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Spread of Democracy/Georgia-U.S. Relations

Q. Mr. President, as you mentioned, you've faced a lot of important challenges in many places like Iran and Iraq, Afghanistan, and North Korea. And at the same time, the whole world recognizes your personal role in promoting democracy and freedom all around. And how do you think, is there any chance that Georgia's aspiration to build free and democratic country may be left off of your agenda?

President Saakashvili. Tricky question.

President Bush. Freedom—I believe freedom is universal. And I believe the spread of liberty is important for peace. And therefore, the freedom agenda will be at the heart of everything I do. The freedom agenda is ingrained in my—it's not only ingrained in my policy; it's ingrained in my soul. I believe it strongly. And I believe the United States has an obligation to work with others to help them secure their liberty.

I understand that elections are only the beginning of the freedom agenda and that there's work needed to be done around the world, including our own country, to continue to build strong institutions and build the organizations necessary for a civil society to develop. Remember, ours was a country that wrote a great Constitution but enslaved people for 100 years. It takes time. And so I understand that, and I want to work with our friends that ask. Georgia is a sovereign government, and when governments say, "Will you help," America must always listen to requests for help, and specifically to Georgia.

One of the signature pieces of policy in my administration has been the Millennium Challenge Account. It's a foreign funding mechanism that recognizes countries that fight corruption, support rule of law, invest in the health and education of their people, and adopt open markets. And one of the most robust Millennium Challenge Account projects is with Georgia. It's a sign—should be a sign to the people of Georgia and people in the neighborhood that the United States respects the decisions this Government has made and wants to work closely with the people of Georgia to help Georgia succeed, to help create the conditions for success.

And so to answer your question, yes, I've got a lot that comes to my desk here, absolutely. I've got a lot to think about. But my friend, the President, wouldn't be sitting here if I didn't have Georgia on my mind. [*Laughter*]

Thank you all very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:15 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Sandra Roelofs, wife of President Saakashvili; and Chairman Kim Jong Il of North Korea.

The President's News Conference With Prime Minister Stephen Harper of Canada

July 6, 2006

President Bush. Thank you all. Welcome. It's been my honor to visit with Stephen Harper, the Prime Minister of Canada, in the Oval Office. After this exercise in democracy, I'll be buying him lunch, where we'll continue our discussions. I'm impressed by his leadership style. I appreciate the fact that he doesn't mince words. He tells me what's on his mind, and he does so in a real clear fashion.

We talked about a lot of subjects. We talked about Iran and our joint desire to convince the Iranian regime to give up its nuclear weapons ambitions. We talked about North Korea, and I shared with him our strategy to work with five other—four other nations to convince the North Koreans to adhere to agreements they had already reached with the world.

We talked about the war on terror, and I told the Prime Minister how pleased Americans were that the Canadian Government did the hard work necessary to disrupt terrorist plots. It just goes to show how safe Canada is. When you've got a government that's active and a police force that's capable, people ought to be rest assured that Canada is on top of any plots.

I thanked the Prime Minister and the Canadian people for their involvement in Afghanistan. This is a serious foreign policy decision by the Government, and it's a necessary decision, in my judgment, to help make this world a more peaceful place. It

just goes to show the important role Canada can play in foreign policy. Canada has got a set of values that are extremely important for the world to see.

And I do want to thank the families of those soldiers who are in Afghanistan for supporting their loved ones. Their soldiers are doing fantastic work. I asked prior to your visit here from our military folks how they were doing; they said, great. And they're making the country proud.

I appreciate very much our discussion about Darfur. I believe that Canada and the United States can make a difference in Darfur and should. As you know, our Nation declared the situation in Darfur a genocide. We will work with the international community to bolster the AU forces that are there now. I believe they ought to be blue-helmeted, and I believe there ought to be NATO involvement with a blue-helmeted, AU-augmented force on the ground. The message has got to be clear to the Government of Sudan: We're not going to tolerate this kind of activity.

I speak frequently with my Secretary of State on this issue, Mr. Prime Minister, to make sure that we expedite the arrival of augmented troops to save lives. I talked to Kofi Annan the other night, by the way, about this very subject. And so I appreciate your understanding, and I really appreciate your working on this.

