AUTHENTICATED
U.S. GOVERNMENT
INFORMATION
GPO

has poured into the battle there, it will be a powerful blow against the global terrorist movement. If Iran is turned back in its attempt to gain undue influence over Iraq, it will be a setback to the—its ambitions to dominate the region. If people across the Middle East see freedom prevail in multiethnic, multisectarian Iraq, it will mark a decisive break from the long reign of tyranny in that region. And if the Middle East grows in freedom and prosperity, the appeal of extremism will decline, the prospects of peace will advance, and the American people will be safer here at home. The surge has opened the door to this strategic victory. Now we must seize the opportunity and sustain the initiative and do what it takes to prevail.

Realizing this vision is not going to be easy. Yet we should never let the difficulty of the fight obscure the justice of the cause. We should never let the difficulty of the moment cause us to shirk our duty to lay the foundation of peace for generations of Americans to come.

You know, when I mentioned justice of the cause, you see that when Americans in full battle gear hand out books to children, hand out books to total strangers. You see it when they defuse bombs to protect the innocent or help organize a town council meeting. And when you see that, there could be no doubt that America is a force for good and decency.

Four thousand of our finest citizens have sacrificed their lives in this mission. Every one of them was loved; every one is missed. And we thank God for the gifts of these brave Americans, and we ask Him to comfort their families. Every one of them will be honored throughout our history. But the best way to honor the fallen is to complete the mission and lay the foundation of peace.

All those who serve on the frontlines of this struggle, this ideological struggle, this confrontation against those who murder innocent men, women, and children to achieve their political objectives, are patriots who are upholding the highest ideals of our country. Many of them are airmen and women. They're adding to the tradition of the great aviators honored by this museum and of others known to us as family, friends, neighbors, or, in my case, dad. The work that today's generation is doing is every bit as challenging, every bit as noble, and every bit as vital to our security as any that came before. When the history of this era is written, it will show that the Air Force and all of Americans' Armed Forces performed with unfailing skill and courage. It will show that the United States of America prevailed, and freedom advanced, and so did peace.

May God bless you. May God bless our country.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:21 a.m. at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base. In his remarks, he referred to Maj. Gen. Charles D. Metcalf, USAF (Ret.), director, National Museum of the United States Air Force; Mayor Rhine McLin of Dayton, OH; Col. Colleen M. Ryan, USAF, commander, 88th Air Base Wing, and installation commander, Wright-Patterson Air Force Base; Gen. David H. Petraeus, USA, commanding general, Multi-National Force—Iraq; Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki and Deputy Prime Minister Barham Salih of Iraq; Lt. Gen. Raymond T. Odierno, USA, commanding general, Multi-National Corps—Iraq; King Hamad bin Isa al-Khalifa of Bahrain; Usama bin Laden, leader of the Al Qaida terrorist organization; and Ayman Al-Zawahiri, founder of the Egyptian Islamic Jihad and senior Al Qaida associate. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

The President's News Conference With Prime Minister Kevin Rudd of Australia

March 28, 2008

President Bush. Thank you all. Please be seated. [*Applause*] Thanks for that rousing ovation. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Prime Minister, welcome. We're sure glad you're here. And, Therese, thank you for joining us as well. Laura and I are thrilled to welcome you here to the White House. And I appreciate the opportunity to visit with a leader of one of America's closest allies and friends. And one thing is for sure: That friendship will strengthen and endure under the leadership of Kevin Rudd.

I have found him to be a straightforward fellow. And being from Texas, that's the way I like it. He is thoughtful. He is strategic in thought. And he is committed to the same values that I'm committed to: rule of law;

human rights; human decency. And we're sure proud you're here.

We spent a great deal of time talking about the economies. One thing we spent time on is talking about the benefits of trade between our two nations and the benefits of a world that trades freely and fairly. And the Prime Minister was asking me about my views on Doha. I said it's possible to achieve a Doha round. He too believes we should work to achieve a Doha round. However, I informed him that it's—we're willing to make serious concessions on the agricultural front, but we expect other nations to open up their markets on manufacturing as well as services. And to this end, Prime Minister Rudd—Kevin Rudd said that he would be more than willing to help, and that's—very grateful.

