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Remarks Following Discussions With Prime Minister Marek Belka of Poland and an Exchange With Reporters

August 9, 2004

President Bush. We'll have two opening statements and two questions per side. I'll call on somebody, and the Prime Minister will call on somebody.

Mr. Prime Minister, welcome. Thank you for coming. We've just had a very good visit, but that's what you would expect when two friends are talking about important issues.

We talked about foreign policy. We talked about economic issues. We talked about the close ties between our respective peoples. And it's my honor to welcome you here, sir. I appreciate your candid observations and appreciate the fact that not only did you serve your nation and frankly, the world, in Baghdad, you've now agreed to serve your nation as the Prime Minister of your country. So welcome here to Washington, DC.

Prime Minister Belka. Well, it's one of a series of very important visits in our dialog. Next month in Warsaw, we're having the beginning of strategic dialog between the United States and Poland. And what happened here was really a beginning of this dialog or at least an introduction to these talks.

We covered a very broad range of issues, from Euro-Atlantic alliance, from the state of relationship between Europe and America, to Middle East, a wider Middle East initiative, and Iraq. We also touched upon our bilateral issues, including our economic cooperation, traveling, and so on and so on.

Well, it's almost unbelievable how we could squeeze so many issues in a relatively short conversation. It was a very good conversation, very good exchange of opinions. And, well, it sets ground for further cooperation and further good, good talks between our people and ourselves.

President Bush. Good job.

We'll start off with Hunt [Terence Hunt, Associated Press].

Iraqi Insurgents in Najaf

Q. Mr. President, U.S. forces have been fighting for 5 days in Najaf against the militia of Muqtada Al Sadr. The U.S. once said it was going to capture or kill him. What's our policy now?

President Bush. Our policy is to work with Prime Minister Allawi and support the Iraqis as they move toward elections. Our troops were engaged against Sadr's militia, and so were the Iraqis. And it appears that we're making pretty good progress about stabilizing Najaf. But Prime Minister Allawi is now in charge of the country. He is a good, strong leader who cares deeply about the aspirations of his people, and he is somebody we're working with. And if he's got some suggestions to make, we're more than willing to listen to him. That's why Ambassador Negroponte is there, and the Ambassador will interface with the Iraqi government at their request.

Polish Forces in Iraq

Q. Mr. President, Polish Government is going to significantly reduce number of Polish troops in Iraq early next year. Did you ask Polish Prime Minister not to do that? And could you both comment on the fact that 73 percent of Poles are opposed to Polish military presence in Iraq?

President Bush. I'll be glad to talk about opinion polls. I try to make my decisions based upon what I think is right. And removing Saddam Hussein from power was the right thing to do. The world is safer for it, and the American people are safer for it. The Polish people are safer for it, and the Iraqi people are better off because of it.

And I'll let the Prime Minister talk about troops. The Poles have been great allies. When we first went in to enforce the demands of the free world after Saddam Hussein once again defied the demands of the free world, Polish special forces were right there. And they performed brilliantly. They're great troops, and they're a great credit to the people of Poland.

And then when the—it became apparent we would need stabilizing forces to help this country become a free country, the Polish Government and the Polish people were very generous and provided not only troops but leadership in a very important sector of the country. So the Prime Minister, I know, is very proud, justifiably so, about the contributions that Poland has made to making the world a better place.

Q. Mr. President——

President Bush. Hold on a second, please.

Prime Minister Belka. Well, I guess, no one wants to stay in Iraq forever. It's a sovereign country. It has its own internationally recognized government. It has its own rules, that is—that are developing. And we treat our presence in Iraq as serving this country to stabilize and stand on its own feet. We didn't discuss dates, numbers. What we discussed is the way—how the situation in Iraq develops, how the political calendar, how the political process is going on, and how is it—how it shapes the character and size of our presence in this country. That's what is most important in our presence in Iraq.

