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Presidential Documents

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WEEKLY COMPILATION OF

PRESIDENTIAL DOCUMENTS

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Week Ending Friday, March 28, 2008

The President's Radio Address

March 22, 2008

Good morning. This weekend families across America are coming together to celebrate Easter. This is the most important holiday in the Christian faith. And during this special and holy time each year, millions of Americans pause to remember a sacrifice that transcended the grave and redeemed the world.

Easter is a holiday that beckons us homeward. This weekend is an occasion to reflect on the things that matter most in life: the love of family; the laughter of friends; and the peace that comes from being in the place you call home. Through good times and bad, these quiet mercies are sources of hope.

On Easter, we hold in our hearts those who will be spending this holiday far from home, our troops on the frontlines. I deeply appreciate the sacrifices that they and their families are making. America is blessed with the world's greatest military, made up of men and women who fulfill their responsibilities with dignity, humility, and honor. Their dedication is an inspiration to our country and a cause for gratitude this Easter season.

On Easter, we remember especially those who have given their lives for the cause of freedom. These brave individuals have lived out the words of the Gospel: "Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." And our Nation's fallen heroes live on in the memory of the nation they helped defend.

On Easter, we also honor Americans who give of themselves here at home. Each year, millions of Americans take time to feed the hungry and clothe the needy and care for the widow and the orphan. Many of them are moved to action by their faith in a loving God who gave His son so that sin would be forgiven. And in this season of renewal, millions across the world remember the gift that took away death's sting and opened the door to eternal life.

Laura and I wish you all a happy Easter. Thank you for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 7:10 a.m. on March 20 in the Cabinet Room at the White House for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on March 22. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on March 21 but was embargoed for release until the broadcast. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of this address.

Statement on the Presidential Election in Taiwan

March 22, 2008

I congratulate the people of Taiwan on the successful conclusion of their March 22 Presidential election. Once again, Taiwan has demonstrated the strength and vitality of its democracy. I also congratulate Mr. Ma Ying-jeou on his victory.

Taiwan is a beacon of democracy to Asia and the world. I am confident that the election and the democratic process it represents will advance Taiwan as a prosperous, secure, and well-governed society.

It falls to Taiwan and Beijing to build the essential foundations for peace and stability by pursuing dialog through all available means and refraining from unilateral steps that would alter the cross-strait situation. I believe the election provides a fresh opportunity for both sides to reach out and engage one another in peacefully resolving their differences.

The maintenance of peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait and the welfare of the people on Taiwan remain of profound importance to the United States. We will continue to maintain close unofficial ties with the people on Taiwan through the American Institute in Taiwan, in accordance with our longstanding "one China" policy, our three joint

communiques with the People's Republic of China, and the Taiwan Relations Act.

NOTE: The statement referred to President-elect Ma Ying-jeou of Taiwan.

Remarks at the White House Easter Egg Roll

March 24, 2008

Well, Laura and I welcome you to the White House for the Easter egg roll. How about the Jonas Brothers? Thanks for coming. We are sure glad you're here. We welcome you to the Easter egg roll.

Pretty soon after a few remarks, I have the honor of blowing the whistle to start the Easter egg roll. But we've got a lot of other people who are going to make sure today is a special day. We want to thank all our volunteers who have made this event possible. We thank our—[*applause*]—yes, there you are. [*Laughter*] We thank our readers. For you Dallas Cowboy fans, it is a great honor to welcome Troy Aikman here to be one of the readers.

We want to remind you that we're dedicating today's Easter egg roll to our—clean oceans. And there's a booth here where you can find out how you can contribute to make sure that we're environmentally sound stewards of our oceans. Ocean conservation is a important aspect of good public service, and it's certainly something that Laura has on her mind, as she comes up to address you. And so now it's my honor to welcome the First Lady of the United States, my dear wife, Laura Bush.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:23 a.m. from the Blue Room balcony at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to entertainers the Jonas Brothers; and Troy Aikman, former quarterback, Dallas Cowboys. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of the First Lady.

Remarks Following a Briefing at the Department of State

March 24, 2008

Madam Secretary, thank you very much for your hospitality. I just had a very interesting dialog on how to strengthen the State Department's capacity to bring freedom and peace around the world, how to make sure the State Department works collaboratively with the Defense Department as we deal with some of the more difficult areas and really take advantage of some of the great opportunities that we're faced with.

And so I really want to thank you, Madam Secretary, and I thank the folks who work in this building. Our citizens have really no idea of how competent, courageous, and successful the people here who work at the State Department are. I do. After my—now my eighth year as President, I've gotten to know the people in the State Department well. And I'm impressed, and so should our citizens.

Obviously, we want to expand the reach of the State Department by increasing the size and its efficiencies and to make sure that there's interoperability. And along these lines, of course, I'm fully aware that folks who have worked in the State Department lost their lives and—in Iraq, along with our military folks. And on this day of reflection, I offer our deepest sympathies to their families. I hope their families know that citizens pray for their comfort and their strength. Whether they were the first one who lost their life in Iraq or recently lost their lives in Iraq, that every life is precious in our sight.

And I guess my one thought I wanted to leave with those who still hurt is that one day people will look back at this moment in history and say, "Thank God there were courageous people willing to serve, because they laid the foundations for peace for generations to come." That I have vowed in the past, and I will vow so long as I'm President, to make sure that those lives were not lost in vain; that, in fact, there is a outcome that will merit the sacrifice that civilian and military alike have made; that our strategies going forward will be aimed at making sure that we achieve victory, and therefore, America becomes more secure, these young democracies survive, and peace more likely as we head into the 21st century.

So, Madam Secretary, I'm honored to be here. And I thank you very much for your hard work and your dedication.

Thank you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:03 p.m.

Memorandum on Determination To Waive Military Coup-Related Provision of the Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Appropriations Act, 2008, With Respect to Pakistan

March 24, 2008

Presidential Determination No. 2008–16

Memorandum for the Secretary of State

Subject: Determination to Waive Military Coup-Related Provision of the Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Appropriations Act, 2008, with Respect to Pakistan

Pursuant to the authority vested in me by the Constitution and laws of the United States, including section 1(b) of Public Law 107–57, as amended, I hereby determine and certify, with respect to Pakistan, that a waiver of section 608 of the Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Appropriations Act, 2008 (Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2008, Public Law 110–161; the "Act"):

(a) would facilitate the transition to democratic rule in Pakistan; and

(b) is important to U.S. efforts to respond to, deter, or prevent acts of international terrorism.

Accordingly, I hereby waive, with respect to Pakistan, section 608 of such Act.

You are authorized and directed to transmit this determination to the Congress and to publish it in the *Federal Register*.

George W. Bush

[Filed with the Office of the Federal Register, 8:44 a.m., April 1, 2008]

NOTE: This memorandum was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on March 25, and it will be published in the *Federal Register* on April 2.

Remarks Following a Meeting With the 2008 Bassmaster Classic Champion and 2007 Women's Bassmaster Tour Champion

March 25, 2008

The President. I've got the fishing champs from this year. And, Judy, thanks for coming.

Judy Wong. Oh, thank you.

The President. She is from Many, Louisiana. She won the Women's Bassmaster. And Alton Jones from Waco, Texas, won the Bassmaster Classic.

And I thought it was important to welcome these champs here to the White House so that—you know, to encourage people to fish. There's nothing better than fishing. I had a fantastic experience with Alton and our friend Charlie Pack. He was a famous local fisherman, and he said, "Do you want to go fishing with a fellow named Jones?" I said, "I've never heard of him. There's a lot people named Jones." [*Laughter*] It turns out, the man I was fishing with is the—wins the Bassmaster Classic.

This is a good, clean sport. It's a sport that requires good conservation in order to make sure our fisheries are good. And I love welcome the champs here. And so we're glad you're here.

Ms. Wong. Thank you.

The President. The people in Louisiana and Texas are proud of you.

Alton Jones. Well, it's an honor to be here. You know, fishing with you, I've got to say that President Bush is actually a very good fisherman and a great conservationist. And I'm really not sure who's working who here. I'm hoping to get an invite to fish on his lake in Crawford.

The President. That's right.

Mr. Jones. And he's looking for a free fishing guide. [*Laughter*]

Ms. Wong. I would be glad to take you any day on Toledo Bend.

The President. That's good.

Ms. Wong. Okay.

The President. Well, thank you, Judy.

Ms. Wong. And bring Laura as well.

The President. Well, yes, she's—I'm a good fisherman; sometimes I'm a good catcher-man. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Jones. There's a big difference.

The President. Yes, there is. Anyway, thank you all for coming.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:11 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to TV host and fisherman Charlie Pack.

Remarks Following Discussions With King Hamad bin Isa al-Khalifa of Bahrain

March 25, 2008

President Bush. Your Majesty, welcome back to Washington. It is such a pleasure to see you. I still have such fond memories of our trip to the Kingdom of Bahrain. His Majesty and I were reminiscing about the sword dance that you put on. It was spectacular. And you've got a—not only do you have a beautiful country, but you've got a prosperous country and a country that is a great friend of the United States. It's just such a honor to welcome you back here.

We had a good discussion—and we'll continue our discussion over lunch—on a variety of subjects. First, I do want to thank the Kingdom for sending an ambassador to Iraq. That's a very strong move that indicates a willingness to lead, as well as a willingness to send a signal that when a young democracy like Iraq is beginning to make progress, that it is important for the neighborhood to recognize that progress. And I really do want to thank Your Majesty for that.