On a bilateral front, not only is the free trade agreement working, but next Monday, we'll be signing an open skies agreement that will further our friendship and further our commercial ties. And I think it's a great success of your administration and ours as well.

We talked about the environment and energy. Here's an interesting moment for all of us to recognize that we can become less dependent, in our case, on foreign oil and, at the same time, be good stewards of the environment. We talked about the need to work collaboratively to achieve an international agreement in which the United States is at the table along with developing nations like China and India. In order for there to be an effective international agreement, China and India must be participants.

Now, we talked about the need to help developing nations improve their environment. And one way that we can do so is to commit ourselves to tariff-free trade and technologies that promote low-carbon energy. And this is something we're spending a lot of money on in the United States. And we'll continue to do so because I happen to believe technologies will enable us to be good stewards of the environment and change our energy habits, which we need to do here in the United States.

So I want to thank you very much for our discussions thus far on our economic interests and our responsibilities. But we also talked about freedom and the need to promote an ideology based on hope and decency, and that's an ideology of liberty. And I want to thank very much the Australian Government and the Australian people for their willingness to help a young democracy such as Afghanistan. The Prime Minister and I discussed how Bucharest can become a success. And I can't thank you enough for going, and I appreciate very much your strong commitment to helping the Karzai Government succeed and thrive. It's in our national interests that we do so.

I also want to thank you very much for being a good, loyal ally on Iraq. Obviously, the Prime Minister kept a campaign commitment, which I appreciate. I always like to be in the presence of somebody who does what he says he's going to do. You know, oftentimes, politicians go out there, and they say one thing on the campaign trail, and they don't mean it. Well, this is a guy who meant it. But he also acted like you'd expect an ally to act, and that is, he consulted closely with his friends. His military commanders consulted closely with our military commanders. But the commitment of Afghanistan is not to leave Iraq alone; it's to change mission.

And so he told me about an interesting story. He met with the Prime Minister, Maliki. Prime Minister Maliki says to Kevin Rudd—or Kevin Rudd says to Prime Minister Maliki, "What can we do to help you?" It wasn't, "What can we do to abandon you?" He said, "How can we help you?" And he said, "How about training some farmers in dry-land farming"—something we know something about in west Texas, by the way, Mr. Prime Minister.

And I want to thank you for that. I want to thank you for stepping forward to help Iraq develop a civil society and a strong economy that will enable this young democracy to thrive and help yield peace. People—I'm sure the press corps is going to say, well, aren't you mad at the Prime Minister for fulfilling his campaign pledge? And the answer is, no—just so you don't even need to ask the question now. [*Laughter*]

We talked about Iran and our joint commitment to continue to work together to see to it that the Iranians do not develop the capacity to develop a nuclear weapon. We talked about Burma, and I want to thank you for your commitment to a free Burma. And

finally, we talked about North Korea and the six-party talks and Australia's support for those six-party talks.

We're going to have a good lunch too, and we'll continue our discussions on a variety of subjects. He's a easy man to talk to. I appreciate his visions. I particularly appreciate his consultations on China. He's an expert on China. It's clear when you talk to him, he is an expert on China. And all in all, we've had a good start to this important trip.

And we want to welcome you again, Kevin, to the White House. And the podium's yours.

Prime Minister Rudd. Thank you. Thanks very much, George. And it's a pleasure to be here in Washington and—with my wife, Therese. And it's great to be here at the White House. And thanks for your hospitality in having us at Blair House. We really appreciate that.

Our alliance doesn't simply reflect our shared past. Our alliance defines our common future as two of the world's great democracies. I was thinking about this, this morning, about the number of Presidents and Prime Ministers who have been party to this alliance, both Republican and Democrat, and both in our country, Labor and Liberal. This alliance has been supported by 12 American Presidents, Republican and Democrat. It's been supported by 13 Australian Prime Ministers, Labor and Liberal. And I'm the 14th.

