing relationship with various terrorist groups, including the al-Qaeda organization.

Now, if we simply sit back and operate by 20th century standards with respect to national security strategy, in terms of how we're going to deal with this, we say wait until we are hit by an identifiable attack from Iraq, the consequences could be devastating for the United States. We have to be prepared to prevent that from happening. I have argued in the past, and would again, if we had been able to pre-empt the attacks of 9/11 would we have done it? And I think absolutely. I think the American people would have supported it. We have to be prepared now to take the kind of bold action that's being contemplated with respect to Iraq in order to ensure that we don't get hit with a devastating attack when the terrorists' organization gets married up with a rogue state that's willing to provide it with the kinds of deadly capabilities that Saddam Hussein has developed and used over the years.

MR. RUSSERT: French President Jacques Chirac said this morning that perhaps there could be a deadline of 30

days or 60 days and he may be able to buy into that. What would be wrong for the United States to say to the world, "OK. We're going to give Saddam 30 days or 60 days and put some pressure on the French to step up and have a united front against Saddam Hussein"?

VICE PRES. CHENEY: Well, that's exactly what we've been doing for 12 years, Tim. And that's what 1441 was all about, the U.N. Security Council resolution that was passed last fall. We negotiated that with the French and with the other members of the U.N. Security Council. We got a 15-to-nothing vote on it. It said that unless he came into compliance, serious consequences would follow. He clearly is not in compliance. He continues to be in material breach. We've now gone through the process that was envisioned in 1441 of extensive consultation with the other members of the U.N. Security Council, and we're approaching the point where further delay helps no one but Saddam Hussein.

The more time passes, the more time he's got to work on developing new capabilities--excuse me--the more time he's got to position his forces to attack or to try to mount and support terrorists operations against our forces in the region or elsewhere. We've run out this string for 12 years and 17 resolutions in the U.N. Security Council. Now, with all due respect to the French, if you look back at their track record, they have consistently opposed efforts to hold Saddam Hussein accountable for his actions.

MR. RUSSERT: Is it because of their financial dealings?

VICE PRES. CHENEY: I can't say that. I don't know. Excuse me. I know, for example, in '95, when there was an effort to pass a resolution, the Security Council finding him in material breach, France opposed it. In '96, when there was an effort to pass a resolution condemning Saddam Hussein for his slaughter of the Kurds, France opposed it. In '97, when there was an effort to block travel by his intelligence and military officials, France opposed it. In '98, France announced he was free of all weapons of mass destruction--something nobody believed. And in '99, of course, they opposed the creation UNMOVIC, the existing inspection regime, that they now want to place their total faith in with respect to trying to disarm Saddam Hussein. Given that pattern of behavior, it's difficult for us to believe that 30 days or 60 more days are going to change anything.

MR. RUSSERT: That's a non-starter?

VICE PRES. CHENEY: I think it is.

MR. RUSSERT: The Los Angeles Times wrote an editorial about the administration and its rationale for war. And let me read it to you and give you a chance to respond: "The Bush administration's months of attempts to justify quick military action against Iraq have been confusing and unfocused. It kept giving different reasons for invasion. First, it was to disarm Hussein and get him out. Then, as allies got nervous about outside nations deciding 'regime change,' the administration for a while rightly stressed disarmament only. Next, the administration was talking about 'nation-building' and using Iraq as the cornerstone of creating democracy in the Arab/Muslim world. And that would probably mean U.S. occupation of Iraq for some unspecified time, at open-ended cost. Then, another tactic: The administration tried mightily, and failed, to show a connection between Hussein and the 9/11 perpetrators, Al Qaeda. Had there been real evidence that Hussein was behind the 9/11 attacks, Americans would have lined up in support of retaliation."

What do you think is the most important rationale for going to war with Iraq?

VICE PRES. CHENEY: Well, I think I've just given it, Tim, in terms of the combination of his development and use of chemical weapons, his development of biological weapons, his pursuit of nuclear weapons.

MR. RUSSERT: And even though the International Atomic Energy Agency said he does not have a nuclear program, we disagree?