You know, we cooperate closely in our neighborhood. We just renewed the NORAD accord, and I want to thank you for that. I remember going out—one of the hurricanes was about to hit us here, and I can remember talking to and having dinner with a Canadian general there, and it was a—it just reminded me of how close that our relations need to be.

We talked about trade. We have a lot of trade with Canada. It's in this Nation's interest to trade with Canada. It's in, I think, the Canadian interest to trade with the United States. I'll let the Prime Minister speak to that. But it's important when you have trade to have goods and services and people flow as smoothly as possible between our two countries.

We've had some disputes in the past, trade disputes. That's what you expect when you have a lot of trade. And probably the most nettlesome trade dispute was softwood lumber. And I appreciate the Prime Minister's leadership in helping us resolve this issue. It's a tough issue. It was a tough issue for the Canadian Government; it's a tough issue for us. Nevertheless, the fact that we were able to reach an accord just goes to show how trading partners can be active in trade and be willing—and solve problems. I think this is a really important solution, and I want to thank you for that.

Needless to say, the Prime Minister expressed deep concerns about the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative. The last time I was with him, he expressed concerns. He basically was a little impatient, if I might clarify your—it seemed like you were impatient, at least—[*laughter*]—and straightforward. "Look," he said, "I understand there's a law on the books; show us what's going to happen." And I understand the concerns. If you have a relationship like we have, where there's a lot of activity and a lot of people moving across the border, it makes sense for the Prime Minister of Canada to say, "Look, we just want to know what the rules are to determine whether or not it is compatible with our relationship."

And so I assured him that my view is—simple and easy to understand is the operative words. And we will continue our discussions about this initiative, particularly since the Secretary of Homeland Security, Chertoff—who is sitting right over there, by the way—will be joining us for lunch. Unless you don't want me to invite him. [*Laughter*]

We talked about—well, we talked about a lot of subjects, and that's what you'd expect friends to do.

Mr. Prime Minister, the floor is yours. I'm proud you're here, and thanks for coming.

Prime Minister Harper. Well, thank you very much, Mr. President, for the invitation and for the kind words. And thank you for doing something I never thought I'd see, which is have the Canadian media stand when I entered the room. But we certainly enjoy that.

[*At this point, Prime Minister Harper spoke in French, and no translation was provided.*]

Prime Minister Harper. ——your hospitality. The United States and Canada have a strong relationship, strong and firm relationship based on the largest commerce and social interaction in the history of any two countries of the world, and we were able to discuss a wide range of bilateral and international matters where we, more often than not, share common values and common objectives.

We discussed many topics of interest to our respective countries and citizens, in particular, as the President mentioned, the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative. The President and I agreed that the implementation of the provisions of the WHTI must not unduly hinder cross-border travel or tourism or trade. And to that end, we've tasked our officials to agree on common standards for securing alternate documents and, preferably, as soon as possible.

We discussed the critical role Canada, in particular our oil sands, can play in providing energy security. The President and I have agreed to task our officials to provide a more forward-looking approach focused on the environment, climate change, air quality, and energy issues in which our Governments can cooperate. We raised the issue of how regulatory cooperation could increase productivity, while helping to protect our health, safety, and environment.

We also expressed, as the President just did, our mutual satisfaction on the significant progress made on the longstanding softwood lumber dispute. Both countries have now initialed the legal text; that legal text faithfully reproduces and documents the agreements reached between our Governments and various premiers on April the 27th, and I now urge all relevant parties to move forward with its implementation.

The President and I also discussed a number of important international issues, in particular our role in Afghanistan. We have 2,300 men and women on the ground as part of the Canadian forces. They're playing an important role in security and development in order to protect our national interest, rebuild Afghanistan, and ensure it never becomes again a safe haven for terrorists.

We also discussed recent developments in Iran, and we expressed our mutual concern about North Korea's latest provocative acts. We also discussed the upcoming G–8 meeting in Russia, where issues like energy security, infectious diseases, education, and innovation will be on the agenda. And finally, we did touch briefly on the recent Mexican election. Canada has full confidence in Mexico's institutions and processes, and I look forward very much to working with the next President of Mexico.

President Bush. Thank you, sir.

Keil [Richard Keil, Bloomberg News].

North Korea

Q. Thank you, Mr. President. Do you want the United Nations to impose sanctions on North Korea? And how will you go about persuading the Russians and the Chinese to back those moves if you make them? And in addition to that, sir, what kind of threat do you think North Korea poses to world peace right now?

