






For Immediate Release
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President Bush Meets with Prime Minister Tusk of Poland

Oval Office

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PRESIDENT BUSH: It's been my honor to welcome the Prime Minister of our very close ally and strategic partner, Poland. We'll both have opening statements, and then we'll take two questions a side.

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I want to thank you for your candor, thank you for your friendship. The people of Poland stand as a great example of freedom and liberty. This is a nation with a proud history, a nation that has resisted tyranny and now lives as an example of a free society. And there are millions of Americans who are proud of their heritage, Mr. Prime Minister; they're proud to be called Polish Americans. And we welcome you.

I want to thank you for your nation's contributions to the liberation of people in Iraq and Afghanistan. Your troops have performed brilliantly and they'll be coming home based upon success. And I thank your government and I thank the people of Poland for the sacrifices. I also thank you to help the young democracy in Afghanistan survive and thrive and flourish. And some day, Mr. Prime Minister, people are going to say Afghanistan did exactly the same thing that happened in Poland -- people realized the blessings of liberty, and out of those blessings flow peace.



The Prime Minister and I had a long discussion about a lot of subjects. One in particular I want to talk about, and that is our mutual security. The United States recognizes the need for Polish -- the forces to be modernized. It's important for our allies to -- when they are worried about the modernization of their forces that friends respond, and we're responding. The first part of a response, of course, is to take inventory of needs. And Mr. Prime Minister, before my watch is over we will have assessed those needs and come up with a modernization plan that's concrete and tangible.

Along those lines we talked about the need for mutual security, and that the significant threat to the 21st century, or perhaps the most significant is the launch of a missile with dangerous materials in its warhead. Technologies are developing that will enable the free world to be able to defend itself from blackmail and/or strife from these such types of launches.

And we're in discussions with Poland about how we can help the mutual security of the region. I've assured the Prime Minister that any decisions made will reflect the sovereignty of Poland. I've assured the Prime Minister that this system is not aimed at Russia, and I will continue to work with President Putin to give him those assurances, as well. This system is designed for the threats of the 21st century.

And so I want to thank you very much for your candor and your friendship, and we're glad you're here.

PRIME MINISTER TUSK: (As translated.) I want to thank very much you, Mr. President, for your hospitality and genuine warmth. It doesn't really happen often that people of such a high position are so open and so friendly as you. From the very beginning, I was absolutely convinced that this meeting can bring us definitely closer to the wealth of good solutions.

I am also very glad, Mr. President, that both during our meeting and also here, you appreciate very much the

contribution we are making with our troops in Iraq and in Afghanistan. For us Poles, it is really a very big effort, and we really are happy, that such an important ally appreciates it.

What really is most important from this meeting, Mr. President, that in the spirit of those talks and also in the agreement, which we have made during this conversation, we can draw the conclusion from that the United States can count on Poland whenever it needs, and Poland can count on the United States whenever Poland is in need. And this is our belief, the embodiment of the idea of solidarity, in the international dimension, and I want to thank you very much for this.

And what is really important for both parties, we came to a conclusion, both during the talks and also the cooperation which we would like to develop together, is that the missile defense system and the modernization of the Polish forces, as well as the reinforcement of the global security system, which also influences the Polish security system, that all these issues come in one package, and that this is really something which gives us very much good hope for the future. This is a very good (inaudible) for us, and once again I want to thank you for that.

PRESIDENT BUSH: Thank you, sir. Feller.

Q Mr. President --

PRESIDENT BUSH: Hold on one second, please.

Q When --

PRESIDENT BUSH: Ben. Excuse me, please. Ben.

Q Thank you, Mr. President. Secretary Rice was able to help get peace talks restarted in the Mideast during her trip, so what is it now that you want Vice President Cheney to get? What is your specific goal for him?

PRESIDENT BUSH: The Vice President will be on an extensive itinerary, as you know. His goal is to reassure people that the United States is committed to a vision of peace in the Middle East, that we expect relevant parties to obligate themselves -- uphold their obligations on the road map; that we fully see the threats facing the Middle East -- one such threat is Iran -- and that we will continue to bolster our security agreements and relationships with our friends and allies.