VICE PRES. CHENEY: I disagree, yes. And you'll find the CIA, for example, and other key parts of our intelligence community disagree. Let's talk about the nuclear proposition for a minute. We've got, again, a long record here. It's not as though this is a fresh issue. In the late '70s, Saddam Hussein acquired nuclear reactors from the French. 1981, the Israelis took out the Osirak reactor and stopped his nuclear weapons development at the time. Throughout the '80s, he mounted a new effort. I was told when I was defense secretary before the Gulf War that he was eight to 10 years away from a nuclear weapon. We found out after the Gulf War that he was within one or two years of having a nuclear weapon because he had a massive effort under way that involved four or five different technologies for enriching uranium to produce fissile material.

We know that based on intelligence that he has been very, very good at hiding these kinds of efforts. He's had

years to get good at it and we know he has been absolutely devoted to trying to acquire nuclear weapons. And we believe he has, in fact, **reconstituted nuclear weapons**. I think Mr. ElBaradei frankly is wrong. And I think if you look at the track record of the International Atomic Energy Agency and this kind of issue, especially where Iraq's concerned, they have consistently underestimated or missed what it was Saddam Hussein was doing. I don't have any reason to believe they're any more valid this time than they've been in the past.

MR. RUSSERT: During the 2000 campaign you were on the program when we were talking about the Persian Gulf War and looking back and I asked whether you had any regrets about taking Saddam out at that time. And you said no. And then you added this, and I want to talk about it. Let's watch:

(Videotape, August 27, 2000):

MR. CHENEY: Conversations I had with leaders in the region afterwards, they all supported the decision that was made not to go to Baghdad. They were concerned that we not get into a position where we shifted, instead of being the leader of an international coalition to roll back Iraqi aggression, to one in which we were an imperialist power willy-nilly moving into capitals in that part of the world taking down governments.

(End videotape)

MR. RUSSERT: "Imperialist power," "moving willy-nilly," "taking down governments." Is that how we're going to be perceived this time?

VICE PRES. CHENEY: Well, I hope not, Tim. And of course, in '91, there was a general consensus that we'd gone as far as we should. We'd achieved our objectives when we liberated Kuwait and that we shouldn't go on to Baghdad. But there were several assumptions that was based on. One that all those U.N. Security Council resolutions would be enforced. None of them has been. That's the major difference. And it was based on the proposition that Saddam Hussein probably wouldn't survive. Most of the experts believed based upon the severe drubbing we administered to his forces in Kuwait that he was likely to be overthrown or ousted. Of course, that didn't happen. He's proven to be a much tougher customer than anybody expected.

We're now faced with a situation, especially in the aftermath of 9/11, where the threat to the United States is increasing. And over time, given Saddam's posture there, given the fact that he has a significant flow of cash as a result of the oil production of Iraq, it's only a matter of time until he acquires nuclear weapons. And in light of that, we have to be prepared, I think, to take the action that is being contemplated. Insist that he be disarmed and if the U.N. won't do it, then the United States and other partners of the coalition will have to do that.

Now, I think things have gotten so bad inside Iraq, from the standpoint of the Iraqi people, my belief is we will, in fact, be greeted as liberators. And the president's made it very clear that our purpose there is, if we are forced to do this, will in fact be to stand up a government that's representative of the Iraqi people, hopefully democratic due respect for human rights, and it, obviously, involves a major commitment by the United States, but we think it's a commitment worth making. And we don't have the option anymore of simply laying back and hoping that events in Iraq will not constitute a threat to the U.S. Clearly, 12 years after the Gulf War, we're back in a situation where he does constitute a threat.

MR. RUSSERT: If we do in fact go into Iraq, would a military operation be successful without the apprehension or death of Saddam Hussein?

VICE PRES. CHENEY: Our objective will be, if we go in, to defeat whatever forces oppose us, to take down the government of Saddam Hussein, and then to follow on with a series of actions such as eliminating all the weapons of mass destruction, finding where they are and destroying them, preserving the territorial integrity of Turkey. As I say, standing up a broadly representative government that's preserving the territorial integrity of Iraq and standing up a broadly representative government of the Iraqi people. Those will be our objectives.