We talked about security measures, the need to work together on joint security operations. I congratulated His Majesty on Bahrain's leadership of a joint task force that's—that is enabling nations to learn how to work together in order to keep the peace.

All in all, it's been what you would expect: a visit that's cordial and comfortable and amongst friends. And so, Your Majesty, welcome back, and thank you for coming.

King Hamad. Thank you. Thank you. I would like to thank the President for his kind invitation and his great support to Bahrain and to the stability and prosperity of our region.

And concerning sending back ambassador—an ambassador to Iraq, Iraq is an Arab state. Iraq is a founder of the Arab League, so it deserves all the support that it can get from other brother Arabs.

And the discussion today focused on bilateral relations concerning the free trade agreement, which we have signed, and concerning the energy as well, which yesterday was signed by the Secretary of State and our Foreign Minister. And we talked about security matters, which really are the most important issue for maintaining the development and the prosperity in our region.

And I came all the way to thank the President for what he has done for Bahrain and for our region and for the whole world—stability and security in fighting terrorism and extremism. And we hope we achieve our common goals by having a stable world.

So thank you, Mr. President. Thank you.

President Bush. Thank you, Majesty. Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:32 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. King Hamad referred to Minister of Foreign Affairs Khalid bin Ahmad al-Khalifa of Bahrain.

Remarks at a Celebration of Greek Independence Day

March 25, 2008

Thank you. Your Eminence, thank you very much. Welcome to the White House. I'm always open for a few suggestions. [*Laughter*] You're an easy man to listen to.

And I want to thank you all for coming. Here we are to celebrate the 187th anniversary of Greek independence. And it's an interesting place to celebrate it, isn't it? You know, the White House is a great symbol for independence and freedom and liberty. And it's a fitting place to celebrate the independence of Greece.

Mr. Minister, thank you for coming. We appreciate you coming all the way over for this event, and we're proud you're here. And thanks for bringing your son.

Mr. Ambassador, thanks for coming. Ambassador Mallias is with us today. Mr. Ambassador—there you are, right there, Ambassador. Thank you. It's good to see your wife. Appreciate you all being here. Ambassador

Kakouris of—to Cyprus is with us—from Cyprus to U.S. is with us.

Senator, thank you for coming. It's good to see you again. We miss you around these parts. [*Laughter*] I don't know if you've missed these parts, but we miss you around these parts. [*Laughter*]

Father Alex, good to see you again, sir. Thanks. I appreciate very much my Greek American—fellow Greek American citizens coming, as well as those who wear the uniform. We're proud to be in your presence.

Your Eminence, all free people stand on the shoulders of Greece. In the ancient world where political power usually came from the sword, the people of Athens came together around a radical and untried idea: that men were fit to govern themselves. It was this freedom that allowed them to create one of the most vibrant societies in history. And that society deeply influenced America's Founding Fathers when they sought to establish a free state centuries later.

Throughout their history, the people of Greece have been committed to liberty. They've also been committed to the important principle that liberty only survives when brave men and women are ready to come to its defense.

In the years leading up to Greece's war for independence, one of the rallying cries of the Greek people was that it was better to be free for an hour than to be a slave for 40 years. Those are the kind of folks who had their priorities straight.

The United States was by Greece's side from the very beginning of the struggle for independence. In those early days, some Americans volunteered to serve in the Greek army, and many more contributed the funds that were necessary to keep the fight alive. Former Presidents John Adams and Thomas Jefferson and James Madison all spoke in favor of the Greek people's right to self-determination. And after many long years, Greece emerged victorious and free. And that's what we're celebrating today.

And from that time forward, the United States and Greece have been strong allies in the cause of freedom. Today, we continue to work to spread the hope of liberty. Our countries are working together in Afghanistan, where Greek troops are an important part of the NATO forces that are restoring hope to that country. We're also partners in promoting stability in the Balkans and in the Middle East, where Greece provides peacekeepers in Bosnia and Kosovo and Lebanon. Please thank your Governments for this—strong signals that liberty is universal and that liberty will bring the peace we all hope.

Our Nation has been inspired by Greek ideals, and we have been enriched by Greek immigrants. Today, more than 1.3 million Americans trace their ancestry back to Greece, and we're better for having them here. America is a richer place, a better place.

Our two countries also share ties of faith. The Greek Orthodox Church has well over 1 million members in the United States. Under the leadership of this fine man, the Church is a source of strength and inspiration for a lot of our citizens. It's a proud part of our country's tradition of religious diversity and religious tolerance.

For nearly two centuries, the bonds between the United States and Greece have continued to strengthen. And during the earliest days of our friendship, one Greek leader told the American people, quote: "It is in your land that liberty has fixed her abode. In imitating you, we shall imitate our ancestors."

Today, I know that both our countries are making these ancestors proud through our commitment to freedom. And I'm confident that this tradition of friendship between the United States and Greece will continue for many years to come.

And so I ask God's blessings on the people of Greece and the people of America. And now welcome the Metropolitan Youth Choir of the Archdiocese.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:41 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Archbishop Demetrios, Primate of the Greek Orthodox Church in America, who spoke prior to the President; Minister of Development Christos Folias of Greece; Greece's Ambassador to the U.S. Alexandros P. Mallias and his wife, Francoise-Anne Mallias; Cyprus's Ambassador to the U.S. Andreas S. Kakouris; and Reverend Father Alex Karloutsos, assistant to the Archbishop for public affairs.

Remarks Following a Visit to ColorCraft of Virginia in Sterling, Virginia

March 26, 2008

The President. Jim, thank you very much for your hospitality.

James H. Mayes. Thank you, sir.

The President. Thank you all very much for greeting me here.

ColorCraft is a small, thriving business that will benefit from the stimulus package that the Congress passed earlier this year. And it will benefit from it because if they make—if Jim decides to purchase software or machinery, there is a tax incentive to encourage him to do so. He's made the decision to do so, and his company will be encouraged to do so through the Tax Code.

And that's important because when he buys a machine or when he buys software, somebody has to manufacture that. And therefore, there is a direct link between the stimulus package and jobs. As well—and we talked about this earlier—a lot of the folks who work here at ColorCraft are going to get a check in the second week of May as part of the economic, progrowth stimulus package. And recently, there's been a mailer out to our citizens from the IRS. And this mailer basically describes the benefits from the stimulus package that people will receive.

One of the things that's very important for our citizenry to understand—that is, if you do not file an income tax return, you need to go to your local IRS office and get a form that will show the Government where you live and who you are, so you can get your check. If you file an income tax form, all you got to do is in your '07 income tax, you know, mail it in.

But there's a lot of people eligible for this stimulus package—for the money coming out of the Government to our individual citizens—who don't file income tax forms, and yet they're eligible. And so recently, the IRS has been indicating that this weekend, this Saturday, there's going to be a—there's an opportunity for citizens to go and make it clear who you are, where you live, so you can get your check as well.

The purpose of this is to respond decisively to the economic downturn that we're going through. The Congress, along with the White House, worked very closely to pass a very substantial progrowth package. And I fully recognize that people are concerned about our economy, but they must understand that this package has yet to fully kick in yet. We've taken action, but it's going to take a while for the economy to feel the effects of this good law that I signed. It's going to take a while for these folks standing behind me to get their money.

Now, Jim has already made a decision because the aspects of the stimulus package for small businesses are clear. It is the law. And therefore, when he buys the equipment and software that he's planning on buying, he can rest assured that their tax incentive will be available for him in this year.

Now, small businesses are the backbone of the U.S. economy. Small-business owners and—are dreamers and doers. We want to watch them and help them expand because if they expand, more and more people find work. [*Inaudible*]—a rough patch right now in our economy, but I'm confident in the long term we'll come out stronger than ever before. One of the most decisive actions a government can take is to give people their money back so they can spend it, and that's exactly what we've done. In the second week of May, a lot of folks are going to be getting a sizable check. And I'm looking forward to that day, and I know they are as well.

Mr. Mayes. Yes, sir.

The President. Thank you for coming.

Mr. Mayes. Thank you.

The President. Yes.

Mr. Mayes. Thank you.

The President. Appreciate you having me. Thank you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:25 p.m. In his remarks, he referred to James H. Mayes, president, ColorCraft of Virginia.

Interview With Foreign Print Journalists

March 26, 2008

The President. All right, sit down. How is everybody doing back there? That's what we call the peanut gallery.

I'm looking forward to going to Ukraine and Romania again, Croatia. This will be a—it's a very important trip; important trip to discuss our bilateral relations, and it's an important trip because of NATO. I believe we'll have a successful summit. The definition of success is to make sure NATO stays relevant, and that we work in a collaborative fashion to deal with the threats of the 21st century and the opportunities of the 21st century.

And there's no better opportunity to deal with the threats of terror than in Afghanistan. So part of the mission—part of our collective mission in Romania for the NATO meeting is to encourage people to take our obligations seriously. And the United States, to that end, will make it clear that we do take our obligations seriously. We've committed 3,500 marines—3,200 marines—3,700 marines?

National Security Adviser Stephen J. Hadley. 3,200.

The President. ——3,200 marines, plus their enablers—[*laughter*]—inside joke—anyway, to—as a part of a stronger commitment, to set an example and encourage others to participate.

