

We had a wide-ranging discussion, as to be expected among friends, and it's been my honor to welcome him here. And I'm glad you're here.

Prime Minister Verhofstadt. Well, we had, in fact, a very good and intense discussion—not only about biking, that was only at the end, the biking, in the search of who can be the successor of Lance Armstrong. [Laughter] We have not made a final choice on who can be the successor.

But we had a very good, I think, discussion about transatlantic relationship. I'm very pleased that since our last meeting, we have started with this transatlantic informal meetings in New York and in Brussels. And it improves, I think, the relationship, the transatlantic relationship. There is certainly a lot of work still to do, and I think that common point of view and a common policy of the U.S. and of Europe on issues like the Middle East, like Iran, is certainly absolutely necessary and can improve this transatlantic relationship.

And we also discussed the need to have more reflection on future of North Atlantic Alliance, on the relationship between European defense and North Atlantic Alliance, and maybe we can develop a number of initiatives with Belgium in Brussels on that issues.

About the Congo, it's very clear that we have to help. The transition period is, at this moment, successful. We hope for elections in April, a second round in June. But we have already discussed what after these elections. The international community has to continue to help and to seek good governance in the Congo and in Central Africa.

So that were, in any way, the most important elements, and then at the end, in fact, we shall start a negotiation with the American administration to have a new tax treatment between Belgium and the U.S., to avoid double taxation in the future.

Thank you.

President Bush. Good job. Thanks, Guy. Appreciate you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:02 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. Prime Minister Verhofstadt referred to 2005 Tour de France winner Lance Armstrong. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Statement on the Death of Sheikh Jabir al-Ahmad al-Jabir al-Sabah of Kuwait

January 17, 2006

I was deeply saddened to learn of the death of His Highness Sheikh Jabir al-Ahmad al-Sabah, the Amir of Kuwait. Sheikh Jabir was a friend and steadfast and reliable ally of the United States. He supported the U.S. servicemen and women who fought to liberate Kuwait and later Iraq from the aggression and tyranny of Saddam Hussein. Sheikh Jabir worked tirelessly to provide a better future for Kuwait's citizens and was the driving force behind many reforms, including the establishment of a vibrant, elected Parliament and a free press. In his last months, he provided critical leadership to ensure that Kuwait's women achieved political rights. On behalf of the American people, Laura and I send our deepest condolences to Sheikh Jabir's family and to the Government and people of Kuwait on the passing of this historic leader.

Letter to Congressional Leaders on Review of Title III of the Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity (LIBERTAD) Act of 1996

January 17, 2006

Dear _____:

Consistent with section 306(c)(2) of the Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity (LIBERTAD) Act of 1996 (Public Law 104–114)(the “Act”), I hereby determine and report to the Congress that suspension for 6 months beyond February 1, 2006, of the right to bring an action under title III of the Act is necessary to the national interests of the United States and will expedite a transition to democracy in Cuba.

Sincerely,

George W. Bush

NOTE: Identical letters were sent to Richard G. Lugar, chairman, and Joseph R. Biden, Jr., ranking member, Senate Committee on Foreign Relations; Thad Cochran, chairman, and Robert C. Byrd, ranking member, Senate Committee on Appropriations; Henry J. Hyde, chairman, and Tom

Lantos, ranking member, House Committee on International Relations; and Jerry Lewis, chairman, and David R. Obey, ranking member, House Committee on Appropriations.

Remarks Following a Meeting With Iraqi Citizens

January 18, 2006

Listen, thank you all for coming. It's been my honor to visit with folks who know firsthand the brutality of Saddam Hussein. These are folks who have suffered one way or the other because the tyrant was a law unto himself and was willing to deny people basic human rights. The stories here are compelling stories. They're stories of sadness and stories of bravery.

In the course of our discussion, we were also able to talk about what a contrast it is between a society which was willing to jail people, torture people, and beat people and kill people, to a society that is beginning to understand the fruits of democracy and freedom.

Last year was an amazing year in Iraq. Millions of people went to the polls to vote, first in January, then to ratify a Constitution, and then back to the polls again to elect a Government under the new Constitution. It's a testimony to the courage of the Iraqi people. Obviously, we still have got work to do and fully intend to do it.

And one of the interesting moments will come here this year when Saddam Hussein's trial is brought forth for the world to see, to see the butcherer, the person who brutalized many people or ordered the brutality of many people here at this table, get his due justice under rule of law.

And so I want to thank you all for coming. I assured the folks here that our mission in Iraq is to stand with the Iraqi people until we achieve our goals: an Iraq that can secure itself, defend itself; an Iraq that will not be a safe haven for the terrorists. And of all the countries in the Middle East, I'm convinced Iraq is going to lead that part of the world to a more democratic future. The Iraqi people are brave and courageous and smart people.

And so thank you for being here. Thank you for sharing your stories. I appreciate it very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:50 a.m. in the Roosevelt Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to former President Saddam Hussein of Iraq. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Notice—Continuation of the National Emergency With Respect to Terrorists Who Threaten To Disrupt the Middle East Peace Process

January 18, 2006

On January 23, 1995, by Executive Order 12947, the President declared a national emergency pursuant to the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (50 U.S.C. 1701–1706) to deal with the unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security, foreign policy, and economy of the United States constituted by grave acts of violence committed by foreign terrorists who threaten to disrupt the Middle East peace process. On August 20, 1998, by Executive Order 13099, the President modified the Annex to Executive Order 12947 to identify four additional persons, including Usama bin Laden, who threaten to disrupt the Middle East peace process.

Because these terrorist activities continue to threaten the Middle East peace process and continue to pose an unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security, foreign policy, and economy of the United States, the national emergency declared on January 23, 1995, as expanded on August 20, 1998, and the measures adopted on those dates to deal with that emergency must continue in effect beyond January 23, 2006. Therefore, in accordance with section 202(d) of the National Emergencies Act (50 U.S.C. 1622(d)), I am continuing for 1 year the national emergency with respect to foreign terrorists who threaten to disrupt the Middle East peace process.