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Iraq

Interview given by M. Jacques Chirac, President of the Republic, to French TV

(3/10/2003)

Q. – (...) Firstly, given that this is your first interview since the beginning of this crisis, let's go back a bit to the start. Can you explain to us why, from the outset, France has so firmly opposed war? (...)

THE PRESIDENT – (...) We want to live in a multipolar world, i.e. one with a few large groups enjoying as harmonious relations as possible with each another, a world in which Europe, among others, will have its full place, a world in which democracy progresses, hence the fundamental importance for us of the United Nations Organization which provides a framework and gives impetus to this democracy and harmony. We want a world where the inevitable crises – regional crises, or what we call proliferation crises – can be managed as effectively as possible (...). Finally, we want a world which attaches special importance to respect for the Other, the dialogue of cultures, dialogue of civilizations, and tries to avoid clashes.

In this context, we have from the outset found ourselves up against a problem, an Iraq which obviously possessed weapons of mass destruction, which were in the hands of an indisputably dangerous regime and consequently posed a definite threat to the world. So it was essential to disarm that regime, that country, to eliminate its weapons of mass destruction.

Q. – Precisely, has Iraq cooperated properly on this?

THE PRESIDENT – There were two ways to disarm her. There was war, of course, but there was also the method of inspections and exerting pressure, the one which consisted in going over there, with the UN's authority, to control these weapons, find and then destroy them. And the international community, by adopting UNSCR 1441 unanimously, took the decision which consisted in saying: "we are going to disarm Iraq peacefully, i.e. through the inspections. We are going to appoint inspectors, and they will tell us whether or not this method is possible".

C) But after 1441, can one say that Iraq is still, this evening for example, a dangerous country?

THE PRESIDENT – A country which has Iraq's past and political structure is always a dangerous country. But the country is genuinely dangerous only if it has the capabilities to commit aggression, if it has the capabilities to attack.

Q. – And for you it doesn't have them today?

THE PRESIDENT – The problem was to make sure that it no longer had those capabilities or, at any rate, that those capabilities could be controlled and destroyed. So the UN sent the inspectors. I'd like to remind you that this isn't a technique which is being tried out for the first time. From 1991 until 1998, there was an inspections regime which, regrettably, was halted as a result of blunders. There was an inspections regime which destroyed more weapons in Iraq than were destroyed throughout the Gulf War and which, in particular, resulted in the complete, almost complete eradication in all likelihood – at any rate according to what the inspectors say – of Iraq's nuclear programme...

Q. – Weapons are still being found today...

THE PRESIDENT – There are some certainly. Missiles with a longer than permitted range are being destroyed. There are probably other weapons.

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Q. – Once Saddam Hussein can no longer be trusted, isn't the quest to disarm through inspections a never-ending one? That's what the United States is saying.

THE PRESIDENT – Firstly, I don't believe that. I think that the inspectors, who are skilled experts in whom we can have total confidence, consider today that if they are given the necessary time and resources – that's what Mr Blix said at the last Security Council meeting, he said that he considers today, if Iraq steps up her cooperation, which is, of course, never sufficient but which has improved, the set objective could be achieved, i.e. the elimination of the weapons of mass destruction.

Q. – But isn't 100% cooperation a sine qua non?

THE PRESIDENT – Certainly.

Q. – Yet today it isn't 100%. (...) The inspectors are saying this.

THE PRESIDENT – No, the inspectors say that cooperation has improved and that they are today in a position to pursue their work. And this is what is of paramount importance. It's not for you or me to say whether the inspections are effective, whether Iraq is sufficiently cooperative. In fact, she isn't, I can tell you that straightaway.

Q. – Not sufficiently.

THE PRESIDENT – Not sufficiently. But it isn't for you or for me to decide that, that's for the inspectors to whom the UN has entrusted the responsibility of disarming Iraq to say. The inspectors have to tell us: "we can continue and, at the end of a period which we think should be of a few months" – I'm saying a few months because that's what they have said – "we shall have completed our work and Iraq will be disarmed". Or they will come and tell the Security Council: "we are sorry but Iraq isn't cooperating, the progress isn't sufficient, we aren't in a position to achieve our goal, we won't be able to guarantee Iraq's disarmament". In that case it will be for the Security Council and it alone to decide the right thing to do. But in that case, of course, regrettably, the war would become inevitable. It isn't today.

REGIME CHANGE

Q. – Some people are arguing: rather than disarm Saddam, couldn't his regime simply be toppled, because after all he's a dictator who has been cruel to his country, we've seen that?