Secondly, enlargement of NATO will be on the agenda. And I'm a strong supporter of encouraging the right decision to be made at Bucharest on Croatia and Albania and Macedonia.

Thirdly, we'll be discussing the aspirations of Ukraine and Georgia. I have been public in my statements that I believe that NATO benefits and Ukraine and Georgia benefit, if and when there is membership. I do know that one of the signals we're going to have to send, and must send, is there is a clear path forward for Ukraine and Georgia. The decision will be made, of course, at Bucharest. But I've analyzed the situation, and I believe it's in the interests that there is that clear path forward. It's in the interest of NATO, collectively, and it's in the interest of each individual country.

And finally, we'll be talking about missile defense and cyberterrorism and counterterrorism activities, how we can work together to stay—to stay effective in this world in which we live.

And so, anyway, I'm looking forward to the trip. And so we'll do a couple rounds of questions.

Alona. Is that an accurate way of saying your name?

Ukraine/North Atlantic Treaty Organization

Q. Yes, Alona.

The President. Alona.

Q. Mr. President, will Ukraine be invited to participate in the Membership Action Plan at NATO summit? And how much, if it gets it, this invitation, how much time will be needed for Ukraine to enter NATO?

The President. Yes——

Q. Nine years as it is for Macedonia, or 5 years as it was for the Baltic States?

The President. Iona, first of all, it's—the decision will be made by NATO members at Bucharest. So when I come to your country, I'll be saying that I believe that Ukraine benefits from not only the process to join NATO but eventually, hopefully, joining NATO. But that decision won't be made until we're all there in Romania.

Secondly, it just depends on the country as to how long events will—the reforms take in order to get offered membership into NATO. So the first step, however, is for there to be a clear path forward, so that people understand. And I believe it's in our collective interest that we offer a clear path forward. But it's very important for the people in your country to understand that the decision won't be made until after I leave Ukraine and make it to Romania.

Are they still talking about the "rainbow speech"? Were you there for that?

Q. Yes.

The President. It was an amazing moment, wasn't it?

Q. Yes. It was amazing moment, yes.

The President. I was giving a speech in the town square where Ceausescu had given his final speech. And it was raining, and just as I got up to speak, a full rainbow appeared.

Q. Yes—and about bridge to a new Russia.

The President. Yes.

Q. You remember that?

The President. I remember the rainbow most of all. It was a startling moment.

Anyway, fire away, Ioana.

Moldova

Q. "Johanna."

The President. "Johanna."

Q. Mr. President, Moldova is a country between NATO member Romania and possible future NATO member Ukraine. But Moldova still has a lot of problems—poverty, corruption, and Russian troops on its territory without its consent. Washington is currently involved in resolving a breakaway region, Trans-Dniestria. But my question is, what do you think the United States can do to help Moldova to become a democratic, independent state and not a failed state under Russian influence, a point of instability at the NATO border?

The President. Right. First is to continue to make our intentions clear, and that is that we want to work to make sure Moldova, which is now an independent nation, has got sovereign borders and is treated like an independent nation. Secondly, we constantly advocate for good, clean, open government. Thirdly, we're a member of a 5-plus-2, which is the process by which, hopefully, the Trans-Dniestria issue would be solved.

So our strategy is to work with the relevant parties and to promote, as you said, a independent, open, transparent, good-government Moldova.

Yes, sir.

Croatia

Q. Mr. President——

The President. Yes.

Q. ——how do you see Croatia future in the NATO architecture in southeastern Europe, regarding its capability to host joint military bases, and primarily NATO forces, and the further development of its armed forces and its readiness to take part in NATO missions and contribute to the common security of the alliance?

The President. Yes, thank you.

Q. And how do you see the role of Croatia in promoting peace and stability in southeastern Europe, especially regarding the present situation relating to the establishment of independent Kosovo?

The President. Kosovo—sure. Whew, it's a long question. First of all, just get this off the table: There's no intention to have NATO bases, permanent bases. Secondly, Croatia has served as a very good example, following a very dramatic moment, and that is the breakup of Yugoslavia. And your Government has made difficult decisions and made those decisions, first and foremost, on behalf of the people. But it turns out, many of the reform decisions, therefore, make it likely that Croatia will be invited into NATO.

Examples are very important. The question is, would people have predicted 15 years ago that we'd be having this kind of discussion about Croatia? And who knows; I don't think many people would have, certainly, 25 years ago. And yet Croatia is a independent, sovereign nation, hopefully soon to be invited to join NATO, which is a clear example of what is possible if people make the right decisions on behalf of their people.

Part of being a part of NATO means commitment to a modern military. And Croatian troops, which have performed bravely in recent active theaters during this war against extremism, will benefit from being in NATO and benefit from serving side by side with other members of NATO. NATO membership would be a very positive thing for the people of Croatia.

And I'm really looking forward to going to your country. I hope I'm coming with good news, but the decision will be made in this case before I go to Croatia. And they say it's one of the most beautiful coastlines in the entire world.

Q. Yes. Hope you're going to see that.

The President. Am I going to get to see the coastline? I hope I do.

Q. I hope; I hope.

The President. You're not my scheduler, okay.

Thomas.

Progress in Iraq

Q. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President. I do think Great Britain ought to be in NATO, yes. [*Laughter*]

Q. I think we were last time I checked. [*Laughter*]

The President. Yes, you are—and a very good member.

Q. Thank you very much. In a different field of operations, in Iraq, there's been a recent upsurge again in violence, which appears to have emanated in the area of Basra,

which Britain used to control. Do you believe recent events there serve as a warning to those in your country and beyond who have counseled you to withdraw rapidly?

The President. My first reaction to watching the Iraqi Government respond forcefully—and to make it abundantly clear that—I think the exact—I can't remember the exact words of the Prime Minister, but "criminal elements," I know, were a part of his declaration—would be dealt with. I thought that was a very positive moment in the development of a sovereign nation that is willing to take on elements that are—you know, that believe they're beyond the law.

And secondly, we are helping, but it's important to know that the Iraqis are in the lead. This is a positive moment in the development of a nation that can govern itself and defend itself and sustain itself. We will provide oversight and, on occasion, support when asked. This is an Iraqi operation.

And one of the things I'll be saying in the runup to the Petraeus-Crocker testimony is that we have made substantial gains, but it's still a fragile situation. Therefore, the decision about our troop levels will be based upon not politics or not who can scream the loudest, but based upon whether or not we can maintain the successes we've had. And I understand there's people here who want us to leave regardless of the situation, but that's not going to happen so long as I'm the Commander in Chief.

British Troop Withdrawal From Iraq

Q. Did we get out too early?

The President. No, you didn't. The British commitment was—first of all, you were there from day one, and you were there during the very heavy fighting. And the British commitment was to move to the airbase based upon success. And I'm very grateful for the British friendship and alliance and the contributions.

Alona. What do you think, Alona? So where do you live? Kiev?

Ukraine/Kosovo Independence

Q. Kiev, yes.

The President. Yes? So you flew all the way over here just for this interview?

Q. Yes.

The President. I'm very grateful. Oh, so guess what happened to me. I went down to Crawford—that's in Texas—and I went to an event for—to honor some of our soldiers' families. And a local doctor—I think it was a doctor—came and said, "Would you mind meeting a group of people from Ukraine?" I said, "Sure." And there we were in Waco, Texas, with, I think, maybe 20 or 30 health care specialists from Ukraine that were in my home State. And it was sure good to meet them.

Q. And how important is Ukraine's recognition of Kosovo in the U.S. point of view? Do you expect this step from the Ukrainian authorities in the nearest future?

The President. That's going to be up to the Ukranian authorities to make the decisions that they deem are necessary. We hope they will recognize Kosovo's independence, just like we have. It's supervised independence, of course, but we strongly supported that idea from the beginning and supported the U.N. plan that would help lead to a supervised independence and, at the same time, guarantee the minority rights within Kosovo. And we would hope Ukraine would do the same thing.

Ioana.

U.S. Visa Policy

Q. Romania is a U.S. ally in Iraq and Afghanistan, but the Romanians are not met as allies on the United States territory.

The President. Aha. [*Laughter*] You're heading towards the visa issue, aren't you?

Q. Yes. What Romania should do to enter in waiver visa program? And what do you recommend us, bilateral negotiations with the United States or negotiations through European Union?

The President. Yes, thank you. [*Laughter*] Very tricky question. [*Laughter*] You ready? You better turn that thing up, because I'm going to give you a whopper of an answer. [*Laughter*]

Q. Give me the news, I hope. [*Laughter*]

The President. Yes. Now, first of all, it is hard for me to justify to the citizens of Romania that they can serve alongside our troops in major theaters in the war against extremists and not be able to have—be treated like other members of the EU, as far as

visa waiver, and I know that. And it's difficult for citizens to understand that.

But we're still dealing with a—you know, it is—we're adjusting law based upon previous practice. And the law needed to change, reflecting the modern era, and it did change. Congress did change the capacity for—to have a new look at visa waiver. But there are some requirements. And my advice is for the Romanian Government to negotiate bilaterally with the United States in order to solve this problem.

There are other countries in your neighborhood that are making good progress toward being granted visa waiver. And I would strongly urge your leaders to take a look at what they have done and then interface with our officials. And I'll, of course, be talking of this with the President and the Prime Minister when I'm there.

Q. Thank you very much.

The President. Yes.

