



The White House

PRESIDENT GEORGE W. BUSH

President * News * Vice President * History & Tours * First Lady * Mrs. Cheney

YOUR GOVERNMENT KIDS ESPAÑOL CONTACT PRIVACY POLICY SITE MAP SEARCH



EMAIL UPDATES

In Focus

- Medicare
- Iraq
- National Security
- Economic Security
- Homeland Security
- More Issues
- En Español

News

- Current News
- Video
- Press Briefings
- Proclamations
- Executive Orders
- Radio Addresses

News by Date

- July 2003
- June 2003
- May 2003
- April 2003
- March 2003
- February 2003
- January 2003
- December 2002
- November 2002
- October 2002
- September 2002
- August 2002
- July 2002
- June 2002
- May 2002
- April 2002
- March 2002
- February 2002
- January 2002
- December 2001
- November 2001
- October 2001
- September 2001
- August 2001
- July 2001
- June 2001
- May 2001
- April 2001
- March 2001
- February 2001
- January 2001

Appointments

- Nominations
- Application

Photos

[Home](#) > [News & Policies](#) > July 2003

[Printer-Friendly Version](#)

For Immediate Release
Office of the Press Secretary
July 17, 2003

President Bush, Prime Minister Blair Discuss War on Terrorism

Press Conference of President Bush and British Prime Minister Tony Blair
The Cross Hall

5:29 P.M. EDT

PRESIDENT BUSH: Good afternoon. It is, once again, a pleasure to welcome the Prime Minister, Tony Blair, and Cherie Blair to the White House. Mr. Prime Minister, fabulous speech. Congratulations. (Applause.)

In his address to Congress this afternoon, Prime Minister Blair once again showed the qualities that have marked his entire career. Tony Blair is a leader of conviction, of passion, of moral clarity, and eloquence. He is a true friend of the American people. The United Kingdom has produced some of the world's most distinguished statesmen, and I'm proud to be standing with one of them today.

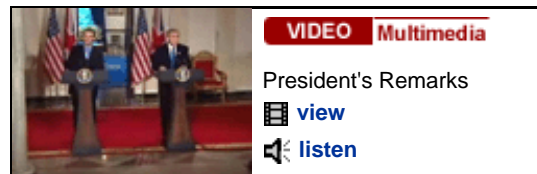
The close partnership between the United States and Great Britain has been and remains essential to the peace and security of all nations. For more than 40 years of the Cold War we stood together to ensure that the conflicts of Europe did not once again destroy the peace of the world. The duties we accepted were demanding, as we found during the Berlin Blockade and other crises. Yet, British and American leaders held firm and our cause prevailed.

Now we are joined in another great and difficult mission. On September the 11th, 2001, America, Britain and all free nations saw how the ideologies of hatred and terror in a distant part of the world could bring violence and grief to our own citizens. We resolved to fight these threats actively, wherever they gather, before they reach our shores. And we resolved to oppose these threats by promoting freedom and democracy in the Middle East, a region that has known so much bitterness and resentment.

From the outset, the Prime Minister and I have understood that we are allies in this war -- a war requiring great effort and patience and fortitude. The British and American peoples will hold firm once again, and we will prevail.

The United States and Great Britain have conducted a steady offensive against terrorist networks and terror regimes. We're dismantling the al Qaeda network, leader by leader, and we're hunting down the terrorist killers one by one.

In Afghanistan, we removed the cruel and oppressive regime that had turned that country into a training





■ Photo Essays

Federal Facts

■ Federal Statistics

West Wing

■ History

camp for al Qaeda, and now we are helping the Afghan people to restore their nation and regain self-government.

In Iraq, the United States, Britain and other nations confronted a violent regime that armed to threaten the peace, that cultivated ties to terror and defied the clear demands of the United Nations Security Council. Saddam Hussein produced and possessed chemical and biological weapons and was trying to reconstitute his nuclear weapons program. He used chemical weapons in acts of murder against his own people.

The U.N. Security Council, acting on information it had acquired over many years, passed more than a dozen resolutions demanding that the dictator reveal and destroy all of his prohibited weapons. A final Security Council resolution promised serious consequences if he continued his defiance. The former dictator of Iraq chose his course of action; and, for the sake of peace and security, we chose ours.



The Prime Minister and I have no greater responsibility than to protect the lives and security of the people we serve. The regime of Saddam Hussein was a grave and growing threat. Given Saddam's history of violence and aggression, it would have been reckless to place our trust in his sanity or his restraint. As long as I hold this office, I will never risk the lives of American citizens by assuming the goodwill of dangerous enemies.

