

The President's News Conference With Prime Minister Tony Blair of the United Kingdom *April 16, 2004*

President Bush. Thank you all. Mr. Prime Minister—Tony, as I like to call you—Cherie Blair, thanks for coming. It's great to see you. Laura and I are pleased to welcome you once again to America and to the White House.

Throughout the last century, the United Kingdom and the United States have stood together when liberty was assaulted and free people were tested. And now in this century, our nations see clearly the dangers of our time, and we share a determination to meet them.

Since our two countries shared the loss of September the 11th, 2001, we've joined in a global manhunt for terrorist killers. We've removed the terrorist camps of Afghanistan and the brutal Government that sheltered them. We've enforced the demands of the United Nations in Iraq and removed a dangerous threat to the region and to the world. We've worked together to end the WMD programs of Libya and bring that country back into the community of nations. We're engaged in difficult and necessary work of helping Iraqis build their own democracy, for the sake of our security and to increase the momentum of freedom across the greater Middle East.

The stakes in Iraq are clear. Iraq will either turn back the challenges to democracy or return to the camp of tyranny and terror. Iraq will either be an example of a region that is weary of poverty and oppression or will be a threat to the region and to our own people.

Our nations face a stark choice as well. Britain and America and our allies can either break our word to the people of Iraq, abandon them in their hour of need, and consign them to oppression, or we can help them defeat the enemies of a free Iraq and build the institutions of liberty. The Prime Minister and I have made our

choice. Iraq will be free. Iraq will be independent. Iraq will be a peaceful nation, and we will not waver in the face of fear and intimidation.

The past few weeks have been hard, and the days ahead will surely bring their own challenges. What we're seeing in Iraq is an attempted power grab by extremists and terrorists. They will fail. The extremists will fail because our coalition will not allow Iraq's future to be stolen by a violent few. They will also fail because they are not widely supported by the Iraqi people, who have no desire to trade one tyrant for another.

Many Iraqi leaders are showing great personal courage in helping to build a free Iraq. And we stand with them, and we appreciate their courage. And troops from our countries and other coalition friends are showing great personal courage as they help Iraq move toward democracy, and we appreciate their sacrifice and courage as well.

One of the essential commitments we've made to the Iraqi people is this: They will control their own country. No citizen of America or Britain would want the Government of their nation in hands of others, and neither do the Iraqis. And this is why the June 30th date for the transfer of sovereignty will be kept. This transfer will demonstrate to the Iraqi people that our coalition has no interest in occupation. On that date, the Coalition Provisional Authority will cease to exist, but coalition forces will remain in Iraq to help the new Government succeed.

This week, we've seen the outlines of a new Iraqi Government that will take the keys of sovereignty. We welcome the proposals presented by the U.N. Special Envoy Brahimi. He's identified a way forward to establishing an interim government that is broadly acceptable to the Iraqi people. Our

coalition partners will continue to work with the U.N. to prepare for nationwide elections that will choose a new Government in January of 2005. We thank the U.N. and Secretary-General Annan for helping Iraqis secure a future of freedom. We're grateful that Mr. Brahimi will soon return to Iraq to continue his important work.

A free Iraq will stand as an example to the Middle East, encouraging reform and hope by demonstrating what life in a free society can be like. At the same time, we must also work to end longstanding sources of bitterness and conflict in the Middle East.

Our commitment to freedom and peace in that region requires us to make every effort to help resolve the conflict between Israel and Palestine. On Wednesday, the Prime Minister of Israel presented his plan to withdraw from Gaza and some parts of the West Bank. I support that plan. It's a good opportunity. It gives the Palestinians a chance to create a reformed, just, and free government. Palestinian leadership must rise to the challenge. It gives all sides a chance to reinvigorate progress on the roadmap. I'm committed to the vision of two states, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security.

As I said Wednesday, all final status issues must still be negotiated between the parties. I look forward to the day when those discussions can begin so the Israeli occupation can be ended and a free and independent and peaceful Palestinian state can emerge.