Yes, sir.

Croatia-U.S. Relations

Q. Mr. President, Croatian NATO membership bid and steadfast support of your administration for that ambition was a centerpiece of the bilateral relations between Croatia and USA last 7 or 8 years. And will it now, if Croatia became a NATO member—and relations will be elevated to the higher level of allies—can we expect to see more importance will be attached to the economic cooperation, U.S. investment in Croatia in the future?

The President. Yes, our relationships tend not to be—they tend to be multidimensional and not just based upon one aspect or another. And I believe strongly in free trade and the movement of investment. And Croatia occupies a crucial part—a crucial space in an important part of the world. And, of course, we want to enhance trade.

A lot of Americans need to learn more about Croatia, although there are about a million Croatian Americans here. And there's going to be all kinds of opportunities. Of course, those opportunities will be advantaged if the Government makes rational decisions on, for example, good investment laws. In other words, there's competition for investment dollars, in this case, or investment euros, or investment whatevers. And therefore, the laws need to be transparent, the rule of law consistent, the Government obviously clean, so that the main risk for an invested currency is not government risk, it is the risk of the enterprise itself.

And therefore, to answer your question, yes, of course we want to have all kinds of different aspects of our relationship flourish with Croatia. But in terms of investing, it's going to be up to the Government to make decisions to make sure the investment climate is good.

Q. Thank you.

The President. Yes.

United Kingdom-U.S. Relations/France-U.S. Relations

Q. Mr. President?

The President. Yes, Thomas.

Q. ——very formal. [*Laughter*]

The President. Okay, Tom.

Q. You mentioned in your preamble that it is important for NATO to honor its obligations to Afghanistan. There has been some criticism of NATO's performance in Afghanistan from Washington. In recent days, Nicolas Sarkozy, your new friend—[*laughter*]—has promised another 1,000 troops for Afghanistan.

The President. Today.

Q. Yes. Is there any sense that on that battlefield and indeed, beyond, France is now emerging as your greatest ally?

The President. I have always said that the relationship with the United Kingdom is a special relationship. And that relationship was never as special as it was during times of conflict, whether it be the relationship in the past between, like, Roosevelt and Churchill, or whether it be the current relationship, more modern relationship between Tony Blair and myself. And so, your question, "our greatest ally"—it's going to be hard for any nation to trump Great Britain as our—United Kingdom as our greatest ally.

Having said that, no question, the relationship is changing for the better, and President Sarkozy gets a lot of credit for that. I like him personally. He's an interesting man. He is a highly energetic, decisive person, who

is not interested in creating divisions between—in the transatlantic alliance, but is interested in making sure that not only are bilateral relations are good but the transatlantic alliance meets the threats.

And his statement about commitment to—French troops to Afghanistan is a very important preamble to the NATO conference. It will pretty much ensure that this conference is a successful conference, because nations will watch very carefully. When you combine our commitment, the Canadian commitment, the British commitment, and the French commitment of troops that will be in harm's way, it is a strong statement that NATO understands the threats, understands the challenges, and is willing to rise to them.

Okay, everybody, it's been a joyous experience. And for you? It's a beauty. [*Laughter*] Okay.

Russia-U.S. Relations

Q. And about Russia?

The President. I thought we said two question apiece.

Q. In your opinion, what are the prospects for democracy in Russia, in Medvedev——

The President. I haven't met President Medvedev yet. I may have met him once, but I haven't had a talk to him, President-to-President, obviously. He's not even the President yet. I'm looking forward to meeting him. I am—have you put out the word yet?

Mr. Hadley. No.

The President. Are you going to today?

Mr. Hadley. I am.

The President. Yes, okay. So I'm going to go to Russia. I've been invited to Russia. President Putin has invited me to Russia. You're the first to hear it, so you can hustle out of here and put it on the wires. This is no longer off the record. Steve is going to come and brief it at 3:30 p.m.—3:15 p.m. President Putin has invited me to go to Sochi. And it's to discuss the strategic agreement, the crucial part of which is missile defense.

Condi Rice and Bob Gates had a good visit with the President and counterparts on this very issue—and hopefully, that we can advance our dialog, so at some point in time, we can reach an agreement on these important matters, proliferation matters. I know we've got agreement on Iran, and that is that Iran should not have the capacity to enrich, and that I supported the Russian efforts to convince the Iranians that they didn't need to learn how to enrich, because he—Putin—was willing to provide enriched uranium for a civilian nuclear powerplant. Therefore, no need to enrich, which I thought was a smart move and supported.

So there's an area where we'll continue to have discussions. And I called President-elect Medvedev and reminded him—and congratulated him for getting elected and reminded him that—of some of the comments he made about rule law and transparency—and can't remember exactly everything he said, but it sounded very progressive. And I said, we're listening very carefully to your words, and I appreciated your speech and looking forward to working with you to help accomplish those objectives.

But I have yet to work with him, obviously, President-to-President. He hasn't been sworn in. So check back in with me after I've had a couple of meetings with him.

President's Visit to Russia/Missile Defense System

Q. When are you going to Russia?

The President. Day after Croatia. We haven't worked the details yet.

Mr. Hadley. We have not worked the details yet.

The President. My crack adviser here is giving me—[*laughter*].

Mr. Hadley. Clearly, we intend to accept. We're going to have to work the details out.

The President. Yes, we intend to accept. In other words, there's an invitation out there, and this is really—the way to look at this is a followup to Condi and Bob Gates's meeting, which is good. Romania and other nations would hope that the United States would have good relations with Russia. And it's important that we have good relations with Russia; we can find common interests.

On the other hand, there are areas where we have been able to be in a position where I've expressed my disagreements with President Putin on different matters related to their democracy. And my strategy all along is to keep relations such that he will actually listen to what I have to say. So when you hear people say, "George Bush has got good

relations with Vladimir Putin," there's a reason why. Because if you're—in order to have somebody listen to you, they got to at least have an open mind. And it's hard to have an open mind if the only thing you're doing is try to blast away on a regular basis about your disagreements publicly. I've chosen not to do that.

Therefore, I'm optimistic we can reach accord on very important matters. I think a lot of people in Europe would have a deep sigh of relief if we're able to reach an accord on missile defense. And hopefully we can. One of the things that, hopefully, is clear to the Russian side is that this system is not aimed at Russia. After all, it doesn't take many missiles to overwhelm the kind of system we're talking about. And Russia has got plenty of missiles if they want to overwhelm. This is really aimed at a potential missile launch, for example, out of the Middle East. And therefore, I think it makes sense for us to be able to be in a position, if people so choose to share information and fully understand the operational activities of a system, so as to build confidence.

So we'll see how it goes. I'm looking forward to it.

Russian Leadership

Q. Do you think President Putin continues to pull the strings?

The President. You know, I just don't know. It's an interesting question. That's speculative.

Q. It's what we do for a living. [*Laughter*]

The President. Not me. [*Laughter*]

Thank you all. Enjoyed it.

NOTE: The interview was taped at 1:53 p.m. in the Roosevelt Room at the White House and was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on March 27. In his remarks, the President referred to Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki of Iraq; Gen. David H. Petraeus, USA, commanding general, Multi-National Force—Iraq; President Traian Basescu and Prime Minister Calin Popescu-Tariceanu of Romania; former Prime Minister Tony Blair of the United Kingdom; and President Nicolas Sarkozy of France. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this interview.

Memorandum on Certification Concerning U.S. Participation in the United Nations-African Union Mission in Darfur Under Section 2005 of the American Servicemembers' Protection Act

March 26, 2008

Memorandum for the Secretary of State

Subject: Certification Concerning U.S. Participation in the United Nations-African Union Mission in Darfur Under Section 2005 of the American Servicemembers' Protection Act

Consistent with section 2005 of the American Servicemembers' Protection Act (Public Law 107–206; 22 U.S.C. 7421 *et seq.*), concerning the participation of members of the Armed Forces of the United States in certain United Nations peacekeeping and peace enforcement operations, I hereby certify that members of the U.S. Armed Forces participating in the United Nations-African Union Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) are without risk of criminal prosecution or other assertion of jurisdiction by the International Criminal Court (ICC) because the United Nations Security Council has permanently exempted members of the U.S. Armed Forces participating in UNAMID from criminal prosecution or other assertion of jurisdiction by the ICC for actions undertaken by them in connection with UNAMID by deciding, in Resolution 1593 (2005), that "personnel from a contributing state outside Sudan which is not a party to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court shall be subject to the exclusive jurisdiction of that contributing State for all alleged acts or omissions arising out of or related to operations in Sudan established or authorized by the Council or the African Union, unless such exclusive jurisdiction has been expressly waived by that contributing State."

You are authorized and directed to submit this certification to the Congress and arrange for its publication in the *Federal Register*.

George W. Bush

NOTE: This memorandum was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on March 27.

Remarks at the National Museum of the United States Air Force in Dayton, Ohio

March 27, 2008

Thank you all very much. Thank you all. General Metcalf, thanks. Thanks for welcoming me back here. I am really pleased to be back to Wright-Patt, and it's great to be on the inside of the National Museum of the United States Air Force, which is a fabulous place. I hope our fellow citizens come and see it. It is a great tribute to the airmen who've flown the missions and secured the skies and defended America's freedom.

