



PRESIDENCE DE LA REPUBLIQUE

PRESS BRIEFING

GIVEN BY M. JACQUES CHIRAC, PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC,

AT THE END OF HIS WORKING VISIT TO ALGERIA - EXCERPTS -

(Algiers, 15 April 2004)

IRAQ

THE PRESIDENT (...) While foreseeable, the situation we see developing in Iraq is nonetheless particularly worrying. I'd like to begin by saying that France wholeheartedly condemns all hostage-taking, which nothing can excuse or justify, and that she is asking for the immediate release of all foreigners in Iraq currently being held or deprived of their freedom. In this respect, I wanted to express my sympathy, my solidarity with Italy who has just been sorely tested in this respect.

I also said to the President, who in fact wholly shared this point of view, that the clashes in several Iraqi towns are causing the civilians great suffering. We know this from all the eyewitness accounts we've had and can see it from the pictures on television. These civilians must be protected and the humanitarian aid must reach them indeed there has been a pressing appeal for this by the ICRC. We of course support this position and it's a responsibility incumbent on the occupying powers.

The events currently taking place in Iraq show that, going beyond security, the solution can only be a political one. It necessitates a rapid, complete and visible handover of sovereignty to the Iraqis themselves and the establishment of genuinely representative, legitimate and fully accountable Iraqi institutions. And any option failing to take account of the will expressed by the Iraqi people to regain their total independence as soon as possible would be fraught with consequences for the stability of the country and, moreover, more broadly of the region. The date of 30 June must thus signal a genuine break with the past. Now, more than ever, France thinks that a conference bringing together all sections of Iraqi society would, pending elections, perhaps allow all the necessary legitimacy to be given to the political transition. We noted with interest the initial declarations in Baghdad by M. Brahimi, the United Nations Special Envoy. We have confidence in M. Brahimi's judgement of the situation and are awaiting the conclusions he will report to the United Nations Security Council. So France is awaiting his return and will look, together with her Security Council partners who, as you know today include Algeria at the role the United Nations might be able to play in the process of political transition.

MIDDLE EAST



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On the Middle East, France and Algeria are of the same mind. Only a negotiated agreement underpinned by principles of international law and paving the way for the creation of a viable Palestinian State can allow the Israeli and Palestinian peoples to live side by side in peace and security. Nothing sustainable will be achieved without negotiating between the parties. Indeed, in our view, no one can pre-empt the results of a necessary negotiation.

So from this standpoint the withdrawal initiatives we see today have to be a step towards the creation of a viable Palestinian State. To be sustainable, the peace must also be global, satisfying the legitimate aspirations of all the region's peoples and consequently concern all the parties to the conflict, and not just Palestinians and Israelis I'm thinking of course of Syria and Lebanon.

(...)

US GREATER MIDDLE EAST INITIATIVE

Q. (...) Second question, what will the French position be on the US Greater Middle East initiative?

THE PRESIDENT (...) Firstly we think that, to be effective, any initiative would have to allow beforehand for substantial progress which there isn't today towards peace in the Middle East and particularly in the conflict between Israel and Palestine. Secondly, we consider any boost to democracy wholly desirable, that it can't be imposed, it must be a concerted one. For many reasons, first of all because things can't be imposed, but, on the contrary, we can consult together, talk, cooperate, give each other mutual assistance. Secondly, the situations and characteristics of the peoples and countries concerned are all totally different. All the countries in the greater Middle East are different and so they don't lend themselves to a "one-size-fits-all" approach. So the method which has to be used must, of course, be one of cooperation, dialogue, consultation and not coercion.

With this in mind, we have great hopes that the Tunis summit which has been postponed for reasons which of course I'm not going to comment on can be held as soon as possible. Why as soon as possible? Because, as you know, the US is going to put this Greater Middle East issue on the agenda of the G8 summit at Sea Island which will have to discuss it. So it would be very important, particularly for the European G8 participants, for the Arab countries to have already given their views and decided on a global position, which Europe could draw on for the negotiations. These negotiations will tackle the political issues, as well as how to boost democracy at the G8 summit and also military issues at the NATO Istanbul summit a few days after the G8.

