

THE WHITE HOUSE

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Office of THE VICE PRESIDENT

Internal Transcript

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TELEVISION INTERVIEW OF THE VICE PRESIDENT  
BY JOHN KING OF CNN

THE VICE President's Ceremonial Office

11:18 A.M. EDT

Q I'll begin just by saying thank you for joining us.

I want to go back to the morning of September 11th. Where are you when you hear -- I assume the first plane is what you heard about first. Where are you then, and what is your initial --

THE VICE PRESIDENT: I was in my West Wing office with my speechwriter, and the secretary called in from the outer office and said a plane had hit the World Trade Center. So at that point, we turned on the television and sat there and watched, speculating about how could this have happened? It's a clear day, there's no weather problem. And then, we saw the second plane actually hit in real time.

Q You're watching the second plane hit?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Right. And that was -- at that moment, you knew this was a deliberate act, and that it was a terrorist act. So that was about -- well, shortly after 9:00 a.m., when the second plane hit.

And I then begin -- Condi Rice came into my office, the National Security Advisor; Scooter Libby, my Chief of Staff; Mary Matalin, others came in. Then we talked to the President on the telephone, from Florida. We talked about his statement that he was about to issue.

He went out and issued his statement; I watched that on television. And then shortly after that, my agent all of a sudden materialized beside me and said, "Sir, we have to leave now," and grabbed me and propelled me out of my office and down the hall, into the underground shelter in the White House.

Q You say "grabbed you and propelled you." Didn't leave you much of a choice, did he?

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**THE VICE PRESIDENT:** No. And I'm not sure how he did it. It was a hand on the back of the belt and a hand on the shoulder, but you didn't really have any choice except to go. And he was moving very fast. And what we found out later was the Secret Service had received a phone call from Dulles, from the air traffic controllers, that an airplane was headed for the White House, for the airspace over the White House.

This is the aircraft that eventually circled back around and hit the Pentagon. At the time, they thought it was going to hit the White House, so they had me evacuated into a tunnel en route to the Presidential Emergency Ops Center; there's a shelter down there, a blast door on each end, telephone, and a television set.

And when I got down there, I called the President again. -- he was in Florida -- and recommended that he not return, that he delay his return, because obviously Washington was under attack now. We didn't know how extensive it was. We had no idea, really, what the threat was, or who was doing it. But it was not a good idea for him to come straight back.

And he wanted to come back, but he agreed that he'd hold off for a while.

**Q** I understand at one point, Eric Edelman came to you and said there was a recommendation, I think from Steve Hadley and Dick Clarke\*, that maybe you should leave the White House.

**THE VICE PRESIDENT:** There was, later on that morning, the suggestion that I be evacuated. We had reports of six aircraft having been hijacked originally, instead of four. And later on, we had reports of incoming aircraft from overseas that were -- had been hijacked. It turned out that wasn't true. Then we had five of them at one point.

During the course of the day, the Secret Service recommended that I be evacuated from the White House complex. And I decided against that. One of the concerns, clearly, is continuity of government; making certain that you've got the succession, the presidential succession provided for. But by then, the President was secure on Air Force One or at Offutt. Denny Hastert, the Speaker of the House, who's third in line to the Presidency, we had evacuated to a remote location. He was safe. We had also located some Cabinet members at a secure location. So we had a well-established succession, and so I felt it was more important that I stay in the White House -- partly because I was connected in. I had communications with the President, communications with the Pentagon, Secret Service and so forth, and we could continue to operate there. And if I left, I'd lose all of that. So we decided not to evacuate.

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Q You mentioned six planes, nine planes. There's obviously a fog of war in the early minutes, and as everybody comes together -- how many planes are in the air? How many are unaccounted for? How many potentially unaccounted for? Can you describe that, especially in those early few minutes, the sense of trying to get a handle on what was happening?

**THE VICE PRESIDENT:** Norm Mineta joined me in the Presidential Emergency Ops Center, and he was working with the FAA. They had made the decision to take all the aircraft down, land everything, and clear the skies. And at that point, we were working off a list of six aircraft -- we had tail numbers and so forth. As I say, it turned out there were only four that had been hijacked. But for some time that morning, we thought there were a total of six.