In Iraq and Afghanistan, in a future Palestinian state, and across the greater Middle East, the best hope for lasting stability, security, and peace is the advance of human freedom. When men and women live in societies that reward their hopes and recognize their dignity, they are far less likely to dwell on resentments and turn to violence. This is not an easy task. For whole nations to construct free institutions after decades of terror and tyranny requires

patience and courage and the help of friends.

Yet, this difficult work is also necessary work. In the Middle East, as elsewhere, the path to peace is the path of liberty, and all who choose that path will have the strong support of the United States and the United Kingdom. In all these efforts, the American people know that we have no more valuable friend than Prime Minister Tony Blair. As we like to say in Crawford, he's a standup kind of guy. He shows backbone and courage and strong leadership. I thank him and Cherie for coming. I thank the British people for their strength and their unyielding commitment to the cause of liberty.

Mr. Prime Minister.

Prime Minister Blair. Thank you very much, Mr. President. George and Laura, thank you very much for welcoming myself and Cherie back to the White House. The many years that—particularly most recently, since September the 11th—our two countries have been friends and allies standing side by side, and we will continue to do so.

Let me restate the historic nature of what we're trying to achieve in Iraq. It is to take a state that, under Saddam Hussein and his family, was a merciless tyranny that brutalized the country over many decades, that used chemical weapons against his own people, a state that threatened its neighbors in the wider world, that caused two wars with over a million casualties, that funded and supported terrorism, a country where, already, the remains of 300,000 innocent men, women, and children have been found in mass graves in Iraq, a state that under Saddam was without human rights, civil liberties, or the rule of law. And our task is to take this state and turn it into a democracy, stable and prosperous, a symbol of hope to its own people and throughout the whole of the Middle East.

Against us in this task are ranged every variety of reactionary forces, sympathizers

of Saddam Hussein, outside terrorists, religious fanatics. We know the future that they have in mind for the people of Iraq, and we reject it utterly, as do the overwhelming majority of the Iraqi people.

It was never going to be easy, and it isn't now. I pay wholehearted tribute to the American and British troops and troops from all the different coalition countries, and to the civilians, also, from many nations. We mourn each loss of life. We salute them and their families for their bravery and their sacrifice. And our promise to them, in turn, is very clear. It is to succeed, to get the job done, to ensure their courage and their sacrifice has not been in vain. And our plan to do this is clear, and we shall see it through.

Our strategy, political and military, is as follows. First, we stand firm. We will do what it takes to win this struggle. We will not yield. We will not back down in the face of attacks either on us or on defenseless civilians. Second, we hold absolutely to the 30th of June timetable for the handover of sovereignty to the Iraqis themselves. Third, we will redouble our efforts to build the necessary capability of the Iraqis, themselves, to take increased responsibility for security and law and order. The measures for recruiting, training, and equipping Iraqi police and civil defense corps will be intensified. Fourth, we will carry forward the plan for reconstruction and investment in Iraq so that all parts of Iraq, Sunni, Shi'a, and Kurdish, know that they have a place and a future in the new Iraq that is being created. Fifth, the U.N. will have a central role, as now, in developing the program and machinery for political transition to full Iraqi democracy. And we will seek a new U.N. Security Council resolution to embody the political and security way forward.

It follows from this that the political and military strategies will reinforce each other, as they do now. The purpose of the military action is to create the security environment in which the political aims can be achieved.

And of course there will be resistance. We have resistance now by assorted terrorists in Fallujah, by supporters of Muqtada Al Sadr in Najaf. We shall deal with both with the right balance of firmness in the face of terror and a clear offer to all people in Iraq, including those who might be tempted to support lawbreaking.

The new Iraq will give opportunities to all its citizens, whatever their ethnic or religious background, but it will not tolerate or compromise with those who want to wreck the future for the law-abiding majority in Iraq.

Alongside this strategy for Iraq, we will seek to broaden the agenda for international action and cooperation. The G-8 gives us the chance, under the chairmanship of the United States this year and Britain the next, to construct such an agenda, to allow us to defeat the security threat but also to confront the issues upon which the terrorists prey, to tackle the poverty, conflict, religious and ethnic strife which mar so much of the world.