THE PRESIDENT – Yes, that's another problem. There are other regimes to which that could also apply.

Q. – You mean the list is too long?

THE PRESIDENT – I'm not today going to draw up a list but, anyway, the North Korean regime naturally comes to mind, it's in no way better than Iraq's and has weapons of mass destruction, in particular nuclear ones which aren't hypothetical, but, regrettably, definitely exist.

Q. – Some people are saying (...) "why not start with Iraq?"

THE PRESIDENT – (...) We have to say what we want. We could have said: "we want first and above all to change the Iraqi regime". That would have been a different argument, a different problem, one which would nevertheless have needed, as you will recognize, consultation, particularly at United Nations level.

We have said: "we want to disarm Iraq". (...) We unanimously chose the path of disarming him. Today, nothing tells us that this path is a dead end and, consequently, it must be pursued since war is always a final resort, always an acknowledgement of failure, always the worst solution, because it brings death and misery. And we don't consider we are at that point. That's why we are refusing to embark on a path automatically leading to war so long as the inspectors haven't told us: "we can't do any more". And they are telling us the

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opposite.

UNSC MEETING AT HEAD-OF-STATE LEVEL

Q. (...) France has proposed that the heads of State themselves go to the meeting, tomorrow or the day after, when the vote is taken. Will you yourself go to New York to voice, defend the French position at the Security Council?

THE PRESIDENT – I myself proposed that the next Security Council meeting be held at head-of-State and government level. Why? First of all for one essential reason. It's that, when it comes to deciding on war or peace, with all the consequences that entails at the human, economic and political levels, and with all the risks it simultaneously presents for men, women, children in the region, it seemed to me legitimate for the decision to be taken by the heads of State and government themselves. That seemed to me to be their responsibility. (...)

We shall see, discussions are under way and we'll see what's decided.

There was [also] a second reason which, in my view, makes a Security Council discussion at summit level inevitable, it's that, as I told you just now, there are other crises in the world. Regional crises, like the Middle East with the Israeli-Palestinian problem, and proliferation crises like that of North Korea. And there are regrettably others. It seems to me important and useful for this problem of how to resolve crises to be assessed at the highest level.

(...)

VOTE ON SECOND RESOLUTION/FRENCH VETO

Q. – And if you go to the UN, it's to say what? It's to vote "no", possibly use your veto or to abstain?

THE PRESIDENT – What's involved here? Today, we are following a course of action laid down by UNSCR 1441. This means that the international community, expressing its view through the unanimous adoption of this resolution by the fifteen Council members, particularly at the suggestion of France who played a very active part in drafting it, has decided to disarm (...) Iraq, through inspections, detection then destruction of the weapons of mass destruction...

Q. – Now, we're moving on to a second resolution....

THE PRESIDENT – (...) and in our view, the inspectors' reports confirm that there are no grounds for changing, that we must pursue this path and that the goal can be achieved by pursuing it. Some of our partners, who have their reasons, consider that we need to finish the task fast and by taking another approach, that of war.

Q. – With an ultimatum?

THE PRESIDENT – That led to the proposal of a new resolution setting an ultimatum. To start with, there was talk of 17 March, then of a possibility of a British amendment to postpone the date of the ultimatum a bit, it's of little consequence. In other words, we move from a course of action involving the pursuit of the inspections in order to disarm Iraq to a different one consisting of saying: "in so many days, we go to war".

Q. – And you don't want that?

THE PRESIDENT – France won't accept it and so will refuse that solution.

Q. – If need be, she will threaten to exercise her veto? (...) That way you will scupper the resolution.

THE PRESIDENT – I repeat: France will oppose that resolution. Now what does that mean? There are fifteen members of the Security Council. Five permanent members and ten

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members who change every two years. For a resolution to be adopted, it must have a majority of nine members. So the first scenario which is today, this evening, the most probable, is that this resolution won't get a majority of nine members.

Q. – The Americans are saying the opposite. Colin Powell thinks he will get it.

THE PRESIDENT – I'm telling you what I feel. I firmly believe, this evening, that there isn't a majority of nine votes in favour of that resolution including an ultimatum and thus giving the international green light to war.

Q. – In other words, France wouldn't need to use her veto?

THE PRESIDENT – In this scenario, that's exactly right. In this scenario, France will, of course, take a stand. There will be nations who will vote "no", including France. Some will abstain. But, in any case, there won't, in this scenario, be a majority. So there won't be a veto problem.

