

inspectors is to verify whether or not Mr. Saddam Hussein is keeping his word, whether or not he's showing up with his weapons and destroying them—the weapons, by the way, he says he doesn't have.

My attitude is that we owe it to future generations of Americans and citizens in freedom-loving countries to see to it that Mr. Saddam Hussein is disarmed. It's his choice to make as to how he will be disarmed. He can either do so—it doesn't look like he's going to. For the sake of peace, we will lead a coalition of willing countries and disarm Saddam Hussein.

If war is forced upon us—and I say “forced upon us” because use of the military is not my first choice. I hug the mothers and the widows of those who may have lost their life in the name of peace and freedom. I take my responsibilities incredibly seriously about the commitment of troops. But should we need to use troops, for the sake of future generations of Americans, American troops will act in the honorable traditions of our military and in the highest moral traditions of our country.

We will try in every way we can to spare innocent life. The people of Iraq are not our enemies. The true enemy of the Iraqi people, Saddam Hussein, has a different strategy. In violation of the Geneva Conventions, Saddam Hussein is positioning his military forces within civilian populations in order to shield his military and blame coalition forces for civilian casualties that he has caused. Saddam Hussein regards the Iraqi people as human shields, entirely expendable when their suffering serves his purposes.

America views the Iraqi people as human beings who have suffered long enough under this tyrant. And the Iraqi people can be certain of this: The United States is committed to helping them build a better future. If conflict occurs, we'll bring Iraq food and medicine and supplies and, most importantly, freedom.

As I said in my State of the Union, liberty is not America's gift to the world. Liberty is God's gift to every human being in the world. America has great challenges, challenges at home and challenges abroad. We're called to extend the promise of this country into the lives of every citizen who lives here.

We're called to defend our Nation and to lead the world to peace, and we will meet both challenges with courage and with confidence.

There's an old saying, “Let us not pray for tasks equal to our strength. Let us pray for strength equal to our tasks.” And that is our prayer today, for the strength in every task we face.

I want to thank each of you for your prayers. I want to thank you for your faithfulness. I want to thank you for your good work. And I want to thank you for loving your country.

May God bless you all, and may God bless America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:07 a.m. in the Presidential Ballroom at the Opryland Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Glenn R. Plummer, executive committee chairman, National Religious Broadcasters; Anthony T. Evans, founder and president, The Urban Alternative; former Senator Phil Gramm of Texas; entertainers Ray Stevens, Michael W. Smith, and Sara Paulson Brummett; and President Saddam Hussein of Iraq.

Remarks Following Discussions With Prime Minister John Howard of Australia and an Exchange With Reporters

February 10, 2003

President Bush. I'm going to make some welcoming comments. The Prime Minister is going to say some things. We'll then take some questions—two from the American side and two from the Australian side.

Prime Minister Howard is a close, personal friend of mine, a person whose judgment I count on, a person with whom I speak quite frequently. I believe he's a man of clear vision. He sees the threats that the free world faces as we go into the 21st century. I'm proud to work with him on behalf of a peaceful world and a freer society. He's a man grounded in good values, and I respect him a lot, and I'm glad he's back here in the Oval Office.

Welcome.

Prime Minister Howard. Well, thank you very much, Mr. President. I'm delighted to

be back in the United States. We've talked naturally about Iraq and other related matters. I want to say that from the very beginning, the President has shown very strong leadership on a difficult issue. He's been prepared to go out and argue a very strong case. It's not been an issue that's been free of criticism for any of those who've advocated a particular point of view.

Australia's position concerning Iraq is very clear. We believe a world in which weapons of mass destruction are in the hands of rogue states, with the potential threat of them falling into the hands of terrorists, is not a world that Australia, if we can possibly avoid it, wants to be part of. And that is the fundamental reason why Australia has taken the position she has.

And it's the fundamental reason why we believe the goals that the United States set of disarming Iraq are proper goals, and they are goals that the entire world should pursue. We all hope that there might—despite the apparent unlikelihood, we all hope that there might be a peaceful solution. The one real chance of a peaceful solution is the whole world saying the same thing to Iraq.

And that's why we believe the closest possible cooperation and unity of—objective and unity of advocacy is very important.

President Bush. Thanks, John. Don't worry, malfunctioning light. There it is.

Patsy [Patricia Wilson, Reuters] and then Ron [Ron Fournier, Associated Press]. Were you from Australia?

Q. Yes. Do I get two questions? One from each side? [Laughter]

President Bush. Knowing Ron's habit, you probably will, I guess.

Iraqi Regime Concessions

Q. Iraq has agreed to allow U-2 flights and also private interviews with some scientists. Does this make it harder for you to argue that Saddam Hussein is not—is not cooperating?