Now, what happens to Saddam Hussein, obviously, is of great interest. My guess is under those circumstances, he's likely to be captured if he's not first killed, perhaps by his own people. But the objective isn't necessarily him per se, but it clearly is to get rid of his government and to put a new one in its place. And that's what we think is required in order to achieve the objectives of eliminating his WMD, etc.

But I don't want to say, you know--I can't predict what's going to happen to Saddam Hussein, in particular. Conceivably, he could be captured and ultimately held for trial by the Iraqi government, maybe treated as a war criminal. There are lots of possibilities. He might flee, which, obviously, would be an improvement over the current situation.

MR. RUSSERT: But no Iraqi would step forward as an alternative as long as Saddam Hussein is hovering out there not captured?

VICE PRES. CHENEY: That's possible. But I'm not sure where he would go. I mean, the fact of the matter is this is not a man who is an aesthetic like Osama bin Laden who is willing to go live in a cave for a long period of time and be cut off from the outside world. This is a man who's used to his palaces and his luxuries. I think he would find it very difficult. I also think that the hatred and animosity of the Iraqi people towards Saddam Hussein, based on the fact that he has been responsible--Human Rights Watch estimates he's been responsible for the death of as many as a million Iraqi citizens over the course of his tenure. And given his track record of absolute brutality, with respect to his opponents, I think the people in Iraq today, whatever group they are affiliated with, whatever part of the country they live in, the vast majority of them would turn him in in a minute if, in fact, they thought they could do so safely.

MR. RUSSERT: If your analysis is not correct, and we're not treated as liberators, but as conquerors, and the Iraqis begin to resist, particularly in Baghdad, do you think the American people are prepared for a long, costly, and bloody battle with significant American casualties?

VICE PRES. CHENEY: Well, I don't think it's likely to unfold that way, Tim, because I really do believe that we will be greeted as liberators. I've talked with a lot of Iraqis in the last several months myself, had them to the White House. The president and I have met with them, various groups and individuals, people who have devoted their lives from the outside to trying to change things inside Iraq. And like Kanan Makiya who's a professor at Brandeis, but an Iraqi, he's written great books about the subject, knows the country intimately, and is a part of the democratic opposition and resistance. The road we get on the people of Iraq is there is no question but what they want to get rid of Saddam Hussein and they will welcome as liberators the United States when we come to do that.

Now, if we get into a significant battle in Baghdad, I think it would be under circumstances in which the security forces around Saddam Hussein, the special Republican Guard, and the special security organization, several thousand strong, that in effect are the close-in defenders of the regime, they might, in fact, try to put up such a struggle. I think the regular army will not. My guess is even significant elements of the Republican Guard are likely as well to want to avoid conflict with the U.S. forces, and are likely to step aside.

Now, I can't say with certainty that there will be no battle for Baghdad. We have to be prepared for that possibility. But, again, I don't want to convey to the American people the idea that this is a cost-free operation. Nobody can say that. I do think there's no doubt about the outcome. There's no question about who is going to prevail if there is military action. And there's no question but what it is going to be cheaper and less costly to do it now than it will be to wait a year or two years or three years until he's developed even more deadly weapons, perhaps nuclear weapons. And the consequences then of having to deal with him would be far more costly than will be the circumstances today. Delay does not help.

MR. RUSSERT: The army's top general said that we would have to have several hundred thousand troops there for several years in order to maintain stability.

VICE PRES. CHENEY: I disagree. We need, obviously, a large force and we've deployed a large force to prevail, from a military standpoint, to achieve our objectives, we will need a significant presence there until such time as we can turn things over to the Iraqis themselves. But to suggest that we need several hundred thousand troops there after military operations cease, after the conflict ends, I don't think is accurate. I think that's an overstatement.

MR. RUSSERT: We've had 50,000 troops in Kosovo for several years, a country of just five million people. This is a country of 23 million people. It will take a lot in order to secure it.

VICE PRES. CHENEY: Well, but we've significantly drawn down our forces in Kosovo and in the Balkans. There's no question but what we'll have to have a presence there for a period of time. It is difficult now to specify how long. We will clearly want to take on responsibilities in addition to conducting military operations and eliminating Saddam Hussein's regime. We need to be prepared to provide humanitarian assistance, medical care, food, all of those other things that are required to have Iraq up and running again. And we are well-equipped to do that. We have got a lot of effort that's gone into that.