The Vice President will be taking a very hopeful message to the Middle East that progress in Iraq is necessary for peace in the Middle East. And so it's -- I'm looking forward to his trip and I'm really appreciative of the fact that he's going.

Do you want to call on somebody from the Polish media?

Q Mr. President, is there any breakthrough as far as the missile defense system is concerned?

PRESIDENT BUSH: Well, I think there's a commitment to a system that respects Polish sovereignty, will -- that will ensure that the people of Poland will not be subjected to any undue security risks, that the system is necessary to deal with the realities of the threats. Obviously there's a lot of work to do, because many times a strategy on paper is a little different from the details. And so our experts are working through a system to make sure that the people of Poland are comfortable with the idea. This is the kind of issue that all kinds of rumors and worries can grow out of -- and we just want to assure people that it's necessary, and at the same time there will be this modernization effort that takes place.

PRIME MINISTER TUSK: What is really very important is what we stressed in the conclusion of this meeting today, that we wanted to stop the speculations on intentions expressed by the United States and expressed by Poland. Our joint intention is to cooperate in all aspects of global security, American security, and Polish security. And an element of the security is the missile defense system.

What I would call a breakthrough is my conviction that though the President of the United States and the American party understand quite clearly our expectations. And if I may use this expression, I think that you have

set the perspective of Poland on the principle of the cooperation here. And as you said, Mr. President, all the technicalities pertaining to the face of the negotiations and all those technical issues, they will be solved by experts.

PRESIDENT BUSH: Matt.

Q Yes, sir. Back on the Middle East, what do you think of Israel's plan to build 750 new homes in a settlement near Jerusalem? And what, if any, threat or complication, do you see to your administration's peace efforts?

PRESIDENT BUSH: We expect both parties to -- involved in the Middle Eastern peace process to adhere to their obligations in the road map. And those obligations are clear. And to this end, the Secretary of State is dispatching the general that we named to be the coordinator of road map activities to the Middle East, for him to conduct meetings with the relevant parties.

The key question is whether or not a vision can prevail that will enable people who reject violence and extremists -- enable them to see a better tomorrow. That's what we're working toward. And, you know, this is a part of the world where people have heard promises before, and they've been vague promises. Now, they've got a President and an administration willing to work for two states, two democracies, side by side in peace.

There are three major forces that are -- we're now witnessing in the Middle East. Two of those forces adhere to peace: Israel and the forces of President Abbas. And then there's one force in the Middle East, and some suspect that they're funded from outside governments and outside movements, all aiming to destabilize democracy; all aiming to prevent the vision where people can live side by side in peace; all wanting to destroy Israel.

And the fundamental question is, will there be enough will and determination to reject those forces of extremism, and to stand up and support those who long for peace? And our mission is exactly along those lines. And I'm optimistic that we'll be able to achieve a vision that shows a way forward, and I'm optimistic leaders will step forward and do the hard things necessary so people don't have to live in deprivation and fear. And so that's our focus, and that's our mission.

Q Mr. President, it's getting to be embarrassing for Polish politicians to talk about visas in the Oval Office, but it's even more embarrassing for my countrymen to apply for visas. And it would be really ironic if Poland would become a third missile defense site, and Polish citizens would still have to apply for visas. So can we expect that, before your watch is over, something will change, and maybe we'll convince the lawmakers on Capitol Hill to do something about this?

PRESIDENT BUSH: Well, thank you very much. First of all, the Prime Minister, of course, brought up the issue. And he was very firm about the need for a friend to treat a friend as a friend when it comes to visas.

Look, this is a tough issue. And we changed law. And now there are ways forward for the people applying for visas. A lot of it has to do with rejection rates. And as the Prime Minister noted, the rejection rates are changing quite dramatically, and so of course, this will be taken into account.

I fully understand the frustrations. And if I were living in Poland, I'd be -- and wanted to come to America, I'd be frustrated, too. And the truth of the matter is, we're going from one era to the next. We're going from a time when the -- during the Soviet era, where there was a different motivation by the people. And we're adjusting. And I fully understand the pace of adjustment doesn't meet expectations inside Poland.

And so I'm very sympathetic. But the law is changing. The paradigm is shifting. And I hope at some point in time, obviously, that the frustrations of our friends and allies are able to be eased with more moderate visa policy.

Thank you, sir. Thank you all.

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