President Bush. Nontransparent societies run by Governments that aren't selected by the people are—very difficult to tell what's going on. That's part of the problem. We're dealing with a person who was asked not to fire a rocket by the Chinese, the South Koreans, the United States, the Japanese, and the Russians. And he fired seven of them—which then caused the Secretary of State and myself to get on the phone with our partners and reminded them that—of the importance of speaking with one voice.

It's to—saying to Kim Jong Il, there is a better way forward for you than isolating yourself from the rest of the world; that there is a opportunity for you to stick to some of your agreements, and that is to verifiably disarm; and that there will be a better life than being isolated, and most importantly, a better life for your people than isolation will bring.

And so I was on the phone this morning with Hu Jintao and President Putin, and last night I talked to Prime Minister Koizumi and President Roh. And my message was that we want to solve this problem diplomatically, and the best way to solve the problem diplomatically is for all of us to be working in concert and to send one message, and that is—to Kim Jong Il—that we expect you to adhere to international norms, and we expect you to keep your word.

One way to send a message is through the United Nations. And the Japanese laid down a resolution which we support. But we're working with our partners to make sure we speak with one voice. Diplomacy takes awhile, particularly when you're dealing with a variety of partners. And so we're spending time diplomatically making sure that voice is unified.

I was pleased from the responses I got from the leaders. They, like me, were—are concerned, concerned about a person who doesn't seem to really care about what others say. And so we're working it, working it hard. And it's—and by the way, an effective policy is one which is not just the United States trying to solve problems. So I spent time talking to the Canadian Prime Minister about it. I mean, Canada is a—should be and must be an active participant in helping deal with problems.

He brought up Haiti, for example, in the Oval Office. Canada has made a significant contribution to stability in Haiti in the past. And it's an important—my only point is, is that we will continue to work with others to deal with problems that crop up.

Q. How much of a threat to the world——

President Bush. Well, you know, Dick, I think that—let's put it this way—he's going to pose less of a threat the more isolated he becomes and the more we work together. And as I mentioned to you, it's hard to tell. This is a society in which there's very little freedom, including freedom of the press. There's not a lot of light shining in there.

And so we take his statements very seriously. He's kind of declared himself to be a nuclear power. We obviously watch very carefully his testings. We're trying to make sure, by the way, that the missile that he fired wasn't headed for Canada. We don't know for a fact where it was headed. But, for example, one thing that Stephen and I talked about is he could be seemingly firing a missile at the United States, say, at—I don't know, this is all speculation—but could be headed toward the Northwest of our country. And it wouldn't take much for it to get off course and end somewhere where he may not have intended.

My only point is, is that we will work very closely on these matters together. It's in our interests that we send a clear message to the leader of North Korea.

Canada-U.S. Border

Q. Christian St. Pierre, Radio Canada. Happy birthday, sir.

President Bush. It's amazing, the first birthday greeting I got from the press came from the Canadian press. [*Laughter*] Thank you. I am grateful. You're not 60 years old, are you? [*Laughter*] Well, let me just say this—it's a lot younger than you think.

Q. President Bush——

President Bush. Sure.

Q. My question is about the security at the border. On the passport issue, you seem very open, but there is a deadline of 2008.

President Bush. Yes.

Q. Is there any chance of getting a—of dealing? And, Mr. Harper, can you comment in French and English, please?

President Bush. Thank you. We are responding to congressional law. And I—let me reinterpret your—is your question, is there flexibility in the law, basically? Yes, I think that if Congress decides there needs to be flexibility, there will flexibility. Interestingly enough, the Senate passed—made its intention clear to extend deadlines. That hasn't happened in the House yet. And so we are operating in the executive branch under the idea that nothing will change, and therefore, we need to get to the Canadian Government as quickly as possible our definition of what a reasonable policy is. If Congress decides to be flexible, we obviously will be flexible.

But the reason we're dealing with this issue is because the legislative branch put this into law, put the need to have these kind of documents into law. And as I told Chertoff, who is responsible for implementing the law, that I would like this—to the extent the law allows, for there to be a lot of flexibility and simplicity.