I want to thank the folks who maintain this shrine. I thank you for giving me a place to park Air Force One. [*Laughter*] And I appreciate the hospitality of the people who serve our country here at Wright-Patt. And I want to thank you for coming to give me a chance to share with you an update on the historic work our Nation is undertaking in Iraq.

Over the past year, we have seen significant security gains result from the surge. Less visible are the political and economic changes taking place, from major pieces of legislation being passed to simple signs of normalcy. This progress isn't glamorous, but it is important. And that's what I'm here to talk about today.

But before I do so, I want to thank not only General Metcalf, but I want to thank Congressman Jim Jordan for serving our country. I appreciate the State auditor, Mary Taylor, for joining us today. Thank you for coming. I am grateful that the mayor, Mayor McLin, took time to come by and say hello. Madam Mayor, thank you very much for your—[*applause*]. Appreciate the other State and local officials.

I do want to thank General Bruce Carlson, commander of the Air Force Materiel Command, Colonel Colleen Ryan, and all those who wear the uniform. I'm proud to be with you, and I'm proud to be your Commander in Chief.

I thank very much the fact that Susan Kettering came, vice president of the Kettering Family Foundation. And the reason why she's important and the foundation is important is, they've been strong supporters of this museum.

And finally, I want to recognize Amanda Wright Lane, great grandniece of Orville and Wilbur Wright. Thanks for coming. Nothing wrong with having famous relatives. [*Laughter*]

This museum pays tribute to a—to great aircraft and great airmen and women, from the first fliers of the Great War to the aces of World War II to the daring pilots of Korea and Vietnam. And over the past 6 years, a new generation of American airmen and women have joined that storied history. After all, the Air Force was critical in liberating the people of Afghanistan and the people of Iraq and taking the fight to the enemy overseas so we do not have to face them here at home. On a fateful day in this war, airmen delivered justice to the Al Qaida terrorist Zarqawi in the form of two precision-guided, 500-pound bombs.

The military achievements in Iraq have been accompanied by a political transformation. It can feel like distant history, but it was only 5 years ago that Iraq was one of the most brutal dictatorships on Earth, a totalitarian nightmare where any election was a sham and dissenters often found themselves buried in mass graves. In a matter of 15 months, the Iraqi people reclaimed their sovereignty. They went on to choose an interim Government and to ratify the most democratic Constitution in the Arab world. And in December 2005, 12 million Iraqis elected a Government under that Constitution, a display of courage that defied the terrorists, disproved the critics, and should always inspire the world.

Tragically, the progress threatened to unravel in 2006. The new Government Iraqis elected took months to form. In the meantime, a terrorist attack on a Shi'a shrine in Samarra drove sectarian tensions past the breaking point. Sunni extremists, including Al Qaida terrorists, and Shi'a extremists, some backed by Iran, slaughtered innocent Iraqis in brutal attacks and reprisal killings. And across the country, political and economic activity was set back.

We took a hard look at the situation and responded with the surge. This dramatic shift in policy had two primary goals. The first was

to improve security conditions. So I ordered 30,000 additional soldiers and marines into Iraq and gave them a new mission: to focus on protecting the Iraqi people and to hold the gains that had been made.

The other goal of the surge was to open up space for political and economic progress after security returned. So we deployed additional civilian experts and more than doubled the number of Provincial Reconstruction Teams, with a mission to ensure that security gains were followed up by improvements in daily life.

General Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker will provide more details about the progress of the surge when they testify before Congress early next month. But this much is clear: The surge is doing what it was designed to do. It's helping Iraqis reclaim security and restart political and economic life. It is bringing America closer to a key strategic victory in the war against these extremists and radicals.

On the security side, the surge has brought important gains, which I discussed in detail last week in a speech at the Pentagon. In Baghdad, we've worked with Iraqi security forces to greatly diminish the sectarian violence and civilian deaths. We've broken the grip of Al Qaida on the capital. We've weakened the influence of Iranian-backed militias. We've dramatically improved security conditions in many devastated neighborhoods in what some have deemed a reliberation.

In Anbar Province, which 18 months ago was declared lost to Al Qaida, we joined with the brave local sheiks who launched the first large-scale Arab uprising against Al Qaida. Together we've systematically dismantled Al Qaida in that Province. In just over a year, Ramadi, the capital of Anbar, has seen its average number of attacks plummet from more than 18 per day to less than 1 per week. It's becoming clear that Anbar has not been lost to Al Qaida—that Al Qaida has been—has lost Anbar. And that's important because this is the place where Al Qaida leadership has said they will find safe haven from which to launch further attacks against the United States of America.

In other parts of Iraq, from Baghdad belts to Diyala Province to parts of the south, we've worked with coalition and Iraqi forces to drive the terrorists out of strongholds and put them on the run. Now Al Qaida's concentrated its efforts in the area of Mosul, which is in northern Iraq. And there's going to be tough fighting in Mosul and in areas around Mosul in the weeks and months. But we are determined, along with the Iraqis, to make sure Al Qaida meets the same fate there that it has met elsewhere in Iraq.

A key factor in these security gains has been new cooperation from the Iraqi people. Ordinary Iraqis have come forward with intelligence tips. Citizens who were once hostile to the coalition have switched sides and are now joining with us. Over the past year, more than 100,000 Iraqis have joined their nation's security forces. In other words, there was an Iraqi surge to match our own. These Iraqis are fighting and sacrificing for their country. They want to live in a free society. Iraqi mothers want their children to grow up in peace, just like American mothers do.

The Iraqi forces are growing in capability. Recently, they planned and executed a highly effective operation to secure nearly 9 million pilgrims celebrating the religious holiday of Arbaeen. And as we speak, Iraqi security forces are waging a tough battle against militia fighters and criminals in Basra, many of whom have received arms and training and funding from Iran.

Prime Minister Maliki's bold decision—and it was a bold decision—to go after the illegal groups in Basra shows his leadership and his commitment to enforce the law in an evenhanded manner. It also shows the progress the Iraqi security forces have made during the surge. Iraqi forces planned this operation, and they deployed substantial extra forces for it. They're leading the operation. Prime Minister Maliki has traveled to Basra to oversee it firsthand.

This offensive builds on the security gains of the surge and demonstrates to the Iraqi people that their Government is committed to protecting them. There's a strong commitment by the central Government of Iraq to say that no one is above the law. This operation is going to take some time to complete, and the enemy will try to fill the TV screens with violence. But the ultimate result will be this: Terrorists and extremists in Iraq will

know they have no place in a free and democratic society.

The surge is yielding major changes in Iraqi political life, and that is important. Before the surge, politics at every level was shutting down. I mean, for leaders, security crisis prevented the routine conduct of government. You know, for ordinary citizens, politics were a distant concern. I mean, after all, they were simply trying to keep their families alive. And for all Iraqis, the violence hardened sectarian attitudes and made tough political compromises impossible.

A year later, 1 year later, after we sent additional troops into Iraq, the situation has changed markedly. With security improving, local citizens have restarted the political process in their neighborhoods and cities and Provinces. Let me give you an example. In Ramadi, tribal sheiks who led the uprising against Al Qaida are now leading a revival of politics. With the support of our PRTs, Ramadi now has a fully staffed mayor's office, and neighborhood councils have formed. Judges are presiding over courts and restoring the rule of law.

As the news of the success in Anbar has spread, similar grassroots movements have sprung up all around the country. Today, some 90,000 Iraqis belong to local citizens group bearing the proud name Sons of Iraq. Many of these groups are Sunnis; some are Shi'a; some are mixed. But whatever their makeup, these groups of citizens are determined to protect their communities; they are determined to fight extremism; and they increasingly participate in civic life. In other words, people have stepped up and said: "We're sick and tired of our families having to live in violence. We can't stand the thought of people who murder the innocent to achieve political objectives, and we intend to do something about it." And they have.

And the central Government is beginning to respond to these Sons of Iraq. And it's not easy. I mean, after all, some of them were former regime members or former insurgents. Yet the Iraqi Government has pledged to incorporate about 20 to 30 percent of the Sons of Iraq into the Iraqi Army and police forces. For the rest, the national Government has now committed $196 million to fund jobs programs so that brave Iraqis who stand up to the extremists and the murders and the criminals can learn the skills they need to help build a free and prosperous nation.

The Sons of Iraq movement is only one element of the bottom-up political process. You know, sometimes it requires grassroots politics to get the folks in central Government to respond. Sometimes that happens in our own country. [*Laughter*] Well, it's happening in Iraq.

You know, another sign of bottom-up political progress is the rebirth of Iraqi civil society. We take civil society for granted in America. But civil society was destroyed during the time of the brutal dictator, Saddam Hussein. And yet it's now coming back to life. Civic organizations are springing up. Institutions that sustain a free nation are strengthening. Our PRT in Karbala, for example, helped local residents establish a women's center that will provide education and promote equality. In Anbar, they just had a 5k race on what used to be the most dangerous streets in Iraq.

I talked to General Odierno; he's the number-two man in Iraq. He just came back after courageously serving our country, and he came to the Oval Office. And here's what he told me. He said he flew over Baghdad 15 months ago, and he couldn't see a single soccer game. On his final flight last month, he counted more than 180. Now, that may sound normal to us, and we take it for granted, but it is a sign that the surge is working and civil society is beginning to grow. It is a sign normalcy is returning back to Iraq.