President Bush. Iraq needs to disarm. And the reason why we even need to fly U-2 flights is because they're not disarming. We know what a disarmed country looks like. And Iraq doesn't look like that. This is a man who is trying to stall for time, trying to play a diplomatic game. He's been successful at

it for 12 years. But no, the question is, will he disarm?

I notice somebody said the other day, "Well, we need more inspectors." Well, a disarmed—a country which is disarming really needs one or two inspectors to verify the fact that they're disarming. We're not playing hide-and-seek. That's what he wants to continue to play. And so, you know, Saddam's got to disarm. If he doesn't, we'll disarm him.

Australia and the Coalition

Q. Sir, can I ask an Australian question?

President Bush. Please.

Q. Could you tell us whether you count Australia as part of the coalition of the willing?

President Bush. Yes, I do. You know, what that means is up to John to decide. But I certainly count him as somebody who understands that the world changed on September the 11th, 2001. Ironically enough, John Howard was in America that day, in Washington, DC, the day the enemy hit.

In our country it used to be that oceans could protect us. At least we thought so. There was wars on other continents, but we were safe. And so we could decide whether or not we addressed the threat on our own time. If there was a threat gathering from afar, we could say, "Well, let's see; it may be in our interest to get involved, or it may not be." We had the luxury. September the 11th, that changed. America is now a battleground in the war on terror.

Secondly, the Secretary of State made it very clear that there are connections between Saddam Hussein and terrorist networks. And therefore, it is incumbent upon all of us who love freedom to understand the new world in which we live. John Howard understands that.

Ron.

French-U.S. Relations/NATO Unity

Q. In addition to being among the some people who are calling for inspections, the French today blocked NATO from helping Turkey. And President Chirac said nothing today justifies a war.

President Bush. Yes.

Q. Given what Americans and the French went through in the last century, are you upset by their attitude now?

President Bush. No, I wouldn't—"upset" isn't the proper word. I am disappointed that France would block NATO from helping a country like Turkey prepare. I don't understand that decision. It affects the Alliance in a negative way.

Q. You think it does?

President Bush. I think it affects the Alliance in a negative way, when you're not able to make a statement of mutual defense. I had a good talk with Jacques Chirac recently. I assured him that, you know, that we would continue to try to work with France as best we can. France has been a long-time friend of the United States. We've got a lot in common. But I think the decision on NATO is shortsighted in my judgment. Hopefully, they'll reconsider.

Reasons for Action Against Iraqi Regime

Q. Mr. President, there are many Australians—there are many Australians and others who are still not convinced that they should be going with you to war. At this late stage, what's your personal message to them?

President Bush. My personal message is that I want to keep the peace and make the world more peaceful. I understand why people don't like to commit the military to action. I can understand that. I'm the person in this country that hugs the mothers and the widows if their son or husband dies. I know people would like to avoid armed conflict, and so would I. But the risks of doing nothing far outweigh the risks of whatever it takes to disarm Saddam Hussein.

I've thought long and hard about this issue. My job is to protect the American people from further harm. I believe that Saddam Hussein is a threat to the American people. I also know he's a threat to our friends and allies.

The second thing—my message is, and I started speaking about this today, I also have got great compassion and concern for the Iraqi people. These are people who have been tortured and brutalized, people who have been raped because they may disagree with Saddam Hussein. He's a brutal dictator. In this country and in Australia, people be-

lieve that everybody has got worth, everybody counts, that everybody is equal in the eyes of the Almighty. So the issue is not only peace, the issue is freedom and liberty.

I made it clear in my State of the Union—and the people of Australia must understand this—I don't believe liberty is America's gift to the world. I believe it is God's gift to humanity.

Thank you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:46 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to President Saddam Hussein of Iraq and President Jacques Chirac of France.

Message on the Observance of Eid al-Adha

January 27, 2003

I send greetings to Muslims in the United States and around the world as you celebrate the Eid al-Adha holiday.

The Qur'an teaches that the sacred feast of Eid al-Adha is a time for Muslims to join family and friends in thanking the Almighty for His many blessings and to reflect on the great sacrifice and devotion of Abraham. During this festive celebration, peace-loving people around the world, including millions of American Muslims, honor Abraham's example by sharing love and demonstrating compassion for those in need.

This year's celebration comes at a time when our world faces great challenges and important opportunities. The United States remains committed to promoting justice, tolerance, and understanding through-out the world, and we will continue to work together with our Muslim friends and people of all faiths to build a future of peace, freedom, and opportunity for all.

Laura joins me in sending our best wishes for a joyous celebration.

George W. Bush

NOTE: This message was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on February 11. An original was not available for verification of the content of this message.