Q. – And if the opposite happens?

THE PRESIDENT – Then, the second scenario: what I believe this evening to be the views of a number of people change. If this happens, there may indeed be a majority of nine votes or more in favour of the new resolution, the one authorizing war, to put things simply. If that happens, France will vote "no". But there is one possibility, what's called exercising a veto, it's when one of the five permanent members – the United States, Britain, Russia, China and France – votes "no", and then even if there is a majority in favour of it, the resolution isn't adopted. That's what's called exercising a veto.

Q. – And, this evening, this is your position in principle?

THE PRESIDENT – My position is that, regardless of the circumstances, France will vote "no" because she considers this evening that there are no grounds for waging war in order to achieve the goal we have set ourselves, i.e. to disarm Iraq.

Q. – So, exercising this veto – in fact, some people call the veto the diplomatic atom bomb –, some people, including some members of the governing party, have said this would be firing a bullet in our allies' back...

THE PRESIDENT – Don't let yourself be influenced by polemics. I repeat: war is always the worst solution. And France which isn't a pacifist country, who doesn't refuse war on principle, who is in fact proving this by currently being the leading contributor of troops to NATO, particularly in the Balkans, France isn't a pacifist country. France considers that war is the final stage of a process, that all possible means must be used to avoid it because of its tragic consequences. (...)

Q. – At the end of the day, wouldn't using your veto be committing a practically unprecedented act vis-à-vis the United States?

THE PRESIDENT – First of all, it's been done quite often.

Q. – But not against the US, except in 1956.

THE PRESIDENT – Vetoes have been used very often. All in all, France has used it eighteen times, the last time in 1989, at the time of the Panama crisis. Britain has used it thirty-two times and the United States seventy-six times. So what you call using the veto, i.e. going against a majority isn't exceptional, it happens, it's allowed under international rules, under international law.

Q. – You will use this veto regardless of the position of the Russians or the Chinese who can also use it? Will it be a common position?

THE PRESIDENT – I believe today that the Russians and Chinese, who are in the same situation as France regarding the possibility of saying a definitive "no", are, I think,

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prepared, if there's a resolution authorizing war, to adopt the same attitude as France.

FRANCE/US

Q. - (...) Colin Powell was saying that that veto would have very serious consequences, a very serious impact on bilateral relations between France and the United States. Wouldn't it trigger a crisis with our allies?

THE PRESIDENT - (...) I told you that France wasn't a pacifist country. Nor is she anti-American, it's absurd to think that. We have two centuries of common history, of sharing the same values. We have always been together at difficult moments, hand in hand, and our relations and our friendship have deep roots in our peoples, going far beyond isolated events. So there's no risk of the United States and France, of the American and French peoples quarrelling or falling out.

Q. - But don't you fear reprisals, for example an economic embargo on a number of our products?

THE PRESIDENT - That doesn't make any sense. First of all, because I know the Americans too well to imagine them using that type of method...

C) They've already done so in the past...

THE PRESIDENT - (...) The US is a free-market country and, above all, we're no longer in the 1960s or 1970s, we're in a globalized world with international organizations. Trade today is governed by the rules of the World Trade Organization, of the European Union. If the Americans wanted to take measures vis-à-vis France, they would have to take them vis-à-vis the whole of Europe, including Britain. So that's not serious. (...)

Q. - ...Franco-American relations will, nevertheless be affected for a long time...

THE PRESIDENT - I'm absolutely convinced of the contrary. In fact, I note that President George Bush has said so very clearly, and to my mind speaking from the bottom of his heart. Two days ago, talking about his difference of views on the Iraq problem with the French and the Germans, he said with the utmost clarity: "the French and Germans are our friends and will remain so". Of course! We have a difference of views, but don't let's get blinded by the problems of this particular moment. Let's not sacrifice our principles and our values because, at a given moment, there's a crisis.

US UNILATERAL ACTION

Q. - And if the Americans don't get this majority, some way or other, at the Security Council, do you think they will nevertheless wage war?

THE PRESIDENT - I can't give an opinion on that point since it's not my decision or my place to interfere in the one the Americans will take. There are almost daily telephone contacts between us (...) and we have told them to take care, that one couldn't be a standard bearer for democracy, dialogue and not use every possible method to avoid a war. And if the international community didn't give its approval, a dangerous precedent would be set if the United States bypassed the UN. You will tell me: "they have deployed 200,000 men". But they have already won! I had the chance to tell President Bush this not long ago. It's highly probable that, had the Americans and British not deployed such significant forces, Iraq wouldn't have provided the more active cooperation the inspectors demanded, which they have found and has probably been obtained because of that pressure. So, it can be said that in actual fact, through their strategy of disarming Iraq, the Americans have achieved their goal. They have won.

