

Interview: Vice President Dick Cheney discusses 9/11 anniversary, Iraq, nation's economy and politics 2002

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

VICE PRES. DICK CHENEY: Good morning, Tim.

MR. RUSSERT: September 11--when you hear those words, "9/11" what are your thoughts?

VICE PRES. CHENEY: Well, it's become sort of a unique event in our history, one of those events that everybody shared in in some fashion. And I think all of us remember where we were when that happened. I think about it a lot in terms of how it's changed, how I spend my time, what I think about, what we worry about in the administration, it's a watershed event. The world before 9/11 looks different than the world after 9/11, especially in terms of how we think about national security and what's needed to defend America. Those are the thoughts that crop up. Obviously, also, I had the opportunity on Friday to go to New York with the Congress. We held a joint session in Federal Hall, where the first Congress convened, and George Washington was sworn in to honor and to remember what happened on September 11 and it brought it all back.

MR. RUSSERT: When we last spoke some eight months ago, you said it was not a matter of if, but when, the terrorists would strike again. Are you surprised they have not struck again within the past year?

VICE PRES. CHENEY: I can't say that I'm surprised, Tim. There's sort of two ways to look at it. One is that there have oftentimes been long periods between major attacks. You know, World Trade Center in '93, Cole bombing in 2000, before that in '98 East Africa embassies, 2001, the New York and Washington attacks. On the other hand, we've also done a lot to improve our defenses. And we've been on the offensive with respect to the al-Qaeda organization. We've wrapped up a lot of them. We have a lot of them detained. We've totally disrupted their operations in Afghanistan, took down the Taliban. We've made it much more difficult I think for them to operate.

Now, did they have a major attack planned in that intervening period? I don't know. I suspect they probably did and I suspect we probably deterred some attacks. But does that mean the problem's solved? Obviously not.

MR. RUSSERT: Leading up this September 11, 2002, are we hearing an increase in chatter? Are intelligence folks picking up conversations amongst the al-Qaeda cells around the world?

VICE PRES. CHENEY: We've seen some of that. As you go through anniversary dates during the course of the year, the anniversary when U.S. troops first went into Saudi Arabia, the various anniversaries crop up. Now, as I say, to date, not much has happened in that respect, although we did see just this week the Germans arrested two individuals planning, apparently, to set off a major explosion at U.S. European Command in Heidelberg, Germany. Now, was that al-Qaeda related? We don't know yet, but there is a temptation I think for terrorists to try to stage events that hark back to historically significant dates. And I wouldn't be at all surprised if that's the case here. I'm not saying something is going to happen on September 11, but as these major milestones come along, we often receive reporting that it's tied into one of those dates.

MR. RUSSERT: One of your many tasks in the administration, the point person on bioterrorism; you've been spending some time at the Center for Disease Control. Do you believe that all Americans should eventually be vaccinated against smallpox?

VICE PRES. CHENEY: We're in the middle of improving our capability to do that. A year ago, we had enough vaccine for maybe 15 million people. We're now well on the way to producing enough vaccine for 350 million people. There is serious consideration now being given to what kind of vaccination program we want. Do you go to first responders, people who have to deal with this when it first arises? Do you do a broader group than that? Do you do it on a voluntary basis for anybody who would like to have it? These are issues under active discussion,

deliberation. Tommy Thompson over at HHS has been actively involved in it as well, too. It's not a zero-sum kind of proposition; that is, it's not a cost-free operation. There are side effects and consequences for most vaccines. And you have to weigh those against the benefits that would be derived by protecting the population.

MR. RUSSERT: If you vaccinated 300 million Americans, a thousand would die from side effects.

VICE PRES. CHENEY: I don't remember the exact numbers, but clearly there would be some people who would be harmed as a result of the vaccination.

MR. RUSSERT: But the risk may be such we may come to that.

VICE PRES. CHENEY: That's entirely possible.

MR. RUSSERT: Let me turn to the issue of Iraq. You have said that it poses a mortal threat to the United States. How? Define mortal threat.

VICE PRES. CHENEY: Well, this will take some time, but it's important for us, as I mentioned earlier, to remember that the world has changed. That prior to 9/11, we really focused our defense capabilities on the possibility, for example, during the Cold War the Soviet Union attacking, and we worked with strategies of deterrents and containment. If we could hold at risk the targets the Soviet Union cared about, then they wouldn't attack us. That strategy, obviously, worked. What we found on September 11 is that the danger now is an attack that's launched from within the United States itself, not from some foreign territory, as happened with respect to the hijackers on 9/11. Also that, in this particular case, it was backed up by a cell, terrorist cell, operating in Hamburg, Germany.

You have to completely recalibrate your thinking in terms of how you deal with that. Now, if you start with that as background, then you deal with Saddam Hussein and his 11 years, now, since 1991, since the end of the war, his refusal to comply with the U.N. Security Council resolutions. If you look at the extent to which he has aggressively sought to acquire chemical, biological and nuclear weapons, over the years, the fact that he has previously used them--he used chemical weapons both against the Kurds and against the Iranians during the 1980s--the fact that he has twice invaded his neighbors. He's launched ballistic missiles against four of his neighbors over the years. There's a pattern and a track record there that one has to be concerned about.