In this regard, we reaffirm again the importance of a solution for the Middle East peace process. We welcome the Israeli proposal to disengage from the Gaza and parts of the West Bank. We want the Quartet to meet as soon as possible to discuss how it can support the Palestinian Authority in particular, economically, politically, and in respect of security, to respond to that offer. We reaffirm that this is part of a process to get us back into the roadmap, which we continue to believe offers the only realistic route to the two states, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace.

We have, therefore, an agenda for Iraq, for change and for democracy in Iraq. We have, also, an agenda to help overcome the problems in our world, the problems not just of terrorism but the problems of the breeding grounds of terrorism. And I believe that our two countries will continue to play a role as allies and friends in securing not just a decent future for the people

of Iraq but a decent future for people everywhere in our world today.

Thank you.

President Bush. Mr. Prime Minister, thank you, sir. We will take three questions a side, and so why don't you ask one question to each of us.

You can start, Mr. Hunt [Terence Hunt, Associated Press].

Timetable for Planning Action in Iraq

Q. Thank you, Mr. President. Mr. President, did you ask Secretary Rumsfeld to draw up war plans against Iraq in November 2001, just as the military action was getting underway in Afghanistan? Why couldn't Iraq wait?

And Mr. Prime Minister—

President Bush. No, I thought—one question apiece, not one question or one question apiece.

You know, I can't remember exact dates that far back. I do know this, that at a key meeting at Camp David, the subject of Iraq—this was on September the—

Q. Fifteenth.

President Bush. Fifteenth. We had been attacked on September the 11th, obviously. On the 15th, we sat down. I sat down with my national security team to discuss the response, and the subject of Iraq came up. And I said as plainly as I possibly could, "We'll focus on Afghanistan. That's where we'll focus." I explained this to the Prime Minister as well in a subsequent meeting. That was about the 20th of September, I think, we came and talked about the response we were going to take in dealing with the attacks on our country.

So I don't remember in times of—what was being developed or not being developed. But I do know that it was Afghanistan that was on my mind. And I didn't really start focusing on Iraq until later on, particularly about the time I started going to the United Nations with this message—to the United Nations, I said, "Let's uphold the demands of the world, finally, after decades of—after a decade of threats to Sad-

dam. You know, 'If you don't do this, this will happen.' Why don't we finally just say something that we mean?"

And it was at that point in time, when a President steps up in front of the United Nations and you say, "Either take care of business, or we others will," you better mean it. And I meant it when I went up in front of the United Nations at that point in time.

Q. I was asking you about November.

President Bush. I can't remember. I'd have to get back to you about a specific moment. But I can tell you, in September, I said, "Let us focus on Afghanistan. Let us make sure that we do this job and do it well."

Level of Violence and the Transition in Iraq

Q. Prime Minister, the—Prime Minister, the handover of power is just, what, 80 days away, and yet the killing is going on, there is still kidnaping. Do you accept it was an error not to involve the U.N. much more early in the process? And I wonder, Mr. President, if I could ask you if that's a mistake that you're prepared to accept as well?

Prime Minister Blair. First of all, we have been involving the U.N. throughout. And actually, the work that Mr. Brahimi has done, we've both made it clear that we welcome. And I can tell you from the conversations I had with Kofi Annan last night that I think there's a common approach. Obviously, we have to discuss the details in particular with the Iraqi groups themselves as to how this political transition is to come about.

But let me just say one thing to you about the violence and the killing there. There was always going to be resistance to transition to democracy. And in particular, as the date for transition to a sovereign Iraqi Government that's going to be broad-based—as that date draws near, there's going to be violence. There's going to be violence from people who don't want an Iraqi future different from the past, and

I don't think we should be surprised at this. There will be religious fanatics, outside terrorists, former Saddam people who will come together, and they will kill innocent civilians. They will try and kill coalition troops. They will kill Iraqis. They'll kill anyone who stands in their way. And the reason that they're doing this is because they don't want a democratic Iraq.

Now, what is the response of ourselves and, indeed, the whole of the world community, regardless of whether you support the war in Iraq or not? The response has got to be that we hold firm; we keep to the political transition; we keep to the timetable; and we do everything we humanly can to build up the capability of the Iraqis to take control of their own affairs, because in Iraq there will be all sorts of people—that vast majority of people out there who aren't terrorists, who don't want to kill people, who want to lead an ordinary life, raise their family, have a job, have some prosperity, have some freedom, as other people in the world do, and they will be sitting there, watching and waiting for one thing: Do we have the will and the determination to finish the job.