BIN LADEN/TRUCE

Q. (...) Al-Arabiya has just broadcast a recording attributed to Osama bin Laden, which has apparently been authenticated by the Americans, proposing a



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three-month truce with countries that withdraw from Muslim countries. What is your comment on that?

THE PRESIDENT Let me tell you: no dealings are possible with terrorists for one simple reason. Terrorism is a barbaric act which targets innocents and thus can't be justified by any reason or cause whatsoever. (...) Nothing can justify a terrorist act, so any kind of discussion with terrorists is impossible.

(...)

MIDDLE EAST/US/SHARON

Q. What's France's reaction to the comments made yesterday by Mr Bush and Mr Sharon on the Middle East? Do you think it means the end of the Roadmap?

THE PRESIDENT (...) I'd simply say that any withdrawal from the occupied territories would naturally constitute a positive measure per se, and I'd say in theory.

However, as all the EU heads of State and government clearly stated in Brussels on 25 March, such a withdrawal, first of all, has to take place within the framework of the Roadmap. Secondly, it has to be done in conjunction with the Palestinian Authority. (...) Thirdly, the withdrawal must be a step towards the creation of a viable Palestinian State, side by side with Israel. Fourthly, the withdrawal must not prejudice what will be for the parties to negotiate, particularly with respect to borders. Finally, nobody can pre-empt the result of the negotiations. That's the position of Europe and of France. It wasn't changed by the statements yesterday. We can only confirm it.

MIDDLE EAST PEACE PROCESS/1967 BORDER

Q. (...) Yesterday there was a major new development on the international stage the inviolability of the 1949 border was pulverized by the US President. Can you tell us if that 1949 border remains inviolable for you?

THE PRESIDENT I think you are in fact referring to the 1967 border, but the question remains the same. I'd like to begin by saying that what I see as fundamental to achieving peace is negotiation. I don't believe you can impose peace, especially when the two adversaries involved have fought each other for a long, long time. I don't believe peace can be imposed it must be negotiated, and negotiated with a partner and not someone of your own choosing, otherwise it generally won't last. Only the parties involved, together, on the basis of a plan they have both approved, can reach an agreement they can commit to and which leads to true peace. And I'm afraid that isn't the path that has been embarked upon. (...)

As for the borders, to my mind these are a matter of international law and this international law must be respected. Consequently, I am doubtful about unilaterally or bilaterally calling international law into question because I



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think it's hard to get the other party to agree to it, and because if international stability and the rules of international law can hinge on individual circumstances and people, it sets an unfortunate precedent which can subsequently be claimed by peoples in other places, it's dangerous.

IRAQ/FRANCE/INTERNATIONAL FORCE

Q. I have a question about Iraq. In his press conference, President Bush called for a resolution to be passed allowing other countries to assist in Iraq. I want to know what you think about that. Would France be prepared in the coming weeks to take part in an international force protecting UN personnel?

THE PRESIDENT That question isn't even on the agenda. As I told you a few minutes ago, we believe that the transfer of full and real responsibility to the UN is a necessity. I mean, there must first be the transfer [of sovereignty] to recognized Iraqi authorities, and then when it comes to managing the situation as a whole, the UN must have a responsibility. At the moment, we're nowhere near that point. In this context, it is utterly out of the question for France to respond affirmatively to a request for a military presence in Iraq.

GREATER MIDDLE EAST INITIATIVE/STUTT GART/MEDITERRANEAN/EU

Q. Don't you think that the American initiative, the Greater Middle East, is particularly aimed at countering or thwarting EU and notably French ambitions to conquer the southern shore of the Mediterranean? I need only point to the Stuttgart meeting which brought together the Americans and the major heads of State of the Maghreb and Sahel countries. They've just adopted the principle of creating a strategic alliance to fight terrorism. Don't you think that's a giant step which the Americans have taken in that direction?

THE PRESIDENT I believe that everything which helps strengthen the fight against terrorism is positive, and so the fact that the Americans are anxious notably in that part of the world to strengthen the ability to fight terrorism seems wholly positive. I don't see it causing difficulties for anyone. In any case, it doesn't cause any for France. Thank you. |