

Remarks Following Discussions With Prime Minister Tony Blair of the
United Kingdom in Brussels
February 22, 2005

President Bush. I just had a good breakfast. I always enjoy being with my friend Tony Blair. We talked about the progress being made in Iraq, and I want to congratulate you on your vision. The Iraqis are—you know, have defied the terrorists and showed the world they want to live in a free society, and we're there to help them achieve that.

I'm looking forward to the NATO meeting today. NATO is a vital relationship for the United States and for Europe. And I'm looking forward to meeting with the EU as well. As I said in my speech yesterday, a strong Europe is very important for the United States, and I really meant that. And the Prime Minister is one of the strong leaders in Europe, and I really enjoy my relationship with him.

Prime Minister Blair. First of all, I'm pleased to come and talk to the President again and go through the range of different issues that we face in the world today. And I both welcome the President's speech yesterday very much and thanked him for it. And I think what it sets out is a very clear way forward for us now. Whatever the differences in the international community have been over the past couple of years, I think we have a really solid basis now for going forward in a unified way. And if we take that opportunity, it will be greatly to the benefit of the international community.

We can see this, obviously, with Iraq, where after the democratic elections that are held now, it's possible to see a way forward in which Iraq can become a stable

and a prosperous and a democratic state. And after all the tragedies of the past and the dictatorship and the loss of life under Saddam, there's now real prospect for the Iraqi people. And that, joined to what has happened in Afghanistan, I think gives us real hope for the future.

In addition, the President set out very clearly a way forward on the Middle East peace process. There's a renewed sense of vigor and optimism in that process. And with the London conference coming up next week, I think we've got every possibility now of trying to reach a settlement, which I think would do so much for international relations worldwide.

Then, of course, we also went through many of the other issues, to the upcoming G-8 later in the year and so on. So it was, as ever, a very constructive, very useful discussion across a whole range of issues. And as I say, I think that yesterday's speech and today's meeting at NATO gives us an opportunity to restate for people in Europe and in America the fundamental importance of this transatlantic alliance. It's been a cornerstone of our security for many, many years. It's based on shared values. It's absolutely the right thing for us to have at the center of our relations. And we'll do everything we can to make sure that that relationship is strong.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:42 a.m. at the Chief of Mission Residence at the U.S. Embassy. In his remarks, Prime Minister Blair referred to former President Saddam Hussein of Iraq.

The President's News Conference With Secretary General Jakob Gijbert "Jaap" de Hoop Scheffer of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization in Brussels

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Secretary General de Hoop Scheffer. Good afternoon. Very good afternoon to you. Let me start by—this press conference by echoing what was said many times around the table this morning, and that is, thanks to President Bush that he is here, showing the continued commitment to NATO so shortly after his Inauguration. I mean, I would be unfaithful to the discussion if I didn't start like this. So let me say once again on my own behalf, Mr. President, thank you for being here. Thank you for coming.

What did we discuss; what have I heard today? I have heard strong support for the Atlantic Alliance. I have heard strong support for the common values which bind us, in the past, in the present, and in the future.

I have heard strong support for NATO's operations and missions, strong support for what we are doing in Afghanistan and our further ambitions, strong support for the training mission in Iraq, where we have further ambitions in setting up the training academy and where we have now fully manned and financed what we committed to do. And you know it's the Iraqi Government's first priority, training the Iraqi security forces so that their dependence on others can be less than it is at the moment. I heard strong support for our continued presence in Kosovo and stability in the Balkans.

I've heard a discussion on the importance of a strong NATO-EU partnership. At length, government leaders, heads of state discussed the political role of NATO, the stronger political role of NATO, and there was a lot of support for what I have been saying over the past 8, 9 months: that this political role is important, that NATO is

a political-military alliance, and that we should not shy away from discussing political subjects of relevance.

Many remarks and interventions were made on the Middle East, the importance of NATO's Mediterranean dialog, which is being strengthened, the importance of the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative for these activities of NATO in this very pivotal region where security and stability is not only important for the region but far beyond. Of course, the hopes for progress in the Israeli-Palestinian question were discussed, and I think it's important that, by outreaching into the region, NATO follow this process, although it does not play a primary role.

Of course, let me come back to Ukraine this morning. There is strong support, strong support, first of all, for NATO's bottom line, which is NATO has an open door for those European democracies who fulfill the obligations, strong support for giving President Yushchenko, in his challenging endeavor to bring Ukraine closer to Euro-Atlantic integration—to support him in that respect.

In other words, because I want to be brief, it was an excellent summit. It was an excellent summit. It was an excellent idea of the President to come here, to have this summit here and now, because there is a daunting and challenging task and a daunting and challenging agenda waiting for NATO. And we'll go for that agenda. And I'll make proposals in the not too distant future on this political role for NATO. And the atmosphere was excellent, and that was the way it should be, because what binds us are the values. We'll discuss them; we'll have difference of opinion, yes, from time to time, but there is a lot more we