Q. - So they wouldn't lose face?

THE PRESIDENT - I don't see how they would lose it. You know, you can't lose face if you achieve your goal without waging war.

Q. - If there is war, if the United States decide to wage war regardless of whether there's a

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UN mandate, if it's without a UN mandate, will France take any part at all in that war? (...)

THE PRESIDENT – We aren't involved and won't be if there's no UN decision, of course.

Q. – No aircraft carrier, base, or deployment of men or soldiers?

THE PRESIDENT – No military capability.

Q. – Overflying national territory, if the request is made?

THE PRESIDENT – That goes without saying. It's part of the normal relations between allies. The Americans are our allies. We don't agree with them on an immediate war in that part of the world, in Iraq, that doesn't mean we aren't allies. If the Americans need to overfly our territory, it goes without saying [they can], that's normal between allies.

(...)

POST-WAR RECONSTRUCTION

Q. – If a war were triggered without a UN mandate, could France, not being involved in the armed operations, be involved in rebuilding Iraq?

THE PRESIDENT – No one can say in advance what the results of a war will be. It's rare for them to be positive. There are first of all dead women, men and children and subsequently, in this specific case, the risk of the country breaking up, with all that means in the way of uncertainty. Then a bit of calm will have to be recreated in a region which has, regrettably, been traumatized for a long time, is vulnerable and really doesn't need an extra war. So we don't know exactly what the consequences of a war will be. But what is certain is that after a war things do indeed have to be repaired.

Q. – And France will ask to participate in that reconstruction?

THE PRESIDENT – She will be asked to do so! There will have to be reconstruction both at the structural and political levels. And that reconstruction can be done only through the UN. One can't imagine anyone taking on alone the responsibility of restoring a viable situation in that country and that region, and that also applies to the United States.

Q. – Even with an American protectorate?

THE PRESIDENT – That's a risky hypothesis.

Q. – You don't believe in it?

THE PRESIDENT – I don't know what the Americans want to do, but I'm saying that's a risky hypothesis. On the other hand, what is certain is that we shall all have to join together to repair, if I may say so, the damage. Quite obviously, France will have her part to play there and will shoulder her responsibilities. But we would prefer, I repeat it once again, to achieve the goal the international community has set itself, i.e. to disarm Iraq. And Iraq's disarmament, make no mistake about it, will bring about the end of the regime. Since disarmament requires transparency. And dictators don't withstand scrutiny for long.

(...)

FRANCE/WORLD POSITION

Q. – In the United States, Richard Perle was saying that, at the end of the day, in this crisis, France is seeking to establish her position in the world by opposing Washington. Is the opposite true, do you yourself get the impression that this crisis is revealing hegemonic designs on the part of the United States vis-à-vis the organization of the world?

THE PRESIDENT – There you're indulging in polemics and I don't do that. Above all, I don't wish to do so with the Americans. But here we're getting to a problem of principle. We're in

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no way in conflict with the United States, we have no reason for having a conflict with the United States. But here we are faced with a problem of principle, I would say a moral problem. Are we going to wage war when there's perhaps a means of avoiding it? In line with her tradition, France is saying: "if there's a way to avoid it, it must be avoided". And we shall do our utmost to do so.

Q. – But they're saying it's a moral problem and Tony Blair too is saying: "there's the axis of evil and that axis of evil must be destroyed"...

THE PRESIDENT – Let's take care to avoid extreme language.

Q. – Does that seem uncalled for to you?

THE PRESIDENT – I didn't approve of it.

EUROPE

Q. – Whatever happens, there will, nevertheless, be a loser in this crisis: Europe.

(...)

T. PRESIDENT – I don't believe so. Firstly, because I've never thought that Europe was a bed of roses. The European path is difficult, steep and full of pitfalls. And you will note that, ever since we've pursued it, we've always made progress, regardless of the difficulties and pitfalls. And whenever there's been a crisis, we've emerged from it with a stronger Europe. Take the example we're dealing with today. We made efforts, in the wake of the single market, a number of other reforms and the single currency, to embark on the path of establishing a common foreign and defence policy. Here again, we knew very well that we would have difficulties. They have surfaced with the Iraq issue. Let me remind you, to give you an example, that at a time when we were obviously taking two different positions, we – the British and ourselves – met for our latest Franco-British summit at Le Touquet, and (...) while noting our difference of view on the Iraq issue, made very significant progress on a whole range of decisions, which went somewhat unnoticed because of the Iraq crisis, but allowed us to make headway on the path towards a common defence. (...)