But the--again, I come back to this proposition--Is it cost-free? Absolutely not. But the cost is far less than it will be if we get hit, for example, with a weapon that Saddam Hussein might provide to al-Qaeda, the cost to the United States of what happened on 9/11 with billions and billions of dollars and 3,000 lives. And the cost will be much greater in a future attack if the terrorists have access to the kinds of capabilities that Saddam Hussein has

developed.

MR. RUSSERT: Every analysis said this war itself would cost about \$80 billion, recovery of Baghdad, perhaps of Iraq, about \$10 billion per year. We should expect as American citizens that this would cost at least \$100 billion for a two-year involvement.

VICE PRES. CHENEY: I can't say that, Tim. There are estimates out there. It's important, though, to recognize that we've got a different set of circumstances than we've had in Afghanistan. In Afghanistan you've got a nation without significant resources. In Iraq you've got a nation that's got the second-largest oil reserves in the world, second only to Saudi Arabia. It will generate billions of dollars a year in cash flow if they get back to their production of roughly three million barrels of oil a day, in the relatively near future. And that flow of resources, obviously, belongs to the Iraqi people, needs to be put to use by the Iraqi people for the Iraqi people and that will be one of our major objectives.

But the point is this is not a nation without resources, and when it comes time to rebuild and to make the kinds of investments that are going to be required to give them a shot at achieving a truly representative government, a successful government, a government that can defend itself and protect its territorial integrity and look to the interests of its people, Iraq starts with significant advantages. It's got a well-trained middle class, a highly literate work force, a high degree of technical sophistication. This is a country that I think, but for the rule of Saddam Hussein and his brutality and his diversion of the nation's resources and his pursuit of weapons of mass destruction, can be one of the leading, perhaps the leading state in that part of the world in terms of developing a modern state and the kind of lifestyle that its people are entitled to.

MR. RUSSERT: And you are convinced the Kurds, the Sunnis, the Shiites will come together in a democracy?

VICE PRES. CHENEY: They have so far. One of the things that many people forget is that the Kurds in the north have been operating now for over 10 years under a sort of U.S.-provided umbrella with respect to the no-fly zone, and they have established a very strong, viable society with elements of democracy an important part of it. They've had significant successes in that regard and they're eager to work with the rest of Iraq, that portion of it that still governs Saddam Hussein. And if you look at the opposition, they've come together, I think, very effectively, with representatives from Shia, Sunni and Kurdish elements in the population. They understand the importance of preserving and building on an Iraqi national identity. They don't like to have the U.S., for example, come in and insist on dealing with people sort of on a hyphenated basis--the Iraqi-Shia, Iraqi-Sunni--but rather to focus on Iraq as a nation and all that it can accomplish as a nation, and we try to be sensible to those concerns. I think the prospects of being able to achieve this kind of success, if you will, from a political standpoint, are probably better than they would be for virtually any other country in under similar circumstances in that part of the world.

MR. RUSSERT: Ten days ago, the president had a news conference and said this, and let me show you:

(Videotape, March 6, 2003):

PRESIDENT GEORGE W. BUSH: No matter what the whip count is, we're calling for the vote. We want to see people stand up and say what their opinion is about Saddam Hussein and the utility of the United Nations Security Council, and so you bet. It's time for people to show their cards, let the world know where they stand when it comes to Saddam.

(End videotape)

MR. RUSSERT: Are we going to demand a second vote in the United Nations to show their cards?

VICE PRES. CHENEY: Well, it has a certain appeal, Tim. The president will address that issue today when he meets in the Azores with Prime Minister Aznar from Spain and Prime Minister Blair from Great Britain. The decision has to be made about whether or not we call for a vote and that's something they'll address. Within a few hours, you'll be able to ask the president that directly. He'll hold a press conference, I'm sure, when he finishes meeting with his colleagues.

MR. RUSSERT: Brent Scowcroft, a man you know well, the national security adviser to former President Bush, when you were secretary of defense, talked to the National Journal and said this, and let me lay it out: "I'm puzzled as to where President Bush stands on the issue of our traditional alliances such as NATO, because during the campaign he made some strong statements about putting more stock in them. Clearly, that hasn't happened. Part of the Bush administration clearly believes that as a superpower, we must take advantage of this opportunity

to change the world for the better, and we don't need to go out of our way to accommodate alliances, partnerships or friends in the process, because that would too constraining.

