

times, and we will meet the tests of our time.

We go forward with confidence, because we trust in the power of human freedom to change lives and nations. By the resolve and purpose of America and of our friends and allies, we will make this an age of progress and liberty. Free people will set the course of history, and free people will keep the peace of the world.

Thank you all very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:22 p.m. in the International Ballroom at the Washington Hilton Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Irving Kristol, senior fellow, and Christopher DeMuth, president, American Enterprise Institute; Allan H. Meltzer, recipient of the first Irving Kristol Award at the dinner; and President Saddam Hussein of Iraq.

## Remarks Following Discussions With President Hamid Karzai of Afghanistan and an Exchange With Reporters *February 27, 2003*

*President Bush.* A couple of opening statements; we'll answer questions today.

Mr. President, welcome back to the Oval Office.

The President has just brought me and members of my administration up to date on the progress being made in Afghanistan. I guess the best way to summarize the discussion is that I'm welcoming a courageous leader, who's got a clear vision about the future of a country he loves, back to the Oval Office.

I was deeply impressed by some of the statistics that he talked about. Over 2 million refugees have returned back to Afghanistan since he was last here in the Oval Office. As the President pointed out, those are people who are expressing their opinion about the future of Afghanistan by making a decision to return home.

He also told me that there are now 3 million children going to school in Afghanistan. Right after and during the period of the Taliban and right after the war, the number of children going to school was negligible.

This is tremendous progress, and I want the American people to know that we're proud of the progress which is being made. I want to continue to thank the American

people for their support of the—of Afghanistan and our desire for the—human life to improve there.

And Mr. President, we appreciate your leadership, your determination. And we continue to look forward to working with you to bring not only peace to that part of the world but a hopeful future for the citizens. So welcome back to the Oval Office.

*President Karzai.* Well, thank you very much, Mr. President. It's an honor for me to be here with you in the White House. The United States and yourself have helped tremendously in the past year to rebuild Afghanistan, to help us in all aspects of life, including the 3 million children that now go to school have been receiving help from the United States. You have helped us with the roads, with the building of the National Army of Afghanistan.

I'm here to thank you and the American people. And I'm also here to ask you to do more for us in making the life of the Afghan people better, more stable, more peaceful. I'm also here to tell you that the war against terrorism is going on. We have defeated them, but some elements are still there. And we should go on strong and

tough to get them all and free the world from that menace.

*President Bush.* Thank you, sir.

*President Karzai.* Thank you.

*President Bush.* Ron [Ron Fournier, Associated Press].

### *Iraq*

*Q.* Mr. President, following up on your speech last night, if the United States had expanded its mission beyond the liberation of Kuwait and removed Saddam Hussein from power in the 1990s, would the Middle East be more peaceful now?

*President Bush.* The mission in early 1990s was to liberate Kuwait, and the United States achieved that mission. The mission now is to disarm Saddam Hussein, in the name of peace. And we will disarm Saddam Hussein.

I noticed today there is some talk about the illegal rockets in Iraq. He—this is part of his—the discussion about these rockets is part of his campaign of deception. See, he'll say, "I'm not going to destroy the rockets," and then he'll have a change of mind this weekend and destroy the rockets and say, "I've disarmed." The rockets are just the tip of the iceberg. The only question at hand is total, complete disarmament, which he is refusing to do.

Steve [Steve Holland, Reuters].

*Q.* If I could just follow up, though, on your rationale from yesterday. If we could have peace in the Middle East by removing Saddam now, couldn't we have had it if we had removed him 10 years ago? Or is that a—

*President Bush.* The mission—just remember what the mission was. When you commit troops to war, you must have a clear mission. Should we be forced to commit our troops because of his failure to disarm, the mission will be complete disarmament, which will mean regime change. That was not the mission in 1991.

### *Situation in the Middle East*

*Q.* You talked last night about the Middle East roadmap. What's holding that up? When can we see that?

*President Bush.* We have been working on the Middle East every day. We will continue to work to bring peace to the Middle East. And my fervent desire is for the—is to achieve peace and to improve the plight of the Palestinian citizen and, at the same time, improve the security for not only the Palestinians but the Israelis. We work the peace issue constantly.

### *National Economy*

*Q.* Mr. President, consumer confidence numbers hit their lowest levels in, I think, 9 years yesterday. And many of those surveyed say that they're more concerned about the economy than they are about Iraq. Money managers on Wall Street say that even when the uncertainty over what is happening in Iraq is resolved, there remain many obstacles of a purely business nature that leave them less than confident looking forward. Are you frustrated by the sense that perhaps perception could become reality here, that the lack of confidence seems to be becoming more entrenched?

*President Bush.* I've got confidence in the future of our economy. There's strong signals that this economy will improve. But I understand we need to have a stimulus package to make sure that the forecasts and the predictions become true. A lot of the experts are projecting growth at 3.3 percent. Inherent in their projections is that Congress pass a stimulus package, fiscal stimulus package. I proposed the one that I think will work.

And so that is one of the reasons why you're seeing this administration on a regular basis pursue a stimulus package that will have a positive effect for job creation, a stimulus package directed to small-business owners in America, a stimulus package which will encourage investment, a stimulus package which will ultimately help seniors

because their dividends might be taxed twice. So this is a stimulus package that is very positive.

But I'm very optimistic about the future of this country—the economic future, and I'm optimistic about our chances to achieve peace.

Thank you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:51 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to President Saddam Hussein of Iraq. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

## Joint Statement Between the United States of America and Afghanistan *February 27, 2003*

President Bush and President Karzai reaffirm their common vision for an Afghanistan that is prosperous, democratic, at peace, contributing to regional stability, market friendly, and respectful of human rights. They affirm their ironclad and lasting partnership in pursuit of this vision, and will work together to ensure that Afghanistan is never again a haven for terrorists and that no resurgence of terrorism threatens Afghanistan.

The United States has demonstrated its commitment to Afghanistan, providing U.S. forces to combat terror and secure stability, and granting over \$900 million in assistance since 2001. Working together, Afghans, Americans, and our international partners have made great progress in ridding Afghanistan of Al Qaida and Taliban elements. We averted famine for some 7 million Afghans last year, and have begun the essential and challenging work of rebuilding after decades of dictatorship, war, and extremism. As a sign of confidence in the future, some 2 million refugees have returned to Afghanistan over the past year. But much remains to be done. This year will mark a shift toward long-term reconstruction projects and the rebuilding of Afghan institutions. The United States will be a full partner in this transition, helping to secure stability and supporting reconstruction throughout the country, including roads, schools, clinics, and agriculture. We

will continue our work together, with other partners, to gather the resources that will hasten the day when all Afghans lead prosperous and secure lives.

President Karzai has declared 2003 to be a year of national institution building for Afghanistan, a year when the economic and social benefits of peace are extended throughout the country.

Afghans are enjoying newfound freedoms and hope for a brighter tomorrow. The United States will work with Afghanistan to extend the accomplishments of the Bonn Accord of December 2001 and the Emergency Loya Jirga of June 2002 so that Afghans can build a democratic, constitutional government within the context of Afghanistan's unique culture and history.

The United States military will continue with its primary mission to prevent terrorist elements from undermining the security environment, while also building the Afghan national army—a central priority for both governments—and facilitating reconstruction. President Karzai strongly favors the creation by the United States and other coalition partners of a number of Provincial Reconstruction Teams that will work closely with Afghan government ministries, UN agencies, and NGOs in advancing common reconstruction objectives while also working with the graduate battalions of the Afghan National Army to advance the mission of enhancing security nationwide.