Q. – Even so, Europe is deeply divided...

THE PRESIDENT – No, don't you believe it! You know, I have long experience of Europe. I know Europe well. I know how it works. (...) It won't be at all divided once the crisis is over. And the remorse felt at having been unable to form a single position will give it new strength to achieve the goal it has set itself. That's the whole story of Europe. Europe's history is punctuated by crises from which, in every case, it has emerged stronger. And this will happen again. Quite simply because everyone is aware that, if we want (...) a multipolar world in which Europe counts for something and exists, it must be genuinely united. And it will be.

TERRORISM/INTER-COMMUNITY ANTAGONISM/ECONOMY

Q. – Our compatriots are worried about two or three things. If there is war, first of all, the risk of a possible resurgence of terrorism. Secondly, that there could be antagonism between the different communities which make up this country, that there could be clashes between them. And, thirdly, about the economy which, finally, has slowed down a great deal recently. And people tend to think it's due to these threats of war. Can you reassure them on these subjects?

THE PRESIDENT – Terrorism first of all. It's certain that, if there's war, the first victims will probably be those seeking confrontation, the clash of civilizations, cultures and religions. In my opinion, a war of this nature can lead only to increased terrorism. In any event it's highly likely.

Q. – Including France?

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THE PRESIDENT – (...) France has suffered painfully from terrorism, she has experienced it. And consequently she is perhaps a bit more on her guard than others. At any rate, what I can tell you is that, in this sphere, it seems to me that war is something which will break up the world coalition against terrorism. Since, after all, we mustn't forget that a very great majority of the world's countries and peoples are against this war, a very, very great majority of them. France isn't isolated, far from it. So if there's war there is indeed a risk of a new upsurge in terrorism. What I can [also] tell you is that the French government has taken a set of the most effective measures possible to combat what is an extremely unpredictable development, to prevent terrorism growing. I note, moreover, that, over the past two or three months a number of spectacular operations, most of which have in fact been made public, have neutralized some really dangerous terrorist rings. At least those have been neutralized.

Q. – On inter-community tension?

(...)

THE PRESIDENT – France is a country which has always aimed to integrate her children and doesn't want to accept the separation of communities along ethnic lines. And so everything which can worsen this problem must be combated. We are trying to do the utmost to ensure that, in France and elsewhere in the world, understanding, respect for the Other – regrettably too often ignored – dialogue, particularly between religions, communities and cultures, prevents these fruitless, dangerous and cruel clashes.

Finally, you referred to the economy. Certainly the sound of boots, so to speak, doesn't help the economy. We can clearly see that growth is falling, with the tragic consequences this entails for employment, that investment is being postponed, that there's an absence of confidence, consumption is suffering and that, consequently, admittedly, the economy is today having problems. It's to a large extent due to the international situation and the prospects of war.

Here too we have to try to act as efficiently as possible. And I believe that the government, from this point of view, has not just taken the right path, but the only possible one, i.e. the one which consists in combining a policy to promote employment, for social reasons, with one to encourage the economy and particularly investment and consumption.

(...)

PRESIDENT CHIRAC/US

Q. – Just one word about yourself, President Chirac. There's a lot of talk about your a ting a Gaullist position. Does this please you? Are you drawing inspiration from Gaullism, particularly when it comes to opposing the United States?

THE PRESIDENT – Hold on, General de Gaulle never opposed the United States. General de Gaulle was even the first to stand at the United States' side whenever there was a crisis.

Q. – Let's say, if you like, that he didn't hesitate to express his opposition?

THE PRESIDENT – No he never opposed the United States.

Q. – He slammed NATO'S door, for example.

THE PRESIDENT – Yes, he asserted France's interests.

Q. – You don't think about that today? Do you feel that connection? Or don't you ever have such thoughts?

THE PRESIDENT – I can but be flattered, at all events, with the comparison you want to make. But I try to find my own inspiration.

ODDS ON AVOIDING WAR

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Q. -- I have one final question to ask you. What today are the odds on avoiding war? People feel it's inevitable.

THE PRESIDENT -- I don't know at all. What I know is that even if they are one in a thousand or a million, that wouldn't in any way lessen my determination to do my utmost to enable us to resolve the Iraq problem without waging war. (...)/.

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