

The President's News Conference With Prime Minister Tony Blair of the United Kingdom in Istanbul

June 28, 2004

Transfer of Sovereignty in Iraq

President Bush. Good afternoon. Earlier today, 15 months after the liberation of Iraq, and 2 days ahead of schedule, the world witnessed the arrival of a free and sovereign Iraqi Government. Iraqi officials informed us that they are ready to assume power, and Prime Minister Allawi believes that making this transition now is best for his country. After decades of brutal rule by a terror regime, the Iraqi people have their country back.

This is a day of great hope for Iraqis and a day that terrorist enemies hoped never to see. The terrorists are doing all they can to stop the rise of a free Iraq. But their bombs and attacks have not prevented Iraqi sovereignty, and they will not prevent Iraqi democracy. Iraqi sovereignty is a tribute to the will of the Iraqi people and the courage of Iraqi leaders.

This day also marks a proud moral achievement for members of our coalition. We pledged to end a dangerous regime, to free the oppressed, and to restore sovereignty. We have kept our word.

Fifteen months ago, Saddam's regime was an enemy of America and the civilized world. Today Iraq's Government is an ally of both. Fifteen months ago, Iraq was a state sponsor of terrorism. Today Iraq's leaders, with our support, are systematically fighting terrorists across their country. Fifteen months ago, we faced the threat of a dictator with a history of using weapons of mass destruction. Today the dictator is a threat to no one, from the cell he now occupies. Fifteen months ago, the regime in Baghdad was the most aggressive in the Middle East and a constant source of fear and alarm for Iraq's neighbors. Today Iraq threatens no other country, and its democratic progress will be an example to the

broader Middle East. Fifteen months ago, Iraq was ruled by a regime that brutalized and tortured its own people, murdered hundreds of thousands, and buried them in mass graves. Today Iraqis live under a Government that strives for justice, upholds the rule of law, and defends the dignity of every citizen.

Iraq today still has many challenges to overcome. We recognize that. But it is a world away from the tormented, exhausted, and isolated country we found last year. Now the transfer of sovereignty begins a new phase in Iraq's progress toward full democracy. Together with the Iraqi Government, we're moving forward on every element of our five-part plan for Iraqi self-government.

Iraq's interim government has gained broad international support and has been endorsed by the U.N. Security Council. The United States and our coalition partners are helping prepare Iraqis for the defense of their own country, and we appreciate NATO's decision to approve Prime Minister Allawi's request for assistance in training Iraqi security forces—in training the Iraqi security forces. We're helping Iraqis rebuild their country's infrastructure, and Iraq will move—continue moving toward free elections, with important assistance from the United Nations.

All this progress is being attacked by foreign terrorists and by thugs from the fallen regime. The terrorists know they face defeat unless they break the spirit and commitment of the civilized world. The civilized world will not be frightened or intimidated. And Iraq's new leaders have made their position clear: Prime Minister Allawi recently said that "The insurgents are trying to destroy our country, and we're not going to allow this."

The struggle is, first and foremost, an Iraqi struggle. The Prime Minister said of his people, "We're prepared to fight and, if necessary, die for these objectives." America, Great Britain, our coalition respect that spirit, and the Iraqi people will not stand alone.

The United States military and our coalition partners have made a clear, specific, and continuing mission in Iraq. As we train Iraqi security forces, we'll help those forces to find and destroy the killers. We'll protect infrastructure from the attacks. We'll provide security for the upcoming elections. Operating in a sovereign nation, our military will act in close consultation with the Iraqi Government. Yet coalition forces will remain under coalition command. Iraq's Prime Minister and President have told me that their goal is to eventually take full responsibility for the security of their country, and America wants Iraqi forces to take that role. Our military will stay as long as the stability of Iraq requires and only as long as their presence is needed and requested by the Iraqi Government.

Today, at the moment sovereignty was transferred, the mission of the Coalition Provisional Authority came to an end. Ambassador Jerry Bremer has been tireless and dedicated, and he returns home with the thanks of his country. Thousands of American civilians have labored for progress in Iraq under difficult and sometimes dangerous conditions. They also have our gratitude.

