



## Interview of President Jacques CHIRAC, with the Daily USA Today.

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New York, (United States of America) September 19, 2006.

**QUESTION** What are the prospects for a solution to the Iranian problems? Do you think a compromise solution is possible?

**LE PRESIDENT** First of all there's one fact. Iran has for a number of years pursued a questionable program regarding nuclear technology. Iran says it's a civilian program. We continue to have doubts about the end use of this program.

Europe, that is, Britain, France and Germany, entered into discussions with Iran. Then there was the adoption of resolution 1696 in the Security Council. The problem is whether a solution is to be imposed or, on the contrary, whether a solution is to be found through dialogue. It has to be understood that for the Europeans, stopping enrichment is a key element. These negotiations expanded, first with the arrival of the Russians and Chinese and then the Americans. There are now six countries talking with Iran in a spirit that has to be one of dialogue.

How are we to move forward? I think it would be opportune to begin a negotiation that could start first with an agreement among the Six and Iran on the agenda and the length of the negotiation. The negotiation could start on the basis of two principles. On the side of the Six there would be an agreement to suspend referral to the Security Council pending the duration of the negotiation. On the Iranian side there would be an agreement to stop continued uranium enrichment pending the duration of the negotiation. At the end of the negotiation we would see if an agreement was reached. At that moment each side would assume its responsibilities. In the event there were confirmation, definitive confirmation of an agreement that would include the suspension, the cessation of uranium enrichment by Iran, this would end the action of the Six in the Security Council.

This is currently being examined by the two officials who are talking together, Mr. Solana for the Six and Mr. Larijani for Iran. This discussion is continuing. I hope that it will lead to a positive conclusion. I think that dialogue is in any case preferable to confrontation.

**QUESTION** The Iranians didn't want to suspend enrichment before the negotiations out of pride. Is it possible for the Europeans and European foreign ministers to meet with Mr. Larijani? The Iranians would then announce a suspension and the Americans would enter into the negotiations. I've heard it's



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an idea that's been floated.....

LE PRESIDENT It's a possibility that could well be studied.

QUESTION Would France be in favor of such a possibility?

LE PRESIDENT If it takes us to a definitive decision with as its goal suspending uranium enrichment, why not?

QUESTION And if the diplomatic approach doesn't succeed? If the Iranians continue to refuse to suspend their enrichment activities, will France support possible sanctions in the Security Council?

The President- I am in principle opposed to sanctions. Experience has shown that sanctions never lead to anything positive, especially with a great and proud people that have an ancient civilization like Iran. I don't believe that sanctions are the way to obtain something. I'm not ruling out however the possibility of sanctions. But they should be examined by the Six and initially they should be provisional and proportionate. But it's not the scenario I'm taking as my basis. We should be able to arrive at a solution, I hope, which excludes on one hand sanctions and on the other enrichment. In any case that is the goal we're pursuing.

QUESTION So you're optimistic, Mr. President?

LE PRESIDENT Yes, that's my nature.

QUESTION Can I talk to you about another matter linked to that issue-Lebanon? Are you concerned about the security of the French troops that have been sent to Lebanon?

LE PRESIDENT It's a concern not just for French troops but all the UNIFIL troops. I'd like to remind you that France decided to send troops after spending several days negotiating the modalities, strategy and assets available to UNIFIL troops with the UN secretary-general and the Department of Peace-Keeping Operations. It was after this discussion and when we had assurance that the UNIFIL troops would have the means to ensure their protection and carry out their mission that we decided to send troops, and to ask other partners to join in this effort. We were in permanent contact with Italy. We got a number of Europeans to join in. And not only Europeans. We made a big effort at the ASEM meeting in Helsinki last week to get the agreement of several Asian Muslim countries, specifically Indonesia, Malaysia and the Sultanate of Brunei, to participate in UNIFIL.

As it was important that the Asian Muslim countries not be the only ones involved but other Asian countries as well, we had in-depth discussions with the Chinese prime minister and the Korean president in Helsinki to urge them to send troops as well.



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We did the same with the Russians who also agreed. So it's not just Europe, not just the Muslim countries of Asia, it's the international community as a whole which is involved in this effort to give the Lebanese government the means to deploy its forces in the South and to ensure its authority over the whole of its territory. Because it is obvious that you can't have a state that doesn't have full authority over the whole of its territory.

**QUESTION** The French general, Alain Pellegrini, who commands UNIFIL reportedly said that if Lebanese troops don't disarm Hezbollah, it would be up to UNIFIL to do it. Is France ready to take on this kind of responsibility?

**LE PRESIDENT** I'm not familiar with the General Pellegrini's remarks, but I doubt he said that.

Q- Perhaps he was quoted incorrectly.