And I'm confident that this alliance has a strong, robust future. And the reason I'm confident of that is because it's rooted in shared values. We actually take the ideal of democracy seriously. It's not a casual thought; it's not a—it's just not a passing observation; it's something which is part and parcel of who we are as peoples. So when you have an alliance which is rooted in a common set of values, it tends to mean that alliance is going to last for a bit.

And there's the things we've done together right from the Second World War to the present, and there's been many of them. And we've been in the field together, and there are many other areas in wider foreign policy where we cooperate as well.

Turning to the future, the President indicated we discussed the current challenges facing the global economy. And this is, for us in Australia, a global challenge. Obviously, the United States, as the world's largest economy, is fundamentally significant in the way in which this thing plays out. But our response—and we discussed this at some length—is looking at how we can get some better transparency out there in financial markets on some of these particular products, which are causing problems around the world. There's an upcoming meeting of the International Monetary Fund, and we'll be working on our common positions towards that end.

As the President has just indicated, we also spoke about the Doha round. My own view is that if ever the global economy needs a psychological injection of some confidence in the arm, it's now, and that can be delivered by a positive outcome on Doha. Takes more than two to tango. Takes a lot of people to tango when it comes to the Doha round, combination of ourselves and the Cannes Group, the United States, the Europeans, Brazil, India, others. But what we have agreed, again, as strong, long-term supporters of free trade around the world, as one of the best drivers of global economic growth, is to work very closely together in the months ahead to try and get a good, positive outcome for Doha, good for our economy, good for the American economy, good for the global economy.

On foreign policy, the President and I also discussed, of course, Iraq and Afghanistan. I thank him for his remarks in relation to Iraq. And what he said is absolutely right in terms of my discussions with Prime Minister Maliki in Baghdad only in December. We—I've confirmed today to the President, as we'll be confirming to the Government of Iraq in Baghdad, an assistance package of some $165 million, a large slice of which will go to how we assist Iraqis train their people better in agriculture and in the wider economy.

Prime Minister Maliki said, "This is a big need for us. We are a dry continent." We know a fair bit about dry-land farming, so we'll be spending a lot of money training a lot of Iraqi farmers and agricultural scientists in the year ahead.

On Afghanistan, I confirmed to the President that we're in Afghanistan for the long

haul. It's a tough fight, but we intend to be there with our friends and partners and allies for the long haul. And I look forward to being with the President in Bucharest soon, so we arrive at a common civil and military strategy with our friends and partners in Europe and elsewhere.

On the other matters which were raised in our discussions, the President has run through them neatly. I won't elaborate on them. But I'll just conclude with this: It was reminding of me—for me when I saw the guest book this morning at Blair House. And one of the first entries, back in 1944, was a page dedicated to the visit by Labor Prime Minister John Curtin to Blair House. FDR was President of the United States at the time. It goes back to remind me how much this alliance has been the product of common nurturing by Presidents and Prime Ministers for a long time.

Mr. President, you said that you had a warm regard for me because, from a Texan point of view, you found me to be a reasonably straight shooter. I therefore designate you as an honorary Queenslander. [*Laughter*] In the great State of Australia, I come from the great State of Queensland. It may surprise you that it's bigger than Texas. [*Laughter*] But can I say quickly—[*laughter*].

President Bush. Can you recover nicely? Yes. [*Laughter*]

Prime Minister Rudd. Yes. The recovery point is this: Queenslanders and Texans have a lot in common——

President Bush. Thank you, sir.

Prime Minister Rudd. ——and they get on well. And so from one Queenslander, one Texan—one Australian to one American, I appreciate the relationship that we're forming, part and parcel of the relationship between two great democracies.

President Bush. Thank you.

Yes, a couple questions a side. John Yang [NBC News].