Acting together, the United States, Great Britain and our coalition partners enforced the demands of the world. We ended the threat from Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction. We rid the Middle East of an aggressive, destabilizing regime. We liberated nearly 25 million people from decades of oppression. And we are now helping the Iraqi people to build a free nation.

In Iraq, as elsewhere, freedom and self-government are hated and opposed by a radical and ruthless few. American, British and other forces are facing remnants of a fallen regime and other extremists. Their attacks follow a pattern. They target progress and success. They strike at Iraqi police officers who have been trained to enforce order. They sabotage Iraqi power grids that we're rebuilding. They are the enemies of the Iraqi people.

Defeating these terrorists is an essential commitment on the war on terror. This is a duty we accept. This is a fight we will win. We are being tested in Iraq. Our enemies are looking for signs of hesitation. They're looking for weakness. They will find none. Instead, our forces in Iraq are finding these killers and bringing them to justice.

And we will finish the task of helping Iraqis make the challenging transition to democracy. Iraq's governing council is now meeting regularly. Soon the council will nominate ministers and propose a budget. After decades of tyranny, the institutions of democracy will take time to create. America and Britain will help the Iraqi people as long as necessary. Prime Minister Blair and I have the same goal -- the government and the future of Iraq will be in the hands of the people of Iraq.

The creation of a strong and stable Iraqi democracy is not easy, but it's an essential part on the war against terror. A free Iraq will be an example to the entire Middle East, and the advance of liberty in the Middle East will undermine the ideologies of terror and hatred. It will help strengthen the security of America and Britain and many other nations.

By helping to build and secure a free Iraq, by accepting the risks and sacrifice, our men and women in uniform are protecting our own countries, and they're giving essential service in the war on terror. This is the work history has given us, and we will complete it.

We're seeing movement toward reform and freedom in other parts of the Middle East. The leadership and courage of Prime Minister Abbas and Prime Minister Sharon are giving their peoples new hope for progress. Other nations can add to the momentum of peace by fighting terror in all its forms. A Palestinian state will be built upon hope and reform, not built upon violence.

Terrorists are the chief enemies of Palestinian aspirations. The sooner terrorism is rooted out by all the governments in the region, the sooner the Palestinian flag will rise over a peaceful Palestinian state.

The spread of liberty in Afghanistan and Iraq and across the Middle East will mark a hopeful turn in the history of our time. Great Britain and America will achieve this goal together. And one of the reasons I'm confident in our success is because the character and the leadership of Prime Minister Tony Blair.

Mr. Prime Minister.

PRIME MINISTER BLAIR: Thank you, Mr. President. And first of all, as I did a short time ago, I would like to pay tribute to your leadership in these difficult times. Because ever since September the 11th, the task of leadership has been an arduous one, and I believe that you have fulfilled it with tremendous conviction, determination and courage.

PRESIDENT BUSH: Thank you, sir.

PRIME MINISTER BLAIR: And I think it's as well that we understand how this has all come about. It came about because we realized that there was a new source of threat and insecurity in our world that we had to counter. And as I was saying in my speech to Congress, this threat is sometimes hard for people to understand, because it's of such a different nature than the threats we have faced before, but September the 11th taught us it was real.

And when you lead countries, as we both do, and you see the potential for this threat of terrorism and weapons of mass destruction to come together, I really don't believe that any responsible leader could ignore the evidence that we see, or the threat that we face. And that's why we've taken the action that we have, first in Afghanistan, and now in Iraq.

And in Afghanistan, we acted to remove the Taliban, and we still pursue the al Qaeda terrorist network there and in other parts of the world. But there is no doubt at all that, but for that action, al Qaeda would have retained its central place of command and control which now is denied to it.

And in respect to Iraq, we should not forget Resolution 1441 that was passed in the United Nations, in which the entire international community accepted the threat that Iraq constituted.

I think it's just worth pointing out, in these last few days, Iraq has had a governing council established, with the help of the United Nations representative Sergio de Mello. And in the last two weeks, the United Nations has spoken about the numbers of missing people and mass graves. And that number, just on the present count, is round about 300,000 people.

So let us be clear: We have been dealing with a situation in which the threat was very clear and the person, Saddam Hussein, wielding that threat, someone of total brutality and ruthlessness, with no compunction about killing his own people or those of another nation.

And, of course, it's difficult to reconstruct Iraq. It's going to be a hard task. We never expected otherwise. But as the President has said to you a moment or two ago, the benefit of that reconstruction will be felt far beyond the territory of Iraq. It is, as I said earlier today, an indispensable part of bringing about a new settlement in the whole of the Middle East.

And I would also pay tribute to the President's leadership in the Middle East and in rekindling the prospect of the Middle East peace process. If I can remind people, I think many people were cynical as to whether this could ever be rekindled. Many people doubted whether the commitment was there, to fairness for Palestinian people, as well as to the state of Israel. And yet the President has stated very clearly the goal of a two-state solution. And now we actually have the first steps, albeit tentative, toward achieving that.