And what you're hearing from myself and the President of the United States is, we will stay there, and we will get the job done, because that's what we promised to do. And we will continue until it's finished.

Israeli Disengagement Plan

President Bush. Steve [Steve Holland, Reuters].

Q. Hosni Mubarak is saying the new U.S. policy on the West Bank could escalate violence. How do you respond to his concerns?

President Bush. I think this is a fantastic opportunity. The fact that Ariel Sharon said, "We're going to withdraw from territory," is an historic moment. And it creates a chance for the world to come together to help develop a Palestinian state based upon a solid foundation, a foundation where the institutions are bigger than the

people, just like our respective Governments are founded.

It's a chance to provide a framework for international aid that will help a Palestinian economy grow. It's a chance for people to come together to work on measures that will enable people to live in peace—security measures. This is an historic moment, and I think people need to view it as such and seize the moment and help a Palestinian state become a reality, a Palestinian state that can live in peace with its neighbors.

And you know, there's a lot of talk about the final status discussions. And that's all and good. The problem is, is that people, by doing so, don't pay attention to the moment. And it's a moment we've got to seize. The final status discussions will become a lot plainer—and by the way, we're not going to prejudge the final status discussions, but the answers will become a lot plainer once there is a peaceful state that's committed to fighting off terror and a state that's capable of providing hope for its people.

I think it's possible. And the Prime Minister and I have spent a lot of time on this subject. And I'm not going to put words in his mouth, but he thinks it's possible. And we look forward to working together to make it possible. But it's going to require a commitment by the Palestinian people to find leadership that is committed to peace and hope. And it's going to require a commitment by people in the neighborhood to support the emergence of a state.

This is an historic moment, and I appreciated the Prime Minister of Israel coming here to announce it. And we intend to seize the moment and to take advantage of an opportunity.

Prime Minister Blair. I think what's happening here is that despite all the reaction—some of which I think it's expected and natural, that always rebound around the world when a statement like this is made—let's just go back and see what the

opportunity is here. If there is disengagement by Israel from the Gaza and from parts of the West Bank, that then gives us the opportunity—and this is where the international community has got to play its role—that gives us the opportunity to help the Palestinian Authority with the economic, the political, and the security measures they take, and they need to take, in order to get to the point where the concept of a viable Palestinian state becomes a real possibility, not something that's put in a document and talked about or discussed in resolutions or speeches but actually is a real, live possibility. And I see this not in any shape or form as pushing the roadmap to the side. On the contrary, I see it as a way back into the roadmap.

Now, I know there'll be all sorts of issues to do with the final status negotiations. And as the President said, no one is prejudging those. But you know, let's not look this particular opportunity in the eye and then turn away. It is an opportunity for people.

And what I want to say to, not just to the Palestinians and the Israelis but to the international community is, whatever the doubts and worries, get involved now, because there is a possibility when that disengagement happens, the Palestinian Authority have got to have the wherewithal in political, in economic, in security terms to start running the land, the territory that will be then under their control, and use that as the basis of getting back into a proper roadmap negotiation.

Because we—this is a—we deal with many difficult issues: Cyprus, we discussed earlier; Northern Ireland, that I'm dealing with. The one advantage that you have in this situation, which is as well to keep in mind, even at this difficult moment, is that there is now an agreement that there should be two states, an Israeli and a Palestinian state, and that Palestinian state should be viable. And I can assure you—and I believe this very strongly from the conversations I've had with the President—that if the Palestinians are willing to make

that effort and the international community helps in doing so, then they will find all of us, then, ready to engage and ensure that the proper discussion and settlement of these issues takes place. We will be ready to step up and do that.

Yes, Mark, sorry.

Q. Mark Martel, BBC. Mr. Sharon says this agreement by the President has ended the dreams of Palestinians. Many Palestinians seem to agree with that as well. Why do you two not see it in that light? The Israelis see it as a victory for their side.

Prime Minister Blair. Well, I don't—I haven't come across those particular words, and I would like to see the context of that. But I don't think that this ends anyone's dream. I think what it does is give us at least the possibility of moving it forward.

