



## THE WHITE HOUSE

PRESIDENT GEORGE W. BUSH

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### **President Discusses Iraq, Syria**

Remarks by the President Upon Arrival From Camp David, The South Lawn

12:53 P.M. EDT

**THE PRESIDENT:** Today is a great day for the families, comrades, loved ones of the seven missing in action who are free. I'm really pleased, for all those who have been praying for their safety, that they are safe.

We still have missing in action in Iraq; we will continue to look for them. We pray that they, too, will be safe and free one of these days. But it's just a good way to start off the morning, to have been notified that seven of our fellow Americans are going to be home here pretty soon, in the arms of their loved ones.

I'll answer a few questions. Scott.

**Q** Mr. President, Secretary Rumsfeld said today he thinks Syria is harboring some Iraqi leadership. Could Syria face military action if they harbor these people?

**THE PRESIDENT:** Well, Syria just needs to cooperate with us. We've made -- I made that clear on Friday. I will, if need be, reiterate it today. The Syrian government needs to cooperate with the United States and our coalition partners and not harbor any Baathists, any military officials, any people who need to be held to account for their tenure during what we are learning more and more about. It was one of the most horrendous governments ever.

**Q** Could they face military action if they don't cooperate?

**THE PRESIDENT:** They just need to cooperate.

**Q** You have been talking a lot about prayer and today is Palm Sunday. What role do you think faith and prayer had in this rescue --

**THE PRESIDENT:** I think it played -- first of all, I know it helps sustain and comfort those who mourn, those who are worried, those who are concerned about their loved ones. You know, I went to the hospital on Friday and met some of our brave troops and their families. And a lot of them told me that they had been sustained by prayer, been comforted by the Almighty during what had to have been incredibly difficult times for them -- to get the phone call that a loved one had been wounded or hurt, and then not knowing whether the person would live -- and then being able to be reunited with them here in Washington.

They told me that they felt like prayers had been answered. Prayer is powerful. One of the great things about this country is a lot of people pray, and I know a lot of people are praying for the families of those who grieve and the families of those who wonder whether or not their loved ones will ever return.

Q Mr. President, some of our colleagues in Iraq are saying while the Iraqis are grateful that the coalition forces freed them from Saddam Hussein, they're frustrated and even scared about the chaos, the looting going on.

THE PRESIDENT: Yes. You know, it's amazing, the statue comes down on Wednesday and the headlines start to read: oh, there's disorder. Well, no kidding. It is a situation that is chaotic because Saddam Hussein created the conditions for chaos. He created conditions of fear and hatred. And it's going to take a while to stabilize the country.

But just like the military campaign was second-guessed, I'm sure the plan is being second -- but we will be successful. And there will be -- let me finish, please -- there will be more stability. There will be more medicine; there will be more food delivered over time. And it's happening as I speak.

Have you got a follow-up question?

Q I just want to ask what your message is to the Iraqi people who are wondering about --

THE PRESIDENT: You're free. And freedom is beautiful. And, you know, it'll take time to restore chaos and order -- order out of chaos. But we will.

Yes, John.

Q Sir, given the success of American military forces, is this a message that people like Syrians and the North Koreans should take to heart? Do you think the North Koreans are taking it to heart?

THE PRESIDENT: I think that people have got to know that we are serious about stopping the spread of weapons of mass destruction and that each situation requires a different response. But we are making good progress in North Korea. We have made it clear that we think that the best way to deal with their proliferation is through a multi-national forum. It looks like that might be coming to fruition. That's very good news for the people in the Far East who are concerned about North Korea and their willingness to develop nuclear weapons. We're making progress on all fronts.

Q Do you think there are weapons of mass destruction in Syria?

THE PRESIDENT: I think that we believe there are chemical weapons in Syria, for example. And we will -- each situation will require a different response and, of course, we're -- first things first. We're here in Iraq now; and the second thing about Syria is that we expect cooperation. And I'm hopeful we'll receive cooperation.

All right. Have a beautiful day.

Q When do you think you'll declare a victory? And will you be the one to declare victory if it comes?

THE PRESIDENT: Did you watch my press conference on Friday?

Q I did.

THE PRESIDENT: Do I need to say it again, then? Surely, you watched -- (laughter.)

Q Tommy Franks is going to call the shots? (Laughter.)

THE PRESIDENT: Listen, we set clear objectives here in Washington. We gave our military what they needed to achieve the objectives. And when those objectives are met, we will hear from our commanders on the ground that they have been met. And that's when the so-called "victory declaration" will come forth.

Q Mr. President, will you go on national television when the time is right?

THE PRESIDENT: I'm on national television right this second. And it's an honor to be here on national television. And it's a great day to be on national television -- seven Americans are alive. Seven people who were missing are now alive. And I am so pleased for their families and loved ones. It is -- Patsy, have you got anything?

Q Yes, sir. Now that there's a vacancy on the axis of evil, is Syria a good candidate?

THE PRESIDENT: We will deal with each situation as it arises. We're making progress on the Korean Peninsula. Everybody knows our position, which is that we expect there to be a nuclear weapons-free Peninsula. The good news is it's a position shared by the Chinese; it's a position shared by the South Koreans; and it's a position shared by the Japanese. So we've got common interests, and working together, I am very hopeful we'll be able to achieve those interests, diplomatically.

Have a great day. Thank you.

END 1:00 P.M. EDT