As the Governor of Texas, I'm used to a border situation where hundreds of thousands of people crossed every day. See, we—on our southern border, there are a lot of Mexican citizens who come into the United States and work on a daily basis and then go back home. It happens a lot. And therefore, I fully understand the need for there to be simplicity in the documentation. It

needs to be easy for somebody who is known and a person that is—makes a living on the other side of the border. There's—a lot of kids go to college in, like, El Paso, Texas, and they're living in Mexico, so they've got to go back and forth on a regular basis. So I'm familiar with this issue a lot, and I really do emphasize the need for us to be mindful of what a onerous program could mean to good relations as well as facilitation of trade.

I can remember Stephen's concerns about the effect of this initiative might have on conventions, for example, in Canada. He brought up today an interesting example of Little League teams playing baseball in Manitoba. And so, in other words, there's a lot of just daily commerce that we've got to be mindful about—not just trade but the movement of people. And we are, we are.

And so to answer your question, if the Congress provides flexibility, of course we will work with the Canadian Government to extend deadlines. If the Congress says, "No, this is what our intent is," we will work with the Canadian Government to make the law work.

[*Prime Minister Harper spoke in French, and no translation was provided.*]

Prime Minister Harper. We're on two tracks here. We've indicated we want to cooperate. We understand this is a congressional law the administration has to put into place. We're prepared to cooperate to make it work as smoothly and effectively as possible. We need more information, and we've been pressing for that for some time, and we'll continue to do so.

At the same time, our other track is obviously to encourage some reexamination of the law. The Senate has recently passed an amendment that would delay this process by a year and a half. We have some indications from some quarters of the House of Representatives, some will there to consider the same thing.

As I say, we—and I just want to emphasize—we in Canada share the United States' security concerns and objectives. I think as you all know, recently with events in Toronto, it's been brought home to all of us that we face exactly the same kind of security threats and are defending exactly the same kinds of values. And I would hate to see a law go into place that has the effect of not just limiting and endangering trade or tourism but endangering all those thousands of social interactions that occur across our border every day and are the reason why Canada and the United States have the strongest relationship of any two countries, not just on the planet but in the history of mankind.

And I would just urge the Congress to think carefully, that if the fight for security ends up meaning that the United States becomes more closed to its friends, then the terrorists have won. And I don't think either of us want that. So we're prepared to cooperate and also urge the Congress to apply some flexibility in reaching their objectives of security.

President Bush. Thank you.

Jim Axelrod [CBS News].

North Korea/Foreign Policy

Q. Thank you, Mr. President. Kim Jong Il has been described as quirky, as odd. A member of your administration yesterday compared him to an unloved child looking for attention. And I'm wondering if you agree with that assessment. Does he pose——

President Bush. Who was that person? [*Laughter*]

Q. Does he pose—come to the booth, sir, I'll tell you who it was. [*Laughter*] Does he pose any particular unique problems to deal with? And do you feel that he's looking, for instance, at what's been offered to the Iranians by the world community in terms of incentives and saying, "I'd like a little of that for myself?"

President Bush. It's hard for me to tell you what's on his mind. He lives in a very closed society. It's unlike our societies where we have press conferences and people are entitled to ask questions, and there's all kinds of discussions out of administrations and people saying this, saying that, and the other. This is a very closed society.

We do know there's a lot of concentration camps. We do know that people are starving. As a matter of fact, our Nation has tried to help feed the hungry. But what we don't know is his intentions, and so I think we've got to plan for the worst and hope for the best. And planning for the worst means to

make sure that we continue to work with friends and allies, as well as those who've agreed to be a part of the six-party talks, to continue to send a unified message.

We've also got a very strong Proliferation Security Initiative, because one of the threats that can emanate from a closed society, particularly one that claims to have nuclear weapons, is proliferation. One of the real dangers we face is weapons of mass destruction in the hands of people who would like to continue to hurt us—hurt the United States or hurt Canada, hurt anybody who has the courage to stand up and embrace freedom, see? That's the big threat.

And so we don't know, Jim, about his intentions, but we take—we're planning. And so one of the things we've done—and I thank Canada's contribution—is for there to be a very strong initiative to prevent proliferation, through what we call the Proliferation Security Initiative. And it's an important initiative. It's a way to say, we're not going to allow you to threaten us; we're not going to allow you to—the rocket—as I say, I'm not exactly sure what the azimuth was of the rocket. We've got our people still analyzing that. But, for example, we didn't—we don't know what was on the rocket. We don't know where the rocket was headed. It would have been helpful, of course, had he said, "Here's what we're going to do; here's our intentions; here's what—we want to work with you; we want to explain it." Who knows—maybe send a satellite—who knows what his intention was.

