

The President's News Conference With Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen of Denmark in Crawford, Texas
March 1, 2008

President Bush. Welcome. Thanks for coming. A couple opening statements, and we'll answer two questions apiece.

Mr. Prime Minister, we're really thrilled you're here. Laura and I love having you and Anne-Mette with us. Pretty good guests when you can have a meaningful mountain bike ride at sunset and then at sunrise, and the man not even break into a sweat. You're in incredible condition, and I really have enjoyed my time with you—my time when we talked and my time when we rode. I also appreciate the fact that you're a good personal friend and a strong leader.

I want to share with you some of the things we talked about. First of all, we talked about the war on terror and the ideological struggle of the 21st century. I appreciate your clear vision of the threats we all face and the opportunities that, by working together, we can help young democracies survive and help people realize the blessings of free societies.

I do want to thank you very much for the strong support of the NATO mission in Afghanistan. I know brave Danish soldiers have lost their lives. Our deepest sympathies go for their—to their loved ones. It is painful when anybody loses a life in any time, but—much less in combat. But it's very important for the people of Denmark, like it is for the people of the United States, to understand that, one, we're denying extremist groups safe haven, the very same groups that attacked and killed thousands of innocent people. We're helping young girls go to school. We're helping infrastructure develop. We're helping people find health care. We're helping a hopeful society begin to emerge. And we spent a lot of time talking about that.

I also appreciate very much the Danish contributions to help the people of Iraq. I strongly believe on the policy of return

on success. We're returning some of our troops based upon success. That's precisely what the Danish Government did, because they were successful in their mission. And I congratulate you, Mr. Prime Minister, for having a vision.

I also was able to share with you my sense of what's happening in Iraq. We're watching a young democracy grow, much to the amazement of a lot of critics, a lot of people who said, "Well, it's impossible for this to happen in the rocky soils of Iraq." And it's happening today, and there's still more work to be done.

We're looking forward to our summit in Bucharest. We talked about what we intend to do and how to work to have a comprehensive, strategic plan available for Iraq—I mean, for Afghanistan, so our allies can take this plan home, can explain to the people why it's important. We also talked about the need to make sure that there's more civilian-military cooperation, that tangible evidence of a free society begins to become more evident to people and to grassroots in Afghanistan.

We talked about the spirit of NATO's open door policy. And we jointly welcome new nations in the alliance, so long as they meet the standards for membership.

We also talked about other global challenges. We talked about Iran, about how Iran must verifiably suspend its uranium enrichment program and come clean about its nuclear intentions and past actions. I also want Iran to stop supporting terror.

We also talked about Africa. I briefed the Prime Minister on our trip to Africa, talked about our mutual desire to help the folks suffering in Darfur. We talked about what happened in Kenya, and we're most grateful to the leaders there to help reconcile what could have been a very difficult situation.

Finally, we talked about climate change, more than once. We talked about climate change as I showed him my ranch and about how we're conservationists here in Crawford. And then we talked about the need for us to develop alternative technologies. And I really do welcome Denmark's leadership for the 2009 U.N. climate change meeting. And I appreciate very much you taking the lead in this issue.

And look, it was a great visit. And I'm now looking forward to giving the man a hamburger—[laughter]—after answering a couple of questions. But welcome, sir.

Prime Minister Rasmussen. Thank you very much, Mr. President. Let me first of all express my gratitude for your invitation to visit your ranch in Crawford. My wife and I are very pleased to be here. We have had a rewarding stay and a challenging stay, I must say. [Laughter] You made me work very hard out there on the terrific mountain bike trails on your wonderful ranch. And I can't imagine a better place to spend time talking and enjoying time with good friends. And I can't imagine a better symbol of the close and strong ties between the United States and Denmark.

President Bush. Thank you, sir.

Prime Minister Rasmussen. Mr. President, freedom, democracy, and human rights are the core values that unite us. Freedom and dignity of the individual are universal values. It is values that people living under oppression and brutal regimes strive for. We have an obligation to stand by these people in their struggle for liberty and democracy. This is our common challenge. And you, Mr. President, and the United States have, above anyone else, advanced this vision of liberty and democracy around the world. Allow me to pay tribute to you for this.

President Bush. Thank you, sir.