"[This doctrine of continually letting each mission to define the coalition and relying almost solely on ad hoc] coalitions of the willing is fundamentally fatally flawed. As we've seen in the debate about Iraq, it's already given us an image of arrogance and unilateralism, and we're paying a very high price for that image. If we get to the point where everyone secretly hopes the United States gets a black eye because we're so obnoxious, then we'll be totally hamstrung in the war on terror. We'll be like Gulliver with the Lilliputians."

Brent Scowcroft, "arrogance," "black eye." Eighty-five percent of Spain, 86 percent of Germans, 91 percent of Russians, all against this war. What happened? How did we lose a PR battle against Saddam Hussein in the world, and why would Brent Scowcroft say those kinds of things?

VICE PRES. CHENEY: Well, I have great affection for Brent. We've been friends for a long time. He is occasionally wrong, and this is one of those occasions.

I think it's important--I don't want to underestimate the extent of which there are differences here between the United States and our allies on these issues, but it helps to understand that, Tim, I think if we back off and try to put this in historical perspective. I do think that 9/11 is maybe a historic watershed, that the world is fundamentally different on the front side of that than it was on the backside, on the 21st century side, if you will, than it was on the 20th century side, that the United States and the president have been forced to come to grips with issues that are allies to date have not yet had to come to grips with, that the problem, once you look at 9/11--and, again, think back to the past--we had certain strategies and policies and institutions that were built to deal with the conflicts of the 20th century. They may not be the right strategies and policies and institutions to deal with the kind of threat we face now from a nuclear armed al-Qaeda organization, for example, should that development, and we have to find new ways to deal with those threats.

We've been forced, partly because we were hit on 9/11, to come to grips with that very real possibility that the next attack could involve far deadlier weapons than anything the world has ever seen. And then it won't come from a major state such as would have been true during the Cold War, if the Soviet Union had ever launched at the United States. It will come from a handful of terrorists on jihad, committed to die, and in the effort to kill millions of Americans. The rest of the world hasn't really had to come to grips with that yet. They're still, I think, thinking very much in terms of the last century, if you will, in terms of policies and strategies and institutions, and part of the difficulty we're faced with here is we do have, I think, a different perception of the world today, and what's going to be required to secure the United States, than they do. And that, in part, accounts for the current debate and difference of perception, if you will, between Americans and Europeans.

There are other things at work here, too. Clearly, the demise of the Soviet Union. That means that a consensus that existed with respect to what the major threats are disappeared with the end of the Cold War. I think the Europeans tend to look at what they've accomplished within Europe, which is truly remarkable--the integration of Europe, the increasing reduction in the significance of national boundaries, political and economic coming together of those systems, finding ways peacefully to deal with their differences so they didn't repeat what happened in the first half of the 20th century when two world wars started in Europe, and they tend to think that the world operates the way Europe does. We look at that, and I think we have to give them enormous credit for what they've accomplished, but it's also true that they accomplished it in part because we provided the security umbrella for the last 50 years. It was U.S. military capability that held the Soviet Union in check, that formed the backbone for NATO.

And, now, as we go forward and look at the threat of rogue states and terrorists equipped with deadly weapons in the future, the only nation that really has the capability to deal effectively with those threats is the United States. The Brits have got some capability, and they're great allies, and we badly want them on board in any venture we undertake, but the fact of the matter is for most of the others who are engaged in this debate, they don't have the capability to do anything about it anyway.

The suggestion that somehow the war on terror has suffered as a result of the differences over Iraq I don't think is valid. I think what we found is that the cooperation and the intelligence area and the law enforcement area, financial area has been enormously successful, continues to be effective and we've seen it in the arrest in recent weeks of very significant figures in the al-Qaeda organization, including Khalid Shaikh Mohammed just a short time ago.