But that's not the way he decided to deal with it. He just decided to say—to start firing, and he fired seven of them. And we take this seriously. We take—and we all should take threats seriously. That's one of the lessons of September the 11th, is that what takes place in other parts of the world can come home to hurt the American people. See, a failed government in Afghanistan enabled plotters and planners to train and then come and kill 3,000 of our citizens. And so it used to be that's it's okay if something were happening from afar, oceans could protect us. I presume that's how some in Canada used to feel. The lesson of September the 11th is, is that we're vulnerable, and therefore, we've got to deal with each threat.

I've assured the American people and assured our friends and allies, we want to deal with threats diplomatically. The best way to deal with threats diplomatically is to encourage others to be a part of the process. And that's what we're doing. That's why we've got the six-party talks.

And one of the keys in the six-party talks is for all the nations to send clear messages to Kim Jong Il. That's why I was on the phone this morning, saying as clearly as I could to our fellow partners, four other leaders, to say, let's send a common message that you won't be rewarded for ignoring the world and that you'll be isolated if you continue to do this, and yet, there's a way forward.

See, I care deeply about the people in North Korea. I truly do. It breaks my heart to know that young children are literally starving to death. And I wish—I just wish at some point in time there was an openness in that society where we could help save lives. I'm also realistic enough to realize what weapons of mass destruction could mean in the world in which we live.

And so we're working this issue hard. We're working the Iranian issue hard. Steve and I talked about a strategy going into the G–8 session. I talked to President Putin this morning abut making sure that not only do we send messages to the North Koreans but that our strategy will work with Iran.

And it's just really important for the American President to see the world the way it is, not the way we would hope it would be, and to deal with threats, and to do so in a way that will achieve results. And it takes a while. I mean, these threats didn't arise overnight, and these problems won't be solved overnight. But we've got strategies in place to deal with them.

And one of the reasons why it's important to have Steve here is so we can talk about how we can work together to deal with it. And they're not just threats to our security that normal people think of. HIV/AIDS on the continent of Africa is a threat to our security in the long run. That's why I'm proud to report the United States took the lead on setting up the Global Fund, as well as bilateral programs to help save people's lives. I think it's in our interests. I also happen to

believe in the admonition, "To whom much is given, much is required."

And so, we've got a robust foreign policy on a lot of fronts, and I intend to keep it that way. And I'm confident that what we're doing is going to make this world a better place. And I'm proud to have allies like Steve who understand the stakes of the 21st century.

Birthday Present for the President

Q. Mr. President, Mr. Prime Minister, before I ask you a question, I'm just curious what you think of that belt buckle the Prime Minister gave you as a birthday gift, and are you wearing it?

President Bush. I hadn't seen it yet. [*Laughter*] Oh, Lee, you gave it away. [*Laughter*]

North Korea/Missile Defense System

Q. Mr. President, on a serious note, in light of the North Korean missile test and the fact that North Korea could launch another series of missiles at any minute, did you ask Canada to reconsider joining in the Ballistic Missile Defense Shield?

And, Prime Minister, do you still think it's wrong and not in Canada's interest to join the BMD? And if—when you're responding, could you do it in French and English, please?

President Bush. Anyway, thanks for the belt buckle in advance. [*Laughter*]

Prime Minister Harper. No problem at all.

President Bush. Looking forward to getting it.

Prime Minister Harper. Figure if you're going to be 60, you should get something.

President Bush. That's right. Just hope the belt fits. [*Laughter*]

No, I didn't bring it up, because I figured if he was interested, he would tell me. I did explain to him, however, that we will continue to build a robust system, because I think it's in—I know it's in our interest to make sure that we're never in a position where somebody can blackmail us.

So we'll continue to invest and spend. And since this issue first came up, we've made a lot of progress on how to—towards having an effective system. And it's in our interest that we continue to work along these lines.

But, no, my attitude was—this is a—this was a particularly difficult political issue inside Canada, and my relationship is such that if Stephen thought it was of importance, he would have told me what's on his mind. Now, maybe he's going to bring it up over lunch, but he didn't bring it up earlier.

Prime Minister Harper. Let me just begin by saying——

President Bush. Interesting question, though.