Now, the more recent developments have to do with our now being able to conclude, based on intelligence that's becoming available, some of it has been made public, more of it hopefully will be, that he has indeed stepped up his capacity to produce and deliver biological weapons, that he has reconstituted his nuclear program to develop a nuclear weapon, that there are efforts under way inside Iraq to significantly expand his capability. There are other elements that need to be considered here. For some 10 or 11 years now, the international community has attempted to deal with this, but it's been generally ineffective.

The sanctions are breaking down. The willingness of nations to trade with Saddam Hussein is increased. He's also sitting on top of about 10 percent of the world's oil reserves and generating enough illicit oil revenue now on the sides that he's got a lot of money to invest in developing these kinds of programs. So we find ourselves, on the one hand, with the demonstrated greater vulnerability of September 11; and, on the other hand, with the very clear evidence that this is a man who is resuming all of those programs that the U.N. Security Council tried to get him to forgo some 10 or 11 years ago. And increasingly we believe that the United States may well become the target of those activities.

MR. RUSSERT: What, specifically, has he obtained that you believe would enhance his nuclear development program?

VICE PRES. CHENEY: Well, in the nuclear weapons arena, you've got sort of three key elements that you need to acquire. You need the technical expertise. You need to have a group of scientists and technicians, engineers, who know how to put together the infrastructure and to build a weapon. He's got that. He had it because of his program that was there previously, which I'll come back and talk about in a minute, but we know he's been working for 20 years trying to acquire this capability. He's got a well-established scientifically, technically competent crew to do it.

Secondly, you need a weapons design. One of the toughest parts about building a nuclear weapon is knowing how to do it. And they've got that. He had it back prior to the Gulf War. We know from things that were uncovered during the course of the inspections back in the early '90s that he did, in fact, have at least two designs for nuclear weapons.

The third thing you need is fissile material, weapons-grade material. Now, in the case of a nuclear weapon, that means either plutonium or highly enriched uranium. And what we've seen recently that has raised our level of concern to the current state of unrest, if you will, if I can put it in those terms, is that he now is trying, through his **illicit procurement network**, to acquire the equipment he needs to be able to enrich uranium to make the bombs.

MR. RUSSERT: Aluminum tubes.

VICE PRES. CHENEY: Specifically aluminum tubes. There's a story in The New York Times this morning--this is--I don't--and I want to attribute The Times. I don't want to talk about, obviously, specific intelligence sources, but it's now public that, in fact, he has been seeking to acquire, and we have been able to intercept and prevent him from acquiring through this particular channel, the kinds of tubes that are necessary to build a centrifuge. And the centrifuge is required to take low-grade uranium and enhance it into highly enriched uranium, which is what you have to have in order to build a bomb. This is a technology he was working on back, say, before the Gulf War. And one of the reasons it's of concern, Tim, is, you know, we know about a particular shipment. We've intercepted that. We don't know what else--what other avenues he may be taking out there, what he may have already acquired. We do know he's had four years without any inspections at all in Iraq to develop that capability.

We also, if you harken back to the past, as I mentioned earlier, before the Gulf War, back in 1990, we had reason to believe then that he had established a program to try to produce a nuclear weapon. I was told then, as secretary of defense, that he was several years away from being able to do that. What we found out after the Gulf War, once we got in there, and got the inspection regime going and so forth, was that he had been much farther along than we anticipated, and that he, in fact, might have been within six months to a year of actually building a nuclear weapon.

MR. RUSSERT: Do...

VICE PRES. CHENEY: So the point that--to be made here is we have to assume there's more there than we know. What we know is just bits and pieces we gather through the intelligence system. But we--you never--nobody ever mails you the entire plan or--that rarely happens. It certainly has not happened in this case. So we have to deal with these bits and pieces, and try to put them together in a mosaic to understand what's going on. But we do know, with absolute certainty, that he is using his procurement system to acquire the equipment he needs in order to enrich uranium to build a nuclear weapon.

MR. RUSSERT: He does not have a nuclear weapon now?

VICE PRES. CHENEY: I can't say that. I can say that I know for sure that he's trying to acquire the capability. But again, you know, if this--some people say, "Well, if you're going to use this process, if you're going to go through the enrichment process, it could take five, six years maybe." But then the question is: "Well, when did he start?" Did he start back when the inspection regime was still under way, prior to '98? Because he did have, for example, a robust biological weapons program then, even though there were inspectors present. Did he start in '98 when the inspectors left? Has he had four years already to work on this process? Or is he only beginning now? We don't know that. We can't tell what the start date is. We do know that he is, in fact, embarked upon this venture. We don't have any way to know, at this point, to specify the date by which he will actually have a weapon he can use.

MR. RUSSERT: There seems to be a real debate in the country as to his capability. This is how The New York Times reported comments by Senator Chuck Hagel, a Republican, who said, "The Central Intelligence Agency had 'absolutely no evidence' that Iraq possess or will soon possess nuclear weapons." Is that accurate?

VICE PRES. CHENEY: I disagree. I think the accurate thing to say is we don't know when he might actually complete that process. All of the experience we have points in the direction that, in the past, we've underestimated the extent of his program. We've underestimated the speed at which it was developing. It's important for people to understand, as well, too, the difficult nature of the target here, in an intelligence perspective. This is a guy who runs a totally controlled system. There is no--he doesn't have to go to Congress to get funds appropriated to build a system. It's a dictatorship. Secondly, it's a police state. He runs a very brutal regime. Third, he has been very good at denial and deception. He's good at hiding whatever he's doing from public view. And therefore, as an intelligence target, it's an especially difficult proposition for us.