MR. RUSSERT: There is a perception, however, if you read any of the papers in Europe and around the world, the constant description of the president as a cowboy, that he wants to go it alone, that the president and you and the administration that was perceived as extremely competent on foreign policy has been stumbling and hasn't

reached out and nurtured alliances, that if you mention the president's name--a friend of mine wrote me a letter and said, "It's like a blast furnace. They just respond, saying, 'He just wants to lead the world into war.'" Every other German says that in the poll. Forty-five percent of Brits say that President Bush is a higher risk to world peace than Saddam Hussein. How did we get to this point? And is the competence of the foreign policy of the Bush administration being seriously questioned?

VICE PRES. CHENEY: Well, I start with the terms of responding to that, Tim, with the explanation that I just gave. I think, you know, we're on one side of the divide, if you will, and they're on the other, at this point. I think eventually there will be a coming together in terms of an understanding, if you will and the development...

MR. RUSSERT: No long-term damage to the United Nations?

VICE PRES. CHENEY: Well, I can't say that. I don't think we damaged the United Nations. I think the United Nations up until now has proven incapable of dealing with the threat that Saddam Hussein represents, incapable of enforcing its own resolutions, incapable of meeting the challenge we face in the 21st century of rogue states armed with deadly weapons, possibly sharing them with terrorists.

With respect to the charge about the president, I just think it's dead wrong. I've gotten to know this man very well. I work side-by-side with him every day, seven days a week, you know, 24/7, as they say. He has a great capability that I think is absolutely essential in an effective leader, and that's the ability to cut to the heart of the issue. If I'm looking for analogies, I think Ronald Reagan, and I think of it as Reaganesque in the sense that President Reagan understood, for example, some very basic fundamental facts. He went out at one point and referred to the Soviet Union as empire of evil. Created consternation on both sides of the Atlantic. A lot of hammering, "How could you possibly say the Soviet Union was the empire of evil?" Well, that was, in fact, true. It guided his policy judgments. He, in turn, ultimately led the alliance in the right direction and we ultimately prevailed on the Cold War.

I look at President Bush and I see, for example, his setting a whole new standard about how we're going to deal with terrorist-sponsoring states. In the past, many of our friends in Europe and elsewhere around the world, when they see a state that's sponsored terror, frankly was willing to look the other way, not to hold them accountable for the fact that they were providing sanctuary for people who were out there in the world doing evil things.

After we got hit on 9/11 the president said no more and enunciated the Bush doctrine that we will hold states that sponsor terror, that provide sanctuary for terrorists to account, that they will be treated as guilty as the terrorists themselves of whatever acts are committed from bases on that soil. That's a brand-new departure. We've never done that before. It makes some people very uncomfortable, but it's absolutely essential as part of our strategy for taking down the al-Qaeda organization and for ending the terrorist threat that the United States has been forced to deal with over the years. So the notion that the president is a cowboy--I don't know, is a Westerner, I think that's not necessarily a bad idea. I think the fact of the matter is he cuts to the chase. He is very direct and I find that very refreshing.

Oftentimes, you can get so tangled up in the nuance and the fine points of diplomacy of dealing with these kind of issues, engage in a large debate but the people who make things happen, the leaders who set the world, if you will, on a new course, deal effectively with these kinds of threats that we've never been faced with before, will be somebody exactly like President Bush. I think he's exactly what the circumstances require.

MR. RUSSERT: Do you believe Saddam Hussein will use chemical weapons against U.S. troops?

VICE PRES. CHENEY: I don't know. I assume he may try. Of course as soon as he does it will be clear to the world that we were absolutely right, that he does, in fact, have chemical weapons.

MR. RUSSERT: How will you respond?

VICE PRES. CHENEY: We've got, I think, a military force that is the best equipped in history to deal with this kind of threat. Our troops are well trained. They've got a lot of equipment that's designed specifically to permit them to operate in that kind of an environment. The other thing we have is just overwhelming capabilities in terms of going after an opposing force, the ability to move very fast, combined arms of air, for example, helicopters, artillery, and armor formations. It's going to take a very brave individual to get close enough to our forces to strike at them with a chemical weapon.

MR. RUSSERT: If he did a widespread chemical attack, would we consider responding with nuclear?