And we accounted for three; two that hit the World Trade Center, one that hit the Pentagon. And then later on, we had reports of two more that had crashed -- one in Pennsylvania, which turned out to be a true report; one on the Ohio-Kentucky border, turned out to be false. In fact, that was, I think, American 77 that hit the Pentagon; when it dropped down off the radar screen and turned around and came back, it was reported as crashed. But that was wrong.

So, as we go through the morning, we're working the problem of trying to identify these aircraft. We also had the issue of the combat air patrol that had been put up. The President had to make a decision about rules of engagement; that is, did he want to authorize the fighter aircraft that were up to protect the city to shoot down a commercial airliner loaded with American civilians?

Q And describe that conversation. It's -- the President, yourself, and Secretary Rumsfeld join in at some point in that?

**THE VICE PRESIDENT:** No, at this point, I had the conversation with the President by telephone from the PEOC, and then passed word back when he'd signed off on doing this. And at the same time, he then subsequently talked to Secretary Rumsfeld, which is really the chain of command for U.S. forces. And later on, they had a conversation when he was out at Offutt with the NORAD Commander, North American Air Defense Commander.

But that was a key decision. And fortunately, we didn't have to shoot down an aircraft. But the concern was that there were airplanes headed for Washington that we didn't know whether or not any of them had been hijacked at that point. But we thought that that was a possibility, and if they wouldn't divert or move away from the city, then the President authorized the Air Force to shoot them down.

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Q You say it matter-of-factly. I assume there was some gravity to that conversation.

**THE VICE PRESIDENT:** Absolutely. I mean, it's -- I don't know that an order's ever been given like that, to instruct American military forces to in effect fire on civilians. But of course, it was rather clear-cut in the sense that it was a question of if you had had the opportunity to shoot down the airplanes that hit the World Trade Center, would you have? And the answer was absolutely yes, you would have saved thousands of lives if you had. And therefore, you know, when you evaluated this, once that airliner was taken over by hijackers, it became a weapon.

And the President, I think, felt strongly, and I certainly did, too, that we were fully justified in that action. As I say, fortunately we didn't have to do it. ♡

Q As all of this is playing out in those first few hours -- you're talking to the President, he leaves Florida, goes to Barksdale, ultimately ends up going on to Offutt -- do you have any time to think? Or are you just responding at this point, about the scope of all this? And at what point in the day does anybody start thinking about who did this and the name bin Laden enter the equation?

**THE VICE PRESIDENT:** There was time to think, but you've got so much your focused on. As I say, the focus initially was on aircraft, and trying to get those down; on the security of the President; on making arrangements for the security of other successors -- the Speaker, Cabinet members, and so forth. So there was plenty to do.

But you also, there are moments when you watch on television as the World Trade Center, the first tower, goes down. A remarkable moment, a very emotional moment for everybody, because I don't think anybody expected that that would in fact happen.

During the course of the day, Scooter Libby, who is my Chief of Staff, at one point suggested that this might be al Qaeda and Osama bin Laden. You know, we had identified him earlier, that they'd been worked as a threat back through the Clinton administration. And there had been an assassination a couple of days before, of Massoud, who was the leader of the Northern Alliance in Afghanistan. And Scooter put those things together and thought that maybe that was preparation for what happened here.

The notion that it was Osama bin Laden and al Qaeda was pretty well in our minds. We didn't have proof of it at that point, it wasn't the final conclusion. But certainly by that evening, we were beginning to focus on him as the potential leader of the act, if you will. We couldn't absolutely confirm

it for a few days yet, but he really became -- I can't say that there was ever anybody else, other than him, that was seriously considered.

**Q** And the first time you see the President is afternoon, he's in Offutt, and he pops up on the videoconference link. Describe that moment. And what does the President say to begin the call?

**THE VICE PRESIDENT:** Well, he -- we talked a lot on the telephone. We were on the phone a lot during the course of the day, as he flew to Barksdale and then Offutt.

He came on the phone, we convened by videoconference, in effect, a National Security Council meeting. He was very decisive. He'd obviously had time to think about what had happened, and believed that we were in fact at war, and had been attacked; that he wanted to make this the top priority of this administration, to find out who did it and to make certain we brought them to justice.