We have a tendency--I don't know if it's part of the part of the American character--to say, "Well, we'll sit down and we'll evaluate the evidence. We'll draw a conclusion." But we always think in terms that we've got all the evidence. Here, we don't have all the evidence. We have 10 percent, 20 percent, 30 percent. We don't know how much. We know we have a part of the picture. And that part of the picture tells us that he is, in fact, actively and aggressively seeking to acquire nuclear weapons.

MR. RUSSERT: Why haven't our allies, who presumably would know the same information, come to the same conclusion?

VICE PRES. CHENEY: I don't think they know the same information. I think the fact is that, in terms of the quality of our intelligence operation, I think we're better than anybody else, generally, in this area. I think many of our European allies, for example, who are reluctant to address this issue or who have been critical of the suggestion that somehow the United States wants to aggressively go address this issue--I think many of them do not have access to the information we have. Now, some of this clearly comes from very sensitive sources, and we have to be very careful to try to protect those sources.

And I know I can cite specific examples. During my time in government, where we have, in fact, had agents, people reporting to us on sensitive matters caught and executed. Their lives are at stake, and our ability to get access, to continue to get access to these programs, depends upon our trying to preserve the classification of some of this information. Having said that, the president, though, still knows and understands very well that we need to provide as much information as we can, especially to the Congress. And he directed me last week, together with Director Tenet of the CIA, to begin that process. We sat down on Thursday afternoon with the big four congressional leaders in the House and Senate--Lott, Hastert, Daschle and Gephardt--and began to share the most sensitive information with them about these new developments that we think are so disturbing.

MR. RUSSERT: You can't just send the military to war. You have to bring a country to war and convince them it is the necessary and right thing to do. I remember 40 years ago, when John Kennedy addressed the nation about the Cuban situation, the Russian buildup of nuclear weapons, President Kennedy spoke to the nation in prime time. Three days later, his ambassador to the United Nations, Adlai Stevenson, directly confronted the Soviet ambassador. And this is what he said:

(Videotape, October 25, 1962):

AMB. ADLAI STEVENSON: Do you, Ambassdor Zorin, deny that the USSR has placed and is placing medium- and intermediate-range missiles at sites in Cuba? Yes or no? Don't wait for the translation. Yes or no?

(End videotape)

MR. RUSSERT: And then he proceeded to show this satellite footage, which we can show here: Clear, for the world to see, including the Soviets, the buildup of nuclear weapons in Cuba. Would this administration be willing to go before the United Nations, the world, and show convincingly just exactly what Saddam has, as best we know?

VICE PRES. CHENEY: Well, I think we've started that process already, Tim. The president's going to address the General Assembly of the United Nations this week. He will lay out his concerns at that point. We have begun to share, as much as we can, with committees of Congress. A lot of this, I hope, eventually will be in the public arena so that we'll be able to discuss it not only with our allies overseas, but also with the American people here at home. They have a right to know and understand what it is that's happened here.

It's also important not to focus just on the nuclear threat. I mean, that sort of grabs everybody's attention, and that's what we're used to dealing with. But come back to 9/11 again, and one of the real concerns about Saddam Hussein, as well, is his biological weapons capability; the fact that he may, at some point, try to use smallpox, anthrax, plague, some other kind of biological agent against other nations, possibly including even the United States. So this is not just a one-dimensional threat. This just isn't a guy who's now back trying once again to build nuclear weapons. It's the fact that we've also seen him in these other areas, in chemicals, but also especially in biological weapons, increase his capacity to produce and deliver these weapons upon, upon his enemies.

MR. RUSSERT: But if he ever did that, would we not wipe him off the face of the Earth?

VICE PRES. CHENEY: Who did the anthrax attack last fall, Tim? We don't know.

MR. RUSSERT: Could it have been Saddam?

VICE PRES. CHENEY: I don't know. I don't know who did it. I'm not here today to speculate on or to suggest that he did. My point is that it's the nature of terrorist attacks of these unconventional warfare methods, that it's very hard sometimes to identify who's responsible. Who's the source? We were able to come fairly quickly to the conclusion after 9/11 that Osama bin Laden was, in fact, the individual behind the 9/11 attacks. But, like I say, I point out the anthrax example just to remind everybody that it is very hard sometimes, especially when we're

dealing with something like a biological weapon that could conceivably be misconstrued, at least for some period of time, as a naturally occurring event, that we may not know who launches the next attack. And that's what makes it doubly difficult. And that's why it's so important for us when we do identify the kind of threat that we see emerging now in Iraq, when we do see the capabilities of that regime and the way Saddam Hussein has operated over the years that we have to give serious consideration to how we're going to address it before he can launch an attack, not wait until after he's launched an attack.

MR. RUSSERT: Some Democrats are saying, "Why now? Why did the administration shift the focus just 60 days before the midterm elections? You were aware of this threat six months ago, 18 months ago. You were aware of it 11 years ago during the Persian Gulf War that Saddam had weapons of mass destruction. Why didn't you destroy them then? Why didn't you start this campaign against Saddam a year ago, rather than waiting to the eve of an election?"

VICE PRES. CHENEY: Well, you know, the argument, Tim, that somehow we should only deal with major national security threats in non-election years, you know, strikes me as a little strange. We're going to take half the calendar, set it aside, 'cause we have an election every other year. Secondly, the timing with respect to this is driven as much by the aftermath of 9/11, as well as developments inside Iraq. We don't control when new intelligence comes out that gives us cause for concern about his activities. A lot of these developments, especially in the biological weapons area and in the nuclear area are relatively recent developments. This is intelligence that's come to us only within the last, oh, 12 to 14 months. So the suggestion that somehow, you know, we husbanded this and we waited is just not true. The president addressed these issues in his State of the Union address last January when he talked about Saddam Hussein and Iraq and weapons of mass destruction and the axis of evil. He addressed it again in June when he went before the U.S. Military Academy up at West Point in a commencement exercises, in a very good speech that addressed these issues.

We have talked about it, I've talked about it repeatedly as I've traveled the country over the course of the last several months. In virtually every speech I've given, I've mentioned the problems of Iraq and Saddam Hussein and his pursuit of weapons of mass destruction. What's happened now is Congress has come back. We've had the opportunity, during the course of the summer--we've got the U.N. General Assembly speech coming up this week, which is very important, that we've now asked, partly because Congress said they wanted to get involved. We've said, "Great. We're glad to have you." The president had the bipartisan leadership down to the White House last week.

We said, "Here it is. Here's the problem. We want to engage, we want you guys to hold hearings. We're going to provide witnesses. We're going to provide briefings, classified and unclassified. We want Congress to engage in this debate. We want them to vote. We want them to take a position and support whatever the president needs to have done in order to deal with this very critical problem." Now, the other options, say, well, let's wait till January or February. We'll do it next year. Congress has got an election this year. They've all got to go home and run for re-election. They're going to adjourn in October. And, of course, they don't work in November and December. So, you know, everybody go home, relax, take it easy and we'll worry about it next year.

Now, we're to the point where we think time is not on our side. We are concerned...

MR. RUSSERT: So you want a vote in congress in October?

VICE PRES. CHENEY: Our preference would be to have a vote in Congress before they go home. And when they go home is up to them ordinarily. Now, they've scheduled an early October adjournment. I don't think they'll ever make that 'cause they've got all the appropriation bills to do yet, too, but this is not--I mean, the suggestion that I find reprehensible is the notion that somehow, you know, we saved this and now we've sprung it on them for political reasons. The president and I have talked about this for months. And now we've asked them to engage on it, not because it's a campaign year. As I say every other year is a campaign year anyway. We've asked them to engage in it because they have a constitutional responsibility to do so. They need to stand up and be counted.

MR. RUSSERT: The former president, William Clinton, on Thursday night, offered some advice. Let's watch:

(Videotape, September 5, 2002):

FORMER PRESIDENT BILL CLINTON: Saddam Hussein didn't kill 3,100 people on September the 11th. Osama bin Laden did. And as far as we know, he's still alive.

We might do more good for America's security in the short run and at a far less cost by beefing up our efforts in Afghanistan, Pakistan and elsewhere to flush out the entire network and to find him.

We know they still have a terrorist network around the world. And we're already kind of changing the subject here, looking at Saddam Hussein, who's not going anywhere.

(End videotape)

MR. RUSSERT: Changing the subject to Saddam Hussein. We could do more good by beefing up our forces in Afghanistan rather than go after Saddam Hussein.

VICE PRES. CHENEY: I brought along a little piece of paper with me, Tim. You always have props, so I brought one with me this morning, in terms of the issue of Iraq. This goes back: The president asked the nation to consider the question: "What if Saddam Hussein fails to comply? We fail to act or we take some ambiguous third route, which gives him yet more opportunities to develop his program of weapons of mass destruction and continue to press for the release of sanctions and ignore the commitments he's made. Well, he will conclude that the international community's lost its will. He will then conclude that he can go right on doing more to build an arsenal of devastating destruction. If we fail to respond today, Saddam and all those who would follow in his footsteps will be emboldened tomorrow. The stakes," he says, "could not be higher. Some day, some way, I guarantee you he'll use the arsenal." Bill Clinton, 1998, on Saddam Hussein.

Now, this was for him, supposedly, a top priority four years ago. There was a great deal of stirring around on it, a lot of debate, resolutions passed by the Congress. Tom Daschle talking about the need to use military force to deal with the threat that Saddam Hussein represented. Of course, what happened is nothing happened. And now four years later, we find ourselves in a situation where the situation has gotten worse. He has gotten more capability. And we're going to have to deal with this situation. But the suggestion that President Clinton made last night, I think, obviously we continue the war on terror. Obviously, we continue the pursuit of Osama bin Laden. We're heavily engaged in Afghanistan. None of that's going to change, and we'll continue to do that as we go along. But we can no longer ignore the threat that Bill Clinton himself talked about four years ago.

MR. RUSSERT: President Clinton also said he was obsessed with Osama bin Laden. Do you see evidence of that?

VICE PRES. CHENEY: You mean while he was president?

MR. RUSSERT: Yes, sir.

VICE PRES. CHENEY: Well, I'm sure he was concerned about it. Obviously, I wasn't part of his administration. I don't know the extent of which it dominated the thinking. I'm sure that there were many people in the Clinton administration who were concerned about Osama bin Laden.

MR. RUSSERT: As you well know, an attempt was made on the life of President Karzai in Afghanistan in Kandahar some 300 miles from Kabul. Will American Special Forces continue to protect Mr. Karzai? They had been scheduled to be removed.

VICE PRES. CHENEY: We have been providing security for him. And, obviously, that was a very wise decision, given the attempt on his life this week. There will continue to be provision made to help provide security for him.

MR. RUSSERT: But, specifically, Special Forces?

VICE PRES. CHENEY: Well, it may be former Special Forces, troops on contract to the State Department. We have that capability, as well, too. It'll--we'll do everything we can to try to help and continue. And my judgment would be there'll be no reduction, no diminution, in our concern for his safety or our willingness to do whatever we have to, to help.

MR. RUSSERT: Should the United States, on the suggestion of President Clinton and others even in your own party, expand our peacekeeping force out of Kabul, throughout the entire nation of Afghanistan in order to secure it?

VICE PRES. CHENEY: There's a debate over expanding the International Security Force. These are the peacekeepers, in effect, that are there from many other countries. Right now they're headquartered in Kabul. I think there is a willingness to do more of that, if we can get people to contribute additional troops. We're also in a situation where every six months that leadership of that force changes. The Brits had it for six months. And now Turkey has it, but they'll finish up the end of this year. And some time in the next three months we've got to find somebody else to move in and take over.

The ultimate solution here will be to train up an Afghan national army to put in place a force that is capable of going forward and doing everything that needs to be done by way of servicing, if you will, the government and stabilizing the situation in Afghanistan. We're working on that, as well, too. The French are cooperating, the Germans and others, as we take Afghans and create a military force responsive to the central government and President Karzai. I think in the final analysis, that's the ultimate solution. But in the interim, we may need to expand ISAF, and we're open to suggestions.

MR. RUSSERT: Including American troops?

VICE PRES. CHENEY: Well, American troops at this stage--I'd set that off on the side, in the sense that we are there. We'll stay there as long as we have to. But we're there really in a very different role. We're there in a combat role and a military role. We're actively and aggressively working to continue to take down Taliban and al-Qaeda individuals and organizations. And that's separate from this ISAF, International Security Force, that is operating in Kabul, that's thought of as the international peacekeeping force that a lot of people want to expand to serve other areas of the country.

MR. RUSSERT: Does it bother you, bug you, that you have not captured Osama bin Laden in over a year?

VICE PRES. CHENEY: I'd like to see him on television in handcuffs, if I can put it in those terms. I think all of us would. But I don't lay awake at night concerned about that. There's one school of thought that says he's already dead. We haven't heard anything of him in many months.

MR. RUSSERT: What do you think?

VICE PRES. CHENEY: I don't know. I really don't know. I mean, I can argue it round or flat. We haven't seen, as I say, hard evidence that we can trace back or attribute directly to him in many months now. On the other hand, you know, he's gone underground before. That's a rough area of the world that they operate in. He could conceivably be in hiding someplace or moved out of the area to some other locale, some other country. We simply don't know. But, in a sense, it doesn't--I don't want to say it doesn't matter. He's not the sole objective of our operations here. What we really want to do--one man all by himself isn't likely to be able to do much by way of damage to the United States. We are very interested in getting him. But we also want to wrap up the al-Qaeda organization.

And what we find with that, of course, lessons we've learned since September 11, is this is an organization that may be in as many as 50 or 60 countries around the world. We've uncovered cells in the UK, in Germany, in Spain, in Italy, Indonesia, and Malaysia, the Philippines, United States. And given that, even if sort of you decapitated the organization--let's assume he is dead--the fact of the matter is, we're still vulnerable to attack. There are still a lot of people out there who have aspirations to kill Americans and the capacity to do so. And whether he's dead or alive, we're going to be engaged in this struggle for a good, long period of time to come. And it would be a mistake for us to assume that capturing bin Laden or not capturing bin Laden automatically sort of wraps up the war on terror. It won't.

Mr. RUSSERT: One year ago when you were on MEET THE PRESS just five days after September 11, I asked you a specific question about Iraq and Saddam Hussein. Let's watch:

(Videotape, September 16, 2001):

Mr. RUSSERT: Do we have any evidence linking Saddam Hussein or Iraqis to this operation?

VICE PRES. CHENEY: No.

(End videotape)

Mr. RUSSERT: Has anything changed, in your mind?

VICE PRES. CHENEY: Well, I want to be very careful about how I say this. I'm not here today to make a specific allegation that Iraq was somehow responsible for 9/11. I can't say that. On the other hand, since we did that interview, new information has come to light. And we spent time looking at that relationship between Iraq, on the one hand, and the al-Qaeda organization on the other. And there has been reporting that suggests that there have been a number of contacts over the years. We've seen in connection with the hijackers, of course, Mohamed Atta, who was the lead hijacker, did apparently travel to Prague on a number of occasions. And on at least one

occasion, we have reporting that places him in Prague with a senior Iraqi intelligence official a few months before the attack on the World Trade Center. The debates about, you know, was he there or wasn't he there, again, it's the intelligence business.

Mr. RUSSERT: What does the CIA say about that? Is it credible?

VICE PRES. CHENEY: It's credible. But, you know, I think a way to put it would be it's unconfirmed at this point. We've got...

Mr. RUSSERT: Anything else?

VICE PRES. CHENEY: There is--again, I want to separate out 9/11, from the other relationships between Iraq and the al-Qaeda organization. But there is a pattern of relationships going back many years. And in terms of exchanges and in terms of people, we've had recently since the operations in Afghanistan--we've seen al-Qaeda members operating physically in Iraq and off the territory of Iraq. We know that Saddam Hussein has, over the years, been one of the top state sponsors of terrorism for nearly 20 years. We've had this recent weird incident where the head of the Abu Nidal Organization, one of the world's most noted terrorists, was killed in Baghdad. The announcement was made by the head of Iraqi intelligence. The initial announcement said he'd shot himself. When they dug into that, though, he'd shot himself four times in the head. And speculation has been, that, in fact, somehow, the Iraqi government or Saddam Hussein had him eliminated to avoid potential embarrassment by virtue of the fact that he was in Baghdad and operated in Baghdad. So it's a very complex picture to try to sort out. And...

Mr. RUSSERT: But no direct link?

VICE PRES. CHENEY: I can't--I'll leave it right where it's at. I don't want to go beyond that. I've tried to be cautious and restrained in my comments, and I hope that everybody will recognize that.

Mr. RUSSERT: Brent Scowcroft--he was national security adviser to the former President Bush, while you were secretary of defense--has been very outspoken about Iraq. He wrote a piece in The Wall Street Journal, and this is what he said and I want to show you: "There is scant evidence to tie Saddam to terrorist organizations, and even less to the Sept. 11 attacks. Indeed Saddam's goals have little in common with the terrorists who threaten us, and there is little incentive for him to make common cause with them. There is little evidence to indicate that the United States itself is an object of his aggression."

VICE PRES. CHENEY: You want me to respond...

Mr. RUSSERT: Do you agree?

VICE PRES. CHENEY: ...to my old friend Brent? I don't. I disagree with Brent. He is a close, personal friend, by the way. We've served together for nearly 30 years, going back to the Ford administration. He's one of the main reasons I was secretary of defense in Bush I. So I have great respect for him. I think he's wrong in this case. The fact of the matter is, if you look at Osama bin Laden and the al-Qaeda organization, on the one hand, and Saddam Hussein on the other, while they come from different perspectives, one's religiously motivated, the other is secular, etc., the fact of the matter is they have the same objective: to drive the United States out of the Middle East, to strike the United States, if at all possible. So to suggest there's not a common interest there, I think, would be wrong.

MR. RUSSERT: Why do you think the advisers to former President Bush, Scowcroft and Baker and others, have such a different view than current President Bush?

VICE PRES. CHENEY: Well, Jim Baker, I would put over very close to our camp. His one suggestion has been that we need to go to the United Nations before we take military action and the president's...

MR. RUSSERT: What do you think of that idea?

VICE PRES. CHENEY: ...going to the United Nations this week.

MR. RUSSERT: Will you seek...

VICE PRES. CHENEY: The president's going to United--let me finish my other answer to your question. But remember...

MR. RUSSERT: Let me stay on the U.N.

VICE PRES. CHENEY: OK.

MR. RUSSERT: Will you seek a resolution before the United Nations which would say, "Mr. Saddam, one last chance for unfettered inspections or there will be military action"?

VICE PRES. CHENEY: Listen to the president's speech on Thursday, Tim. I won't preempt my boss. But on this question of advisers, I say, Jim I put very much over in our camp. I think Henry Kissinger clearly is, too. George Shultz clearly is, too. Brent and Larry Eagleburger, obviously, feel differently about it. I think part of what happens here is that unless you--I don't mean to be negative on anybody else by any means or to diminish the importance of their expertise and experience over the years. But when you sit where I sit now and the president does, when you have the responsibilities we have after 9/11, when you contemplate day in and day out the prospects for a possible attack against the United States, and you look at the real world out there, I think we probably see things differently than somebody who set in those positions and occupied them 10 years ago and hasn't been party to the latest deliberations, hasn't seen all of the intelligence that we've seen and isn't as sensitive, I suppose, as we are, to the enormous consequences to the United States, if, in fact, someone--Saddam Hussein or terrorists--should ever get through our defenses and attack the United States with, you know, a smallpox or anthrax or a nuclear weapon.

MR. RUSSERT: Do you believe, do you know if former President Bush has advised or spoken to his son about Iraq?

VICE PRES. CHENEY: I don't know. I don't know. They talk frequently. But usually it's more about family matters and personal matters than it is about policy.

MR. RUSSERT: Why Iraq? Why not North Korea? Why not Iran? They, too, have weapons of mass destruction. Why not go after them?

VICE PRES. CHENEY: There's a very different record here. We're concerned about Iran and about North Korea. The president talked about them again last January in the State of the Union speech. But the thing that's different about Iraq is its government and its regime and its past history, the fact that he has launched ballistic missiles against Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Israel, Iran. He's twice invaded his neighbors, that he has and has used this deadly capability before, in terms of the chemical weapons during the war with Iran and against the Kurds in northern Iraq. It is a qualitatively different thing. He met recently with his nuclear weapons experts--this was reported in the Iraqi press--and praised them as being the ones who were going to help him drive the American infidels back across the ocean. He has and continues to conduct himself in a way that is fundamentally threatening to the United States. Now, if he doesn't have any significant capability, you don't have to worry about it. He's just a blow hard out in Iraq. But once...

MR. RUSSERT: So Saddam's more dangerous than North Korea or Iran?

VICE PRES. CHENEY: I think so because of his past practice and because we believe that he is a danger, a fundamental danger, not only for the region but potentially the United States, as well. And I say, a lot of that is based on the evidence that's now available, that he is working actively to improve his biological weapons program and his nuclear weapons program.

