



## Interview of President Jacques CHIRAC, with CNN.

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Elys e, Paris, September 18, 2006.

**QUESTION** Mr. President, thank you for joining us on CNN today. You said in a letter to the American people on September 11 that you wanted to express the French people's solidarity and friendship with the American people. Does that mean that you and President Bush agree on foreign policy at this time?

**LE PRESIDENT** I'd like first to wish you a most cordial welcome and to thank you. We've just had the 5th anniversary of 9/11 and I'd like to say again the French people feel a deep sense of solidarity with the American people, who were traumatized by the events that day. The horror that gripped us is long-lasting and profound. I'd like to express this solidarity, very deeply, to the American people and to President Bush.

As for foreign policy, it's been emphasized that we've had differences of views on certain problems. This was true, particularly over Iraq. I made no secret of it, and neither did he. But on the whole, there is a real solidarity. It's true in most of the conflicts which the world is currently exposed to, and on which we have common analyses with the Americans and President Bush. I'm very much looking forward to meeting him Tuesday, in New York, precisely to review the problems in the Middle East and Africa, especially Darfur--I know he's greatly concerned about it, as I am.

**QUESTION** Mr. President, France is apparently on the list of Al Qaeda targets according to what we learned last week. Is the reason for these threats the fact that you've moved closer to US policy?

**LE PRESIDENT** First of all, I don't believe we know the facts of the situations; second, terrorism can strike anybody, and at any time. That's why we need complete solidarity, especially among the Western nations, so as to fight together against terrorism. I don't believe anybody's a special target, but we must all, without exception, be extremely vigilant and cooperate very closely.

**QUESTION** You mentioned Darfur. You obviously believe in multilateralism, in the United Nations and its capacity to resolve problems. Why, in your view, has the world not acted in a concerted way to prevent the situation in Darfur from becoming a tragedy?

**LE PRESIDENT** Darfur already is a tragedy. And it's growing. I am most alarmed. It's now the end of the rainy season, people are beginning to be able to move around again, and I'm very worried lest we have millions of displaced



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persons and maybe even hundreds of thousands of dead like we've already had. That's the reason why when I'm in New York--and in this regard, my position is the same as President Bush's--I will solemnly call on all countries, and particularly the president of Sudan, to agree to UN mediation. In other words, replacing the present African troops, who cannot stay much longer, with a UN force of about 20,000 who could probably provide a solution to this tragic problem.

**QUESTION** It's being said in some quarters in the US that this is further proof that multilateralism can't work because things take too long...

**LE PRESIDENT** Experience shows that when multilateralism runs into difficulties, there are no other solutions. I don't see another solution. Obviously, one might imagine one or another country making war on its own. It's not really conceivable. No one thinks so. So there's no solution other than multilateralism. It's the conscience of the world and its effectiveness. And it's expressed through the UN.

**QUESTION** This week, Mr. President, you received a special envoy from the Iranian president. What was his message? Is Iran trying to divide the Western governments?

**LE PRESIDENT** Iran has been engaged for a very long time in processes that we consider blameworthy. Today, it's essential to address this difficulty and to stand firm against the danger of proliferation. The three Europeans--Germany, Britain and France, followed by the Russians and Chinese and then by the Americans, who were naturally informed and were positive from the outset about this approach--decided to present proposals to Iran. These proposals weren't spontaneously accepted, however they were discussed. Now, we have on one hand Mr. Solana speaking on behalf of the six countries, and then Iran's representative, Mr. Larijani. I'm convinced that only dialogue will enable us to reach a positive outcome. I hope for my part that we'll arrive at a solution that will enable us to prevent a conflict, of any kind.

**QUESTION** Did the Iranian president's envoy give you any reasons for hoping that the Iranians are interested in a more pragmatic dialogue?

**LE PRESIDENT** I hope so. I interpreted his comments in a rather positive sense. I've naturally briefed all our partners.

**QUESTION** Mr. President, how far would France be prepared to go to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons: sanctions, military action?

**LE PRESIDENT** As you know, I'm always in favor of a negotiated solution. I think that dialogue still has every chance and consequently I'd like us to take the dialogue through to the end. Then we'll see if there are grounds for reaching some other conclusion. I'd like to see dialogue resolve this crisis.



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**QUESTION** President Bush said last Friday that he wouldn't meet with the Iranian president when he comes to New York. Is it an opportunity missed, in your view, do you think he should meet him, receive him?

**LE PRESIDENT** I've no advice, no suggestion to make to President Bush in this area. We have to recognize that the Iranian president has made statements that are quite unacceptable to certain members of the international community, especially his remarks about Israel.