What have people been asking for years? They've been asking for the Israelis to withdraw from the occupied territories. Now, this is not the final end of it. This is not a unilateral attempt to impose a settlement. But it does at least give the Palestinians, if they're able, then, to seize this opportunity, the ability to construct in the Gaza and those parts of the West Bank that will be under their control, with the settlements removed from there. And remember—I can't remember exactly how many people it is—it's maybe 7,000 people that there are in the Gaza part of—and those settlements withdrawn.

Now, forgive me, but I've been dealing with this for almost a decade. And it's been very, very difficult ever to get a situation where an Israeli Prime Minister is prepared to say, "We're actually going to take these settlements away," and make that not conditional on something that the Palestinians are doing but say, "We're just going to do that."

Now of course, there's a whole string of things that then have to be decided. All these issues have to be negotiated. We have to get back into the roadmap and get on a proper process towards a resolution of those issues.

But if that disengagement takes place, surely the intelligent thing, not just for the Palestinians but for the international community, is to be ready to respond. And here's where the Quartet can play a part, the other partners in this process. The European Union, for example—we put money into reconstruction in the Palestinian Authority. I believe that there is a real possibility, if we can get the right political system there, of the European Union putting money in to help reconstruct the country, to help build the proper security capability.

These are—these are things, however difficult, that offer opportunities. That's all I'm saying, and I think we should seize them.

President Bush. Let me say one quick thing about this. I haven't seen the context in which he said it, either. But I can tell you what he told me. He told me he supported a Palestinian state. He thinks it's in Israel's interest that there be a Palestinian state. Obviously there's a caveat: He wants a peaceful Palestinian state, and he wants somebody who will promote peace, not violence, somebody who's willing to join with a lot of us to fight off terror.

He also recognizes that it's important that there be hope in his neighborhood. And a peaceful Palestinian state that gets help from the world is a state that can help small businesses grow, help an education system develop, help a health care system develop that provides basic services to its people. I think this is a great opportunity. And you're going to have to ask him exactly what—whether that was in context or not.

But the impression I got from having sat with the man right upstairs here in the White House was, he views this as a hopeful moment as well and made it clear that it's a part of the roadmap process and knows what I know, that as we gain confidence in a Palestinian leadership and a Palestinian state that's committed itself to peace, further progress will be made on territory. And therefore, the final status dis-

cussions—and I repeat, which are not being prejudged by the American Government, as stated clearly on Wednesday—will be easier to deal with. And that's what's important.

We'll seize the moment, is what the Prime Minister is saying.

Let's see—April [April Ryan, American Urban Radio Networks].

2004 Election/Transition in Iraq

Q. Mr. President, some of your critics are saying that it's a political ploy by you to stand firm to this June 30th deadline, especially that you don't have an Iraqi organization to transfer power over to. What do you say to that? And for—what organization would you like to see transferred power over to, both of you, if you could answer that?

President Bush. Well, I appreciate that. I guess, it's a political year; everything I'm going to say is being—they're going to say is political. What's important is that we honor our word and honor our commitments to the Iraqi people. I suspect that if you look deep into the soul of the Iraqi people, they'd be saying, "We don't know if we can trust America and Great Britain to be tough and hang in, hang in with us." And one of the things we've said is, "We'll transfer sovereignty on June the 30th," and we're going to.

If they believe that we'll cut and run—in other words, if times get tough, and we'll just say, "See you later," nobody is going to take a stand for freedom and liberty. They're afraid of getting killed or tortured or maimed. These are—I said the other night that a year seems like a long time for Americans and people in Great Britain. But a year is not much when you're trying to shed yourself from the habits of tyranny and torture. Remember where these people came from. They came from a society where if they dared speak their mind, it's likely they'd end up in a mass grave or in a torture room. If they criticized Saddam

Hussein in any way, they would be maimed or killed. And that's a hard thing to forget.

See, it's easy for us to not recognize that fear because, fortunately, our societies are such that we don't have to live with it. They did. And if they think that we will be leaving because of politics, then they won't take a risk toward freedom. We're not leaving because of politics, April. We're standing firm on our word because it's right, and it's in the long-term interests of our countries that we stand firm, because a free Iraq is an historic opportunity to change the world for the better.