And over time, these developments at the local level have increased pressure for action at the national level. Leaders in Baghdad are responding. By any reasonable measure, the legislative achievements in Baghdad over the past 4 months have been remarkable.

In December, the Government enacted a pension law that will allow tens of thousands of Sunnis to collect the retirement benefits they were promised. Part of reconciliation is to reach out to groups who may not have trust in central Government, and you build trust by honoring commitments.

In January, leaders enacted a de-Ba'athification law that allows mid-level Ba'ath Party members to reenter political and civic life. There was a period of time

that if you were associated with the Ba'ath Party, you couldn't teach in a school, and yet there was a need for teachers. And this law will make it easier for civil society to grow and helps reconcile the past.

In February, leaders enacted a budget that increases spending on security and capital reconstruction projects and Provincial governments. And on the same day, leaders enacted an amnesty law to resolve the status of many Iraqis held in Iraqi custody. Last week, leaders reached agreement on a Provincial powers law that helps define Iraqi federalism and sets the stage for Provincial elections later this year. And that's an important piece of legislation because it will give Iraqis who boycotted the last Provincial election, such as Sunnis in Anbar or Ninawa Provinces, a chance to go to the polls and have a voice in their future.

These pieces of legislation deal with complex issues that are vital for the reconciliation of the country and fundamental for a democratic society. I mean, we've been arguing about the role of the Federal Government relative to the States for a long time here in America. We've been trying to get the balance right. There's a constant struggle between the proper role of State and local government versus the role of the Federal Government. Well, that's what the Iraqis are now struggling through.

You know, they got their budget passed, and sometimes it takes our Congress awhile to get its budget passed. [*Laughter*] Nevertheless, some Members of Congress decided the best way to encourage progress in Baghdad was to criticize and threaten Iraq's leaders while they're trying to work out their differences. But hectoring was not what the Iraqi leaders needed. What they needed was security, and that is what the surge has provided. When the security situation improved and the Iraqi leaders were reassured that America wouldn't leave them, that America would support them, they then made tough compromises necessary to get key pieces of legislation passed.

And it is a lesson worth remembering as Iraq's national Government goes about the substantial work that remains, including implementing the laws it's passed, reviewing its Constitution, drafting a electoral law, and passing laws to reform its oil sector and codify revenue sharing. It's also worth remembering the enormity of what the Iraqis are trying to do. They're striving to build a modern democracy on the rubble of three decades of tyranny in a region of the world that has been hostile to freedom. And they're doing it while under assault from one of history's most brutal terrorist networks.

When it takes time for Iraqis to reach agreement, it is not foot dragging, as one Senator described it during Congress's 2-week Easter recess. It is a revolutionary undertaking that requires great courage. You know, one Iraqi leader recently acknowledged that he's faced four assassination attempts a year since liberation. Yet he proudly serves his nation with strong determination because he wants to live in a free society. And he understands what I understand: Free societies yield the peace we want. And it's in our interests to stand strongly with the leaders like that in Iraq and give them all the support necessary to succeed.

The improvements in security resulting from the surge are also enabling Iraqis to make progress on their economy. Iraq has great economic potential. They've got a young, energetic population; it's got a lot of natural resources. Yet in many ways, the legacy of the tyrant continues to haunt the Iraqi economy. The Government is forced to rely on the centralized food and fuel rationing system that Saddam used to control his population and to punish his enemies. The infrastructure for Iraq's oil sector is still owned and managed by the central Government and suffers from decades of underinvestment. Iraq's economic problems grew worse during the sectarian violence that preceded the surge. Oil revenues declined; businesses closed their doors; and infrastructure was destroyed.

A year later, almost every key economic indicator has turned around. Since the surge began, business registrations have increased by more than 9 percent. Total inflation has fallen by more than 60 percentage points. Investment in the energy and telecom industries has increased. The agricultural sector is improving. Oil production is up, particularly north of Baghdad. The oil fields there

have more than doubled production, and exports through Turkey have expanded significantly.

The national Government has announced a plan to reform the food rationing system. Economic growth is projected to be a robust 7 percent this year. And the confidence of Iraqis is rising. They're beginning to see a more hopeful future. More than 75 percent of Iraqi businesses, according to a recent survey, expect the economy continue to growing over the next 2 years.

As the economic situation stabilizes, Iraq's Government has stepped forward to meet more of its own expenses. This is a mark of pride for Iraqis, and it is a point of insistence for us. Early in the war, America funded most of the large-scale reconstruction projects in Iraq, and we've changed our focus. Now we're focused on encouraging entrepreneurship. The Iraqi Government is stepping up on reconstruction projects. They have outspent us in the recent budget 11 to 1, and soon we expect the Iraqis will cover 100 percent of those expenses.

The same is true when it comes to security spending. Initially, the United States paid for most of the costs of training and equipping the Iraqi security forces. Now Iraq's budget covers three-quarters of the cost of its security forces, which is a total of more than $9 billion in 2008. And soon Iraq should, and we expect them to, shoulder the full burden of their security forces.

They have other work to do in their economy. The reforms needed to transition from a command-and-control economy to a modern market-based system are complex, and it's going to take some time. Centralized electricity generation is now above prewar levels, but it is not sufficient to meet the needs of Iraq because demand is growing. Other key infrastructure needs to be upgraded, especially energy pipelines and storage facilities. Unemployment is still too high. Corruption remains a challenge. But the good news is, the Iraqis recognize these shortcomings. They understand what they have to do. And we're going to help them succeed. We're sending experts to help them succeed in their goals.

Listen to the words of Iraq's Deputy Prime Minister: "Last year was the year of security," he said. "This year is the year of reconstruction; it is the year of services; and it's the year of combating corruption." And we're going to help them meet those goals.

The surge is also helping give Iraq's leaders the confidence to expand their international engagement. Iraqi leaders are working hard to meet the criterion required to join the WTO, which would help its entrepreneurs benefit from the opportunities of a global economy. Iraq has taken steps to attract foreign investment, including holding its first Business to Business Expo since the gulf war. The Government is meeting its pledge to reform its economy in exchange for development assistance and debt relief through the International Compact for Iraq.

Much of the world is increasing its commitment to Iraq. The United Kingdom, Italy, and South Korea are leading PRTs. The United Nations is playing an expanded role in Iraq and will help prepare for this year's Provincial elections. And next month, the third Expanded Neighbors Conference will meet in Kuwait City to discuss ways the region and the world can further support Iraq's political, economic, and security progress. This is a key diplomatic initiative. It will include all of Iraq's neighbors as well as the permanent members of the U.N. Security Council, the G–8, the Arab League, and the Organization of Islamic Conference.

Iraq's neighbors can do more, and we're constantly sending out diplomatic missions to encourage them to do more. Earlier this week, the King of Bahrain came to visit me in the Oval Office, and his Government announced that he will send an ambassador to Iraq. And I appreciate that and urge other nations in the region to follow his lead. It's in their interest that a peaceful Iraq evolve. At the same time, the regimes in Iran and Syria must stop supporting violence and terror in Iraq.

Iraq also wants to solidify its relationship with the United States. Last year, Iraqi leaders came to us with a request to form a long-term strategic partnership. This partnership would help assure Iraqis that political and economic and security cooperation between our nations will endure. This partnership would also ensure protections for American

troops when the U.N. mandate for multinational forces in Iraq expires this December. Now, this partnership would not bind future Presidents to specific troop levels. This partnership would not establish permanent bases in Iraq. It would be similar to partnerships that we have with Afghanistan and other free nations around the world. My administration will work to complete this strategic partnership in the coming months. The Iraqi people have chosen to stand with America against our common enemies, and it's in our interest that we stand with them.

Having witnessed all this progress from the surge, the natural question is, what are the next steps? Well, this week, I've been discussing that question with my national security team in Washington as well as with General Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker in Baghdad. They will discuss that questions with Members of Congress when they come and testify in April. They'll outline the achievements of the surge as well as the challenges that remain, including the continued presence of Al Qaida, the violence caused by Shi'a extremists, the destructive influence of Iran, the flow of suicide bombers through Syria, the activities of PKK terrorists.

I'm going to carefully consider the recommendations of Secretary Gates and the Joint Chiefs of Staff and those on the ground, General Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker. And I'll announce my decisions soon after I have fully met with them and heard their recommendations. And as I consider the way forward, I will always remember that the progress in Iraq is real, it's substantive, but it is reversible. And so the principle behind my decision on our troop levels will be ensuring that we succeed in Iraq.

As this debate unfolds, I ask people on both sides to keep an open mind and to take a close look at the situation on the ground. Here is what one scholar and critic of the war recently said: "No one can spend some 10 days visiting the battlefields in Iraq without seeing major progress in every area. If the United States provides sustained support to the Iraqi Government—in security, governance, and development—there is now a very real chance that Iraq will emerge as a secure and stable state."

Some, however, seem unwilling to acknowledge that progress is taking place. Earlier in the war, they said the political situation wasn't good enough. Then after Iraq held three historic elections, they said the security situation wasn't good enough. Then after the security situation began to improve, they said politics, again, wasn't good enough. And now that political progress is picking up, they're looking for a new reason.

But there's one thing that is consistent. No matter what shortcomings these critics diagnose, their prescription is always the same: retreat. They claim that our strategic interest is elsewhere, and that if we would just get out of Iraq, we could focus on the battles that really matter. This argument makes no sense. If America's strategic interests are not in Iraq—the convergence point for the twin threats of Al Qaida and Iran, the nation Usama bin Laden's deputy has called "the place for the greatest battle," the country at the heart of the most volatile region on Earth—then where are they?