Situation in Iraq/Afghanistan/Upcoming NATO Summit

Q. Mr. President, thank you very much. I'd like to ask you about Iraq. Thank you. Yesterday in Dayton, in your remarks, you said that the Iraqi offensive against criminals and militants in Basra was a sign of progress. But it's also triggered clashes with supporters of Muqtada Al Sadr. And this morning, U.S. forces were again fighting the Mahdi army in Sadr City. What does this say about progress in terms of reconciliation in Iraq among the various factions? And what can the United States do, what can you do, what can your administration do to help Prime Minister Maliki make progress in that area?

And, Mr. Prime Minister, if I could ask you, when you're in Bucharest next week at the NATO summit, what's going to be your message to the European allies to try to bring them along, to have the same sort of commitment you just stated here and a commitment to have military operations with their forces in Afghanistan?

President Bush. Yes, John, any government that presumes to represent the majority of people must confront criminal elements or people who think they can live outside the law. And that's what's taking place in Basra and in other parts of Iraq. I would say this is a defining moment in the history of a free Iraq. There have been other defining moments up to now, but this is a defining moment as well. The decision to move troops—Iraqi troops into Basra talks about Prime Minister Maliki's leadership.

You know, one of the early questions I had to the Prime Minister was would he be willing to confront criminal elements, whether they be Shi'a or Sunni? Would he, in representing people who want to live in peace, be willing to use force necessary to bring to justice those who take advantage of a vacuum or those who murder the innocent? And his answer was, "Yes, sir, I will." And I said, "Well, you'll have our support if that's the case, if you believe in evenhanded justice." And his decision to move into Basra shows evenhanded justice, shows he's willing to go after those who believe they're outside the law.

This is a test and a moment for the Iraqi Government, which strongly has supported Prime Minister Maliki's actions. And it is an interesting moment for the people of Iraq, because in order for this democracy to survive, they must have confidence in their Government's ability to protect them and to be evenhanded.

And so—the other thing that's interesting about this, by the way, this happens to be one of the Provinces where the Iraq's are in the lead—Iraqis are in the lead. And that's what they are in this instance. And the United States, of course, will provide them help if they ask for it and if they need it. But they are in the lead. And this is a good test for them. And, of course, routing out these folks who've burrowed in society, who take advantage of the ability to be criminals or the ability to intimidate citizens, is going to take a while. But it is a necessary part of the development of a free society.

Prime Minister Rudd. In answer to your question on Afghanistan, the message I would take to our friends and partners in Europe when we get to Bucharest is, all of us have got to share the burden. And it's built on an assumption that all of us share a common strategy. So the first message, I think, for all of our friends and partners there in Bucharest is, we need to sign up to a common script, both military and civil, in terms of how we actually prosecute and succeed in this conflict. And I believe we can. No point in being there unless you believe you can.

And then the second thing is, once you've signed up to a common script, a common strategy, which has both civilian and military dimensions to it in an integrated fashion, to then say to all of our friends and partners, let's all step up to the plate to make this work—and across the country of Afghanistan, not just in parts of it.

I'm optimistic that we're going to make some progress in Bucharest. I know the President has put in a lot of effort with a lot of European leaders up until now. We've been talking to some ourselves. And I think we should look forward to a good outcome because the people of Afghanistan deserve a good outcome.

If I could ask Mark Kenny for his question.

Australia-U.S. Foreign Policy

Q. Mark Kenny from the Advertiser—Mr. President, both sides have stressed that the alliance is in perfect working order and good nick. But how can that be the case? How can the alliance remain unchanged given that Australia has signaled new foreign policy with quite different positions from yours on things like Iraq, climate change, and potentially over China?

President Bush. I guess it depends if you're a half-glass empty guy or a half-glass full guy. It sounds like to me our foreign policy interests are aligned. You know, after all, we've committed to an international agreement that will be effective when it comes to greenhouse gases. The Prime Minister just defined his desire to help this young democracy in Iraq succeed. That's what we're for.

So I don't see differences when it comes to foreign policy. As a matter of fact, I see common agreement. And one reason why is, is because we share the same values. And those values are more important than the people who actually occupy the office, by the way. Those are the values that allow 12 U.S. Presidents and 14 Australian Prime Ministers to be united in common goals. And so I disagree with the assessment of whatever expert laid that out.

