

of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of this address.

Remarks on Arrival From Camp David, Maryland

March 19, 2006

Progress in Iraq

This morning I had a phone call with our Ambassador to Iraq, and the Ambassador informed me of the progress that the Iraqis are making toward forming a unity government. I encouraged the Iraqi leaders to continue to work hard to get this Government up and running. The Iraqi people voted for democracy last December; 75 percent of the eligible citizens went to the polls to vote. And now the Iraqi leaders are working together to enact a Government that reflects the will of the people. And so I'm encouraged by the progress; the Ambassador was encouraged by it.

Today, as well, marks the third anniversary of the beginning of the liberation of Iraq, and it's a time to reflect. And this morning my reflections were upon the sacrifices of the men and women who wear our uniform. Ours is an amazing nation where thousands have volunteered to serve our country. They volunteered to—many volunteered after 9/11, knowing full well that their time in the military could put them in harm's way. So on this third anniversary of the beginning of the liberation of Iraq, I think all Americans should offer thanks to the men and women who wear the uniform and their families who support them.

We are implementing a strategy that will lead to victory in Iraq. And a victory in Iraq will make this country more secure and will help lay the foundation of peace for generations to come.

May God continue to bless our troops in harm's way. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:56 p.m. on the South Lawn at the White House.

Remarks Following Discussions With Secretary General Jakob Gijssbert “Jaap” de Hoop Scheffer of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization

March 20, 2006

President Bush. Fine-looking crowd we've attracted here, fine-looking crowd.

Mr. Secretary General, thanks for coming. We've just had a wide-ranging discussion on a variety of issues, which is what you'd expect when allies and friends come together. We discussed Iraq, and I want to thank NATO for its involvement in helping train Iraqi security forces so they can end up protecting the Iraqi people from the—from those who want to kill innocent life in order to affect the outcome of that democracy.

I want to thank you very much for your strong involvement in Afghanistan. A NATO presence in Afghanistan is really important. I learned that firsthand when I went to Afghanistan and talked to the—President Karzai and his Government. They were very supportive of the mission—and thankful for the mission. NATO is effective, and that's one of the things that's really important for our citizens to understand, that our relationship with NATO is an important part of helping us to win the war on terror.

We also talked about Darfur in the Sudan. I'd called the Secretary General earlier this year. I talked to him about a strategy that would enable NATO to take the lead in Darfur. However, some things have to happen prior to that happening. And the first thing is that the African Union must request from the United Nations a U.N. mission to convert the AU mission to a U.N. mission, at which point if that's done, the—NATO can move in with United States help—inside of NATO—to make it clear to the Sudanese Government that we're intent upon providing security for the people there, and intent upon helping work toward a lasting peace agreement.

And so I appreciate your understanding of that. The first time I made the phone call to the Secretary General, he fully understood the challenge, fully understood the need, and it was great to work with a friend in peace to devise a strategy on how to move forward.

So thanks for coming. Looking forward to the meeting later on this year, big NATO summit. And I'm convinced that, like the last summit we had, you'll lead that meeting with the efficiency and professionalism that you're known for.

Secretary General de Hoop Scheffer. Thank you very much, Mr. President. Let me echo what the President has been saying about NATO delivering, about NATO making the difference. In Afghanistan, the fight against terror is an extremely important element there. NATO indeed assists in the African Union in Darfur, and I'm quite sure, as I've told the President, that when the U.N. comes, the NATO allies will be ready to do more in enabling the United Nations force in Darfur.

NATO assisted after Hurricane Katrina. NATO had a major humanitarian operation in Pakistan. NATO is in the Balkans. All 26 NATO allies participate in one way or the other in the training mission in Iraq. Now I want to see NATO-trained Iraqi officers taking their responsibility in fighting the terrorists in their own country.

In other words, NATO is delivering. And in the runup to the NATO summit in Riga at the end of the year, as the President mentioned, we'll make sure—and NATO will make sure that this will be an important event.

In NATO's outreach, let me mention the Middle East, North Africa, Israel, Jordan, the nations of the gulf—NATO's contacts with other nations who share our values—we have Australia, Japan, South Korea—in other words, we'll see to it that the military agenda of NATO and the political agenda of NATO will be very seriously addressed in Riga. And I'm very glad for the support, the permanent support, and the friendship of our most important ally, the United States, and its leader, President Bush.

Thank you very much.

President Bush. Thank you. Yes, good. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:16 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to President Hamid Karzai of Afghanistan.

Remarks to the City Club of Cleveland and a Question-and-Answer Session in Cleveland, Ohio *March 20, 2006*

The President. Thank you all. Please be seated. Sanjiv, thanks for the introduction. He called me on the phone and said, "Listen, we believe in free speech, so you're going to come and give us a speech for free." [Laughter] Thanks for the invitation; thanks for the warm welcome. It's good to be here at the City Club of Cleveland.

For almost a century, you have provided an important forum for debate and discussion on the issues of the day. And I have come to discuss a vital issue of the day, which is the safety and security of every American and our need to achieve victory in the war on terror.

I want to thank the mayor for joining us. Mr. Mayor, appreciate you being here. It must make you feel pretty good to get the "Most Livable City" award. [Laughter] I want to thank all the members of the City Club for graciously inviting me to come. I want to thank the students who are here. Thanks for your interest in your government. I look forward to giving you a speech and then answering questions, if you have any.

The central front on the war on terror is Iraq, and in the past few weeks, we've seen horrific images coming out of that country. We've seen a great house of worship—the Golden Mosque of Samarra—in ruins after a brutal terrorist attack. We have seen reprisal attacks by armed militia on Sunni mosques. We have seen car bombs take the lives of shoppers in a crowded market in Sadr City. We've seen the bodies of scores of Iraqi men brutally executed or beaten to death.

The enemies of a free Iraq attacked the Golden Mosque for a reason: They know they lack the military strength to challenge Iraqi and coalition forces in a direct battle, so they're trying to provoke a civil war. By attacking one of Shi'a Islam's holiest sites, they hoped to incite violence that would drive Iraqis apart and stop their progress on the path to a free society.

The timing of the attack in Samarra is no accident. It comes at a moment when Iraq's elected leaders are working to form a unity