He was very much in command. And I reported to him on -- that I was getting ready to call the congressional leadership that had been evacuated, and brief them. And he gave me some instructions with respect to, Make sure they understand, you know, my feelings on this, what we're going to do, and this is going to be the top commitment of the government, to get these guys.

**Q** Angry, on the part of either of you, at any point up to this point or at that point?

**THE VICE PRESIDENT:** Well, I think there was an undertone of anger there. But it's more a matter of determination. You don't want to let your anger overwhelm your judgment in a moment like that. And the thing that I was struck by was that the people working with me in the PEOC, the President, I think the people with him on Air Force One -- the real sense of professionalism; that yes, this was a major blow, but no sense of panic. I remember in the PEOC itself, everything was fairly calm.

As I say, there were moments of tragedy, emotional moments, but they were quiet moments, moments of people watching as events unfolded, for example, in New York City, or we got word that the Pentagon had been hit. But there was no sense of panic or unease; it was just a group of people who had a job to do and they did it.

**Q** Did you ever have a second to say -- your children are grown -- but, you know, "Where are my daughters? Where's Mrs. Cheney?"

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**THE VICE PRESIDENT:** Well, Lynne was with me. She'd been downtown that morning, and when the -- after the plane hit the Pentagon, her agents brought her to the White House. And so she joined me in the PEOC, and she was there all day long and into the evening. And during the course of the day, she told me she checked on the girls and everybody was fine. So I didn't have to worry about it, because she did.

But -- it's something you think about, but again, it's not so much a personal consideration at that point. It may have been for people who didn't have anything to do.

**Q** Right.

**THE VICE PRESIDENT:** But if you're in the middle of the -- sort of the cyclone, and there's a lot of work to be done, a lot of communications required, decisions to make and so forth, you're really focused on the job. And in a sense that's a blessing, because you don't have time to focus on the personal side of things. And shouldn't.

**Q** And you, perhaps, can offer rare insight in the sense that you were the Defense Secretary during major military operations, including the Persian Gulf War the day the ground war went, and you had troops going in any number of directions. Describe the -- is there a comparison, being in the Situation Room watching something like that unfold, and doing what you were doing on 9/11, in terms of trying to get information, coordinate information, and make decisions and deal with it?

**THE VICE PRESIDENT:** There is. It's valuable experience, to have been through similar crisis-type situations such as the use of military force or responding to a disaster. And one of the great advantages we had, for example, we had Don Rumsfeld over at the Pentagon as the Secretary of Defense. Second tour, had been through a lot before. We had great people working with me -- Condi Rice, Steve Hadley, Scooter Libby, Dave Addington, Mary Matalin. These are people that we had all worked with together before. And that experience, that prior experience -- you know certain things. You know that first reports are always wrong. Six aircraft? No, it was four.

You get bad information coming, misinformation -- a car bomb's gone off at the State Department. Turned out not to be true. A bomb's been detonated at the Washington Monument; turned out not to be true. Planes crashed in Ohio and Kentucky; not true. Plane's crashed in Pennsylvania; is true. So you have to sort through the flow of information and be able to sort out what's important from what isn't.

You seek verification. You spend a lot of time going back, saying, Look, check, and you verify for me that. You know, I need to know this.

And once you've been through that kind of an operation, you get a sense of who you can trust, who's handling themselves in a professional manner and giving you good information, and who's maybe somewhat panicky and you've got to be careful not to let them sort of taint the overall atmosphere and affect other people's judgments.

**Q** What was the first thing you said to the President when he got back to the White House and came down to the PEOC?

**THE VICE PRESIDENT:** Well, he came down -- we talked a lot during the course of the day, so it wasn't as though we'd been out of touch and then suddenly back together again. Laura was there; it was the first chance he'd had to see Laura since all of this had happened. And my wife was there. And then he went upstairs, worked on his speech, and delivered his address to the nation. It was a -- you know, it was an emotional moment.