Steven Lee [Steven Lee Myers, New York Times].

Situation in Iraq/Tibet/China

Q. Thank you, Mr. President. I wonder if you could talk a little bit more about Iraq and how it's—you mentioned criminal elements that are being fought against now. How concerned are you that the violence now reflects, in fact, a deepening political and civil, even ethnic conflict inside of Iraq? How much now are American forces being drawn into the fighting in the last—just few hours even? And how is it going to affect your decision looming on the way ahead?

And if I could ask you both, please, to talk a little bit about the crackdown in Tibet and how you see that affecting relations with China. Thank you.

President Bush. Any other subjects you want to wedge in there? [*Laughter*] Okay. Repeat some of those things. You had about five different things. I'm getting old, Steven. Look, wait a minute. Look, yes, I talked about criminal elements. And one of those things that's been well-known is that Basra has been a place where criminality has thrived. It's a port; a lot of goods and services go through there. And there was—from the beginning of liberation, there have been

criminal elements that have had a pretty free hand in Basra. And it was just a matter of time before the Government was going to have to deal with it.

And I haven't spoke to the Prime Minister since he's made his decision, but I suspect that he would say, look, the citizens down there just got sick and tired of this kind of behavior. Most people want to have normal lives. Most people don't like to be shaken down. Most mothers want their children to go to school peacefully. And yet that wasn't the case in Basra. And so I'm not exactly sure what triggered the Prime Minister's response. I don't know if it was one phone call. I don't know what—whether or not the local mayor called up and said, "Help. We're sick and tired of dealing with these folks." But nevertheless, he made the decision to move. And we'll help him.

But this was his decision. It was his military planning. It was his causing the troops to go from point A to point B. And it's exactly what a lot of folks here in America were wondering whether or not Iraq would even be able to do in the first place. And it's happening. Now, they're fighting some pretty tough characters, people who kill innocent people to achieve objectives. And, yes, there's going to be violence, and that's sad. But this situation needed to be dealt with, and it's now being dealt with—just like we're dealing with the situation up in Mosul.

I have said in my remarks, there's been substantial progress, and there has been. But it's still a dangerous, fragile situation in Iraq. And therefore, my decision will be based upon the recommendations of Secretary Gates, the Joint Chiefs, as well as General Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker, all aiming to make sure that we have enough of a presence to make sure that we're successful in Iraq.

And the reason why it's successful—important to be successful in Iraq, because, one, we want to help establish a democracy in the heart of the Middle East, the most volatile region in the world. Two, we want to send a clear message to Iran that they're not going to be able to have their way with nations in the Middle East. Three, that we want to make it clear that we can defeat Al Qaida. Al Qaida made a stand in Iraq. They're the ones who said this is the place where the war will take place. And a defeat of Al Qaida will be a major victory in this war against extremists and radicals. Four, we want to show what's possible to people. There are reformers all over the Middle East who want to know whether or not the United States and friends will stand with these young democracies.

And so this is vital for our national interests. And I'm confident we can succeed, unless we lose our nerve, unless we allow politics to get in the way of making the necessary decisions, which I have vowed to our military and our civilians in Iraq that that's not going to be the case so long as I'm the President. And I'm—as I told you, this is a defining moment, and it's a moment of—where the Government is acting. And it's going to take a while for them to deal with these elements, but they're after it. And that's what's positive.

Tibet—he wants to talk to you about Tibet. [*Laughter*]

Prime Minister Rudd. I'll say one or two things about Tibet, and then we'll flick to an Australian. It's absolutely clear that there are human rights abuses in Tibet. That's clear-cut. We need to be upfront and absolutely straight about what's going on. We shouldn't shilly-shally about it. We've made our positions clear on the public record, the Australian Government has, about the need for restraint in the handling of this. I think it would be appropriate for the Chinese Government to engage the Dalai Lama or his representatives in a informal set of discussions about future possibilities when it comes to internal arrangements within Tibet.

