



THE WHITE HOUSE

PRESIDENT GEORGE W. BUSH

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President Bush Meets with President Karzai of Afghanistan

Remarks by President Bush and President Karzai of Afghanistan in a Press Availability
The Rose Garden

[Rebuilding Afghanistan](#)

11:27 A.M. EDT

PRESIDENT BUSH: Good day. Laura and I are pleased to welcome President Karzai back to the White House -- really glad you're here.

PRESIDENT KARZAI: Thank you very much.

PRESIDENT BUSH: Thanks for the good visit, and I'm looking forward to having a good lunch with you and your delegation.

PRESIDENT KARZAI: Well, I'm looking forward to that.

PRESIDENT BUSH: President Karzai recently visited Fort Drum and thanked American troops on behalf of the Afghan people --

PRESIDENT KARZAI: Yes.

PRESIDENT BUSH: -- for their service and sacrifice. And, Mr. President, that was a sign of a true friend. I want to thank you for doing that.

PRESIDENT KARZAI: Thank you very much.

PRESIDENT BUSH: I also appreciate your honor and your courage and your skill in helping to build a new and democratic Afghanistan. You've been instrumental in lifting your country from the ashes of two decades of war and oppression. Under your leadership, Afghanistan's progress has been dramatic.

Three years ago, the Taliban had granted Osama bin Laden and his terrorist al Qaeda organization a safe refuge. Today, the Taliban has been deposed, al Qaeda is in hiding, and coalition forces continue to hunt down the remnants and holdouts. Coalition forces, including many brave Afghans, have brought America, Afghanistan and the free world its first victory in the war on terror. Afghanistan is no longer a terrorist factory sending thousands of killers into the world.



Three years ago, 70 percent of Afghans were malnourished, and one in four Afghan children never saw their 5th birthday.

PRESIDENT KARZAI: Yes.

PRESIDENT BUSH: Today, clean water is being provided throughout the country, hospitals and clinics have been rehabilitated, and millions of children have been vaccinated against measles and polio.

Three years ago, women were viciously oppressed and forbidden to work outside the home, and even denied what little medical treatment was available. Today, women are going to school, and their rights are protected in Afghanistan's constitution.

PRESIDENT KARZAI: Yes.

PRESIDENT BUSH: That document sets aside a certain number of seats for women in the National Assembly. And women will soon compete for those seats in open elections this September.

Three years ago, the smallest displays of joy were outlawed. Women were beaten for wearing brightly-colored shoes. Even the playing of music and the flying of kites were outlawed. Today, we witness the rebirth of a vibrant Afghan culture. Music fills the marketplaces, and people are free to come together to celebrate in open.

Afghanistan's journey to democracy and peace deserves the support and respect of every nation, because free nations do not breed the ideology of terror. Last week, at the G8 Summit, President Karzai talked with world leaders about the challenges of building a secure and stable country.

My government reaffirms its iron-clad commitment to help Afghanistan succeed and prosper. Security is essential for steady progress and growth. The forces of many nations are working hard with Afghans to find and defeat Taliban remnants and eliminate al Qaeda terrorists. We're helping to build the new Afghan national army, and to train new Afghan police and border patrol. Together, we will maintain the peace, secure Afghanistan's borders and deny terrorists any foothold in that country.



I'm proud to call President Karzai a strong ally in the war on terror.

The United States is also joining with Afghanistan to announce five new initiatives that will help the Afghan people achieve the peace, stability and prosperity they deserve. First, the United States pledges its full support as Afghans continue to build the institutions of democracy. America will launch an ambitious training program for newly-elected Afghan politicians and help newly-elected assembly members better serve those who elected them.

Second, Afghanistan and America are working together to print millions of new textbooks and to build modern schools in every Afghan province. Girls, as well as boys, are going to school, and they are studying under a new curriculum that promotes religious and ethnic tolerance. We pledge to continue this progress through a new \$4-million women's teacher training institute in Kabul. Graduates of this innovative program will return to their provinces and rural districts to train other teachers in the crusade against illiteracy.

Education can be nurtured in other ways, as well. Cultural exchange programs help to foster understanding and respect, as well as accelerate progress. Last year close to 100 Afghans studied here in various training programs. More want to come to learn and to share their experiences, so our third initiative will expand these opportunities to include more than 250 qualified Afghans who will participate in Humphrey, Fulbright, Cochran and other exchange programs.