**LE PRESIDENT** Probably. UNIFIL's mission is not in fact to disarm Hezbollah. Disarming Hezbollah is in the nature of things. It is prescribed in Security Council resolution 1559. And it goes hand in hand with restoring the authority of the Lebanese state to all of its territory. We have said all along that it is for the Lebanese government, in the framework of a Lebanese negotiation, to set in train the process that will let Hezbollah transform itself from a militia to a political party, which is legitimate and natural.

**QUESTION** I want to go back to my initial question. Do you see a link, Mr. President, between the negotiations with the Iranians and the re-establishment of stability in Lebanon, and particularly in southern Lebanon?

**LE PRESIDENT** Certainly Iran has an important role to play in the general stability of the region. Everyone knows the possible links between Shiite Iran and Shiite Hezbollah. But we've no reason today to say that Iran is playing the worst card. I don't believe it.

**QUESTION** When I met you three years ago, it was obvious that things weren't going very well for the United States in Iraq. How do you see the situation in the region now? Is the world safer since the invasion of Iraq?

**LE PRESIDENT** I'm not going to go back to France's position at the time of the war in Iraq. Today we have a situation which is far more disturbing, with the risk of confrontation, civil war and Iraq splintering. This would be a very bad thing for stability in the region. There is an Iraqi prime minister now who is trying to broaden his base. Naturally, we support his action. But I won't say that I'm very optimistic.

**QUESTION** Do you think there's a civil war going on in Iraq now?

**LE PRESIDENT** That depends on what you call a civil war. But we're not far from it. The Iraqi people have to be given a sense that foreign troops are there for a limited time even though I'm not talking about a date for



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withdrawal. But I believe that this is necessary and that the Iraqi people must be told when they can recover their liberty. It's a major aspect for Iraq.

QUESTION You're seeing President Bush tomorrow. Are you going to propose a date or ask for guarantees for a withdrawal of American troops?

LE PRESIDENT I believe it will have to be done one way or another. But I recognize that this poses enormous problems.

QUESTION In fact whatever is done, we're doomed, the loser?

LE PRESIDENT No. One is never the loser. One can always hope for a re-establishment of the situation. But for now the situation isn't very encouraging.

QUESTION Do you think that we are safer now than three years ago and that the region is more stable than it was?

LE PRESIDENT I don't have that feeling.

QUESTION Now about Darfur. It's a genocide in slow motion that we're seeing unfold before our eyes. What can we do to get the Sudanese authorities to permit the deployment of an adequate force in the region?

LE PRESIDENT I'm very concerned about Darfur. It's a vast region, part of a country which is the largest in Africa, which comprises many ethnic groups, many people who are at odds with others, who contest the government. Apparently the president of Sudan, Mr. Bechir, has confirmed his intention of settling the problem by force. In any case it's the impression we've had for some days, with the resumption of the bombardments.

There have already been millions displaced and hundreds of thousands of dead. It's an utterly tragic situation. Now's the end of the rainy season which means that everyone can start moving on the roads again. The situation, combined with these actions of force, is liable to spawn millions of displaced persons again in tragic conditions with probably thousands and thousands of dead again.

The African Union force obviously doesn't have the possibility or the means of maintaining order in Darfur.

That's what led to the idea of deploying a large UN force of about 20,000. This was the voice of wisdom. We support this position. The problem is that President Bechir refuses as things stand now to allow UN forces to enter Sudan and Darfur. Tomorrow, and I probably won't be alone, I shall be solemnly calling the General Assembly's attention to the tragic consequences of this situation and the compelling need to remedy it.

I recognize that President Bechir is not alone, that he is supported by some countries, specifically Arab Africa. I believe we should call the attention of



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all these countries to the new tragedy which is looming. There is no other solution than for UN forces to enter Darfur, and to do so in sufficient numbers.

It can probably be arranged--it's the secretary-general's role--for these troops to come for the most part, if possible, from Muslim countries. We can work out modalities, but there is no other solution to having UN troops maintain order, otherwise the situation risks becoming disastrous.

QUESTION What ways do you have to put pressure on Bechir? He's protected in the Security Council by China?

LE PRESIDENT We should be able to discuss things with the Chinese. It's more the fact that certain Arab countries are supporting him.

QUESTION Do you think they are the problem?

LE PRESIDENT In any case what seems to me necessary is to bring sufficient pressure to bear. That's what I'm going to say tomorrow. Others will probably say it as well. Putting sufficient pressure on President Bechir so that he agrees to UN troops. There is no alternative. The alternative is tragedy. Bechir's conviction that he'll be able to resolve the problem by force is totally erroneous.

QUESTION What means do you have to make the pressure effective?

LE PRESIDENT The force of the international community, if it really is mobilized. In any case France will definitely be on the same wavelength as the United States in mobilizing the international community.

QUESTION It's perhaps the last time unfortunately, the second and last time, that I'll have the opportunity of interviewing you as president.

LE PRESIDENT You never know. There's an old proverb in French that says 'never two without three.'

