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was an offer put on the table, a reasonable offer, for them to make the choice as to the way forward.

And our choice is, look, we want to have relations with you, but you're not going to have a weapon or the capacity to make a weapon. It would be incredibly dangerous if we—5 years from now, Iran shows up with a nuclear weapon and threatens people in the neighborhood, and they're going to say, "Where were you? What were you doing during that period of time?" And that's what we're working on.

And so time—when we said, weeks, not months, we meant it. And now we're heading to the U.N. Security Council. They can show up any time and say, "Wait a minute; now we'd like to go back and negotiate, now—take a look at the interests." We're not precluding any further negotiations with the Iranians.

In order for us to come to the table, however, what they must do is verifiably show that they're not enriching, like they said they would do earlier. This is not a—this is not a new statement by them. They agreed to this in Paris. All we're asking them to do is to honor what they said they would do in the past in a verifiable fashion.

The rest of your four-part question?

Situation in the Middle East

Q. Sorry about that, sir.

President Bush. That's okay, it just—it's a bad habit.

Q. Does the Beirut—the attack on the Beirut Airport, does that concern you, and are you concerned about triggering a wider Middle East war?

President Bush. As I mentioned, my biggest concern is whether or not actions taken will weaken the Siniora Government. Democracy in Lebanon is an important part of laying a foundation for peace in that region. We have worked really hard to get Syria out of Lebanon—U.N. Resolution 1559 and its followup Resolution 1680 were manifestations of the work of the international community to get Syria out of Lebanon. We've always felt that a democracy in Lebanon is important for the Lebanese people, and it's important for the region.

So the concern is that any activities by Israel to protect herself will weaken that Government. And we have made that—or topple that Government—and we've made it clear in our discussions.

Having said all that, people need to protect themselves. There are terrorists who will blow up innocent people in order to achieve tactical objectives. In this case, the objective is to stop the advance of peace—which is a remarkable statement, isn't it—willing to kill to stop peace.

We have a good chance to get a two-state solution, two democracies living side by side in peace. It is a clear and achievable vision. There is a way forward called the roadmap—to achieve that vision. What will prevent that vision from being achieved is—are terrorist activities, and that's what you're seeing taking place.

Thank you all.

Chancellor Merkel. Thank you.

NOTE: The President's news conference began at 12:34 p.m. in the Town Hall. In his remarks, he referred to President Vladimir Putin of Russia; President Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) of the Palestinian Authority; Prime Minister Fuad Siniora of Lebanon; and President Bashar al-Asad of Syria. A reporter referred to Minister of Foreign Affairs Philippe Douste-Blazy of France. Chancellor Merkel spoke in German, and her remarks were translated by an interpreter.

Remarks in a Discussion With Civic Leaders in St. Petersburg, Russia

July 14, 2006

Ambassador, thank you for setting up this meeting. I've just had a really interesting meeting. I've been meeting with young, vibrant Russian activists who, first, love their country; secondly, care deeply about the form of government of the country; and third, care deeply about the human condition in their country.

These folks come from a variety of different NGOs and civic groups, representing a variety of issues—all bound together to be involved in their governments, in their countries, so that it's the best it can possibly be.

I spent a lot of time listening to their concerns. I assured them that the United States

of America cares about the form of government in Russia, that we believe in the universal values embedded in democracy. We believe in rule of law; we believe in human rights; we believe everybody has a right to be treated equally.

I explained to them that our own government and our country took a while to evolve, but nevertheless, it's important to be aiming toward a better tomorrow.

I hope my visit here was encouraging to them; it certainly was instructional for me. I explained to them my strategy of dealing with Vladimir Putin, who is my friend. Some asked me to deliver messages, which I'd be more than happy to do. I explained to them that it's in the U.S. interests to remain engaged with Russia—Russia is a great country with a fantastic future—and that the foreign policy of my administration will be to work with Russia to solve common problems and at the same time be in a position where we can have a frank exchange of ideas and philosophies and views.

I told the young leaders here that this has been a very enriching experience for me. I shared the thought—shared the idea that I'm the father of 24-year-old twin daughters. I'm looking at some folks here at the table who are their age; I'm impressed by their courage and their idealism and their desire to make their societies a better place.

So I want to thank you all for your visit. Thank you for your frank exchanges. I will you all the very best, and I ask for God's blessings on the people of Russia.

NOTE: The President spoke at 4:06 p.m. at the Counsel General's residence. In his remarks, he referred to U.S. Ambassador to Russia William J. Burns; and President Vladimir Putin of Russia. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Statement Honoring Former President Gerald Ford's Birthday

July 14, 2006

President Gerald Ford's story is a true American story. It is the tale of a son of the Midwest who achieved great things through hard work, dedication, courage, and humility. President Ford played football at Michigan, received a law degree from Yale, served in the Navy during World War II, and for decades he represented western Michigan as a Republican Congressman from Grand Rapids.

Then came his appointment with history. He assumed the Presidency at a perilous moment for our country. A President had resigned; the United States was involved in a cold war; the economy was sputtering; and America's confidence was deeply shaken.

Few leaders have ever faced such challenges upon taking office. Yet President Ford met them with steadfastness and courage. His leadership helped heal a wounded nation.

Since leaving office, President Ford has set a high standard for grace and character. He has never forgotten his roots or lost sight of the things that matter—including his deep love for his wife and partner, Betty.

Laura and I join all Americans in wishing President Ford a happy birthday.

Digest of Other White House Announcements

The following list includes the President's public schedule and other items of general interest announced by the Office of the Press Secretary and not included elsewhere in this issue.

July 8

In the morning, the President had an intelligence briefing.

July 10

In the morning, the President had an intelligence briefing.

In the evening, in the State Dining Room and the East Room, the President and Mrs. Bush hosted a social dinner and entertainment in honor of the Special Olympics.

The President announced his designation of the following individuals as members of a Presidential delegation to Abuja, Nigeria, to attend the Leon H. Sullivan Summit on July 19: Alphonso Jackson (head of delegation); John Campbell; John A. Simon; Herbert H. Lusk II; and Anita Smith.