MR. RUSSERT: Why not go to the U.N. and say, "Give us inspections, unfettered, coercive if necessary and unless you give us complete, open access, there will be a military response"? What if Saddam said yes to that?

VICE PRES. CHENEY: Well, it might be a great idea, Tim. But, you know, the president will decide and will, on Thursday, address the United Nations, and that's when we'll know what specific course of action--that's when the country will know and the world will know, what specific course of action we've decided upon.

MR. RUSSERT: But you don't think it's a great idea. Let me show you what Richard Cheney said about inspections and put it on the screen for you and our viewers: "A return of inspectors will provide no assurance whatsoever of compliance with U.N. resolutions. On the contrary, there is a great danger that it would provide false comfort that Saddam was somehow `back in his box.'"

VICE PRES. CHENEY: Yeah, I'm a real skeptic about inspections. But the key to inspections, if they're going to work, is it's essential that the inspectee, the target of the inspections, cooperate. And, of course, Saddam Hussein's never done that. That's one of the reasons that inspections haven't achieved the desired result.

MR. RUSSERT: And you don't think he'll ever cooperate?

VICE PRES. CHENEY: I suppose I could be optimistic and say he's going to change his spots. I doubt it. But that doesn't mean that it doesn't make sense for the president to go address this issue before the United Nations. We very much believe this is a problem, not just for the United States. Tony Blair has been eloquent on the subject. This is a problem the world has. And the United Nations has a special problem because they have repeatedly, some 16 or 17 times, passed resolutions, demanding full and unfettered access, sent in inspection teams and insisted that he must comply with all those resolutions that were adopted at the end of the Gulf War. And he has consistently refused to do that and there have been absolutely no consequences.

MR. RUSSERT: If Saddam did let the inspectors in and they did have unfettered access, could you have disarmament without a regime change?

VICE PRES. CHENEY: Boy, that's a tough one. I don't know. We'd have to see. I mean, that gets to be speculative, in terms of what kind of inspection regime and so forth.

MR. RUSSERT: But what's your goal? Disarmament or regime change?

VICE PRES. CHENEY: The president's made it clear that the goal of the United States is regime change. He said that on many occasions. With respect to the United Nations, clearly the U.N. has a vested interest in coming to grips with the fact of Saddam Hussein's refusal to comply with all those resolutions. He pledged, you know, to give up all his chemical and his biological and his nuclear weapons and his ballistic missile capabilities beyond a certain range. And the danger here is that the United Nations and the Security Council will become to look like a toothless tiger; that they pass resolutions, addressing a major international problem, but then there's never any action. There's never any follow-through. There's nobody providing any leadership to move forward.

MR. RUSSERT: So you don't think you can get disarmament without a regime change?

VICE PRES. CHENEY: I didn't say that. I said the president's objective for the United States is still regime change. We have a separate set of concerns and priorities with the U.N. And given the international community's involvement with respect to the United Nations over the years in addressing this issue, we think that's one of the places he needs to go to address this issue. We're trying very hard not to be unilateralist. We're working to build support with the American people, with the Congress, as many have suggested we should. And we're also, as many have suggested we should, going to the United Nations, and the president will address this issue on Thursday of this week.

Now, that's all--doesn't mean that we're prepared to ignore the realities. I spoke about inspections as I did. And I don't want to undercut the serious efforts that were made by a lot of good people. I've known and worked with some of the inspectors. The fact of the matter is, as long as he's not willing to cooperate, as long as he's doing everything he can to hide, what we've seen in the past is that in the end, the inspectors were not able to uncover everything. And we know he was able to hide materials, programs and keep it secret, even while the inspectors were in the country.

MR. RUSSERT: The foreign minister of Turkey said, "Any change in Iraq's government system should be carried out by that country's people." Dick Arme, Republican, said that, we as a nation should not be doing pre-emptive strikes. International law--where is our right to remove or topple another country's government?

VICE PRES. CHENEY: We believe that, especially since September 11th, we have to consider action that may, in fact--I suppose you can call it pre-emptive--we've talked about it in the past--to head off an attack against the United States. If we have reason to believe someone is preparing an attack against the U.S., has developed that capability, harbors those aspirations, then I think the United States is justified in dealing with that, if necessary, by military force.

Let me take you back to 9/11, Tim. If we had known what was about to happen to us on September 11th and we could have prevented it by military operation, in effect, pre-empt, would we have done it? The answer is: You bet we would have. And virtually all Americans would have supported it. We are in a place now that, I think, some Americans, as well as some of our European friends, for example, have difficult adjusting to, because, in the case of the Europeans, they haven't the experience we have of 3,000 dead Americans last September 11th. They are

not as vulnerable as we are, because they're not targeted.

They also really don't have the capacity to do anything about the threat. You know, if you take--they can participate in an international coalition, but left to their own devices, they can't deal with Saddam Hussein. Only the United States has the military force capable of doing that. So we find ourselves in a situation where the president has an obligation to defend the nation, and it's conceivable that that could at some point require him to take military action. We'd like to do it with the approval and support of the Congress. We'd like to do it with the sanction of the international community, but the point in Iraq is this problem has to be dealt with one way or the other.

MR. RUSSERT: We have just a minute in this segment. Will militarily this be a cakewalk? Two, how long would we be there and how much would it cost?