VICE PRES. CHENEY: I can't say how we would respond under the circumstances, Tim. We've always adopted the policy that if someone were to use a weapon of mass destruction--chemical, biological or nuclear--against the United States or U.S. forces, we reserve the right to use any means at our disposal to respond. And I'm sure that'll continue to be our policy here. We would not want to telegraph what we might or might not do under those circumstances.

MR. RUSSERT: We have to take a quick break. We'll be right back with more of our conversation with the vice president of the United States, Dick Cheney, right after this.

(Announcements)

MR. RUSSERT: More with Vice President Dick Cheney after this brief station break.

(Announcements)

MR. RUSSERT: And we are back with the vice president. Front page of The New York Times: "Anger On Iraq Seen As New Al-Qaeda Recruiting Tool." The Arab street will rise up, recruit more people. The president has embraced a new road map of the Middle East. Some say that was a political calculation to help with the war in Iraq. What will happen in the Arab street? And will more young Arabs, Muslims sign up to attack the United States?

VICE PRES. CHENEY: I can't predict that, Tim. It's possible. There's another point of view, though, that I think is very valid here, important not to lose sight of, and to some extent the United States has established over the last several years, going back at least to the '80's, an unfortunate practice that we've often failed to respond effectively to attacks on the United States. And I think the impression has grown in that part of the world--I think Osama bin Laden believes this and I think Saddam Hussein did, at least up until 9/11--that they could strike the U.S. with impunity, and we had situations in '83 when the Marine barracks was blown up in Beirut. There was no effective U.S. response. In '93 the World Trade Center in New York hit; no effective response. In '96, Khobar Towers, in '98 the east Africa embassy bombings, in 2000, the USS Cole was hit, and each time there was almost no credible response from the United States to those attacks.

Everything changed on 9/11 when we got hit here at home and we had a different president in place, who was bound and determined to go forward. And I firmly believe, along with, you know, men like Bernard Lewis, who's one of the great, I think, students of that part of the world, that strong, firm U.S. response to terror and to threats to the United States would go a long way, frankly, towards calming things in that part of the world. People who are moderate, people who want to believe in the United States, and want to support us will be willing to stand up because the United States is going to stand with them and not pull back and disappear when the going gets tough.

One of the keys, for example, with respect to Iraq is our friends in the region have been willing to step up now and be supportive of what we need to do from a military standpoint because they believe this president will do exactly what he says he will do. They don't want to stand up and stick their necks out if the U.S. is then going to fade as we have so often in the past, so...

MR. RUSSERT: But a lot of countries, Mr. Vice President, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Egypt, the neighbors of Saddam, other than Kuwait, are not supportive.

VICE PRES. CHENEY: Well, I think we will find, Tim, that if in fact we have to do this with military force that there will be sighs of relief in many quarters in the Middle East that the United States finally followed through and deal effectively with what they all perceive to be a major threat, but they're all reluctant to stand up if Saddam's still in power and if there's a possibility he will survive once again to threaten them and to threaten their region. So for the United States to follow through here, be determined, be decisive, do exactly what we said we were going to do, I think we'll find we've got far more friends out there than many people think.

MR. RUSSERT: And Jordan and Pakistan and countries like that will be stable?

VICE PRES. CHENEY: I think so. I think weakness, vacillation, and unwillingness of the United States to stand with our friends, that is provocative. It's encouraged people like Osama bin Laden, as I say, to launch repeated strikes against the United States, and our people overseas and here at home, with the view that he could, in fact, do so with impunity and now he knows different.

MR. RUSSERT: North Korea an imminent threat; they have a nuclear bomb, perhaps on line to build six more by June. Why not have a pre-emptive military strike against North Korea or at least sit down with them, one-on-one,

and try to resolve that crisis?

VICE PRES. CHENEY: The situation in North Korea is very serious. We recognize that. We are thoroughly engaged diplomatically in an effort to deal with it. Each set of circumstances we're faced with around the world is different. It doesn't automatically mean an approach that makes sense in Iraq is necessarily an approach that would make sense in North Korea. North Korea, we think the key is a multilateral approach. Everybody always wants us to be multilateral and we think it's appropriate here. The matter has been referred to the U.N. Security Council now from the International Atomic Energy Agency when North Korea violated their existing safeguards agreements. That's been now referred to the U.N. The U.N.'s going to have to come to grips with it.