From the first hours of Operation Iraqi Freedom and to this very hour, in their battles against the terrorists, America's men and women in uniform have been unrelenting in the performance of their duty. They've had staunch allies, like Great Britain, at their side. We asked a lot of our military, and there's still much hard work ahead. We're grateful for the sacrifice of all who've served. We honor the memory of all who've died. The courage of our military has brought us to this hopeful day,

and the continued service of our military assures the success of our cause.

In Iraq, we're serving the cause of liberty, and liberty is always worth fighting for. In Iraq, we're serving the cause of peace by promoting progress and hope in the Middle East as the alternative to stagnation and hatred and violence for export. In Iraq, we're serving the cause of our own security, striking the terrorists where we find them, instead of waiting for them to strike us at home.

For all these reasons, we accepted a difficult task in Iraq, and for all these reasons, we will finish that task.

Mr. Prime Minister.

Prime Minister Blair. Thank you, Mr. President.

Today is, obviously, an important staging post on the journey of the people of Iraq towards a new future, one in which democracy replaces dictatorship, in which freedom replaces repression, and of which all the people of Iraq can look forward to the possibility and the hope of an Iraq that genuinely guarantees a future for people from whatever part of Iraq they come.

I think it's just worth reflecting for a moment on what we now have before us, because today, of course, is extremely important. It's the transfer of real and full sovereignty to the people and the Government of Iraq. From now on, the coalition changes. We are there in support of the Iraqi Government and the Iraqi people.

And what you have very clearly, therefore, is on one side you have the Iraqi Government, the Iraqi people, the international community that has now spoken through the United Nations, who want a free, stable, pluralist, democratic Iraq. And on the other hand you have some of the former Saddam supporters; you have outside terrorists; you have fanatics and extremists of one sort or another who want to stop the possibility of that new Iraq happening.

And of course, it's going to carry on being difficult and dangerous. There was

the tragic loss of a British soldier today, and many American servicemen have died. Many Iraqi civilians have died. Many of those who are joining up to the new Iraqi security services have died, have given their lives. But they've all given their lives in the cause of trying to provide a different and better future for the people of Iraq.

And I think what is interesting about this situation is that for those people who are there in Iraq causing this death and destruction, they have a very, very clear and simple objective. And the objective is not just to destabilize Iraq, to produce chaos, to produce bloodshed, to try and prevent democracy. The strategy of these terrorists is to try and prevent Iraq becoming a symbol of hope not just for the Iraqi people but, actually, for that region and the wider world.

And that is why, in a very real sense, because Al Qaida and other terrorist groups are actually there in Iraq now, what is happening in Iraq, the battle in Iraq, the battle for Iraq and its future, if you like, is, in a genuine sense, the frontline of the battle against terrorism and the new security threat that we face.

And that security threat is what has dominated our discussion here at the NATO summit. And that security threat, which is about this new and poisonous and evil form of extremism linked to a perversion of the true faith of Islam and repressive, unstable states that proliferate in and deal in chemical, biological, nuclear weapons—that security threat is the threat of our times.

And the reason why it is so important that NATO fulfills its functions in respect of Afghanistan and Iraq is that in both those countries, the same struggle for democracy and freedom is going on. And you can see in Afghanistan—yes, of course, there are still tremendous difficulties—but 2½ million refugees have returned there; girls are now allowed to go to school—several million of them at school were banned from school under the Taliban; eco-

nomic growth rates of 30 percent last year, 20 percent this year.

What is the struggle? The struggle in Afghanistan is the struggle between the majority of Afghans, 4 million of whom have already registered to vote, against Taliban elements, Al Qaida elements, people who want to drag the country backwards, who want to turn it back into a failed and repressive state.