Fourth, to promote bilateral economic ties, the United States and Afghanistan announced our intent to pursue a bilateral trade and investment framework agreement. Years of war and tyranny have eroded Afghanistan's economy and infrastructure, yet a revival is underway. Afghans are busy starting their own businesses. Some 15,000 licenses have already been issued for foreign businesses and investors to explore economic opportunities in Afghanistan. Working with Japan, we have rebuilt the Khandahar-Kabul Highway, a vital commercial and transportation link between Afghanistan's two largest cities. A bilateral trade agreement will add new fuel to the economic revival.

And, finally, we pledge to continue our efforts to create opportunities for women. The United States is dedicating \$5 million to fund training programs and grants for small businesses. Under the Taliban, women were oppressed, their potential was ignored. Under President Karzai's leadership, that has changed dramatically. A number of innovative programs designed in collaboration with the Afghan government are increasing the role of women in the private sector. The traditional funding we announce today -- the additional funding we announce today will provide Afghan women with small business grants and training in business management skills. As my wife, Laura, has said, no society can prosper when half of its population is not allowed to contribute to its progress.

The road ahead for Afghanistan is still long and difficult. Yet, the Afghan people can know that their country will never be abandoned to terrorists and killers. The world and the United States stands with them as partners in their quest for peace and prosperity and stability and democracy.

Welcome, President, glad you're here.

PRESIDENT KARZAI: Thank you very much. Thank you. Mr. President, it's a tremendous privilege and honor for us to be invited again by you and the First Lady to the White House. It was a great honor for me today to be speaking to a joint meeting of the U.S. Congress. I will cherish that memory of talking to the representatives of the American people.

There, today, I thanked America for the help that it gave us liberate ourselves and rebuild ourselves and prosper. That help has been the source of all growth in the past two years. Our economy in the year 2002 grew by 30 percent, in the year 2003, by 25 percent or more. In the year 2004, the growth is estimated to be 20 percent. And we are hoping, as some of the banks have predicted, that the Afghan economy will grow to 2008 by 15 percent, and beyond that, for another five years, by 10 percent.

Thank you very much. This could of not been possible without your help, without America's assistance.

We are sending today five million children to school. Almost half of those children are girls. Our universities are open. Our universities are coming up in all -- all over the country, in other provinces of the country. We are building a national army, a vital institution for the defense of our country. You want us to stand on our own feet; you want us to defend our own sovereignty and provide security to our people, and you're helping us do that.

The National Army of Afghanistan is popular with the Afghan people. Wherever they go, people receive them with welcome. In Farah Province, where they went some months ago, school girls and boys give

them flowers. Thank you very much for that.

We are also building our police forces. We have a constitution that we have today which is the most enlightened in that part of the world. And that constitution has been made possible because of the liberation that you helped us gain, and because of the stability that the United States helped us have in Afghanistan. As a result of that, we have a constitution that sets us as an example of an Islamic democratic state. Thank you very much, Mr. President, for that.

We are looking forward in this relationship to a stronger relationship. And I'm sure the United States will remain committed to Afghanistan. Afghanistan is, in the month of September, looking forward to elections, presidential elections, and elections of parliament and elections of the provincial assemblies and district assemblies.

So far we have registered 3.8 million voters. And out of the 3.8 million voters, Mr. President, 35.4 percent are, so far, women. And as the trend continues, as we move forward to the registration of more voters, the number of women registering will exceed, definitely, 40 percent. In certain parts of the country, in the central highlands, today I learned that the registration of women has exceeded that of men; they are more than 50 percent. This could have not been achieved in Afghanistan without your help and that of the international community.

Afghanistan has problems, too. Among the problems is the question of drugs. The Afghan government is adamant, the Afghan people are adamant to fight this menace, to end it in Afghanistan and receive your help in that.

Thank you very much, Mr. President. It's been nice visiting the United States again. One likes to stay here and not go, it's such a good country. (Laughter.) Thanks very much.

PRESIDENT BUSH: Get home and get to work, will you?

PRESIDENT KARZAI: Thank you, yes. (Laughter.)

PRESIDENT BUSH: We'll answer some questions, in the tradition of democratic societies. Are you ready? We'll start with Hunt.