The reality is that retreating from Iraq would carry enormous strategic costs for the United States. It would incite chaos and killing, destroy the political gains the Iraqis have made, and abandon our friends to terrorists and death squads. It would endanger Iraq's oil resources and could serve as a severe disruption to the world's economy. It would increase the likelihood that Al Qaida would gain safe havens that they could use to attack us here at home. It would be a propaganda victory of colossal proportions for the global terrorist movement, which would gain new funds and find new recruits and conclude that the way to defeat America is to bleed us into submission. It would signal to Iran that we were not serious about confronting its efforts to impose its will on the region. It would signal to people across the Middle East that the United States cannot be trusted to keep its word. A defeat in Iraq would have consequences far beyond that country, and they would be felt by Americans here at home.

For the same reason, helping the Iraqis defeat their enemies and build a free society would be a strategic victory that would resound far beyond Iraq's borders. If Al Qaida is defeated in Iraq after all the resources it

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,

and people's mortgages are resetting. In other words, the interest rates are going up. And that has caused a consternation and concern and care. A lot of families are facing the frightening prospect of foreclosures. Foreclosures obviously place a terrible burden on a family, as well as they lead to losses for lenders and investors. And this affects our entire economy.

We have a role to play at the Government level, and that is to help lenders and borrowers work together to avoid foreclosure. There's some homeowners who have made responsible buying decisions and who could keep their homes with just a little help—some information and some help. And so to help them, in October, my administration helped bring together a private sector group of lenders, loan servicers, investors, mortgage counselors, which is called the HOPE NOW Alliance. And the members of this group have made some progress. First of all, they agreed to industry-wide standards to streamline the process for refinancing and modifying certain mortgages. HOPE NOW also runs a national hotline to connect struggling homeowners with mortgage counselors just like the folks here at Novadebt.

I also have been—met with some homeowners who've got help. Danny Cerchiaro is with us from Iselin, New Jersey. Thank you for being here, Danny. He owns a home that also serves as a studio for his movie production business. Danny and his wife learned their adjustable-rate mortgage was resetting to a higher rate this past summer, and he became concerned about financial stability. He was worried about staying in his home. He needed a place for his business, and he needed a place to sleep. And he became concerned about whether or not he could afford it.

He got—he called HOPE NOW, and he became working with a mortgage counselor named Penny Meredith. Penny is here. Appreciate you coming, Penny. And in less than 2 months later, Penny helped Danny get a more affordable fixed-rate mortgage. Danny calls Penny, and I quote, the "magic lady." She helped him a lot.

And there's a lot of other Americans who can get the same kind of help. One of the reasons I've come today is to say to people who are worried about staying in their home, there is help available.

I also want to thank Theresa Torres from Kansas City who is with us. She got really worried. She's a mom of three. Her husband is a subcontractor. And she was very worried about staying in her home. And the family fell behind on their mortgage payments in December. But fortunately, she knew to call and to get help, and in this case, from Novadebt. They helped her modify her mortgage. And today, as a result of the help she received, she no longer worries about losing her home. And I thought her statement was pretty interesting. She said: "I see my role today to serve as an example for people in a similar situation." So, Theresa, we're glad you're here.

There are hundreds of thousands of homeowners like Theresa and Danny who can benefit from calling HOPE NOW. And so one of my purposes is to make it clear there is a place where you can get counseling. And I want my fellow citizens, if you're worried about your home, to call this number: 1–88–995–HOPE. Let me repeat that again: 1–88–995–HOPE.

HOPE NOW can help homeowners find the right solution. By the way, we've got more work to do in Washington, and one of the things we can do is make sure the Federal Housing Administration gets the reforms it needs. And there's a program called FHASecure, which has given FHA greater flexibility to offer struggling homeowners with otherwise good credit histories a chance to refinance. This program is very helpful. It's, so far, helped 130,000 families refinance their mortgages. And by the end of the year, we expect the program to have reached 300,000 families.

And this is a good start. We want to help people. We're committed to helping our fellow citizens. And I fully understand, as do most Americans, that the housing market problems are complicated, and there's no easy solutions. But in the stories I've heard today, I've seen how Americans are responding with compassion and determination. We will support them with good policies. We will help responsible homeowners weather a difficult period. And in so doing, we will strengthen the dream of homeownership.

Thank you all very much.

Danny Cerchiaro. [*Inaudible*]

The President. One, eight, eight, eight—good. Is it two eights or three eights? Okay.

Danny just told me I got to get the number right—1–888–995–HOPE.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:30 p.m. In his remarks, he referred to Joel Greenberg, president and chief executive officer, and Jill Feldman, vice president, Novadebt. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

Proclamation 8228—To Modify the Harmonized Tariff Schedule of the United States and For Other Purposes

March 28, 2008

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

1. Section 1205(a) of the Omnibus Trade and Competitiveness Act of 1988 (the "1988 Act") (19 U.S.C. 3005(a)) directs the United States International Trade Commission (the "Commission") to keep the Harmonized Tariff Schedule of the United States (HTS) under continuous review and periodically to recommend to the President such modifications to the HTS as the Commission considers necessary or appropriate to accomplish the purposes set forth in that subsection. In 2006, the Commission recommended modifications to the HTS pursuant to section 1205 of the 1988 Act to conform the HTS to amendments made to the International Convention on the Harmonized Commodity Description and Coding System (the "Convention"). In Presidential Proclamation 8097 of December 29, 2006, I modified the HTS pursuant to section 1206(a) of the 1988 Act (19 U.S.C. 3006(a)) to conform the HTS to the Convention.

2. The Commission has recommended further modifications to the HTS pursuant to sections 1205(a) and (d) of the 1988 Act (19 U.S.C. 3005(a) and (d)) to alleviate unnecessary administrative burdens, and to ensure that the prior modifications proclaimed in Proclamation 8097 maintain substantial rate neutrality.

3. Section 1206(a) of the 1988 Act authorizes the President to proclaim modifications to the HTS based on the recommendations of the Commission under section 1205 of the 1988 Act, if he determines that the modifications are in conformity with United States obligations under the Convention and do not run counter to the national economic interest of the United States. I have determined that the modifications to the HTS proclaimed in this proclamation pursuant to section 1206(a) of the 1988 Act are in conformity with United States obligations under the Convention and do not run counter to the national economic interest of the United States.

4. Presidential Proclamation 7746 of December 30, 2003, implemented the United States-Chile Free Trade Agreement with respect to the United States, and Presidential Proclamation 7747 of December 30, 2003, implemented the United States-Singapore Free Trade Agreement with respect to the United States. In Presidential Proclamation 8097, I proclaimed modifications to the HTS that I determined were necessary or appropriate to continue to carry out the duty reductions proclaimed in Proclamations 7746 and 7747.

5. In Presidential Proclamation 8214 of December 27, 2007, I further modified the HTS pursuant to section 1206(a) of the 1988 Act to ensure the continuation of tariff and certain other treatment accorded originating goods under tariff categories modified in Proclamation 8097 and to carry out the duty reductions proclaimed in Proclamations 7746 and 7747. Technical rectifications to the HTS are required to provide the intended tariff treatment.

6. On August 5, 2004, the United States entered into the Dominican Republic-Central America-United States Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA–DR) with Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua. The Congress approved the CAFTA–DR in section 101(a) of the Dominican Republic-Central America-United States Free Trade Agreement Implementation Act (the "CAFTA–DR Act") (19 U.S.C. 4011).

7. Sections 321–328 of the CAFTA–DR Act (19 U.S.C. 4081–4088) authorize the President to take certain actions in response to a request by an interested party for relief from serious damage or actual threat thereof to a domestic industry producing certain textile or apparel articles. I assigned certain functions under these provisions to the Committee for the Implementation of Textile Agreements (CITA) in Proclamation 7987 of February 28, 2006.

8. Executive Order 11651 of March 3, 1972, as amended, established CITA, consisting of representatives of the Departments of State, the Treasury, Commerce, and Labor, and the Office of the United States Trade Representative, with the representative of the Department of Commerce as Chairman, to supervise the implementation of textile trade agreements. Consistent with 3 U.S.C. 301, when carrying out functions vested in the President by statute and assigned by the President to CITA, the officials collectively exercising those functions are all to be officers required to be appointed by the President with the advice and consent of the Senate.

9. Section 604 of the Trade Act of 1974, as amended (the "Trade Act") (19 U.S.C. 2483), authorizes the President to embody in the HTS the substance of the provisions of that Act, and of other Acts affecting import treatment, and actions thereunder, including removal, modification, continuance, or imposition of any rate of duty or other import restriction.

Now, Therefore, I, George W. Bush, President of the United States of America, acting under the authority vested in me by the Constitution and the laws of the United States of America, including but not limited to section 1206 of the 1988 Act, sections 321–328 of the CAFTA–DR Act, section 301 of title 3, United States Code, and section 604 of the Trade Act do proclaim that:

(1) In order to modify the HTS to conform it to the Convention or any amendment thereto recommended for adoption, to promote the uniform application of the Convention, to establish additional subordinate tariff categories, and to make technical and conforming changes to existing provisions, the HTS is modified as set forth in Annex I to this proclamation.

