

for us to differentiate between those who on the border go back and forth on a daily basis—and that's easy to figure out a way to facilitate that. It may be biometrics; it may be a card; it may be—something. That's been discussed for a long period of time. And then there are those who are inside the country legally, and again, some kind of ID is a possibility. These are all open for discussion.

But the thing that is important for Americans to understand is that there are a lot of employers looking for people to work and a lot of people from Mexico who are willing to do the job and looking for work, and we've just got to come up with a plan that facilitates that. And I don't know all the details, and I don't have—but those are the kinds of things that our people are discussing with the Mexicans to come up with a compassionate policy.

Colombia

Q. Are we closer to seeing U.S. troops in Colombia?

The President. No. No, no, no. We have committed to help the Colombians fight narco-trafficking. We're in the process of discussion with Congress the make—to allow our aid and advice to help the Colombians fight terrorism. As you know, we put the terrorist groups within Colombia on our list of terrorist organizations.

And so I don't see any role beyond advising and training. And I think that's important. It's important for the Colombians to make the decision themselves, to get the will necessary to take on these terrorists. And we will help them help themselves. It is a terrible situation where a part of your country has been taken over by a terrorist organization, that evidently doesn't want to reach an accommodation with you—I'm talking about FARC, now—does not want to reach an accommodation with the Colombian Government. Pastrana tried, and he tried, and he tried, and every attempt to create peace and a peaceful situation has been rejected by them. And now they're going to take a new tack, and we're there to help.

Q. Thank you very much.

The President. Thank you, sir.

NOTE: The interview began at 11:09 a.m. in the Map Room at the White House. In his remarks,

the President referred to President Vicente Fox of Mexico; and President Andres Pastrana of Colombia. The President also referred to FARC, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this interview.

Exchange With Reporters in Alexandria, Virginia

March 20, 2002

Military Tribunals

Q. Mr. President?

The President. Yes.

Q. What are you hoping to achieve by holding the military tribunals? And at this point, do we have any people eligible to face those tribunals?

The President. Well, the tribunals are just an option for us. And we'll be using the tribunals if in the course of bringing somebody to justice it may jeopardize or compromise national security interests. So they're a tool; they're an option. As you know, we're discussing rules about how they can function well. The Defense Department asked a lot of opinions from respected scholars, and the world's now beginning to see what we meant by a fair system that will enable us to bring people to justice but at the same time protect national security. I have no plans right now to use anybody—nobody in mind yet. But the option is available.

Q. Are many of those people otherwise going to be sent back to their home countries, and have you decided which ones would be—

The President. Well, we're still in the process of getting as much information from the detainees as possible. Remember, these are—the ones in Guantanamo Bay are killers. They don't share the same values we share. They would like nothing more than to come after Americans or our friends and allies. And so, therefore, it's in our national interest to make sure we know enough about them before we decide what to do with them. So there's a process—ongoing process to get as much information as we can from the prisoners, the detainees. Some talk; some don't talk.

Q. But let me follow, if I could——

The President. There will only be three questions.

Q. Okay, sorry. But if you say they're killers——

The President. They said they're killers.

Q. ——what makes them eligible to go to the tribunal?

The President. I told you, if any evidence that is required to convict them jeopardizes the national security interests of the country, we'll use the tribunal.

Situation in the Middle East

Q. Mr. President, are you frustrated by the continuing violence in the Middle East, that looks—one day it looks good, the next day it's——

The President. Of course, I am. I am frustrated by the violence in the Middle East, and so are a lot of people who live in the Middle East. I know there are some people who do not want us to achieve any kind of peaceful settlement of a longstanding dispute. And they're willing to use terrorist means to disrupt any progress that's being made. And that frustrates me. It frustrates mothers and dads who happen to be Palestinians and Israelis, because they want to raise their children in a secure environment.

Nevertheless, we'll continue to work the issue and work it hard. Zinni is over there; he's making some progress. He's saying to both parties, "Stay the course. Work hard to get into Tenet." And hopefully we can achieve what we all want to achieve, which is eventually a political settlement. But first and foremost, we've got to come up with a security agreement. We made some progress, and I want to thank Zinni for his job that he's doing there. And I'm looking forward to being briefed by the Vice President tomorrow morning when he gets back from—he's getting back this afternoon, but he's going to come in tomorrow morning. We'll have breakfast first thing in the morning, prior to me leaving for Mexico.

Q. Mr. President, just yesterday the Vice President was suggesting that he could meet with Chairman Arafat if there was a cease-fire. Does a cease-fire mean an end to all suicide bombings?

The President. Well, what he said was, was that there are certain conditions under which he would meet with Mr. Arafat, and that is getting into the Tenet agreement and meeting the conditions. And we've also said that we expect there to be a 100 percent effort by Chairman Arafat. We expect him to be reining in those people with whom he's got influence. Clearly, he's not going to have influence with every single suicide bomber. I understand that. But we expect him to be diligent and firm and consistent in his efforts to rein in those who would like to disrupt any progress toward peace and rein in those who would harm our friends the Israelis.

And as I've said in the past, I didn't think he has done a very good job of doing that up to now, and I believe he can do a better job. And that's exactly the message the Vice President is delivering in his statement.

Listen, thank you all very much. I don't want to hold two press conferences in one week.

NOTE: The exchange began at 1:25 p.m. in the mini-auditorium at Samuel W. Tucker Elementary School. In his remarks, the President referred to U.S. Special Envoy to the Middle East Gen. Anthony Zinni, USMC (Ret.); and Chairman Yasser Arafat of the Palestinian Authority. The President also referred to the Tenet plan, the Israeli-Palestinian cease-fire and security plan of June 13, 2001, negotiated by Director of Central Intelligence George J. Tenet. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included Mrs. Bush's closing remarks.

Remarks at Samuel W. Tucker Elementary School in Alexandria, Virginia

March 20, 2002

Thank you, Laura, for that warm introduction. I appreciate what a fine job she's doing as the First Lady. She's a pretty calm voice in a time—in turbulent times for our country, and I'm lucky to be married to her.

I want to thank all the Tucker Tigers for letting me come by to say hello. Gosh, it's good to see you all. I want to thank the fact that you understand that you can make a big difference in somebody's life, that you can