VICE PRES. CHENEY: First of all, no decision's been made yet to launch a military operation. Clearly, we are contemplating that possibility. I'm confident that if it became necessary--if the president felt that this was the right course of action so that he instructed the military to undertake this, that the U.S. military would be enormously effective in this circumstance. And I don't think it would be that tough a fight; that is, I don't think there's any question that we would prevail and we would achieve our objective. You always want to plan for the worst, though. And, clearly, we would do that.

In terms of how long we would be there, if we were to get involved like this, as I mentioned the other day in my speech at the VFW, we clearly would have to stay for a long time, in terms of making sure we stood up a new government and helped the Iraqi people decide how they want to govern themselves until there was a peaceful stability present so that it was no longer a threat to its neighbors and things were secure.

MR. RUSSERT: That's very costly.

VICE PRES. CHENEY: Could be very costly. The danger of an attack against the United States by someone with the weapons that Saddam Hussein now possesses, or is acquiring, is far more costly than what it would cost for us to go deal with this problem.

MR. RUSSERT: And the rest of the Arab world would stay stable?

VICE PRES. CHENEY: I think so. But the risk here that has to be weighed, Tim, isn't just--you know, what's it going to cost you to do this today? It's what will the cost be if you don't do it? And what happens if you delay six months or a year or two years? And at that point, when you start to weigh those prospects, then the cost of military action, if that's what it comes to, strikes me, would be significantly less than having to deal with it after we've been struck once again by a deadly system.

MR. RUSSERT: Bottom line, it looks like we're going to war.

VICE PRES. CHENEY: Can't say that. It will depend a lot on what happens over the course of these next few weeks. The president, as I say, has got a major speech before the United Nations on Thursday. It's a very important event. But there shouldn't be any doubt in anybody's mind that this president's absolutely bound and determined to deal with this threat and to do whatever is necessary to make certain that we do so.

MR. RUSSERT: We have to take a quick break. We'll be right back with more of our conversation with Vice President Dick Cheney, right after this.

(Announcements)

MR. RUSSERT: More with the vice president after this very brief station break.

(Announcements)

MR. RUSSERT: And we are back.

Mr. Vice President, corporate responsibility--when you ran as a CEO, boasting of your record at Halliburton--much has been written and said about it. Let me show you from the Associated Press on our screen, "Halliburton has been in the news often this year, mostly for the wrong reasons. It lost \$476 million through June. It is under

attack from disgruntled investors who've seen the value of Halliburton's stock fall more than 70 percent since [Dick] Cheney left in August 2000. The stock price collapsed under the weight of falling energy prices, accusations of shady accounting and lawsuits over asbestos."

Should Halliburton have notified the SEC about their accounting changes? And two, should there have been more due diligence done when the Supreme Court, in '97, six months before the merger, began to overturn and look into asbestos liability?

VICE PRES. CHENEY: Well, that's a lot for--how much time have you got, Tim? The accounting question is being handled in an inquiry between the SEC and Halliburton. I'm not a direct party to it, but obviously interested. I avoid commenting on it because I don't want to be accused of trying to influence the SEC operation. But you can go to the Halliburton Web site, and you'll find there, laid out, answers to all those questions that the current management had to answer with respect to the accounting questions. And I think all of that will be resolved shortly, as it should be.

Secondly, with respect to the asbestos matters: Asbestos is a problem out there that afflicts a great many companies, not just Halliburton. Halliburton had an involvement in asbestos long before I arrived at the company. When we acquired Dresser, they had vested themselves in another company that had been involved in the asbestos business. Since I left, there have been a couple of lawsuits and decisions handed down that have raised the possibility of additional liability. I think the company's dealt with it reasonably well. They brought in a group of outside experts to estimate the actual liability. But I don't know a lot of the details, since most of the difficulties arose since I left two years ago. So I'm reluctant to--we need more detail.

MR. RUSSERT: But should you have known?

VICE PRES. CHENEY: I think from the standpoint of the overall operation, I think our experience with asbestos at Halliburton was that we were insured, we were indemnified. We had a track record in terms of what settling asbestos claims cost. What's different now is there have been some decisions handed down with respect to Halliburton since then that have raised this specter. But I have other views with respect to the asbestos claims. I think a lot of this is generated, frankly, by trial attorneys. But...

MR. RUSSERT: The stock went from 52 to 14.

VICE PRES. CHENEY: It did get hit hard, as did the stock of a great many other companies. They haven't been alone this year. But it's a great company. I was proud of my association with them. They've got some fantastic men and women who work for it. They do great things all over the world. And they deserve and I'm sure will perform much more effectively in the future, with respect to share price and...

MR. RUSSERT: Do you want to run for re-election in 2004?

VICE PRES. CHENEY: That's totally up to the president. I mean, at this point, I don't have an offer. We haven't talked about it. He'll have to decide who he wants to be his running mate. I've loved being his vice president for the last two years. Look forward to the rest of the term. He'll decide. And then, as I've said, I'll counsel with my bride.

MR. RUSSERT: Physically, you're fine?

VICE PRES. CHENEY: Physically, I'm fine. If the doctors say go and the president wants me, then I'll be happy to serve. But it's up to the president, let me emphasize that.

MR. RUSSERT: But you are ready, willing and able if he asks?

VICE PRES. CHENEY: Well, so far.

MR. RUSSERT: Mr. Vice President, we thank you for sharing your views during this important time.

VICE PRES. CHENEY: Thank you, Tim.

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

(Announcements)

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