And so that's why it's right for NATO to step up to the mark today and say, "We are going to extend the role of the security force." It's quite right for us to say, as the U.K., "We will make a contribution in putting the ARRC force forward in 2006 to allow NATO to continue with its responsibilities." It's why it's right for us to look at the measures we need urgently in order to give the protection for the Afghans as they approach their September election date.

And in respect to Iraq, exactly the same issues arise. As I say, there again—you have people trying to get towards freedom and democracy and people trying to stop them. And so our job's got to be, again as an international community, to give them help. And that's why it's important that NATO helps with the training of the Iraqi security forces.

And everybody knows that ultimately we can be there in support, but as the Iraqis themselves will tell you, they know that ultimately their task, their responsibility is to make their country safe. And they want us to help. So that's what we're going to do, help with the training and equipping of the Iraqi security forces.

Just one final point I want to make. I thought we had an interesting set of discussions this morning and at lunch today. But there was a very powerful speech that was made by the President of Latvia at our lunch today when we were discussing the question of what NATO should do to help Afghanistan and Iraq. And I think it's sometimes a very useful reminder for some of the newest democracies in our world

to tell us, from a standpoint of immense moral force, just what democracy means to people who have faced repression for so many years. And she made a very powerful intervention that reminded us and reminded me, certainly, again, of what it is we are here to do. We know the security threat we face. We know the ultimate answer to it is not just force of arms and security measures; it is ultimately the values of democracy and freedom and justice and the rule of law. And that's what we're trying to do.

And for NATO, after the end of the cold war, after all the changes that have happened, I think it has its role today. It is to support that process of transition and change, the world over, because ultimately our best guarantee of security lies in the values that are not values that are American or British or Western values but the values of humanity.

Thank you.

President Bush. We'll answer a couple of questions. Dick [Richard Keil, Bloomberg News], you got a question?

Q. I do, Mr. President.

President Bush. Why don't you ask it?

Possibility of Martial Law in Iraq

Q. Mr. President, Iraq's new Prime Minister has talked in recent days about the possibility of imposing martial law there as a way of restoring security. Is that something that you think a new, emerging Government should do, and particularly with the use of U.S. forces, who would have to be instrumental in doing it?

President Bush. You know, Prime Minister Allawi has fought tyranny. He's a guy that stood up to Saddam Hussein. He's a patriot, and every conversation I've had with him has been one the recognizes human liberty, human rights. I mean, he's a man who is willing to risk his life for a democratic future for Iraq.

Having said that, he may take tough security measures to deal with Zarqawi, but he may have to. Zarqawi is the guy who

beheads people on TV. He's the person that orders suiciders to kill women and children. And so Prime Minister Allawi, as the head of a sovereign Government, may decide he's going to have to take some tough measures to deal with a brutal, cold-blooded killer. And our job is to help the Iraqis stand up forces that are able to deal with these thugs.

I mean, it's tough; there's no question about it. Look, they can't whip our militaries. They can't whip our militaries. What they can do is get on your TV screens and stand in front of your TV cameras and cut somebody's head off, in order to try to cause us to cringe and retreat. That's their strongest weapon. And we just—as Prime Minister Allawi has said publicly many times, he will not cower in the face of such brutal murder, and neither will we—neither will we.

Prime Minister Blair. I think you've got to distinguish very carefully between two separate things. The first is, undoubtedly, the new Iraqi Government will want to take tough security measures. They have to. They've got a situation where they've got these terrorists who are prepared to kill any number of innocent people. And remember, the innocent Iraqis who are dying in Iraq today are dying because of these terrorist acts.

On the other hand, I know perfectly well from the discussions I've had not just with the Prime Minister but with the other Iraqi ministers, their purpose is to take tough security measures but in order to guarantee freedom for people, not to take it away. So they're not going to be wanting to introduce martial law that takes away the basic freedoms of the people. On the contrary, they will be wanting to take tough security measures, and we will want to help train their forces able to guard and get after the people doing this killing. But it's not going to be about taking away people's freedoms. It's going to be about allowing those freedoms to happen.

Andy.