**QUESTION** As you know, President Bush has decided to block Iranian access to funds held by banks in the United States. Would you be ready to cooperate on that?

**LE PRESIDENT** I have no comment to make on US policy in this area. What I'm saying, and I'll say it again, is that Iran is a great nation with a great historical tradition, a great culture, and we should press forward with dialogue till the end, till it succeeds. Dialogue is absolutely essential for solving the problem which confronts us and which we cannot accept.

**QUESTION** Mr. President, you referred to the Middle East. French troops arrived with tanks in south Lebanon this week. They're deploying right now. In your opinion, realistically, what can the French troops do? Can they prevent Hezbollah or Israel from attacking each other?

**LE PRESIDENT** First of all, France isn't alone. You mentioned French troops, but the main European nations are present in the reorganized, reinforced UNIFIL. And the Europeans are not alone either. We have most of the Asian countries, Muslim and non-Muslim, including China. We've also got Russia. And the whole of this international community is absolutely determined to carry out the tasks that the restructured UNIFIL is to undertake. That is, to make sure that there are no attacks by one party on another, and vice versa. And that the Lebanese government, through its forces, can exercise authority over its entire territory since there can be no free and independent state if the democratically elected government does not have authority over the whole of its territory. This gives Hezbollah a natural opportunity to speak in the framework of a political party, in the framework of political action. But it precludes the existence of militias. That is one of the problems that have to be solved.

**QUESTION** And on that precise question of Lebanon, Mr. President, some of your European partners think that France is wrong not to include Syria in the equation, to keep its distance from Syria. In your opinion, would it be possible to have a dialogue with the Syrians? They are full-fledged parties to what happens in Lebanon, aren't they?

**LE PRESIDENT** I fully understand the motivation of our European friends, or at least those you are alluding to. Perhaps they haven't had sufficient experience in relations with Syria. France has always had such relations but they haven't always paid off.



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**QUESTION** Let me ask you a question about a recent study. France and the US have always had a separation of Church and State, and some have said here that there are too many religious components in American political life, particularly in American foreign policy. What do you think about that, Mr. President?

**LE PRESIDENT** I would certainly not allow myself to comment on the role of religion in the United States or in American politics. In France, we uphold the principle of the separation of religion and state. It's one of the fundamental principles of the French Republic. It's secularism.

**QUESTION** May I ask you another question, Mr. President? Does it annoy or irritate you that your interior minister made statements criticizing you directly on how you manage the transatlantic relationship when he was in New York?

**Mr. President** - You know, it's quite natural for a French politician who also happens to be the head of a major French political party-a party with which, moreover, I have great sympathy-to make comments. You are alluding to Iraq. I took a position on Iraq and I must say that the reality on the ground does not prove me wrong. I remain very pessimistic about Iraq and about Iraq's future.

**QUESTION** I think you surprised a number of people on July 14, Mr. President, and particularly political analysts, when you said that you hadn't yet decided whether you would run again in the next presidential elections. Do you think that if there were a world crisis, the world would look to you, the eyes of the world would turn to you?

**LE PRESIDENT** I won't comment on that. I stated very clearly that everything had to come in its own time. In a democracy, there's a time for presidential campaigning and there's a time for daily management. The government must take care of daily management, under my responsibility and my authority. I make sure that it acts accordingly. When the time comes, during the first quarter of next year, as I've said, the presidential campaign will begin. At that time, everyone, starting with me, will express his intentions. I don't want anyone to prejudge the campaign. We have a lot to do. That's why the government was appointed, not to engage in campaigning.

**QUESTION** When CNN interviewed you three years ago, just before the Gulf War, you said you had warned President Bush that entering Iraq would be a mistake. You said that if there really had to be a war, he should try to limit the damage and the destruction. Three years later, what would your message to President Bush be on this matter?

**LE PRESIDENT** There's no point in rehashing the past. Today we offer our support for the Iraqi prime minister's ambition to overcome the current difficulties. I'm not sure that can really be achieved, at least so long as there is no objective known to the Iraqis as far as the departure of foreign forces.



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QUESTION Can France help the United States in Iraq, or help it get out of Iraq?

LE PRESIDENT If President Bush asks me about that, he would certainly be welcome and I would respond.

QUESTION What would your advice be concerning Iraq?

LE PRESIDENT I think we have to be very careful now to ensure that Iraq doesn't explode. We must give absolute priority to Iraq's internal cohesion. That's what the Iraqi prime minister wants, and it isn't easy. We must give hope to the Iraqis, a hope that allows them to think that they will be free and independent in their own country as soon as possible.

QUESTION Mr. President, thank you so very much for joining us on CNN.

LE PRESIDENT Thank you.

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