We went from that into a meeting of the National Security Council. And I guess the thing I was struck by was the extent to which he'd begun to grapple with these problems, and to make decisions -- that we were in a war on terror, this was an act of war that had been committed against us. The whole notion of the Bush Doctrine: if you harbor a terrorist or provide sanctuary for a terrorist, you'll be treated like a terrorist and bear some responsibility for their actions.

So he was very decisive and very determined from the outset. And that was reassuring for everybody. He was our leader, he knew what he wanted to do, and so it was time for everybody to get on with it and do it.

**Q** And you left the White House that night -- what time?

**THE VICE PRESIDENT:** After his speech. Then we had a smaller meeting of the NSC down in the PEOC, and then my wife and I got on the white-top, a helicopter, on the South Lawn and flew off to an undisclosed location and spent the night, and then came back to work the next morning.

The thing that struck me about lifting off the lawn that night -- it was unusual in the sense that the only time I'd ever lifted off the South Lawn before was with the President. And as we lifted off and headed up the Potomac, you could look out and see the Pentagon, see that black hole where they'd been hit, a lot of lights on the building, smoke rising from the Pentagon. And you know, it helped really bring home the impact of what had happened that day, that we had in fact been attacked.

**Q** Ever dawn on you, in your days in the Congress, in the Ford White House, as Defense Secretary, that the centerpiece of

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American military might would be attacked if the United States ever were attacked?

**THE VICE PRESIDENT:** No. I thought about it in terms of nuclear war. The fact is, back during the '80s and the '70s when I was President Ford's Chief of Staff, later as a member of the Intelligence Committee, and subsequently Secretary of Defense, I had been heavily involved in the Cold War, and strategy, the SIOP, the plan for deploying nuclear weapons and so forth, had responsibility for our forces. So I've been exposed a lot to that.

But it was always -- thought about it in terms of the possibility of a nuclear exchange with the Soviet Union, obviously. We used to plan for it, exercise it, and so forth. So -- but this was different. I mean, this wasn't an exercise anymore. This was real, live, it actually happened. Thousands of Americans had died.

And you know, we watched it all right there, it happened in front of our very eyes. And it was different. It wasn't an academic exercise anymore, or even a training exercise. This was a major, major attack against the United States.

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**Q** I want to focus now on one year later, as the American people assess not only what happened, but what is being done about it. And they look at the war against terrorism, one question they have to have is if the United States government has said Osama bin Laden is responsible for this, and the al Qaeda network is responsible for this, what can you say about the capabilities of al Qaeda today, and your opinion, based on everything you know, about is Osama bin Laden still out there?

**THE VICE PRESIDENT:** With respect to Osama bin Laden, we don't know. That's the most honest answer I can give you. We haven't seen any hard evidence that we can trace directly to him for several months.

**Q** Several months. Can you go back and help understand - when was the last time the United States could say he was alive and he was here on this day?

**THE VICE PRESIDENT:** I don't want to be more precise than that to protect intelligence sources and methods. But it's been several months since we had a solid report on his presence. He could be dead. He may not be dead, he may be alive. We just don't know.

We do know, with respect to the al Qaeda organization, that we've done serious damage to it. Clearly, when you think about our operation in Afghanistan, it was very successful, with a



relatively small force in terms of numbers of people. We've gotten rid of the Taliban. We have eliminated a big chunk of the al Qaeda organization there.

But Afghanistan's going to require a long-term commitment. I think clearly there are going to be continuing security requirements there, we've got to help them stand up an effective government, and so forth. So I wouldn't want to say the task is over with; it's not, by any means.

The al Qaeda members, I think, have -- some of them are still in Afghanistan, in hiding. Some have scattered to other parts of the world -- perhaps into Pakistan, perhaps Iran, other parts of the Middle East. And the other thing to keep in mind is this al Qaeda organization really has a global reach. We estimate there may be as many as 60 countries out there that have al Qaeda cells in them. You know, we had cells here in the United States, and we found them in Germany, the United Kingdom, in Canada, Spain, Italy, Germany, Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia. So, since September 11th of last year, we know, we've uncovered this worldwide network that's out there.

We've made progress against it. We've wrapped up a number of these individuals. We work cooperatively with intelligence services and law enforcement agencies around the world. We've made progress on the financial front. But it's also probably fair to say we're closer to the front of the end of the war than we are to the back end of the war. This will take a long time.