*Iraqi Government Action Against Terror/
Germany and France*

Q. Andrew Martin, BBC. Could I ask both leaders, following on from that, do we, in some sense, then give the new Iraqi administration carte blanche to go after these people? The Iraqi Defense Minister was talking this morning about hunting down and eliminating the insurgents. And if I could also just ask, do you now regard Germany and, in particular, France as shoulder to shoulder alongside you, after the difficult times you've had with them over the past 18 months?

Prime Minister Blair. On the first point, I don't think there's any question of the Iraqis—no Iraqi minister has said this to me, of wanting to hunt people down, in the sense of kill people without a proper trial and end up taking away people's basic liberties. They don't want that at all. But you've got to understand what they're faced with there. They're faced with a group of people who will kill any number of people and who will do the most terrible acts of barbarity. And why—in order to stop them getting a democratic and stable country.

As I keep saying to people, there are lots of things that we thought might happen as a result of the conflict in Iraq. I mean, we were confident of military victory. But there were lots of things that we thought might happen. We thought there might be a humanitarian crisis, and we made a lot of provisions for that. We thought that maybe—and we were told this by many people, many so-called experts who said, "Well, the Iraqis, they'll want a theological state. They won't want a proper democracy." These issues have actually either been dealt with or resolved themselves.

What we've got is a very simple problem to describe and a complicated problem to overcome. We have groups of terrorists and insurgents who will use suicide bombs, who do not care in the least about killing innocent people, who will do whatever it takes to stop the country functioning properly.

Now, in those circumstances, I don't blame at all the Iraqi ministers—any of us would be doing this, as politicians in the same situation—of wanting to get after those people and hunt them down. But they're not getting after them and hunting them down in defiance of basic freedoms but in order to help basic freedoms. And so I don't think we should set this new thing away that somehow the new Iraqi Government wants to—somehow wants to put aside democracy and freedom and all the rest of it. The reason they're trying to stop the terrorists is so that democracy and freedom can flourish in Iraq.

Secondly, in relation to France and Germany, look, I mean, there's no point in thinking—we haven't overcome the disagreement there was about whether the conflict was justified. I mean, there's no point in us standing here and saying, "All the previous disagreements have disappeared." They haven't. On the other hand, what is important is you've got a United Nations resolution that has blessed the new Government in Iraq, and you've got a situation in which we have accepted today that there is a good and sound NATO role, which is actually the only role we ever sought for NATO, of training and helping to train the Iraqis so that they can do their own security work, which is the request that they have made to us. And in that sense, I think the international community has come together, and I welcome it.

President Bush. Yes, my sense is, is that there's a hope that we succeed with all the nations sitting around the table. Everybody understands the stakes. And the stakes are high, particularly for those of us who recognize that the long-term defeat of terror will happen when freedom takes hold in the broader Middle East. It's a long-term solution.

And if you really think about what's happened since September the 11th, there's been some amazing progress. Pakistan has now joined the battle against Al Qaida. President Musharraf has made a concerted

decision to go after Al Qaida, which hides in remote regions of his country on the Afghanistan border. Libya has declared and produced its weapons programs that we're now destroying. You know, Turkey is solid. There's a solid democracy here in the broader Middle East which is a great example.

Afghanistan, which was a terrorist haven—this is where the terrorists plotted and trained to come and kill, not only in America but elsewhere—is now heading toward elections. Who ever thought Afghanistan was going to have elections? Three years ago you said, “Gosh, you think Afghanistan is going to have elections,” I probably would have said, “No.” And so is Iraq—Iraq is headed towards elections too. It's substantial change in a quick period of time. And I think everybody sitting around the table is hopeful that democracy will serve as an agent of change in this part of the world.

In terms of hunting them down, look, I think the Iraqis understand what we know, that the best way to defend yourself is to go on the offense and find the killers before they kill. I presume that's what he was saying; I haven't asked him his language. I have sometimes used that language myself. And I've used it because my most solemn duty is to defend my country, is to defend it from people that obviously are willing to kill innocent life just like that. And my position is, is the best way to defend yourself is to find the few, the few—and I believe that's what he's saying—that we're going to find those few before they continue to bomb whoever happens to be in their way. And we'll support him. We'll help him.