And when I met Prime Minister Sharon in London a few nights ago, I was more than ever convinced that if we could provide the right framework within which these tentative steps are made, then we do, genuinely, have the prospect of making progress there.

And then, again, as I was saying earlier, the commitment that America has now given, that the President has given, in respect of Africa, in tackling some of the poorest parts of our world, is again a sign of hope. And all these things are changing our world. And however difficult the change may be, I genuinely believe it is change for the better.

So I am honored once again to be here in the White House, with you, Mr. President. As I said earlier, we are allies and we are friends. And I believe that the work that we are embarked upon is difficult, but is essential, and so far as we are concerned, we shall hold to it, ride the way through.

THE PRESIDENT: We'll take a couple of questions. Tom.

Q Mr. President, others in your administration have said your words on Iraq and Africa did not belong in your State of the Union address. Will you take personal responsibility for those words? And to both of you, how is it that two major world leaders such as yourselves have had such a hard time persuading other major powers to help stabilize Iraq?

THE PRESIDENT: First, I take responsibility for putting our troops into action. And I made that decision because Saddam Hussein was a threat to our security and a threat to the security of other nations.

I take responsibility for making the decision, the tough decision, to put together a coalition to remove Saddam Hussein. Because the intelligence -- not only our intelligence, but the intelligence of this great country -- made a clear and compelling case that Saddam Hussein was a threat to security and peace.

I say that because he possessed chemical weapons and biological weapons. I strongly believe he was trying to reconstitute his nuclear weapons program. And I will remind the skeptics that in 1991, it became clear that Saddam Hussein was much closer to developing a nuclear weapon than anybody ever imagined. He was a threat. I take responsibility for dealing with that threat.

We are in a war against terror. And we will continue to fight that war against terror. We're after al Qaeda, as the Prime Minister accurately noted, and we're dismantling al Qaeda. The removal of Saddam Hussein is an integral part of winning the war against terror. A free Iraq will make it much less likely that we'll find violence in that immediate neighborhood. A free Iraq will make it more likely we'll get a Middle Eastern peace. A free Iraq will have incredible influence on the states that could potentially unleash terrorist activities on us. And, yeah, I take responsibility for making the decisions I made.

Q Mr. President --

PRESIDENT BUSH: Hold on for a second, please.

PRIME MINISTER BLAIR: First of all, before I answer the question you put to me about other countries helping us, let me just say this on the issue to do with Africa and uranium. The British intelligence that we had we believe is genuine. We stand by that intelligence. And one interesting fact I think people don't generally know, in case people should think that the whole idea of a link between Iraq and Niger was some invention, in the 1980s we know for sure that Iraq purchased round about 270 tons of uranium from Niger. So I think we should just factor that into our thinking there.

As for other countries, actually, other countries are coming in. We have with us now round about nine other countries who will be contributing or are contributing literally thousands of troops. I think I'm right in saying the Poles in their sector have somewhere in the region of 20 different countries offering support. And I have no doubt at all we will have international support in this. Indeed, to be fair, even to those countries that opposed the action, I think they recognize the huge importance of reconstructing Iraq.

And it's an interesting thing, I was at a European meeting just a couple of weeks ago, where, as you know, there were big differences between people over the issue of Iraq. And yet, I was struck by the absolutely unanimous view that whatever people felt about the conflict, it was obviously good that Saddam was out, and most people now recognize that the important thing is that we all work together to reconstruct Iraq for

the better so that it is a free and stable country.

Adam.

Q I wonder if I could ask you both about one aspect of Iraq and freedom and justice which, as you know, is causing a great deal of concern in Britain and the British Parliament. That is, what happens now in Guantanamo Bay to the people detained there, particularly whether there's any chance that the President will return the British citizens to face British justice, as John Walker Lindh faced regular American justice?

And just on a quick point, could the Prime Minister react to the decision of the Foreign Affairs Committee tonight that the BBC reporter Andrew Gilligan is a "unsatisfactory witness"?

PRESIDENT BUSH: You probably ought to comment on that one. (Laughter.)

PRIME MINISTER BLAIR: Can I just say to you on the first point, obviously, this is an issue that we will discuss when we begin our talks tonight, and we will put out a statement on that tomorrow for you.

PRESIDENT BUSH: We will work with the Blair government on this issue. And we're about to -- after we finish answering your questions, we're going to go upstairs and discuss the issue.

Q Do you have concerns they're not getting justice, the people detained there?

PRESIDENT BUSH: No, the only thing I know for certain is that these are bad people, and we look forward to working closely with the Blair government to deal with the issue.