**Q** In your best guess, if you had to finish this sentence: "U.S. troops will remain in Afghanistan until -- "?

**THE VICE PRESIDENT:** I think until there's an effective government in place, and forces that can guarantee the security of that government and the security and safety of the Afghan people.

**Q** You won't be specific, for intelligence reasons, about Osama bin Laden. But there were the reports and discussions that they came close at Tora Bora, that he escaped from that area, and the continuing reports are that if he's alive, he's sort of wandering back and forth along the border with Pakistan. Is Pakistan doing everything it can to help, and is it giving U.S. forces free rein to do everything they want to do?

**THE VICE PRESIDENT:** Pakistan has been very helpful, and President Musharraf has been a good friend and ally through this whole process.

They've worked with us by putting their forces actively involved in the search on the Pakistan side of the border. We've done a lot of cooperative efforts together. They've let us use some of their facilities inside Pakistan, in terms of operating

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into Afghanistan. So it's been a very good, very positive relationship.

**Q** The Bush Doctrine, as laid out by the President, is: harbor a terrorist, you are equal to a terrorist. You just said that some al Qaeda have moved into Iran. Logic would say, then, the Bush Doctrine would be go get them.

**THE VICE PRESIDENT:** No, but I mean, in terms of individuals fleeing, we know they scattered. Beyond that, you can find evidence a lot of places in that part of the world where we think people moved to. That doesn't mean, by any means, that a particular government is providing sanctuary, or close to it.

It may be true. That could conceivably at some point be an issue that needs to be addressed, but it --

**Q** Is it being addressed? We don't have relations, obviously, with the government of Iran. Are there conversations?

**THE VICE PRESIDENT:** I don't want to leave you with the impression tonight that we are somehow about to do something in connection with Iran. But the Iranians know how we feel. Obviously, we didn't know we had al Qaeda in the United States on September 11th, and I think there are probably a lot of other countries out there that may also lack that knowledge.

We have to work this diplomatically, financially, through the intel services, to wrap up as many as we can.

**Q** You say you don't want to leave the impression anything is imminent with regards to Iran. Some would say you have left the impression that something is brewing with regard to Iran's neighbor, Iraq, and there is now a full-fledged debate. The President says he will seek the support of Congress, that he will work the international allies, including a speech to the United Nations.

One of the questions that comes back is what is the evidence that things have changed? What is the evidence that Saddam Hussein is a clear and present danger now? Will the administration lay out that evidence of what your real-time intelligence -- not what he did to the Kurds decades ago, but what do you know now about his weapons programs?

**THE VICE PRESIDENT:** We will share as much as we can publicly. We will share more -- because a lot of it's highly classified -- with congressional leadership, for example. Some of it has to be protected and held in a very tight circle, otherwise we lose the ability to continue to receive that type of intelligence.

**Q** Right. What does it show?

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**THE VICE PRESIDENT:** I think the -- let me draw some conclusions if I can.

Saddam Hussein, if in fact the U.N. Security Council resolutions had been implemented, if he'd lived up to them, would have been disarmed, in terms of his chemical, biological, nuclear weapons, his ballistic missiles, and so forth. That hasn't happened. He has instead thumbed his nose repeatedly at the U.N.

If you go back to the '96-'98 time frame, six different times the Security Council addressed this issue. They found him to be in flagrant violation of the resolutions. They told him he had to open up and allow inspectors without any kind of limits or qualifications. And he thumbed his nose at them every single time, and nothing happened. No consequences.

That was up until '98. From '98 to the present time, four more years, now, there have been no inspectors. He's been free -- and we know he has -- to continue to improve his chemical weapons capability. We know he has worked to and has succeeded in improving his biological weapons capability. And we're confident that he has also begun, once again, to try to acquire a nuclear weapon.

On the nuclear front, prior to the Gulf War, I was told that he was some years away from having a nuclear weapon -- this was when I was Secretary of Defense. We found out after we got in there, after Desert Storm, that in fact he was perhaps within six months to a year of actually acquiring a nuclear weapon.

He still has -- the technicians who did that work for him are still in Iraq. He's got a weapons design that he'd had prior to that time. He does not have the fissile material, but he may be working on it. Our -- based on what we've seen, we're fairly confident that he in fact is moving forward once again to develop nuclear weapons. And as I say, we know he has improved his biological and chemical capabilities at the same time.

**Q** You say "fairly confident" and "based on what" you've seen. I understand you can't discuss this in a public setting. But if you sat down with a key member of Congress, or the German Chancellor, who has voiced a great deal of skepticism about this, and showed them the file, would they walk away saying there is evidence now -- meaning, in the past year, past several months -- that Saddam Hussein is working on his nuclear program again, working on his chemical and biological? They would answer the question yes, you think?

**THE VICE PRESIDENT:** Yes. We will do that with members of Congress. I don't know how much we'll share with the German Chancellor. But the -- there's no question but that the

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evidence is there to support those conclusions, that his weapons of mass destruction is growing more robust.

We also have circumstances now that are different than before September 11th. What happened on September 11th was an attack that was launched from the territory of the United States against us. It came originally, a lot of the planning and organizational efforts, of course, in Hamburg, Germany. I don't mean to blame the Germans, they didn't know any more than we did what was going on there.

But it's a different set of circumstances now. We know our vulnerabilities. And when we think about these kinds of weapons of mass destruction, and when we know, as we do, that the al Qaeda organization, the terrorist organization that hit us on September 11th, is also doing everything they can to acquire chemical, nuclear, and biological weapons -- and we know they've tested chemical weapons on dogs; your network broadcast that footage last week.

So we have to be concerned now about the possibility that we're vulnerable to an attack the likes of which we did not experience prior to last September 11th, with a far more deadly weapon. We have to worry about the possible marriage, if you will, of a rogue state like Saddam Hussein's Iraq with a terrorist organization like al Qaeda. And we have to worry about the possibility that Saddam Hussein, for his own reasons, could use that growing capability on our friends and allies in the region, on U.S. forces in the region, or on the United States itself.

We know he has this capability, we know he's developing it. We know he sits on top of ten percent of the world's oil reserves. He's got a significant cash flow coming in to finance these acquisitions and procurement projects. And the world has sort of gotten relaxed about him, if you will, and a lot of people are doing business with him now.

And so we find ourselves in a situation where there's a growing threat that needs to be addressed. And it's not just a U.S. problem; it's also a problem for the United Nations.

Q You have captured the world's attention again by focusing on this. The President will go to the United Nations, and one of the debates now that is back again is let's get the inspectors back in.

You have voiced great skepticism that A, Saddam Hussein would let them in in the first place; but that if he did, that, in your view, it would most likely be a fraud, that he would try to block them. Politically, in trying to build international support, is it your belief today that you will have to go through

this exercise again, despite your skepticism? That inspectors will have to go back into Iraq?

**THE VICE PRESIDENT:** The President will speak to the United Nations this week, and lay out a case, and also his recommendations for how to proceed. Those are presidential decisions, and I don't want to pre-empt that approach.

The concern about inspectors is to remember that inspectors are not the end here; they're just a means to an end. There's a bit of a tendency for the international community to become seized with this issue of inspectors and forget that the issue really is disarmament. The inspectors are a way for the outside world to verify that he's done what he promised he would do and what the Security Council required him to do, which was to get rid of those deadly weapons. And so I think you need to look at inspectors within that context.

I obviously, based on the past history, am a skeptic. Inspectors were in there for seven years, and worked for seven years, and they did a lot of good work. But they didn't get everything. And what we found was, often times, that even with a very robust and aggressive inspection regime, he was still able to go forward and hide some of these weapons capabilities that we were never able to account for.

So that's the concern. If you're going to have any kind of inspections regime, it obviously needs to be better and more effective than the last one.

**Q** When you traveled to the Middle East a few months back, you said if the inspectors go back in -- allowing your skepticism -- it had to be anytime, anyplace, anywhere. Not like the last experience. As this debate comes back again -- whether the administration likes it or not, that's where it's going -- do you think it needs to be anytime, anyplace, anywhere, or else? And that the United Nations needs to say that, there needs to be a new resolution that makes that clear?