PRESIDENT KARZAI: I'm ready. I now know, Mr. President, what the free press means. We have it in Afghanistan.

PRESIDENT BUSH: That's good.

Hunt.

Q Mr. President, Iraq's Prime Minister says the new government expects to take custody of Saddam Hussein and all other detainees when sovereignty is transferred in about two weeks. And your spokesman says that that's under consideration. Will you turn him over by that date, and what factors are you weighing in that decision?

And, President Karzai, who will try Osama bin Laden and Mullah Omar when they're caught?

PRESIDENT BUSH: We're working with the Iraqi government on a couple of issues. One is the appropriate time for the transfer of Saddam Hussein. And secondly, we're working to make sure there's

appropriate security. I mean, one thing, obviously, is that we don't want and I know the Iraqi interim government doesn't want is there to be lax security and for Saddam Hussein to somehow not stand trial for the horrendous murders and torture that he inflicted upon the Iraqi people. So we're working with them.

PRESIDENT KARZAI: Osama and Mullah Omar have committed crimes against the Afghan people, against the people in the United States, and against the international community. They are international criminals. They are wanted by the international community. They are wanted by the world conscience. They have to be arrested and tried. And when they are arrested, we will consult the international community and find appropriate mechanism for their trial.

PRESIDENT BUSH: Caren.

Q Mr. President, you've referred to Muqtada al-Sadr as a thug, and your administration has promised to bring him to justice. Is it appropriate for the new interim Iraqi government to now welcome him into the political fold?

PRESIDENT BUSH: The interim Iraqi government will deal with al-Sadr in the way they see fit. That's -- they're sovereign. When we say we transfer full sovereignty, we mean we transfer full sovereignty. And they will deal with him appropriately.

Let's see here. Do you want to run the table, or do you want to go eat lunch?

PRESIDENT KARZAI: Go ahead.

PRESIDENT BUSH: Run the table, okay.

Holly.

Q Mr. President --

PRESIDENT BUSH: Hold on a second, I'll get you in a minute, please. A little patience in front of the President here.

Holly.

Q Mr. President, there are signs that inflation may be on the horizon in the U.S. economy. How concerned are you about this? What are you -- I mean, do you think this might slow down the recovery that you've been so happy about? Also, if I can ask you a follow-up on the security about Saddam Hussein. What guarantee --

PRESIDENT BUSH: How many questions? One question apiece. If we're going to stand out here in 100-degree temperature, let's just have one question.

Q Okay.

PRESIDENT BUSH: You can pass your question on to some other person, and I might call on them. I'm not so sure I'm going to be so international this press conference. (Laughter.)

The first question was about am I concerned about economic vitality? I'm pleased with -- what?

Q -- inflation --

PRESIDENT BUSH: No, I thought you said am I worried that inflation is going to -- what I'm pleased about is the fact that our economy is strong and is getting stronger. All indications are -- is that the economic stimulus plan we put in place is working. There's strong growth. There is -- there is -- there are new jobs being added. Consumer spending is up. Disposable -- after-tax disposable income is high. In other words, the ingredients for continued economic growth are present. And I'm very pleased. I'm particularly pleased because it means that workers are able to do their duties to their families.

And I am an optimistic person. I guess if you want to try to find something to be pessimistic about, you can find it, no matter how hard you look, you know? I'm optimistic. I have seen what we have come through. We've been through a recession, a national emergency, corporate scandals, a war, and yet, our economy is incredibly strong -- which speaks to the great vitality of the American entrepreneurial spirit and the vibrancy of the small business sector. And the plans we put in place are working.

There's more to do. We need an energy plan out of the United States Congress if we expect our economy to grow in the long-term. We need tort reform. We need to make sure that the -- we deal with the cost of health care in a rational way, by not empowering the federal government, I might add, but by empowering consumers. And I'd laid out such a plan to do so.

I mean, there's other things we need to do. We need to make sure that we don't become economic isolationists. And -- no, I'm optimistic about the future.

Roberts, I take it you had a question to ask.

Q If I could just pick up on that, sir, about pessimism. Your presumed Democratic challenger is spending this week and next partially critical of your economic policies. And while things have looked good in the last few months, could the case not be made that over the longer-term of your administration, that you're still operating at an economic deficit?

