

NATO and Iraq

Q. You will certainly talk about Iraq. Will the United States, if it decides to go to war with Iraq, seek the support of NATO as an alliance?

The President. Well, first, I hope we don't have to go to war with Iraq. I mean, my first choice is not to commit our troops to regime change. I hope that Saddam Hussein does what he said he would do, and that is disarm. For the sake of peace, he must disarm. Most nations understand that—most nations in NATO understand that. They want Saddam to disarm. The U.N. Security Council has spoken and says he must disarm. So it's his choice to make.

If he refuses to disarm, then we will lead a coalition of the willing and disarm him. And of course, I hope our NATO friends come with us. I think they will realize it's in the interest of peace and stability that that happen. But we're not close to that decision point yet because we're just beginning the process of allowing Saddam the chance to show the world whether or not he will disarm.

And that's an important distinction the people of the Czech Republic must know. It's not up to me. It's up to him. He said he would disarm, and the inspectors are not the issue. The inspectors are simply a means to determine his willingness. And we'll see. He's had a bad history. He's had 11 years of lying and deceiving, and now it's time to bring him to account, one way or the other.

NATO-U.S. Shared Values

Q. Some critics now see NATO as a toolbox, and the United States just goes and picks whatever it needs when it needs it. Do you agree?

The President. No, of course not. I mean, I think we view this as an alliance of nations with whom we share common values, the common values of freedom and individual rights and democracy. This is an opportunity for us to combine our values with our deep desire to have a peaceful world. And we will work in concert with each other, not in opposition to each other. And by working in concert we can really address those threats.

See, that's the interesting thing that people have got to know. There's threats to your

freedom. If you embrace freedom and love freedom and willing to stand strong against global terrorism, you will be threatened. And we can't let that happen. It's just a different type of threat that we face, but it's a true threat.

We face it here in America today. There's still an enemy that wants to hit us. There's still an enemy that wants to hit our friends. And the NATO Charter says, "If you attack one, you attack us all." And that's a very important alliance, a very important statement of commonality to keep the peace.

I think NATO is a good thing, and I look forward to working with our friends in NATO.

Q. Mr. President, thank you very much for the interview.

The President. Thank you. I'm so looking forward to going to Prague. It's going to be an exciting time for Laura and me to go. Thank you. Good job.

NOTE: The interview was videotaped at 1:20 p.m. in the Library at the White House. In his remarks, the President referred to President Saddam Hussein of Iraq. The interviewer referred to Secretary General Lord Robertson of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. The transcript of this interview was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on November 19. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this interview.

Teleconference Remarks With Senate Republican Leaders

November 19, 2002

Senator Trent Lott. [*Inaudible*]

The President. Well, I appreciate that, Trent. And I want to thank you all for working hard. We're making great progress in the war on terror. Part of that progress will be the ability for us to protect the American people at home. This is a very important piece of legislation. It is landmark in its scope, and it ends a session which has been 2 years' worth of legislative work, which has been very productive for the American people.

Senator Lott. [*Inaudible*]

The President. Well, I want to thank you all. It is an honor to be representing the greatest country on the face of the Earth over

in Europe. And we're going to have an historic day on Thursday when we go to expand NATO. The people of Europe appreciate America. They appreciate our strength, and most importantly, they appreciate our compassion and our love for freedom. And I know you all share that side of America with me.

Again, I want to thank all the Senators in the room there for your hard work and look forward to seeing you when I get back.

Senator Lott. [Inaudible]

The President. All right, well thank—

Senator Lott. [Inaudible]

The President. I think that's important. Trent, that piece of legislation will help put hardhats back to work, and that's going to be good, and I appreciate you working on that as well.

Senator Lott. [Inaudible]

The President. I need to hear a Texas voice.

Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison. [Inaudible]

Senator Don Nickles. [Inaudible]

The President. Oh, that's good news. Well, thanks. Thanks for your good work, and I certainly appreciate it all.

Senator Lott. [Inaudible]

The President. Okay, sir. Thank you all very much. Bye-bye.

NOTE: The teleconference began at 1:23 p.m. The President spoke aboard Air Force One en route to Prague, Czech Republic. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Statement on Congressional Action on Legislation To Establish the Department of Homeland Security

November 19, 2002

The United States Congress has taken an historic and bold step forward to protect the American people by passing legislation to create the Department of Homeland Security. This landmark legislation, the most extensive reorganization of the Federal Government since the 1940s, will help our Na-

tion meet the emerging threats of terrorism in the 21st century.

This bill includes the major components of my proposal—providing for intelligence analysis and infrastructure protection, strengthening our borders, improving the use of science and technology to counter weapons of mass destruction, and creating a comprehensive response and recovery division.

I commend the employees who will move into this new Department for their hard work and dedication to the war on terrorism. Setting up this new Department will take time, but I know we will meet the challenge together.

I look forward to signing this important legislation.

NOTE: The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language version of this statement.

Statement on Congressional Action on Terrorism Insurance Legislation

November 19, 2002

I commend the House and Senate for passing terrorism insurance legislation. Terrorism insurance will help get America's hardhats back on the job, create new jobs for America's workers, and spur billions in new investment in construction projects all across the country. This bill comes at a critical time, as commercial construction is at a 6-year low.

The legislation provides a Federal backstop for costs associated with acts of terrorism, ensures meaningful industry participation in any losses resulting from terrorist acts, fully consolidates lawsuits in a single Federal court, and provides fair and certain resolution of claims. While I supported even stronger liability measures to strengthen our economy and believe that further reforms need to be pursued, this bill significantly improves the legal system to prevent abusive lawsuits.

I look forward to signing this important legislation into law.