I confirm that Polish troops, in our opinion, are doing right things. They behave gallantly. They show professionalism and also are quite successful in developing good working relations with the local leaders, helping them not only in keeping order but also in developing institutions, rebuilding their economy, their schools, hospitals. Well, this is not a typical military operation. It's a stabilization in all sense of this word.

President Bush. Steve [Steve Holland, Reuters].

National Economy

Q. Mr. President, with the economy not producing a whole lot of new jobs, are you considering adjustments or additions to your economic plan to try to give it a boost? And would an increase in interest rates tomorrow help or hurt?

President Bush. Monetary policy is decided independently from the White House. Secondly, the economy is strong, and it's getting better. Imagine me being able to say to the Prime Minister of Poland, in spite of a recession, emergency, attacks, war, and corporate scandals, we're growing and growing quite substantially. We've added nearly 1.5 million jobs over the last 12 months.

And what we don't need to do is run up the taxes on the American people. This campaign is going to be talking about visions, about how to keep the economic recovery going, and there's a clear difference of opinion as to how to do it. I believe taxes ought to be low. I know we need tort reform. I know we need an energy policy. I know we need reasonable health policy to help hold down the costs, and that stands in stark contrast to my opponents who are willing to raise taxes and not willing to fight for tort reform, for example. But I'm optimistic about the economic vitality of the country.

Visa Policy

Q. Mr. President, when is the United States going to lift visas for Polish citizens, or at least this $100 fee for visas——

President Bush. Well, listen——

Q. ——as a gesture of reciprocation?

Prime Minister Belka. We discussed this.

President Bush. Well, I'll tell you, we sure did discuss it, and the Prime Minister was very strong on the subject. He made it very clear what—what his opinion is and the opinion of his Government and the expectations of the Polish people. And because of his persuasiveness, there's now a preclearance procedure that will be taking place at the Warsaw airport. Secretary Tom

Ridge is—Ridge is here today, and he'll be given instructions to accommodate the Prime Minister's wishes that we begin a reform of the process. And it will start with preclearance process.

And I want to thank the Prime Minister for being such a strong advocate and—pretty clear where he stands. And hopefully, this will be a step in the right direction for the people of a country whose friendship we value.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:55 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Muqtada Al Sadr, Iraqi Shiite cleric whose militia engaged in an uprising in Iraq which began in early April; Prime Minister Ayad Allawi of the Iraqi Interim Government; U.S. Ambassador to Iraq John D. Negroponte; and former President Saddam Hussein of Iraq.

Statement on Signing the Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation Act of 2004

August 9, 2004

Today I have signed into law H.R. 2443, the "Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation Act of 2004." The Act authorizes appropriations for the United States Coast Guard, facilitates navigation and shipping, and strengthens the security of maritime transportation.

To the extent that provisions of the Act, including sections 217, 708(c)(2), and 803(c)(11), call for submission of legislative recommendations to the Congress, the executive branch shall construe such provisions in a manner consistent with the President's constitutional authority to supervise the unitary executive branch and to recommend for the consideration of the Congress such measures as the President shall judge necessary and expedient. Accordingly, the affected departments and agencies shall ensure that any reports or recommendations submitted to the Congress are subjected to appropriate executive branch review and approval before submission.

To ensure consistency with the Appointments Clause of the Constitution, the executive branch shall construe the phrase "if acceptable to the President and the Senate" as used in section 220 of the Act to require nomination by the President and the advise and consent of the Senate for the appointments addressed by that section.

GEORGE W. BUSH

The White House,
August 9, 2004.

NOTE: H.R. 2443, approved August 9, was assigned Public Law No. 108–293.

Remarks Announcing the Nomination of Porter J. Goss To Be Director of the Central Intelligence Agency

August 10, 2004

The President. Thank you all for coming. I'm pleased to announce my decision to nominate Congressman Porter Goss as the next Director of the Central Intelligence Agency. Porter Goss is a leader with strong experience in intelligence and in the fight