

Remarks Following Discussions With King Abdullah II of Jordan and an Exchange With Reporters
March 15, 2005

President Bush. It's my real pleasure to welcome His Majesty back to the Oval Office. Your Majesty, every time you come, I really enjoy our conversation. His Majesty leads a great country in the midst of a part of the world that is changing, changing for the better. And I want to thank His Majesty for his leadership, his understanding about the need for reform, his strong alliance, his clear vision that the world needs to jointly fight terror. And I really appreciate you coming.

King Abdullah. Thank you.

President Bush. Welcome.

King Abdullah. I'd like to thank the President for welcoming me back to Washington. As always, our discussions have been very fruitful, to try and make the Middle East a better place. We had the chance to discuss the issues of the peace process, how we can move that forward, and obviously our commitment to regional reform. And as always, we've come away with some very good ideas and a decent way of being able to look at the future.

President Bush. We'll answer a couple of questions. [Jennifer [Jennifer Loven, Associated Press].

President's Upcoming Meeting With the Maronite Patriarch of Antioch/Hizballah

Q. Yes, sir. Thank you. The Lebanese Maronite Patriarch you're meeting with tomorrow supports integrating Hizballah into the political mainstream.

President Bush. A little louder, excuse me.

Q. The Lebanese Maronite Patriarch you're meeting with tomorrow supports integrating Hizballah into the political mainstream in his country. Are you willing to consider that kind of role for Hizballah?

President Bush. Well, first, I look forward to listening to the Patriarch. It's going to

be a very interesting discussion. One of the messages I want to say is that my meeting with the Patriarch is in no way embracing any religion for Lebanon; it is a way for me to speak to people that believe the Lebanese society ought to be free.

We view Hizballah as a terrorist organization, and I would hope that Hizballah would prove that they're not by laying down arms and not threatening peace. One of our concerns The Majesty and I discussed is that Hizballah may try to derail the peace process between Israel and the Palestinians. And it's very important that this peace process go forward, for the sake of the Palestinians, for the sake of the Israelis, and for the sake of all the people in the region. But Hizballah has been declared a terrorist organization by the United States because of terrorist activities in the past.

Peace and Progress in the Middle East

Q. Mr. President—

President Bush. Yes.

Q. —the Arab peace initiative in Beirut has defined the ground for resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict, which would be also re-articulated in the coming Algeria summit. What would be the role of the United States in the coming stage to push forward that initiative? And when it comes to reforms, how would the United States help the Arab world, and Jordan in particular, in pushing forward?

President Bush. Well, I appreciate that question. First, let's start with Jordan. One of the things we've done is entered into trade negotiations with Jordan, so that commerce between our countries can flow better. It's much easier to reform when there's prosperity, when people are able to see His Majesty's vision about a prosperous future. And I—the other way to encourage reform

is to herald examples of reformers, people who are willing to put mechanisms in place that respond to the voice of the people, and His Majesty has done that.

We look forward to hearing the results of the conference in Algeria. The Foreign Minister briefed us on His Majesty's plans and the Jordanian Government's plans to have accountability measures in place, so as to help measure as to whether or not reforms are going forward.

As for the Palestinian-Israeli issue, the role of the United States will be to continue to urge both parties to make the sacrifices necessary—sacrifice meaning that Israel must withdraw from the settlements; there must be contiguous territory for a Palestinian state—into which a Palestinian state can grow. The Palestinians, in their part, must continue to work hard to fight any terrorist activities within the territories, and the Arab world must continue to work together to help Palestine build the necessary structures for democracy.

And I believe progress is being made. I said in my State of the Union Address to our country that I believe peace is within hand and that the United States Government will do that which is necessary to help move the process forward.

One of the things we've done is we've recently sent a general, Your Majesty, to the region to help the Palestinians have an effective security force. I believe President Abbas is desirous of developing a state that will live side by side with Israel in peace. And we recognize that the Palestinians need help in consolidating security forces and training security forces to defeat the terrorists who would like to stop the march of freedom.

Let's see—Steve [Steve Holland, Reuters].

Social Security Reform

Q. Sir, a new poll says 55 percent of Americans oppose your proposals on Social Security. Do you worry you're losing ground here? Is it a question of getting

your message across, or does the plan need to be changed?