Prime Minister Rasmussen. And it is no easy task; there are obstacles and opponents. But I do share your vision. Freedom is universal. And in the struggle between

democracy and dictatorship, no one can be neutral. It is as simple as that.

That is why we are in Afghanistan to fight the Taliban. That is why we removed the brutal dictator in Iraq. That is why your leadership in the Middle East is crucial. That is why we work for development and against extremism in Africa. That is why we have joined forces in the Balkans, stabilized and recognized Kosovo, and work for Balkan countries to be fully integrated in Europe.

The United States and Europe are key partners in this endeavor. Through NATO and the European Union, we reach out to aspiring countries like Ukraine and Georgia. We support their efforts to reform and develop links with Europe and across the Atlantic. And we will send a strong signal of support from our upcoming NATO summit in Bucharest.

Mr. President, as you mentioned, in 2009 Denmark will host the Global Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen. And it will take place in the land of windmills. We need a comprehensive global agreement, and American leadership is needed to reach that goal. And American leadership is crucial in order to motivate major economies like India and China to contribute.

Climate is a huge international challenge. Many countries are suffering from adverse weather conditions. We need to protect our globe. We need to reduce CO₂ emissions through green technology. We need to reduce our dependency on fossil fuels. And we need to break our addiction to oil, not only to counter climate change, but also to reduce our dependency on unstable and sometimes even undemocratic regimes. And I see the United States and Europe as key partners in the struggle to fight climate change and ensure energy security.

Mr. President, together we have handled the challenges of the past. Now let us together meet the challenges and threats of the future. We owe that to future generations.

Thank you.

President Bush. Thank you, sir.

Deb [Deb Riechmann, Associated Press].

Iraq/Iran

Q. Mr. President—

President Bush. Yes, Deb.

Q. I'd like to ask you about Iraq. General Petraeus and Gates are talking about a pause in troop reductions once we get to the pre-surge levels in July. Will that be it, or is it possible that there will be additional drawdowns before you leave office?

And also, does the Iraqi Government's decision to host Ahmadi-nejad in Baghdad undermine your efforts to isolate Tehran?

President Bush. To the latter, I—look, I mean, he's a neighbor. And the message needs to be, quit sending in sophisticated equipment that's killing our citizens, and that the message will be that we're negotiating a long-term security agreement with the United States precisely because we want enough breathing space for our democracy to develop.

My message is for him, stop exporting terror, and that the international community is serious about continuing to isolate Iran until they come clean about their nuclear weapons ambitions. And that's why there will be action in the United Nations here early next week as we work collaboratively to continue to send a clear message.

In terms of troop levels, there is going to be enormous speculation, again, about what decision I will make. I can only tell you, Deb, that it's going to be based upon the recommendations of Secretary Gates, General Petraeus, the Joint Chiefs. My sole criterion is, whatever we do, it ought to be in the context of success.

If we fail in Iraq, the consequences for world peace will be enormous; the consequences for the security of the United States will be enormous. And therefore, my question is, what does it take to succeed? And we're not going to let politics drive my decision—again. If I worried about polls

and focus groups, I wouldn't have sent more troops in. I sent more troops in because the situation was unacceptable. And now we're succeeding. And so therefore, Ryan Crocker—the Ambassador—and General Petraeus will be coming back, and they'll report to the country, and they'll report to me. And the decisions—you'll see them evolve.

Q. Can I ask just one follow-up?

President Bush. Maybe. [Laughter]

U.S. Troop Levels in Iraq/Iraqi Provincial Elections

Q. Are you worried about reducing U.S. troop presence before the elections in October?

President Bush. Deb, see, that's what I said. I just—politics isn't going to play into it.

Q. You mean the Iraqi politics?

President Bush. Oh, you mean the Iraqi—I thought you meant our—

Q. No, no.

President Bush. I didn't listen.

Q. I'm sorry. [Laughter]

President Bush. I apologize.

Q. I believe there's Provincial elections coming up in—

President Bush. There are.

Q. Okay. Which—

President Bush. The 1st of October 2008, that's very observant.

Q. Would you be worried about—

President Bush. And I was not being observant. And it must be because I'm just so relaxed on the ranch, I didn't even bother to listen to your question. [Laughter]

Q. Would you be concerned about doing it before then?

President Bush. I think our generals ought to be concerned about making sure there's enough of a presence so that the Provincial elections can be carried off in such a way that democracy advances. But that—I'll wait and hear what they have to say. But yes, I mean, that ought to be a factor in their recommendation to me. I apologize.

