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Lebanon's forthcoming parliamentary elections can mark another milestone in Lebanon's return to independence and democracy if they are free and fair, conducted without outside interference, and guaranteed by international observers. The implementation of UNSCR 1559 is essential to the organization and success of these elections. The people of Lebanon deserve this opportunity, and we stand with them in their aspirations for freedom, sovereignty, and security.

NOTE: An original was not available for verification of the content of this joint statement.

Remarks Following Discussions With President Jacques Chirac of France and an Exchange With Reporters in Brussels

February 21, 2005

President Bush. It's my honor to be joining Jacques Chirac for dinner. I thank you for coming, sir. I've really been looking forward to this moment.

Every time I meet with Jacques, he's got good advice. And I'm looking forward to listening to you. We've got a lot of issues to talk about, Middle Eastern peace, Lebanon, Iran, helping to feed the hungry, working together to help spread medicines necessary to cure illness.

So, Mr. President, thank you very much for your—coming back for dinner, and thank you for your time.

President Chirac. Thank you. It's, of course, a great pleasure. It always is great pleasure to meet with President Bush. And let me take this opportunity to thank him for his very warm welcome to me today as always.

Now, President Bush and I have always shared very—always had very warm relations, which in fact translate, to a certain extent, of relations—of warm relations that have always been characterized—the links between our countries and the relations, be they bilateral or transatlantic ones, which have always been excellent between France and the United States.

Indeed, we have struggled for some two centuries, 200 years now, to uphold and keep alive these values which we share, and which our people share and hold very dear to their hearts, and which we are very attached to.

We are present together, that is to say France and the United States, in some of the world's hotspots. I'm thinking of Afghanistan. I'm thinking of the Balkans, of course, but I'm thinking also of what we're doing in Haiti and in Africa. I'm thinking also of our excellent cooperation over the tragedy in Asia, from the tsunami here. And let me take this opportunity to thank the President for all the help that was extended to our military by the American military, for instance, the making available to our military of American helicopters, which made our work that much easier.

So we do share many, many ideals and values. We have many things in common. For instance, we, together, are struggling against the scourge of weapons of mass destruction and terrorism. And we adopted—we have the same approach to the situation which is prevailing in Lebanon, especially following the murder of former Prime Minister Hariri, who, of course, was a man who enshrined the ideals of democracy, independence, and liberty of that country.

Therefore, I am looking forward to a very constructive discussion, and I welcome this new opportunity to meet with the President and in a broader context, which is that of the continuing dialog, ongoing dialog between the United States and the rest of Europe.

President Bush. Tom [Tom Raum, Associated Press].

Russia

Q. For both Presidents: You talked about Russia, Mr. President, in your speech. What practical things can you do to pressure Russia to go back to a path towards democracy? And should you, for instance, make membership in the WTO contingent on Russia renewing its commitment to democracy? For both Presidents, please.

President Bush. Part of the WTO requirements are that there be an open market, that there be a liberal economy. And open markets and liberal economies tend to attract countries that are open to the voices of their people.

I look forward to seeing Vladimir Putin in 2 days. I've got a good relationship with Vladimir; I intend to keep it that way. But as well, I intend to remind him that if his interests lie West, that we share values, and that we—and those values are important. They're not only important for people that live within Russia; they're important to have good relations with the West.

France-U.S. Relations

Q. The first question to President Chirac. You have said, sir, yourself, that relations have always been excellent between France and the United States. We get the sense that in recent weeks they have become even better. They have become warmer and that there's a veritable new honeymoon, as it were, taking place.

And to you, President Bush, may I ask the following question: If, indeed, relations have improved, if certainly they are better between France and the United States, are they good enough as yet for that to warrant an invitation to President Chirac to go to the United States or even to your ranch? [*Laughter*]

President Bush. I'm looking for a good cowboy. [*Laughter*]

President Chirac. Let me say—repeat what I already said, namely, that our relations are indeed excellent. But they have been excellent for over 200 years now, because—why do I say that? Because they are based upon common values, common values that we share. And these things don't change overnight, with the wave of a wand.

Now, of course, that doesn't mean that because we share common values we don't—we necessarily agree on everything all the time. Of course, we can have our differences, our divergence of opinion. Recently, this was the case. We didn't share the same view over Iraq. But this in no way affects or in no way undermines the bedrock of our relations, namely, our common values and our common vision. And I repeat what I said earlier on, namely, that I feel it's so important that within the broader context of U.S.-EU relations, this relationship should continue to be cemented, broadened, and strengthened.

President Bush. This is my first dinner, since I've been reelected, on European soil, and it's with Jacques Chirac, and that ought to say something. It ought to say how important this relationship is for me, personally, and how important this relationship is for my country.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:13 p.m. in the Ambassador's Residence at the U.S. Embassy. In his remarks, he referred to President Vladimir Putin of Russia. President Chirac referred to former Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri of Lebanon, who was assassinated on February 14 in Beirut. President Chirac spoke in French, and his remarks were translated by an interpreter. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

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