President Bush. Well, first, in that same survey I was heartened to see that over two-thirds of the Americans recognize we have a problem. And therefore, the administration and members of both parties in the legislative branch must come together to permanently solve the problem. My first concern was that Members of Congress would think the public didn't think there was a problem, but they do. And I am mindful that when the public says there's a problem, we've got to work to solve it.

Secondly, I was also heartened to see in that survey that many people believe younger workers ought to be allowed, at their option, to set aside some of their own money in a personal savings account. That principle was embraced by a lot of folks in the survey.

My view about taking on a tough issue is that that's what the American people expect a President to do. And I look forward to working with Members of the Congress to develop a plan. I've suggested ideas. I've suggested that we stop partisan bickering and come together to work for a solution. And I'm looking forward to finding that solution. That's what the people expect.

So, no, listen, I'm just getting started on this issue, Steve, and I'm enjoying every minute of it. I like to take big issues to the American people. I like to say to the American people, you've sent us here to Washington for a reason, and that is to solve problems, and we've got a problem. The American people say we've got a problem, and they're going to expect people to come to the table, and they're not going to like it when they see people not coming to the table.

Q. May I ask the King a question? May I ask the King a question, please?

President Bush. That's up to His Majesty. He's a generous guy, unlike me. [Laughter]

King Abdullah's View on Middle East Peace

Q. Your Majesty, since the new Palestinian leadership took over, what's your personal vision for the region at this time?

King Abdullah. Well, I'm, again, very supportive of President Abbas. I think he's a man of his word, and I think that you'll see him give 110 percent to deal with the security issues and to push the process forward.

I truly believe that in this man, Prime Minister Sharon has a partner for peace, and I'm very optimistic that between the

two leaders that the process will go forward and go forward positively.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:48 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Nasrallah Boutros Cardinal Sfeir, Maronite Patriarch of Antioch; Minister of Foreign Affairs Hani Fawzi al-Mulki of Jordan; Lt. Gen. William E. Ward, USA, Senior U.S. Security Coordinator, Department of State; and President Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) of the Palestinian Authority. King Abdullah referred to Prime Minister Ariel Sharon of Israel.

Remarks at the National Republican Congressional Committee Dinner
March 15, 2005

Thank you for the warm welcome. It is great to be here with good friends and great allies, the Republican Members of the United States Congress.

I'm here to thank the Members of the Congress for their service to our Nation. I appreciate your courageous decision to enter the arena, to put your name on the ballot, to lay out an agenda, and to campaign for what you believe. I appreciate your hard work, and I appreciate working with you. See, we came to Washington to make a difference, not to mark time.

I am honored to have been introduced by one of the Nation's greatest Speakers ever, Speaker Denny Hastert—solid as a rock, tenacious as a wrestler—[laughter]—and capable as all get-out. Mr. Speaker, Laura and I are proud to call you friend.

We got a lot of work to do. We're going to continue to pursue a positive agenda, an optimistic agenda for a stronger America and a safer world. We're going to continue to expand opportunity for all who live here in America. And we're going to continue to advance the cause of freedom and peace. On issue after issue, we will do what Americans have always done to build a better

world for our children and our grandchildren.

And I'm honored to be sharing my responsibilities with a fantastic woman, a great mom, a great wife, a fabulous First Lady, Laura Bush.

And I'm proud of my runningmate and Vice President, from the great State of Wyoming, Dick Cheney. Mine is a job that requires making a lot of decisions, which means I must listen to capable, smart people, people who are able to give good advice when times are good and times aren't so good. Vice President Cheney has been that steady adviser, the solid rock. And what a decent man he is. I'm proud to be serving with him for 4 more years.

I appreciate other leaders of the United States Congress—my friend from the great State of Texas, Tom DeLay, and from Missouri, Roy Blunt. I want to thank Congresswoman Deborah Pryce from Ohio and Jack Kingston from Georgia and John Doolittle from California and John Shadegg from the State of Arizona. I particularly want to pay homage to Congressman Tom Reynolds, who has done a fabulous job as the chairman of the NRCC. And the chairman of