Prime Minister Harper. Let me just begin by saying that—first of all, the question was asked earlier, I think, is North Korea a threat. I don't think the issue is whether North Korea is a threat. North Korea clearly wants to be a threat. And I think—I just want to repeat what the President has said. Given that that's a society of the kind of nature it is, I think this should concern us immensely, and the fact that it is prepared to arm itself and prepared to threaten to use such armaments—I think it is something that we should be gravely concerned about, as was said earlier.

Missiles that are fired in the direction of the United States constitute a threat to Canada. That's one of the reasons why our Government renewed, on a permanent basis, the NORAD treaty. Through NORAD we have a special relationship on air defense and we share information on these kind of matters. I think as you know, to answer your specific question, the Government of Canada is not prepared to open a missile defense issue at this time, but I will say that I think it should be obvious, when we look at this kind of threat, why the United States and others would want to have a modern and flexible defense system against this kind of threat. So I think that's something, at least, our Government fully understands.

[*Prime Minister Harper spoke in French, and no translation was provided.*]

President Bush. Welcome. Thank you for your birthday greetings.

President's Birthday

Q. Mr. President, happy birthday.

President Bush. Thank you very much. Yes.

Q. It's also my birthday.

President Bush. Today's your birthday, too?

Q. Yes, sir.

President Bush. It is? Come on up. Let's have a birthday picture. Come up, come up, come up. [*Laughter*] Come on. Get up here. Anybody else have their birthday today? [*Laughter*] It's your birthday? Yes, sure. It is your birthday? Come on. [*Laughter*] It's amazing, how everybody's birthday is today.

[*All present sang Happy Birthday to the President and others celebrating birthdays.*]

President Bush. Dear Richard—he just told me he's 30 years old. [*Laughter*] Happy birthday. Happy birthday.

NOTE: The President's news conference began at 11:55 a.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, the President referred to Secretary-General Kofi Annan of the United Nations; Chairman Kim Jong Il of North Korea; President Hu Jintao of China; President Vladimir Putin of Russia; Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi of Japan; and President Roh Moo-hyun of South Korea.

Remarks Following a Meeting With United States Ambassador to Iraq Zalmay Khalilzad

July 6, 2006

The President. It's been my pleasure to sit here and talk to our Ambassador from Iraq. I want—first, Zal, I thank you for your service. I really appreciate your family supporting you on this very important mission. I know the Secretary of State and the National Security Adviser join me in saying, it gives us great comfort to know that we've got a man of your caliber there. It's a hard job. And Zal has earned the confidence of the new Iraqi Government, and I was able to see that firsthand in how the Prime Minister and other members of his administration related to him.

He brought back a report that is realistic. On the one hand, he said they've got a good Government—goal-oriented people who are working to achieve certain objectives. And I know that you've been impressed by Prime Minister Maliki's determination to succeed and his willingness to lay out a commonsense agenda and then hold people to account.

Zal also said it's still a dangerous place because there are people there that will do anything to stop the progress of this new Government. And you have to ask yourself, who's afraid of democracy? I mean, why would people be afraid of a peaceful civil society? And the answer is, people who want to not only harm Iraqis but want to harm us.

And I've assured Zal that—to assure the Iraqi people that when we give our word, we'll keep our word. And we intend to work closely with the Government and to help defend the people until this Government is more capable of defending itself.

And he talked about police training. There's more work to be done in training the police. And we talked about the training of the Army, and it's gone quite well. Zal is concerned about foreign influences in the country, as am I.

I do appreciate your briefing on the Prime Minister's recent trip in the neighborhood, which looked like a very successful trip. We, of course, are concerned that some in the neighborhood may want to derail the progress of a free Iraq. And that is troubling and something that we'll work on.

But, Mr. Ambassador, you represent our country with a lot of class and dignity. And so, thank you. You may want to say a few comments.

Ambassador Khalilzad. Thank you, Mr. President. I came today to also wish the President a happy birthday. Happy birthday, Mr. President. And it's an honor to serve the United States in Iraq. Under your leadership, we're working very hard to make sure Iraq succeeds because Iraq is the defining challenge of our time. And what happens in Iraq will shape the future of the Middle East, and the future of the Middle East will shape the future of the world.

So it's an honor to see you again. And happy birthday, Mr. President.

The President. Thank you, sir. Thank you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:12 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks,