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The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on March 30 but was embargoed for release until the broadcast.

Statement on the Arrest of Former President Slobodan Milosevic of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro)

April 1, 2001

I welcome today's arrest of Slobodan Milosevic, the former President of Yugoslavia. His arrest represents an important step in bringing to a close the tragic era of his brutal dictatorship.

Milosevic was responsible for great suffering throughout the Balkan region. He deserves to be tried for his crimes against the Serbian people. He also deserves to be tried for violations of international law. We cannot and must not forget the chilling images of terrified women and children herded onto trains, emaciated prisoners interned behind barbed wire, and mass graves unearthed by U.N. investigators.

Milosevic's arrest should be a first step toward trying him for the crimes against humanity with which he is charged. I am confident that Yugoslavia will continue down the path of cooperation with the U.N. War Crimes Tribunal. I am encouraged by the actions that Belgrade has already taken to work with the Tribunal, including its assistance over the last several weeks in transferring two indictees to The Hague. I call on President Kostunica to continue this cooperation and to see that Milosevic is likewise brought to justice.

The United States appreciates the hard job that Yugoslavia faces in building its new democracy. I assure the Yugoslav Government and people that they can count on the friendship of the United States as they continue down the path of democratic and economic reform. We look forward to the day that Yugoslavia is fully part of a Europe that is whole and free and at peace.

NOTE: In the statement, the President referred to President Vojislav Kostunica, Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro).

Remarks on the United States Navy Aircraft Incident in the South China Sea

April 2, 2001

Late Saturday night in Washington, Sunday morning in China, a United States naval maritime patrol aircraft on a routine surveillance mission in international airspace over the South China Sea collided with one of two Chinese fighters that were shadowing our plane. Both our aircraft and a Chinese aircraft were damaged in the collision. Our aircraft made an emergency landing at an airfield on China's Hainan Island.

We have been in contact with the Chinese Government about this incident since Saturday night. From our own information, we know that the United States naval plane landed safely. Our Embassy in Beijing has been told by the Chinese Government that all 24 crewmembers are safe.

Our priorities are the prompt and safe return of the crew and the return of the aircraft without further damaging or tampering. The first step should be immediate access by our Embassy personnel to our crewmembers. I am troubled by the lack of a timely Chinese response to our request for this access. Our Embassy officials are on the ground and prepared to visit the crew and aircraft as soon as the Chinese Government allows them to do so, and I call on the Chinese Government to grant this access promptly.

Failure of the Chinese Government to react promptly to our request is inconsistent with standard diplomatic practice and with the expressed desire of both our countries for better relations.

Finally, we have offered to provide search and rescue assistance to help the Chinese Government locate its missing aircraft and pilot. Our military stands ready to help.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:38 a.m. on the South Grounds at the White House.

Remarks Following Discussions With President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt and an Exchange With Reporters

April 2, 2001

President Bush. I'm going to start off with a statement; the President will make a statement. We'll have two questions from the American press, two questions from the Egyptian press, and then you'll be asked to leave in a prompt fashion. [*Laughter*]

Of course, it is my honor to welcome the President of Egypt here to the Oval Office. I had the honor of meeting the President a couple of years ago. I found him to be an engaging, charming, strong leader then; my opinion hasn't changed after our good, frank discussion today.

We're friends. We will remain friends. And we will work together to bring peace to the Middle East, and we'll work together to try to convince all parties involved to lay down their arms, so there would be less violence. I'm also committed to working with the President on relations—economic relations that will be to the advantage of both our countries.

And so it is my high honor to welcome President Mubarak here to the Oval Office and to the United States.

Mr. President.

President Mubarak. Thank you. I'm so pleased to come here for the first time to meet with my friend President Bush in the Oval Office. He's a friend. I know him some time ago. And I'm very keen to work with him on all issues concerning the Middle East, especially the Middle East problem.

We are working very hard, and we are going to cooperate very hard in the direction of peace because our main concern is peace and stability in the area of the Middle East, which is in the interest of the United States, of Egypt, Jordan, and all countries in the area. We are going to do our best; we are going to cooperate with the main players, with the United States. And I have great hopes that President Bush will do the maximum effort of that so as to reach—lessening the tension and resume negotiations, which is vitally important.

U.S. Navy Aircraft Incident

Q. Mr. President, on China, do you consider the American service personnel hostages? And secondly, is it true that the Chinese have already boarded our Navy spy plane, and how do you react to that?

President Bush. My reaction is, is that the Chinese must promptly allow us to have contact with the 24 air men and women that are there and return our plane to us without any further tampering. I sent a very clear message, and I expect them to heed the message.

Q. Have they boarded the plane, sir?

President Bush. My message stands for itself.

Q. Will you be more involved, sir——

Q. The Middle East situation is deteriorating——

President Bush. Yes, ma'am.

Q. Actually, sir, I had another question, altogether, but the point is——

President Bush. Did Gregory [David Gregory, NBC News] steal your question? That's very inhospitable of you. [*Laughter*]

Middle East Peace Process

Q. The Middle East situation, sir, is deteriorating day by day. The press is speculating the American administration is disengaging itself from the area. Can the Middle East afford this vacuum by the absence of an active American role? And have you formulated a new approach, if any?

And President Mubarak, please comment afterwards.

President Bush. Well, we're very engaged in the Middle East and will remain so. As a matter of fact, the Secretary of State has been involved on the telephone this morning with Prime Minister Sharon. I have had numerous telephone conversations with leaders in the Middle East. I'll continue to be actively engaged at promoting a peaceful resolution of the issue. After all, most of our conversation today was talking about how to bring peace in the Middle East.

I understand that we can facilitate peace. We can't force a peace. And we will use our prestige and influence as best we can to facilitate a peace. Part of it is to build a strong foundation for peace in the Middle East. It's important for us to build strong relationships