

have—but on transportation. And I said to Congress then, if our forces could win the ground war in 100 hours, then surely Congress can pass this legislation in 100 days.

And the clock has been ticking. And our transportation bill, thanks to Sam and many of you in this room, has made some headway in the Senate. I'm informed that the House is beginning now to move on this, but there's still a long way to go to get a satisfactory bill. And I don't have to tell you that 16 blocks between this house and the two Houses of Congress can be a long, long trip—long road in American politics. So now's the time to move a sound transportation bill out of the Congress and onto my desk. And today as we mark the special significance of transportation to America's economic welfare and international security, I ask each one of you: Please join us, join the Secretary, join me, in urging Congress

to rise to the challenges and act now.

And once again, it is my pleasure to welcome you all here to the White House. And I will now sign these proclamations declaring National Maritime Day, National Defense Transportation Day, and National Transportation Week. And then I would like to suggest to those outside of what is known as the White House complex that I walk out of here into the Oval Office, and I'd like each one of you, if you have time, to come by and shake hands and at least say hello and see my magnificent office.

Note: The President spoke at 10:18 a.m. in the Roosevelt Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Secretary of Transportation Samuel K. Skinner. The proclamations are listed in Appendix E at the end of this volume.

Remarks and an Exchange With Reporters Following a Meeting With Secretary of State James A. Baker III on Middle East Peace Talks

May 17, 1991

The President. Let me just say that I've just received a full report from Secretary Baker on his travels to the Middle East. I've also been on the phone, as has Secretary Baker, with President Mubarak of Egypt. And my assessment after hearing the report from Secretary Baker is that there is real cause for optimism.

And we will continue to work this process. We're not about to stop. We're going to continue to do that. And progress has been made. And so, when you're working a problem this complicated, you just keep on plugging away. And as I said to some of you all yesterday or the day before, a lot of this has got to be conducted with quiet diplomacy.

It's a very difficult problem the Secretary has been working. I thank him for this endless amount of travel he's put in. But the point I wanted to make, after assessing his report, is that there's reason for optimism. Good reason for optimism.

Q. What is the reason?

The President. A lot of these things have to be quiet when you're talking about diplomacy.

Q. Why can't we have any reasons?

The President. You've got some. You can see what's already been done. Everybody was writing off Saudi Arabia earlier on, and the GCC countries have made a pretty good statement.

So, there's plenty of reason. But I'm not going to go into any detail with you, Helen [Helen Thomas, United Press International], because I've told you that the way to solve this conundrum is to not get these parties' position by public statements.

Q. Well, will there be a peace conference?

Q. What is the next step?

Q. Will Secretary Baker go on another trip?

Q. Mr. President, are you giving any thought to inviting them to a conference in

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Washington?

The President. We're going to keep on working it, from here, and if there's reason to go back, he will. It might kill him—been traveling all the time—but he's doing a first-class job on it.

Q. Are you going to invite anyone here?

Q. What about a Washington peace conference—are you considering that still?

The President. That's a detail I'm not discussing—along with all the other details I'm not discussing.

Q. Mr. President, is that window of opportunity that was opened after the Iraq war closing? Are you losing some of that advantage?

The President. I don't think so. I think the credibility of the United States is higher in the Middle East than it's ever been. I think it's still there, Jim. I don't think there's an erosion to it.

Q. Are you standing by [United Nations Security Council Resolutions] 338 and 242? Do you continue to support land for peace?

The President. Well, that's—the United States position is there.

Anybody want to ask the Secretary a question before I—before we fire this machine up?

Q. Yes, I would like to ask Mr. Baker—

Secretary Baker. Let me say something about 242 and 338, which is a very good question. The parties with whom we've been talking have agreed that the objective

is a comprehensive settlement based on 242 and 338. And that represents, I think, a pretty important agreement. That doesn't bring you to a peace conference, because you've got to get agreement on everything before—every last thing has to be agreed to before you can have a peace conference. But that first fundamental agreement has to be made. And it has been made.

Q. Well Mr. Secretary, the parties don't even agree on what 242 and 338 require.

Secretary Baker. If there was an agreement on what 242 required you wouldn't have to have a conference. You wouldn't even, indeed, have to have negotiations. That's what the negotiations are for—is to determine exactly what's meant by 242.

Q. You're saying everyone's committed to those?

Secretary Baker. To 242 and 338—

Q. Can a conference be held without—

Q. Mr. President, can you see any benefit at all to a Washington conference?

Q. Mr. President, are you willing to accept some restrictions on MFN for China?

The President. Thank you all very much. Thank you all very much, and good day. [Laughter] I'm leaving. We'll see you guys.

Note: The President spoke at 1:40 p.m. on the South Lawn of the White House. In his remarks, he referred to President Mohammed Hosni Mubarak of Egypt.

Letter to Congressional Leaders on the Strategic Framework in Asia May 17, 1991

Dear 111111:

Pursuant to section 915 of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Years 1990 and 1991 (Public Law 101-189), I am hereby transmitting a follow-on report that updates the status of the implementation of our Strategic Framework in Asia.

Sincerely,

GEORGE BUSH

Note: Identical letters were sent to Robert C. Byrd and Mark O. Hatfield, chairman

and ranking Republican member of the Senate Committee on Appropriations; Sam Nunn and John W. Warner, chairman and ranking Republican member of the Senate Committee on Armed Services; Claiborne Pell and Jesse Helms, chairman and ranking Republican member of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations; Jamie L. Whitten and Joseph M. McDade, chairman and ranking Republican member of the House Committee on Appropriations; Les Aspin and William L. Dickinson, chairman and ranking