(2) In order to provide the intended tariff treatment to imports of originating goods from Chile, the HTS is modified as set out in section A of Annex II to this proclamation.

(3) In order to provide the intended tariff treatment to imports of originating goods from Singapore, the HTS is modified as set out in section B of Annex II to this proclamation.

(4) The CITA is authorized to exercise my authority under sections 321–328 of the CAFTA–DR Act to provide relief from imports that are the subject of a determination under section 322(a) of the CAFTA–DR Act, to the extent necessary to remedy or prevent serious damage and to facilitate adjustment by the domestic industry.

(5) The United States Trade Representative shall modify the HTS in a notice published in the *Federal Register* to reflect determinations pursuant to paragraph (4) of this proclamation by the CITA.

(6) Any provisions of previous proclamations and Executive Orders that are inconsistent with the actions taken in this proclamation are superseded to the extent of such inconsistency.

(7) The modifications to the HTS set forth in Annex I and Annex II to this proclamation shall be effective with respect to goods entered, or withdrawn from warehouse for consumption, on or after the respective dates specified in each section of such Annexes for the goods described therein.

In Witness Whereof, I have hereunto set my hand this twenty-eighth day of March, in the year of our Lord two thousand eight, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and thirty-second.

George W. Bush

[Filed with the Office of the Federal Register, 8:44 a.m., April 1, 2008]

NOTE: This proclamation will be published in the *Federal Register* on April 2.

Memorandum on Determinations Under Section 1106(a) of the Omnibus Trade and Competitiveness Act of 1988—Ukraine

March 28, 2008

Presidential Determination No. 2008–17

Memorandum for the United States Trade Representative

Subject: Determinations under Section 1106(a) of the Omnibus Trade and Competitiveness Act of 1988—Ukraine

Pursuant to section 1106(a) of the Omnibus Trade and Competitiveness Act of 1988 (19 U.S.C. 2905(a)) (the "Act"), I determine that state trading enterprises account for a significant share of Ukraine's exports and goods that compete with imports into Ukraine. I further determine that such state trading enterprises unduly burden and restrict, or adversely affect, the foreign trade of the United States or the United States economy, or are likely to result in such burden, restriction, or effect.

Ukraine is seeking to become a member of the World Trade Organization (WTO). The terms and conditions for Ukraine's accession to the WTO include Ukraine's commitments that it will ensure that all state trading enterprises will make purchases of goods and services that are not intended for governmental use, and sales in international trade in accordance with commercial considerations (including price, quality, availability, marketability, and transportation) and that U.S. firms will have an adequate opportunity, in conformity with customary practice, to compete for such purchases or sales.

The obligations that Ukraine will assume under the WTO Agreement, including Ukraine's protocol of accession, meet the requirements of section 1106(b)(2)(A) of the Act (19 U.S.C. 2905(b)(2)(A)), and thus my determinations under section 1106(a) do not require invocation of the nonapplication provisions of the Marrakesh Agreement Establishing the WTO with regard to Ukraine.

You are directed to publish this determination in the *Federal Register*.

George W. Bush

[Filed with the Office of the Federal Register, 8:53 a.m., March 31, 2008]

NOTE: This memorandum will be published in the *Federal Register* on April 1.

Memorandum on Assignment of Functions Under Section 1821(c) of the Implementing Recommendations of the 9/11 Commission Act of 2007

March 28, 2008

Memorandum for the Secretary of State

Subject: Assignment of Functions Under Section 1821(c) of the Implementing Recommendations of the 9/11 Commission Act of 2007

By virtue of the authority vested in me as President by the Constitution and the laws of the United States, including section 301 of title 3, United States Code, I hereby assign to you the functions of the President under section 1821(c) of the Implementing Recommendations of the 9/11 Commission Act of 2007 (Public Law 110–53).

In the performance of your responsibility under this memorandum, you shall, as appropriate, consult the heads of other departments and agencies.

You are authorized and directed to publish this memorandum in the *Federal Register*.

George W. Bush

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.

March 22

In the morning, at Camp David, MD, the President had an intelligence briefing.

March 23

In the afternoon, the President and Mrs. Bush returned to Washington, DC.

In the evening, the President had a telephone conversation with Secretary of the Treasury Henry M. Paulson, Jr., who updated him on the discussions between JPMorgan, Bear Stearns Companies, Inc., and the Federal Reserve.

March 24

In the morning, the President had an intelligence briefing. Later, in the Situation Room, he participated in a National Security Council meeting, where he was briefed by U.S. Ambassador to Iraq Ryan C. Crocker and Gen. David H. Petraeus, USA, commanding general, Multi-National Force—Iraq, via secure video teleconference.

In the afternoon, in the Oval Office, the President met with Minister of External Affairs Pranab Mukherjee of India.

March 25

In the morning, the President had a telephone conversation with Prime Minister Yusuf Raza Gillani of Pakistan to congratulate him on his recent nomination and discuss Pakistan-U.S. relations and the war on terror. Later, he had an intelligence briefing.

In the afternoon, in the Old Family Dining Room, the President had a working lunch with King Hamad bin Isa al-Khalifa of Bahrain. Later, he traveled to McLean, VA, arriving in the evening.

Later in the evening, at a private residence, the President attended a National Republican Senatorial Committee reception. He then returned to Washington, DC.

March 26

In the morning, the President had a telephone conversation with President Hu Jintao of China. He then had an intelligence briefing. Later, he traveled to Arlington, VA, where, at the Pentagon, he participated in Defense Department briefings.

Later in the morning, the President traveled to Sterling, VA.

In the afternoon, the President returned to Washington, DC.

The President declared a major disaster in Arkansas and ordered Federal aid to supplement State and local recovery efforts in the area struck by severe storms, tornadoes, and flooding beginning on March 18 and continuing.

The President announced his intention to nominate Kameran L. Onley to be Assistant Secretary of the Interior (Water and Science).

The President announced his intention to nominate A. Ellen Terpstra to be Chief Agricultural Negotiator in the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative, with the rank of Ambassador.

The President announced his intention to designate William E. Kovacic as Chairman of the Federal Trade Commission.

March 27

In the morning, the President had a telephone conversation with President Mohammed Hosni Mubarak of Egypt to express his condolences for the accidental death of a citizen who was killed in the Suez Canal by U.S. naval gunfire. Later, he had an intelligence briefing. He then traveled to Dayton, OH.

Later in the morning, the President traveled to Bellbrook, OH.

In the afternoon, at a private residence, the President attended an Ohio Victory 2008 reception. Later, he returned to Dayton, OH, where, at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, he met with families of military personnel killed in the war on terror.

Later in the afternoon, the President traveled to Pittsburgh, PA, where, upon arrival, he met with USA Freedom Corps volunteer Lydia Humenycky. He then traveled to Sewickley, PA, where, at a private residence, he attended a Pennsylvania Victory reception.

In the evening, the President returned to Washington, DC. While en route aboard Air Force One, he participated in an interview with the History Channel for the documentary "Air Force One: Behind the Scenes."

March 28

In the morning, the President had an intelligence briefing.

In the afternoon, the President traveled to Wrightstown, NJ, where, upon arrival, he met with USA Freedom Corps volunteer Andrell

Reid. Later, he traveled to Freehold, NJ, where, at Novadebt, he participated in a roundtable on the HOPE NOW Alliance. He then toured Novadebt.

Later in the afternoon, the President returned to Washington, DC.

The White House announced that the President and Mrs. Bush will welcome Prime Minister Gordon Brown of the United Kingdom and his wife, Sarah, to the White House on April 17.

The President announced his intention to nominate Luis Aguilar and Elisse B. Walter to be Commissioners of the Securities and Exchange Commission.

The President announced his intention to nominate Marie L. Yovanovitch to be Ambassador to Armenia.

The President announced his intention to appoint Christopher A. Padilla as a member of the Congressional-Executive Commission on the People's Republic of China.

The President announced his intention to appoint Alexa E. Posny as a member of the National Institute for Literacy Advisory Board.

The President announced his intention to designate Stephanie Johnson Monroe as Acting Assistant Secretary for Legislation and Congressional Affairs at the Department of Education.

Nominations Submitted to the Senate

NOTE: No nominations were submitted to the Senate during the period covered by this issue.

Checklist of White House Press Releases

The following list contains releases of the Office of the Press Secretary that are neither printed as items nor covered by entries in the Digest of Other White House Announcements.

Released March 24

Transcript of a press briefing by Press Secretary Dana Perino

Statement by the Press Secretary announcing that the President signed S. 2733

Released March 25

Transcript of a press briefing by Press Secretary Dana Perino

Released March 26

Transcript of a press briefing by National Security Adviser Stephen J. Hadley on the President's trip to the NATO summit

Statement by the Press Secretary on a call by the President to President Hu Jintao of China

Statement by the Press Secretary on disaster assistance to Arkansas

Excerpts of the President's interview with foreign print journalists

Released March 27

Transcript of a press gaggle by National Security Council Press Secretary Gordon Johndroe

Fact sheet: Achieving Political and Economic Progress in Iraq

Released March 28

Statement by the Press Secretary: Visit of Prime Minister Brown and Mrs. Brown of the United Kingdom

Fact sheet: Taking Sensible, Decisive Action To Help Homeowners

Acts Approved by the President

Approved March 24

S. 2733 / Public Law 110–198
Higher Education Extension Act of 2008

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