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Mahathir-Transcript

TRANSCRIPT OF DR MAHATHIR-BUSH MEETING AT THE WHITE HOUSE

The following is a transcript of remarks by U.S. President George W. Bush and Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad during their photo opportunity session before the media at the Oval Office of the White House in Washington Tuesday. The transcript was issued by the U.S. Embassy in Kuala Lumpur.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you all for coming. Mr Prime Minister, welcome to the Oval Office, it's great to see you. I've been looking forward to this visit to publicly thank the Prime Minister for his strong support in the war against terror.

He, right after the September the 11th attacks, immediately went and signed a condolence book in our embassy, and that meant a lot. He's been a -- somebody with whom we can talk, we've got good relations. We share a deep concern about terror, what terror means to our respective countries, what it means to our peoples.

Mr Prime Minister, I want to thank you for your friendship and thank you for your leadership, and I want to welcome you.

THE PRIME MINISTER: Thank you very much, Mr President, for the invitation. Since we met in Shanghai, I have always wanted to follow up on what we discussed there, in particular with regard to how we handle this problem of international terrorism. And I hope that as a result of this visit we will be able to understand the strategy and maybe to work out how best to deal with this problem which plagues all the world, not just the United States. I'm quite sure that this visit will be very fruitful.

THE PRESIDENT: I think so, too. Thank you.

(Then turning to reporters present, President Bush invited some questions).

Question: Mr Prime Minister, when you met with a group of us in New York, you said that there was no evidence at that time that al Qaeda was actively -- was active in Malaysia. American officials have now told us that they believe some links do exist. Has your opinion changed since then?

And, Mr President, I'd like to know whether it's still the position of the United States that Anwar Ibrahim has been jailed primarily for his political opposition to the Prime Minister?

THE PRIME MINISTER: Well, at that time we were not very certain, but we have discovered that some of these people who were active, who planned to overthrow the government by force of bombs had activity into Pakistan and eventually to Afghanistan, where they did meet with the al Qaeda people.

And they -- I believe that they could overthrow the government by force of bombs in order to establish what they consider to be an Islamic state.

Q: You believe they are al Qaeda?

THE PRIME MINISTER: Yes, they are. We have found evidence that they have had involvement with these people.

THE PRESIDENT: What was the second part of your question?

Q: The question was, Mr President, is it still the position of the United States that Anwar Ibrahim, the former finance minister --

THE PRESIDENT: Yes.

Q: -- Was jailed primarily for his political opposition to the Prime Minister? Or do you believe -- and do you believe he should be released?

THE PRESIDENT: Our position has not changed.

Q: Mr President, can you tell us what you -- what we can expect of future Malaysia-U.S. relations as a result of these talks that are taking place today?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, I think you can expect continued cooperation -- intelligence sharing, for example. Let me finish, please.

One of the things that we're finding is that our enemy is shadowy. They lurk behind civil institutions and then they strike. They -- they're not like an enemy we've known before. And in order to make sure our respective societies are as secure as possible, we must share intelligence. We find out a lot about movements throughout the region, and we're more than willing to share with the Prime Minister's government what we know. And vice versa, and that's important. That's incredibly important. My most important job -- I remind this to the American people -- is to secure our homeland.

Q: Not more extensive than that --

THE PRESIDENT: There's a lot more. We'll talk about trade. We'll talk about economy. There's a lot more to talk about. But when it comes to the security of a homeland, that's about as extensive as it gets. You see, I'm not going to let our nation forget, or our friends in the world forget what happened to us on September the 11th. It could happen to somebody else, as well, and the Prime Minister understands that.

And this is a very important visit from that respect. The -- we'll also talk about the Middle East, and I look forward to hearing from the Prime Minister on the Middle East. So we'll have a good discussion.

Q: Mr President, former President Carter is in Cuba, about to address the Cuban people. Has his -- have his remarks complicated your foreign policy? And what would you say to the Cuban people, if allowed to speak directly to them?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, I -- you know, I appreciate President Carter's focus on human rights. I think that's important in Cuba, in a place where there is no human rights.

My message -- first of all, it doesn't complicate my foreign policy because I hadn't changed my foreign policy. And that is that Fidel Castro is a dictator and he is repressive. And he ought to have free elections. And he ought to have a free press. And he ought to free his prisoners. And he ought to encourage free enterprise.

And my message to Fidel -- my message to the Cuban people is, demand freedom and you've got a President who stands with you. And my message to Fidel Castro is precisely what I said. I'm going to deliver that message next Monday in -- here, and then I'm going to go down to Miami for Cuban Independence Day.

Last question here for --

Q: Mr President, what do you think of Dr Mahathir's definition of terrorism and his view that the root causes of terrorism must be addressed not through military action alone?

THE PRESIDENT: I agree with that. I think that -- but, first, some of these people are nothing but cold-blooded killers, and there's no

rehabilitation programme, except for bringing them to justice. I mean, there's no way. That these people, made up their minds, the leaders of these groups have decided that they're going to come and kill. And it may be an American, it may be a Malaysian, who knows -- but we're going to stop them.

And so the best programme is to use our respective militaries, intelligence gathering, cutting off money, to go after these killers.

Now, in terms of youngsters who are looking for -- you know, who are searching for a future, if there's a hopeless future there may be an opportunity to convert them into potential suiciders or potential killers. And that's what I think we need to talk about, about how to ease hopelessness where there is no hope; I mean, to help people and to help people realize there's a better future other than joining up with a terrorist organization whose sole intent is destruction.

That's why education is important. Good health care initiatives are important. That's why it's important for, you know, people in the Middle East to feel like there is a future. It's one of the reasons I've advocated a Palestinian state to be able to live side by side with Israel in peace, so that there -- people realize there's a future. And there's a better -- provide better choices for people other than suicide killing.

But in terms of the senior al Qaeda members or some of these -- listen, there's no -- as I say, I want to repeat, there's no rehabilitation programme for them. There's only one thing to do, is to get them, and we're going to. We're going to bring them to justice. And I will remind the Prime Minister it's going to take a while. This is a -- and we're patient. He needs to know that the American President, our government is a very patient government. And we're steadfast. And we're resolved. And we're going to hunt them down. And we look forward to continue working with him to do just that. And we'll bring them to justice, and that's precisely what's going to happen to these people.

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