Do you want to call on somebody?
Prime Minister Rasmussen. Yup.

Progress in Iraq

Q. Thank you. Mr. President, Mr. Prime Minister, the war in Iraq—if we could stay on that subject for just a minute—I mean, it's been going on for almost 5 years. Is there anything you would have done differently, Mr. President, if you had known back then in 2003 what you know today?

President Bush. That's an interesting question. One thing I wouldn't do differently is leave Saddam Hussein in power. It was the right decision then; it's the right decision today; and it will be viewed as the right decision when history is finally written.

You know, I—look, I mean, there's going to be ample time to second-guess decisions, and I'll let the historians do that. A war is constantly changing, and what appears to have been an easy decision today might have been a lot difficult when you take it—put it in historical context. And so my focus, sir, is moving forward and making sure this progress that we're watching continues.

And there's been some ups and downs, obviously. I mean, the great moments were, of course, the writing of a modern Constitution for the Middle East and votes for a President and a Parliament. And then 2006 came along, and an enemy was able to stir up unbelievable sectarian hatred and violence. And so I had a choice to make, you know, accept it and allow for failure, or do something about it. And obviously, I chose the latter, which was—I wouldn't call that exactly a popular decision. But if you follow popularity as your guide, then you sacrifice principle and vision.

And so, look, this is a—this will be an important chapter of my Presidency, and they'll be analyzing these decisions for a long time. And I just got to tell you, I've got great faith in the capacity of democracy to be transformative, not only for the people of Iraq but for the region. And that's

why we're discussing with the Iraqis a long-term security agreement, to have a—have the kind of effect that will enable people to be confident to make hard decisions when it comes to reconciliation and political progress.

But the historians, I'm sure, will find ample—well, there's some short-term historians already trying to find some ample opportunity to figure out what went right or what went wrong, what we could have done differently. But there's no such thing as accurate short-term history, as far as I'm concerned. There needs to be time for people to be able to see and put things in proper perspective.

Michael [Mike Emanuel, FOX News].

Afghanistan

Q. Thank you, Mr. President. And thank you for bringing us to the great weather.

The President. Yes, back to Texas, man. The guy cut his teeth in Texas. [Laughter]

Q. Mr. President, you've had an opportunity to meet with multiple leaders this week to talk about the war in Afghanistan. As you head into the NATO summit next month, what do you anticipate, in terms of, do you think some of the allies may be able to contribute more in terms of trainers and Provincial Reconstruction Teams?

And, Mr. Prime Minister, we've heard the President and other U.S. officials praise Denmark's contribution to Afghanistan. I'm wondering what you think can be done to encourage some other NATO allies to perhaps step up and contribute more.

President Bush. As you know, my administration has made it abundantly clear, we expect people to carry their—to carry a heavy burden if they're going to be in Iraq—Afghanistan. In other words, Secretary Gates made—said, look, if we're going to fight as an alliance, let's fight as an alliance.

Having said that, I understand there's certain political constraints on certain countries. And so we ought to be—I am going

to go to Bucharest with the notion that we're thankful for the contributions being made and encourage people to contribute more. The United States is putting in 3,200 additional marines. We are trying to help Canada realize her goal of 1,000 additional fighters in the southern part of the country, as is Anders working toward that.

You know, the key in Bucharest is for people to—from around the world to understand, one, how important the mission is to the successes that are being achieved. Remember last year about this time—it was: The Taliban was going on the offensive; the Taliban was going to be doing this; the Taliban was going to be doing that. Well, the Taliban had a bad year when it came to military operations. And are they still dangerous? Yes, they're dangerous. They're still capable of convincing young kids to go in and blow people up with suicide vests. That's dangerous. Are they overwhelming the Government? No. Do they have a presence in the country? Yes. Do we have the capacity to go after them? Absolutely. Do we need more capacity? Yes, we do, and that's the mission, and that's what we'll work on.

The other thing, as Anders mentioned and I mentioned, was that this is an opportunity to keep an open door policy for NATO, presuming that countries meet certain criterion and meet the obligations to which they signed up.

