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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

with countries such as Egypt and Jordan and other countries in the Middle East who have got a stake in peace. But we will remain very actively engaged, and hopefully, there will be positive results.

It is very important for people to realize that the United States will not set a timetable that meets our specific needs. The only lasting peace is one in which the parties involved come to the table. And the role for strong countries like ourselves and Egypt is to encourage, first, the violence to end and, secondly, for discussions to begin again. And I'm very optimistic and hopeful that we'll be able to achieve that.

Q. Mr. President——

Q. Mr. President, your comments——

Q. A comment from President Mubarak——

President Bush. Hold on. AP man. AP man. Excuse me. Oh, sorry.

President Mubarak. I think the President told you everything about that. He is committed to work for peace. We are not going to impose any solution on the parties. We are going to facilitate the situation so that they can sit together, negotiate, and we will help them to reach a final conclusion for peace, because all of us need stability in the area.

Q. The U.S.-Egypt relation is bigger than just the peace——

President Bush. Of course.

Q. Is that true?

President Bush. Oh, absolutely. The U.S.-Egyptian relation is about economic commerce; it's about cultural exchanges. Absolutely. But one of the key things is that we can use our historic relationship to work together to bring peace in the Middle East. It's an important part of our relationship, but not the only important part.

U.S. Navy Aircraft Incident

Q. Mr. President, do you see this accident as a provocation on the part of China or a true accident? And what will it do to U.S.-Chinese relationships, especially your decision on selling arms to Taiwan?

President Bush. Well, I made a very clear statement about how I viewed the incident. It is clear that we had a plane flying in international—over international waters that was damaged. It landed, and we expect there to be contact, as soon as possible, with our crewmembers. And we expect that plane to be returned to us.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:14 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Prime Minister Ariel Sharon of Israel. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Remarks to the National Restaurant Association

April 2, 2001

Well, Denise, thank you very much for your kind introduction and your leadership. I'm honored to be here, and I'm glad you all are here, as well. I'm so pleased with the strong support that my budget and tax relief plan has received from the restaurant folks all across America. It means a lot. A lot of Members of Congress and Members of the United States Senate eat in your establishments, so it's a pretty good place to start the lobbying process. [*Laughter*]

First, I want to describe a little bit about the budget I submitted. It's created some heartburn in Washington because the increase in discretionary spending wasn't as large as some would like to see it.

In the past, during the last fiscal year, the last year that affected this fiscal year, the discretionary spending in our budget went up by 8 percent. Now, that's a lot. It's a lot when you're talking in terms of billions of dollars. It's a lot when you're trying to preserve money for Social Security. It's a lot when you're worried about the state of our economy. It's too much—the increase was way too much. It's almost as if there was a bidding contest to determine who got out of town first.

And so, we came to town with a new attitude that said, we can meet priorities if we control discretionary spending. We can meet priorities; we can pay down debt if we control discretionary spending. We can meet priorities, pay down debt, set aside money for contingency, and send back money to the people who pay the bills if we control discretionary spending.