Let's see—Jim [Jim Angle, FOX News].

Opposition to Coalition Action in Iraq

Q. We were reminded by the anniversary of D-day that 60 years ago it took an massive invasion to end the occupation of France and other European nations. Now, in Iraq, the coalition has gladly and will-

ingly returned sovereignty to the Iraqis. And I wonder, is there any sign that this has changed the views of your more skeptical NATO brethren, any evidence that the critics are now persuaded to the view that you both argued, that it was, in fact, a liberation? Or at this point, does it matter to each of you what the critics say?

President Bush. Yes, it matters to me what you say. I mean, it matters to me what—[laughter]—sorry. [Laughter] Just a little humor. [Laughter] Yes, it matters. It matters because it is important for nations that are blessed by freedom to come together to help nations that are struggling to be free, and that's why it matters. The more people participating in the process, the better off it is. The more reconstruction there is, the more people willing to help with the education of children, the more people willing to help rebuild hospitals, the more people willing to help to rebuild this destroyed infrastructure, infrastructure destroyed by the Taliban or by Saddam Hussein, the better off the world will be.

And so, yes, the more people who say this is worthwhile, the more likely it is 50 million people are going to realize the blessings that we have, and the world will be better off for it.

And the examples of free societies in their neighborhoods are going to make a huge difference in the lives of others. Listen, there are people inside of Iran who are watching what's happening, young, vibrant, professional people who want to be free, and they're wondering whether or not they'll have that opportunity. And I think a free Iraq and a free Afghanistan are going to set such a vibrant, bright example for others.

And so, yes, it matters. And I think people are beginning to see that we were, in fact, liberators and that we're not only going to liberate, we'll follow through, no matter how tough it gets on the ground.

Prime Minister Blair. I think, speaking as someone with a largely uncritical media—[laughter]—I think that, sure—I'm

not sure that we will have persuaded all our critics, no. But I think that—I think it's just worth emphasizing the degree to which our own strategy has evolved, post-September the 11th. Sometimes people talk about this issue to do with international terrorism today as if somehow it was because of what we have done in Afghanistan or Iraq that this terrorist threat exists. This terrorist threat was building up there for a long time. September the 11th did—and should have—changed our thinking. And the way our strategy has evolved is that I think we know now that it is important not simply to go in and get after the Taliban in Afghanistan but also to say, “No, we’re going to do something else. We’re also going to give that country democracy and freedom, because that is actually part of the battle against terrorism as well.”

And that’s why it’s important to see this as a whole picture. The fact is, if Iraq becomes a stable and democratic country—and I’m not underestimating for a single instant the difficulties in doing that, incidentally—but if it does, that is a huge blow to the propaganda and to the effort of the extremists. That’s, in fact, why sometimes I think they have a clearer idea of how important it is to stop us than sometimes the Western world has of why it’s so important that we get there with Iraq and with the Iraqi people.

And so the Greater Middle East Initiative and the idea of spreading democracy there, resolving the Israeli-Palestinian issue on the basis of two states, both democratic states—because what we want for the Palestinians is not just their own state; we want a democratic state for them, where they have proper freedoms as well.

So I think that you can see this as part of an evolving strategy, where we realize we’ve got to be prepared to take tough security measures and tough action where necessary, but we know that that is not all that it’s about. It’s also about trying to show that there is a value system there that isn’t related to any religion or one reli-

gion, one civilization. It’s about these basic values of humanity that, wherever they’re implemented and tried, you get greater security, because basically democracies—well, they have to fight sometimes when they have to defend themselves, but they don’t have the same aggressive intent that these unstable or extreme or fanatical regimes do.