But it also is important that our friends in the region deal effectively with it. Though, they're far more directly affected than we are--Japan, South Korea and especially China--the idea of a nuclear-armed North Korea with ballistic missiles to deliver those will, I think, probably set off an arms race in that part of the world, and others, perhaps Japan, for example, may be forced to consider whether or not they want to readdress the nuclear question. That's not in China's interest, and we've been working with China, with Japan and Korea--I'm going to be out there next month; Colin Powell was recently there to try to put together effective international approach to North Korea to make it clear to them that it is not in their interest to proceed with building more nuclear weapons.

MR. RUSSERT: What's after Iraq? Will we consider military action to pre-empt the nuclear program of North Korea, of Iran?

VICE PRES. CHENEY: Tim, I didn't come this morning to announce any new military ventures or, frankly, to take any off the table. We haven't thought in those terms. The fact of the matter is we hope we can deal with those issues by peaceful means wherever that kind of problem arises. It's one of the reasons the president tried so hard to have the U.N. Security Council be effective with respect to the Iraq question is because there are these other issues out there. They are best addressed if possible through the U.N. Security Council. But it'll only work if the council is going to be a meaningful organization that is prepared to enforce its own resolutions. Up till now they haven't been willing to do that. We hope they will do it. And I'm sure we'll continue to take an international approach to address this proliferation question.

But it is a major issue and you've touched on it this morning, that I think back on the discussions we've had in years past, we've worried about the possibility of proliferation. But it is now here. It's a real threat, and it's growing. There are increasing number of nations out there that are looking to acquire these capabilities and the world would be radically different if some of these rogue regimes do, in fact, acquire that capability.

MR. RUSSERT: A front page all across the world, this mystery illness, this flu-type illness from Asia that antibiotics do not seem to be able to treat. Do you know anything about that?

VICE PRES. CHENEY: No more than what I've seen in the press. The information that's available to us is public. The World Health Organization has put out a worldwide alert, which is unique. It doesn't happen very often. Our folks down at the CDC, the Center for Disease Control in Atlanta, are actively engaged in it. We don't know what it is. We don't know the cause of it at this point. It is very worrisome because it appears to spread from whoever has got it to the health-care workers caring for them. It appears to be moving fairly rapidly starting in Asia. We're, obviously, working very hard to try to identify it as soon as possible and figure out how to deal with it.

MR. RUSSERT: Any suggestion it's terrorism?

VICE PRES. CHENEY: There's none to date.

MR. RUSSERT: How's your health?

VICE PRES. CHENEY: Good. No complaints.

MR. RUSSERT: How's your diet?

VICE PRES. CHENEY: My diet is good. I'm watched over very carefully by my wife and by doctors and I've got...

MR. RUSSERT: Do you prefer french fries or freedom fries?

VICE PRES. CHENEY: I don't eat them whatever they're called. I used to love them, but, no, I stay away from french fries. They're not on my diet.

MR. RUSSERT: In order to pay for this war, would the president consider suspending his proposed tax cut?

VICE PRES. CHENEY: We don't believe that's the right course of action, Tim. This is one of those times when as important as the war on terror is and as important as the problem of Iraq is, we've also got a lot of other balls in the air. And an American president these days doesn't have the choice of focusing on only one thing. We've also got to deal with the Middle East peace process, with Israelis and Palestinians which we did this week. We've got to deal with the domestic economy. It's very important to get the economy growing again. And one of the reasons we've had a fall-off in revenue, obviously, is a slow economy and we need to get growth started again. We can't wait until after we've dealt with our military problems to get the economy growing again. So we believe the tax cut is good, long-term growth policy for our economy. And that's the best way for us to be able to afford the kind of things we're going to have to do internationally.

MR. RUSSERT: I hope some day we can come back and have a full discussion on the economy.

VICE PRES. CHENEY: Well, I hope so, too, Tim.

MR. RUSSERT: Mr. Vice President, thank you very much for sharing your views.

VICE PRES. CHENEY: Thank you.

MR. RUSSERT: And we'll be right back.

(Announcements)

Document MTPR000020030904dz3g0005q

© 2007 Factiva, Inc. All rights reserved.