There's a lot of talk about the war on terror, and can we win the war on terror. Of course we can win the war on terror in the long run. We can do a lot of things in the short term to protect ourselves, starting with staying on the offensive. But in the long term, it's the spread of freedom that will win the war on terror.

See, the great thing about our two countries is we believe in the power of free societies. And we don't say freedom is only—is consigned to one group of people or one religion. We believe freedom is universal, and free societies are peaceful societies. And freedom will be the cure for those who harbor deep resentment and hatred in their heart. And I appreciate the Prime Minister understanding that vision as well. It's a wonderful feeling to have a strong ally in believing in the power of free societies and liberty. And that's why we're going to stay the course in Iraq. And that's why when we say something in Iraq, we're going to do it, because we want there to be a free society. It's in our long-term interests. It's in the interests of our children and our grandchildren that Iraq be free.

Q. Mr. Prime Minister—

Q. Who is going to—

President Bush. Hold on for a second. That's going to be decided by Mr. Brahimi. That's the recommendation of Brahimi. He's in the process—you're watching a

process unfold, and you won't have to ask that question on July the 1st.

Prime Minister Blair. That's absolutely right. And what will happen is that there will be discussions, obviously, that Mr. Brahimi is conducting. But the idea will be to have a broad-based Government, and then next year to move to a new constitution, and then, finally, to democratic elections. And that's the—so who's going to end up governing Iraq ultimately? It's going to be the Iraqi people with a proper democratic constitution.

President Bush. One final point on this. Thank you, April, for bringing it up. Transitional Administrative Law that had been written is a—this is an historic document. And it's a wonderful opportunity. It is for the people of Iraq to say, "Here's how civilized people must live. Here's how you protect minority rights. Here's how you protect the rights of religious people. And here's how civilized people should live if they're going to provide hope for the future."

And there doesn't seem to be much focus on that, what we call the TAL these days. And yet, it is a—it is the cornerstone for what is going to be a free and hopeful society.

Go ahead, final question.

Prime Minister Blair. Adam [Adam Boulton, Sky News].

Q. If I could just ask you about Iraq again, the fact of the matter is that weapons of mass destruction have not been found, that a link between Saddam Hussein and Al Qaida has not been proved, and that a year on, troop numbers are going up, not coming down. So however determined you are to make a better Iraq, isn't the awkward fact for both of you that you misled your peoples in taking troops to war and shedding blood as a result?

Prime Minister Blair. First of all, I just remind you that when, in November of 2002, we passed the United Nations resolution calling upon Saddam to comply fully with the United Nations inspectors, we did

that on the basis of an understanding that wasn't confined simply to Great Britain and America but was right across the hall of the Security Council, that Saddam Hussein was a threat. And indeed, it would be difficult to conclude otherwise given that his was a regime that actually used chemical weapons, weapons of mass destruction against their own people.

And yes, a year on, we have faced some difficult times. We'll face difficult times again in the future. But one of the most interesting things to me is when I go and I actually talk to other leaders out in that region—and some of them have got very difficult politics over this issue, as you all know, for very obvious reasons—but I'm struck by how much more secure they feel with Saddam Hussein gone. And whatever their differences over the conflict, they know how important it is to their region and their stability and, actually, their chance of changing their own country, that Iraq does become a stable and democratic state.

And this is one of these situations where—you know, people often say to me, "Well is it—is the world safer, given all the difficulty and violence that you have in Iraq?" And I say to them, "Well, first of all, don't think that violence wasn't happening every day in Iraq under Saddam Hussein. It was." But secondly, when you take on and you deal with these issues, yes, of course, you face difficult times. You're bound to have them. But the question is, is the aim and objective you're trying to secure one that if you do secure will make the world, indeed, safer and better? And that's why—I find now, whatever the differences people have over the wisdom of the conflict—and that's a debate that will go on, and go on for many, many years, no doubt; the historians can all pour over it—but everybody should recognize the common interest today in making sure that Iraq achieves the aim that we have set out and that everybody of any sense

in the international community supports, because if—

Q. [Inaudible]

Prime Minister Blair. No, because I believe the important thing is to make the world more secure as a result of Saddam Hussein going, as a result of that threat, then, from Saddam and his regime, the threat that they carried out in their own region. I just listed for you two wars in which there were over a million casualties, hundreds of thousands of his own people killed.