**THE VICE PRESIDENT:** I have my views. The President will set the policy, and he'll enunciate it later this week.

**Q** But you're not interested in reopening this inspections debate again as an indefinite, if they go in and don't get access, they haggle about it -- that would serve no purpose, in your view?

**THE VICE PRESIDENT:** I'd refer back to what the President said to the Congress when he met with the bipartisan leadership on this issue. He said the only option that's been ruled out is doing nothing. We are not going to simply stand by this time and take no action. That's not an option.

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And given the growing threat, we think that the United Nations has to address this issue. And it's -- partly this is a challenge to them. They've had repeated assertions of authority over Iraq. Saddam's thumbed his nose with impunity at them, and there has been no consequence.

**Q** Tom DeLay walked out of the meeting with the President the other day at the White House and said that the President made clear he has not settled on the military option, but in his view, looking at this, that it is inevitable. Do you have that view?

**THE VICE PRESIDENT:** I work for the President. And he has not yet made a decision. He does want to discuss this with the Congress, and he does want to discuss it with our friends and allies, and with the United Nations. And I think that's as it should be.

He is bound and determined that we will address this issue. We have to deal with that emerging threat. The question is how best to do it. And we'd like to have the support of the international community as we move forward here. We've worked with them in the past on this issue. In a sense, it's the failure of the international effort that puts us in the position we're in today, where we're having to even think about the possibility of military action in Iraq.

**Q** You spoke about how much you'd like the support of the international community. It has been slow to come, as you know. And the President asked you specifically to go to the Middle East region because of your relations, both in government and out of government, with that part of the world.

The Secretary General of the Arab League said a U.S. military confrontation with Iraq would "open the gates of Hell" in the Middle East. Still a steep hill to climb.

**THE VICE PRESIDENT:** Yes. And I -- I think if the U.S. decides that action's needed, I think we'll have the requisite support from our friends in the region. I -- there's been a lot of posturing in advance of anybody doing anything here.

(Interruption to interview.)

**Q** You say international support is critical. It has been hard to come by, with the exception, perhaps, of Prime Minister Blair.

A man you know well -- and the President asked you to travel to this region a while back because of your expertise there, in and out of government -- the Secretary General of the Arab League says a U.S. military confrontation with Iraq would "open the gates of Hell" in the Middle East. Steep hill still to climb?

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**THE VICE PRESIDENT:** Yes, but I disagree with that assessment on his part. I think that strong U.S. decisive leadership has traditionally, in that part of the world, produced valuable results. I think if we were forced to do it, I think it would encourage the moderates, friends of the United States to know that we mean business. And it would discourage the more radical elements out there that have been a big part of the problem.

I think the people of Iraq would frankly welcome a U.S. force as liberators, that they would not see us as oppressors by any means. And our experience was, after the Gulf War of '91, that once the United States had acted and provided leadership, that in fact the community, the region was much more peaceful for some considerable period of time. That's what made possible a lot of the progress in the peace process between the Israelis and Palestinians back in the early '90s.

So the idea that somehow the U.S. acting decisively to deal with a major international threat and a threat to the United States automatically leads to chaos, I don't think is a valid judgment.

**Q** Let me close by bringing you home. A couple of weeks ago you said -- half in jest, but you seemed serious about your answer -- that if the President wanted you to serve a second term as Vice President, you would be happy to run again, but that two people got to make that call: the President and Mrs. Cheney. Any feedback in those subsequent weeks?

**THE VICE PRESIDENT:** Neither one of them's said a word to me since.

**Q** Is that good or bad?

**THE VICE PRESIDENT:** No, it's the President's call, obviously. And I've enjoyed immensely working with him. It's a real privilege to serve in this administration in this capacity. And at the appropriate time, I'm sure, leading up to the 2004 election, he'll decide who he wants to have as his running mate next time around. And that's his call to make, and I'll be happy to support whatever he decides.

**Q** And you don't read anything into the fact that neither he nor your wife have said anything about it?

**THE VICE PRESIDENT:** No, I don't. Not yet.

**Q** Thank you very much.

**THE VICE PRESIDENT:** Thank you, John.

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END

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