Prime Minister Rasmussen. Thank you very much. We have to make sure that our mission in Afghanistan will be a success. A lot is at stake for the Afghan people, for international security, and for NATO. Therefore, we need more troops in Afghanistan. This is the reason why Denmark decided to increase our number of troops, equivalent to 50 percent, last autumn.

I feel confident that we can convince partners to contribute with more troops than today. And I think the best way to encourage partners to contribute to a higher degree is to show the good example.

Denmark is a small country, but per capita, Denmark is among the biggest contributors in Afghanistan. And we work together with the British in the southern Helmand Province, really a hot spot. And so I think the good example is a very important thing.

And finally, I think we should be better to tell the positive stories about Afghanistan because, actually, there is a lot of progress: democracy, construction of infrastructure, roads, the health system is in a better condition, not least education. Girls and women have now access to the educational system. We should be better to tell this positive story and, thereby, encourage the international community to step up its efforts.

President Bush. Final question, Anders, I'm getting hungry. [Laughter]

Prime Minister Rasmussen. Yes. We have a Danish gentleman over here.

President Bush. Yes.

2008 Presidential Election/Environment

Q. Mr. Prime Minister, you talked about climate. Did these talks make you believe that a bridge can be made so that there will be an agreement at the U.N. climate summit in Copenhagen in 2009?

And, Mr. President, based on what we have heard the two Democratic leading contenders for your job state about foreign policy, what parts of your foreign policy do you see threatened by—

President Bush. Yes. You know, that's a very clever attempt—I'm going to let him answer the climate change thing—but it's a very clever attempt by you to drag me into the middle of the 2008 campaign, similar to what these two fine folks—three fine folks have been doing. So therefore, we'll let it sort out. But I will tell you this: The issue in America is going to be, who will keep taxes low and who will be tough in protecting America. And our candidate for President is going to win because he will have convinced the American people to this truth.

Nice try. [Laughter]

Prime Minister Rasmussen. Thank you. Our talks about climate change have really been encouraging. Actually—excuse me, Mr. President—I think the American President is really a convinced environmentalist. And the President has assured me that the United States will take leadership in our endeavors to achieve a comprehensive global deal in Copenhagen in 2009.

And I have commended the President for his initiative to gather the 15 or 17 major economies in the world, because we have to take on board all the major emitters of greenhouse gases. And I consider the American initiative a very valuable input in our preparations for the Global Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen. So based on our talks today, I'm a bit more optimistic than I was before.

President Bush. I know when he says committed environmentalist, it doesn't conform to stereotype. All I ask people is to look at the record.

Thank you all very much for coming. We're thrilled you're here at the ranch. Good to see some of you again. Welcome.

2008 Presidential Election

Q. Did you vote in the Texas primary?

The President. I did, and I'm not telling you who. [*Laughter*] Thank you.

NOTE: The President's news conference began at 12 p.m. at the Bush Ranch. In his remarks, he referred to Anne-Mette Rasmussen, wife of Prime Minister Rasmussen; President Mahmud Ahmadi-nejad of Iran; and Gen. David H. Petraeus, USA, commanding general, Multi-National Force—Iraq.

Remarks to the National Association of Attorneys General March 3, 2008

General Wasden, thank you, sir. And General Lynch, thank you for having the Attorney General and me here to visit with the Nation's attorney generals. I thank you very much for serving the country. I'm honored that you've stepped forward to say, you know, my family—I'm going to put my family in such a way that we're going to serve together. And I hope you have found the experience to be as enriching as I've found it—my experience in public life to be.

I also know that you're dealing with a wide variety of issues. I was the Governor of Texas. I see my—the attorney general of Texas here. It's been—it was a great joy to work with Greg when I was the Governor. We have a solemn responsibility together, and that's to protect the country. You do it in a variety of ways. And we've got a responsibility here. As a matter of

fact, there's no greater responsibility at the Federal Government than to protect the American people, which means that we must make sure our professionals have the tools they need to do the jobs we've asked them to do.

Now, there's a serious debate here, and some of the attorney generals have written a letter, both Democrats and Republicans, urging that the debate be solved in such a way that the professionals can do the job. And I thank you for wading in. There's a lot of legal complexities on the FISA renewal debate, but the real issue comes down to this: To defend the country, we need to be able to monitor communications of terrorists quickly and be able to do it effectively.

And we can't do it without the cooperation of private companies. Now, unfortunately, some of the private companies have