Now, this is an historic struggle, and we're at a very, very crucial moment. And I think, for many, many people in Iraq, I think what the President said just a moment ago is absolutely right. Of course they're going to be sitting there asking, "After all the decades of tyranny we've had, after all the promises that the international community gave us and, frankly, let us down on, are these people going to stay the course?"

And we are, and we want the international community to work with us in doing that. We're not setting aside the United Nations or that process at all. We're actually trying to work with the U.N. now, because everybody understands the importance of fulfilling that objective. And you just imagine an Iraq, stable and prosperous and democratic, and think of the signal that would send out. Think of the instant rebuttal of all that poisonous propaganda about America, about it all being an attack on Muslims or it being part of a war of civilization—Iraq, run by the Iraqis, the wealth of that country owned by the Iraqis, and a symbol of hope and democracy in the Middle East.

Now, for me this is a cause that any person of good will and good heart should be able to support.

President Bush. Good job, Prime Minister. Thank you, sir. Well done.

NOTE: The President's news conference began at 11:57 a.m. in the Rose Garden at

the White House. In his remarks, he referred to former President Saddam Hussein of Iraq; Secretary-General Kofi Annan of the United Nations, and Lakhdar Brahimi, Special Adviser to the Secretary-General; and Prime

Minister Ariel Sharon of Israel. Prime Minister Blair referred to Muqtada Al Sadr, Iraqi Shiite cleric whose militia engaged in an uprising in Iraq in early April. A reporter referred to President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt.

The President's Radio Address

April 17, 2004

Good morning. For the past year, the September the 11th Commission has met to examine the facts surrounding the terrorist attack on our Nation. I look forward to the Commission's report, and I expect it to contain important recommendations for preventing future attacks.

One lesson our Nation has already learned is that law enforcement and intelligence personnel must be allowed to share more information, so that we can better pursue terrorists inside the United States. In the weeks after September the 11th, Congress made essential reforms by passing the USA PATRIOT Act. That vital legislation gained overwhelming bipartisan support in the House of Representatives and passed the Senate by a vote of 98 to one.

The PATRIOT Act tore down the artificial wall between the FBI and CIA and enhanced their ability to share the information needed to hunt terrorists. The PATRIOT Act also marked a major shift in law enforcement priorities. We're no longer emphasizing only the investigation of past crimes but also the prevention of future attacks. Because we passed the PATRIOT Act, FBI agents can better conduct electronic surveillance and wiretaps on suspected terrorists. And they now can apply other essential tools—many of which have long been used to investigate white-collar criminals and drug traffickers—to stop terrorist attacks on our homeland.

Our Government's first duty is to protect the American people. The PATRIOT Act fulfills that duty in a way that is fully con-

sistent with constitutional protections. In making America safer, it has helped us defend our liberty. Since I signed the PATRIOT Act into law, Federal investigators have disrupted terror cells in at least six American cities. And since September the 11th, the Department of Justice has charged over 300 persons in terrorism-related investigations. So far, more than half of those individuals have been convicted or pled guilty.

Key elements of the PATRIOT Act are set to expire next year. Some politicians in Washington act as if the threat to America will also expire on that schedule. Yet we have seen what the terrorists intend for us, in deadly attacks from Bali to Mombassa to Madrid. And we will not forget the lessons of September the 11th. To abandon the PATRIOT Act would deprive law enforcement and intelligence officers of needed tools in the war on terror and demonstrate willful blindness to a continuing threat.

Next week, I will travel to Hershey, Pennsylvania, and Buffalo, New York, to meet with the law enforcement officers who see the importance of the PATRIOT Act in their daily duties. They know we must not let down our guard. The war on terror will be won on the offensive, so Congress must renew the PATRIOT Act.

Every hour of the day, America depends on the work of vigilant law enforcement and intelligence personnel. These men and women have difficult and dangerous jobs, and they are performing superbly. In their