QUESTION Be that as it may, I'd like to ask you a few questions about your legacy as president. You've known success, and more difficult times during these 11 years. What do you remember as being the greatest successes and the most difficult moments?

LE PRESIDENT It's not for me to judge the successes or the difficult moments. I just want to express a certain satisfaction at seeing France's economic and social situation improve. We're seeing it on the employment front and in the financial situation. France is going to be the only major country in the Eurozone to keep its deficit below 3%.

We do have a problem which must be dealt with today, and that's purchasing power, with the resumption of growth. Growth in France is going to be there



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again the best of all the Eurozone countries. So one should draw the consequences. I've been very clear about the line that is to be followed until the next elections. I said it again this morning in remarks to a French radio station.

**QUESTION** The point about your relations with the United States. When we last met they weren't very good. You should know that people aren't talking about 'freedom fries' any more. It's back to 'French fries' even in the Congressional cafeteria.

**LE PRESIDENT** I'm glad to hear it.

**QUESTION** What's your feeling? Are we back to some improvement?

**LE PRESIDENT** We live in a world where things are always greatly exaggerated by observers. When I say observers, I'm not just speaking of observers in the media, I'm also speaking of political observers. It's like that. Small things are blown out of proportion. I can tell you one thing-relations between France and the United States are very old. They've always been marked by solidarity, esteem and friendship. Of course there may be differences of views on this decision or that or on a particular point. We're not aligned with each other. It's perfectly possible to have different points of view, and when we do we talk about them. But they're merely exceptions which confirm the rule. Relations between France and the United States are and will remain good. It's in the nature of things. The transatlantic link is absolutely essential in the equilibrium of the modern world, and more and more so as the world evolves. So you see, it's not a problem of 'French fries' (sic).

**QUESTION** One last question, Mr. President, a little impertinent perhaps. Mr. Sarkozy was in Washington as you know and met with President Bush. He was a bit critical of you, without being so directly, over the disputes between France and the United States and the split over Iraq. Did it irritate you to see how he was received in Washington?

**LE PRESIDENT** Not at all. Not only did it not irritate me but he told me about his trip, and I asked our diplomats to extend every courtesy to him, which was done and was legitimate. Mr. Sarkozy is a prominent member of the government. He is also president of a political party, to which I'm very attached, and in this capacity it's perfectly legitimate for him to have one or another personal opinion. This in no way undermines government solidarity. I am pleased at his trip to the US especially as it took place on the fifth anniversary of 9/11. We were all traumatized by 9/11 in Europe, particularly in France. We felt very close in America's tragedy. It was the anniversary and it was useful for one of the most prominent members of the government to demonstrate France's solidarity on this occasion. I asked him to do so, and he did it very well.

**QUESTION** Is there anything you'd like to say, Mr. President, that we've not addressed and which you think is important, would be important for Americans to know?



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LE PRESIDENT That we can't today resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict which has been causing an extremely serious situation for too long, and is an excuse for some people for terrorism. So a solution has to be found to this problem. There will be no solution unless there is an agreement between the Palestinian Authority and the Israeli government. Such an agreement naturally depends largely on the authority of the United States. I think that the situation being what it is today, there is distrust between these two peoples. There's no trust any more. There have been periods of confidence, and we were close to the goal in the time of Begin and Sadat, and Rabin and Arafat. We've been quite close. There was a certain confidence that existed. Today that confidence has disappeared. So it has to be restored. It won't be restored by itself.

That is why I am proposing that the Quartet, which is there to address these problems, meet very soon. The Quartet's objective should be to prepare for an international conference which would allow the international community to state clearly what guarantees it is prepared to give the two parties to guarantee any future agreement between themselves. I think this is absolutely essential. I'm very troubled by the current situation in Gaza. We cannot let the situation deteriorate as it's doing now. This has tragic consequences for the Palestinians. It's serious for the Israelis. I am convinced that the two peoples in reality wish very much to see two states living side by side, in security, security guaranteed by the international community.

At present the situation in Gaza is tragic. Just think there are a million people there, not counting the families of officials who haven't been paid for five months. You can see a little the consequences it has, without counting the military actions in Gaza. I leave it to you to imagine how this breeds resentment and hate. Afterwards, we have to try to fix all that. We can't go on doing nothing.

QUESTION Are you going to bring this up with President Bush tomorrow?

LE PRESIDENT Certainly. I'm even going to bring it up publicly at the UN.

QUESTION Is this a new proposal for a conference or something you've already spoken about?

LE PRESIDENT It's an idea I've had for some time but I'm going to express it clearly at the UN. It's on one hand a meeting of the Quartet, followed by an international conference to provide international guarantees for an eventual agreement between the two parties.

QUESTION Would France be ready to host such a conference?

LE PRESIDENT Yes, that's no problem.

QUESTION We'll have to see what President Bush says. Thank you so much.



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LE PRESIDENT Thank you.

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