So part of what we’re trying to do—and yes, it’s tough at the moment, and of course, you get into a situation where people will fight us very hard. That’s in the nature of any of these struggles that you undertake, but our honest belief is the world will be a safer place if we’re able to make this work. And I don’t know whether we’ve convinced people of this or not, but I do think—the one thing that interests me is occasionally when people who opposed our action in Iraq will say, “The really important thing now is to get those democratic elections.” And I think that’s fantastic, but let’s be clear: We wouldn’t be talking about democratic elections in Iraq if Saddam was still there.

Timing of Transfer of Sovereignty in Iraq

Q. A question for both of you. How do you counter the impression you’ve created today that you couldn’t hand over the burden of Iraq quickly enough and the way that it was done is proof, is a symbol, if you like, of a shambles in Iraq?

Prime Minister Blair. It’s a little bit tough there, Bill—I mean, you know—[laughter].

President Bush. Well, let me try it then. You know that last Friday we handed over the final ministry to the Iraqi interim government. In other words, we have been making a transfer of sovereignty all along. And the—actually, we’ve been contemplating this move for a while. But the final decision was by Prime Minister Allawi, and he thought it would strengthen his hand. And so that’s why the handover took place today, as opposed to 48 hours later. And so, not only is there full sovereignty in the

hands of the Government, but all the ministries have been transferred, and they're up and running.

I supported the decision. I thought it was a smart thing to do, primarily because the Prime Minister was ready for it. And it's a sign of confidence. It's a sign that we're ready to go, and it's a proud moment—it really is—for the Iraqi people. And frankly, I feel comfortable in making the decision, because I feel comfortable about Prime Minister Allawi and President al-Yawr. These are strong people. They're gutsy. They're courageous. They're, as we say in Texas, standup guys. You know, they'll lead. They'll lead their people to a better day. And it's going to be very hard for them and very trying, but they just—they and the Iraqi people need to hear, loud and clear, they'll have our friendship and our support, no matter how tough it gets.

Prime Minister Blair. I think it's worth just pointing out as well—I agree, obviously, with what's just been said, but I think you've got somewhere in the region of, is it 10 or 11 ministries that are already effectively run by the Iraqis themselves. I mean, their health and education ministries are already run by Iraqis. But it's a sign of their confidence and their desire to get on with it. They want to do it. They know that in the end, they've got to do it. They want that responsibility.

And I think one of the exciting things about the last few weeks is that the Iraqi

people, in a sense, through their Prime Minister and President, have indicated, "We want the responsibility." Now, we then stay and support, however, and we're not walking out of this at all. We stay and support them, and we'll stay for as long as it takes to make sure that that support is there for them, so that we help them to that freedom and democracy they want to see. And it's a—I think that, in a way, the relationship between us and the Iraqi Government has been—it's a healthier, better relationship now that there's this transfer of sovereignty there, and where they really want the responsibility of running their own country. But they know the practical fact is, for the moment, until their own security forces are built up properly, they need our support, and they have our support.

President Bush. Thank you all very much.

NOTE: The President's news conference began at 4:55 p.m. at the Hilton Istanbul. In his remarks, he referred to Prime Minister Ayad Allawi and President Ghazi al-Ujayl al-Yawr of the Iraqi interim government; L. Paul "Jerry" Bremer III, former Presidential Envoy to Iraq; former President Saddam Hussein of Iraq; senior Al Qaida associate Abu Musab Al Zarqawi; and President Pervez Musharraf of Pakistan. Prime Minister Blair referred to President Vaira Vike-Freiberga of Latvia. A reporter referred to Minister of Defense Hazim Qutran al-Khuzai al-Shalan of Iraq.

Remarks at Galatasaray University in Istanbul *June 29, 2004*

Thank you all very much. Distinguished guests, the rector of this fine university, ladies and gentlemen: Laura and I are grateful for the warm and gracious hospitality we have received these past 3 days in the Republic of Turkey. I am honored

to visit this beautiful country where two continents meet, a nation that upholds great tradition and faces the future with confidence. America is honored to call Turkey an Ally and a friend.