PRIME MINISTER BLAIR: On your other point, Adam, the issue here is very, very simple. The whole debate, for weeks, revolved around a claim that either I or a member of my staff had effectively inserted intelligence into the dossier we put before the British people against the wishes of the intelligence services. Now, that is a serious charge. It never was true. Everybody now knows that that charge is untrue. And all we are saying is, those who made that charge should simply accept that it is untrue. It's as simple as that.

THE PRESIDENT: Patsy, Reuters.

Q Mr. President, in his speech to Congress, the Prime Minister opened the door to the possibility that you may be proved wrong about the threat from Iraq's weapons of mass destruction.

THE PRESIDENT: Yeah.

Q Do you agree, and does it matter whether or not you find these weapons?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, you might ask the Prime Minister that. We won't be proven wrong --

PRIME MINISTER BLAIR: No.

PRESIDENT BUSH: I believe that we will find the truth. And the truth is, he was developing a program for weapons of mass destruction.

Now, you say, why didn't it happen all of a sudden? Well, there was a lot of chaos in the country, one. Two, Saddam Hussein has spent over a decade hiding weapons and hiding materials. Three, we're getting -- we're just beginning to get some cooperation from some of the high-level officials in that administration or that regime.

But we will bring the weapons and, of course -- we will bring the information forward on the weapons when they find them. And that will end up -- end all this speculation. I understand there has been a lot of speculation over in Great Britain, we've got a little bit of it here, about whether or not the -- whether or not the actions were based upon valid information. We can debate that all day long, until the truth shows up. And

that's what's going to happen.

And we based our decisions on good, sound intelligence. And the -- our people are going to find out the truth, and the truth will say that this intelligence was good intelligence. There's no doubt in my mind.

THE PRIME MINISTER: If I can just correct you on one thing. I certainly did not say that I would be proved wrong. On the contrary; I said with every fiber of instinct and conviction I believe that we are right. And let me just say this one other thing to you, because sometimes, again, in the debate in the past few weeks, it's as if, prior to the early part of this year, the issue of Saddam Hussein and weapons of mass destruction were some sort of unknown quantity, and on the basis of some speculative intelligence, we go off and take action.

The history of Saddam Hussein and weapons of mass destruction is a 12-year history, and is a history of him using the weapons, developing the weapons, and concealing the weapons, and not complying with the United Nations inspectors who were trying to shut down his programs. And I simply say -- which is why I totally agree with the President -- it's important we wait for the Iraq survey group to complete their work. Because the proposition that actually he was not developing such weapons and such programs rests on this rather extraordinary proposition that, having for years obstructed the United Nations inspectors and concealed his programs, having finally effectively got rid of them in December '98, he then took all the problems and sanctions and action upon himself, voluntarily destroyed them but just didn't tell anyone. I don't think that's very likely as a proposition. I really don't.

Right, Nick.

Q Nick Robinson, ITV News. Mr. President, do you realize that many people hearing you say that we know these are bad people in Guantanamo Bay will merely fuel their doubts that the United States regards them as innocent until proven guilty and due a fair, free and open trial?

PRESIDENT BUSH: Well, let me just say these were illegal combatants. They were picked up off the battlefield aiding and abetting the Taliban. I'm not trying to try them in front of your cameras or in your newspaper.

But we will talk with the Prime Minister about this issue. He's asked. Prior to his arrival, he said, I want to talk about this in a serious way, can we work with you? And the answer is, absolutely. I understand the issue. And we will. We'll have a very good discussion about it -- right after he finishes answering this aspect of your question.

PRIME MINISTER BLAIR: I just think you should realize -- I mean, of course, as I said a moment or two ago, we will discuss this together and we'll put out a statement for you tomorrow. But I think, again, it's important just to realize the context in which all this arises, without saying anything about any specific case at all. And the context was a situation in which the al Qaeda and the Taliban were operating together in Afghanistan against American and British forces. So, as I say, we will discuss this issue, we will come back to it, you will have a statement tomorrow.

But I want to say just in concluding, once again, that the conviction that this threat of terrorism and weapons of mass destruction is the security threat our world faces has never left me. It's with me now, and I believe it to be the threat that we have to take on and defeat. I really do.

PRESIDENT BUSH: Good job. Thank you. I appreciate your coming.

Thank you all.

END 5:55 P.M. EDT

 [Printer-Friendly Version](#)

[President](#) | [Vice President](#) | [First Lady](#) | [Mrs. Cheney](#) | [News & Policies](#) |
[History & Tours](#) | [Kids](#) | [Your Government](#) | [Appointments](#) | [Jobs](#) | [Contact](#) | [Text only](#)

[Accessibility](#) | [Search](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Help](#)