

Statement on the Situation in the Middle East
March 29, 2001

I am deeply concerned about the escalating violence in the Middle East. It is claiming the lives of innocent civilians on both sides. The tragic cycle of incitement, provocation, and violence has gone on far too long.

Both sides must take important steps to calm the situation now. The Palestinian Authority should speak out publicly and forcefully in the language of the Palestinian people to condemn violence and terrorism. It should arrest the perpetrators of terrorist acts, and it should resume security cooperation with Israel.

The Government of Israel, for its part, should exercise restraint in its military response. It should take steps to restore normalcy to the lives of the Palestinian people by easing closures and removing checkpoints. Last week Prime Minister Sharon assured me that his government wants to move in this direction, and I urge Israel to do so.

I will be meeting with Egypt's President Mubarak next Monday and Jordan's King Abdullah the week after to seek their help

in defusing the tensions. Egypt and Jordan are two of our most important partners in the region, and their role is crucial. I have asked Secretary Powell to call Chairman Arafat and contact other leaders to urge them to stand against violence. Our diplomats in the region are fully engaged in this effort.

Our goal is to encourage a series of reciprocal and parallel steps by both sides that will halt the escalation of violence, provide safety and security for civilians on both sides, and restore normalcy to the lives of everyone in the region. A lasting peace in the region will come only when the parties agree directly on its terms.

This week I vetoed an unbalanced U.N. resolution because it tried to force the adoption of a mechanism on which both parties did not agree. My approach will be to facilitate the parties' work in finding their own solution for peace. We seek to build a stable foundation for restoring confidence, rebuilding security cooperation, and resuming a political dialog between the parties.

Remarks at the Radio and Television Correspondents Association Dinner
March 29, 2001

Thank you all very much. Well, Lew, thank you very much. Laura and I are thrilled to be here.

I appreciate the members of the press. I think you serve a very useful purpose, especially tonight. As you know, we're studying safe levels for arsenic in drinking water. [Laughter] To base our decision on sound science, the scientists told us we needed to test the water glasses of about 3,000 people. [Laughter] Thank you for participating. [Laughter]

It's good to see so many Members of the Congress here, my fellow Texan Tom DeLay here at the head table. Lew asked me a little earlier if Tom ever smiled. I said, "I don't know. I've only known him 9 years." [Laughter]

Senator Lieberman is here. We all know Joe is an Orthodox Jew, so he does no work from sundown Friday until sundown Saturday. This has so impressed me, I myself am thinking of converting—[laughter]—so I don't have nothing to do from