We recognize China's sovereignty over Tibet. But it is difficult, and it's complex. And it certainly will be matters which I'll be raising when I visit China myself at the end of this visit abroad.

Q. [*Inaudible*]

President Bush. Mr. Prime Minister, excuse me. Steven Lee is anxious on my view on Tibet. He couldn't have said it better. And that's exactly what I told Hu Jintao a couple of days ago, that it's in his country's interest that he sit down again with representatives of the Dalai Lama—he, not personally, but to have his representatives do so—and that we urged restraint. And I appreciate the

Prime Minister's view and advice on dealing with this issue.

Prime Minister Rudd. Paul Bongiorno.

Australia's Role in Iraq/War on Terror Strategy

Q. Paul Bongiorno with Ten News—Mr. President, as you noted, Australia will begin withdrawing 500 combat troops from southern Iraq. And I heard that you accept this decision, which did, as you say, play out in our election. But how does it fit with your view, expressed quite strongly again yesterday, that to withdraw troops at this time would be to retreat?

And you've described our former Prime Minister as a man of steel. I'm wondering how you'd describe Mr. Rudd.

President Bush. Fine lad; fine lad.

First of all, I didn't exactly say that. And by the way, we are withdrawing troops. It's called return on success. And our intention is to have pulled down five battalions by July. Troops are coming out—five brigades, excuse me—troops are coming out because we're successful. And so I would view the Australia decision as return on success—returning home on success.

That's fundamentally different from saying, well, it's just too hard; pull them all out. That sends a different signal. This is a signal in which we're working collaboratively with the Iraqi Government. They know our intentions, and they know we're not going to leave them.

In the very same speech, I talked about developing a long-term strategic relationship with Iraq as well. And for those who didn't listen to the full speech, I will remind you that it's in our interests that we enter into such an arrangement. But a long-term strategic arrangement does not commit any future President to any troop level, nor does it talk about permanent bases. But it does talk about a joint strategic relationship to make sure that the Iraqi people know and the Iraqi Government knows that we're not going to leave them in the lurch.

And so we are taking troops out, just like the Australians are, because we're being successful. And his question—Steven Lee's question was, well, are you going to bring any further out? Not, are you going to bring any out; are you going to bring any further troops out from that which we committed to do earlier? And the answer is, it depends on what our commanders say and the folks in Washington say, and it depends upon conditions on the ground. His real question was, have the conditions changed such that you believe your commander is going to make a different recommendation than he might have two days ago? And I can't answer that question. I can only tell you what I'm going to do after we get back from NATO.

Thank you for coming. I've enjoyed it.

Q. [*Inaudible*]

President Bush. Yes. Heck, yes. [*Laughter*] Thanks for coming.

Prime Minister Rudd. Good. [*Inaudible*]

President Bush. Appreciate you coming.

NOTE: The President's news conference began at 11:37 a.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Therese Rudd, wife of Prime Minister Rudd; President Hamid Karzai of Afghanistan; Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki of Iraq; Iraqi Shiite cleric Muqtada Al Sadr; Gen. David H. Petraeus, USA, commanding general, Multi-National Force—Iraq; Tenzin Gyatso, the Dalai Lama of Tibet; and President Hu Jintao of China. A reporter referred to former Prime Minister John Howard of Australia.

Remarks Following a Tour of Novadebt in Freehold, New Jersey

March 28, 2008

The President. Thank you very much. I really want to thank Congressman Chris Smith and Vito Fossella for joining me here in Freehold, New Jersey. I'm here at a company called Novadebt. And I really appreciate Joel Greenberg and Jill Feldman for giving me an opportunity to come to this center, this company and talk with people whose lives are being positively affected as a result of a significant counseling effort to help people stay in their homes. And I really do want to thank you all for your hospitality.

During my tour, I have met with skilled professionals who provide free mortgage counseling for struggling homeowners. And the reason why I'm here is because we have got a issue in housing in America. The value of the houses have gone down in some areas,