And what do you plan to do to avoid the fate of Bush 41 who didn't get credit for an improving economy in an election year?

PRESIDENT BUSH: Well, I think one thing the American people have seen is that I know how to lead. When I first came to office, the economy was headed into a recession. And we acted. We acted in a way that called upon the true strength of the American people, and that is we encouraged the entrepreneurial spirit to flourish by letting people keep more of their own money.

In other words, some might have said, well, let's strengthen the federal government. I made the decision to strengthen the pocketbooks of the people. And they had more money to spend, and our policy is working. And not only that, we stimulated growth in the small business sector. See, I recognized most new jobs are created by small business owners. And a significant part of the economic stimulus plan was aimed at small businesses so that they would have confidence to expand and grow, and they have.

And we also have overcome corporate scandal, which we acted in a bipartisan fashion on -- to make it clear that we're not going to tolerate dishonesty in the boardrooms of America. In other words, we acted. And the economy is getting better.

We've overcome a lot. We've overcome a lot through good policy, but we've overcome a lot because I have great faith in the American people, in the small business owners and the entrepreneurs and the

workers of the country. And we're getting -- not only are we strong today, we're getting stronger. Our economy is the strongest of any major industrialized nation in the world. And there's more work to do. See?

Go ahead, Terry. No, you've asked your question. Terry. Hold on for a second. Terry. Thank you, though.

Q Mr. President, back on the Iraqis being detained by U.S. forces. If the Iraqi government is truly going to be sovereign after June 30th, and if they are expressing the desire to take control over their citizens --

PRESIDENT BUSH: Right.

Q -- and the coalition disappears, by what authority --

PRESIDENT BUSH: And what coalition disappears?

Q If the Coalition Provisional Authority, I'm sorry --

PRESIDENT BUSH: Okay.

Q -- the entity disappears --

PRESIDENT BUSH: Yes.

Q -- by what authority does the United States continue to hold the citizens of a sovereign country --

PRESIDENT BUSH: I fully agree that it's a sovereign country. That's why we're working with them to make sure that there is good security. Look, nobody wants Saddam Hussein to leave, and when there's a transfer of responsibility, we want to make sure that he is secure. He's a killer. He is a thug. He needs to be brought to trial. We want to make sure that the transfer to a sovereign government is done in a timely way and in a secure way. That's what we're discussing with the government.

Yes, Stretch. And then you next.

Q Mr. President, thank you. Just to follow up on John's question. In Afghanistan, things are improving, as you've mentioned. In Iraq, we're about to transfer sovereignty. And even domestically, the economy is booming. Why is it that you're having trouble pulling ahead of your opponent, John Kerry?

I know you don't pay attention to the polls, but we are four-and-a-half months from election day.

PRESIDENT BUSH: Yes.

Q What can you do to improve your political standing as the campaign moves forward?

PRESIDENT BUSH: You see, I think you answered your own question.

We are four-and-a-half months from election day. In other words, there's a long time before the election. I'm just going to do my job, Stretch. My job is to continue to lead. My job is to say to the American people, follow me, the world is going to be better. The world will be more free, the world will be more peaceful, the world will be -- America will be a stronger country because our economy will improve;

America will be a better country because we're calling upon the compassion of our fellow citizens to help a neighbor in need.

Q Mr. President, I want to follow up on this issue of Iraqi security because I'm detecting some reservation that you may have about the Iraqis' ability to really head up their own security after June the 30th, because you seem to signal that there are concerns about their ability to even continue to detain Saddam Hussein. So what will happen between now and June 30th that would help you overcome that concern? And just related to that, there was a report from Baghdad yesterday indicating that after the deadly bombing, car bombing, that Iraqi police, as crowds gathered against the United States, just stood around and didn't do anything. Why is that happening?

PRESIDENT BUSH: Which question do you want me to answer?

Q Well, I think they're related; both --

PRESIDENT BUSH: No, they're not -- (laughter.)

Q Please, I'll say, please.

PRESIDENT BUSH: Look, it's very hot out here, we've got a President from a -- a respectful President here. Why don't you just ask one question, if you don't mind? I don't mean to be telling you how to do your business. All right, I'll answer both. (Laughter.)

First, I just want to make sure that when sovereignty is transferred, Saddam Hussein is -- stays in jail. That's just a matter of discussion and understanding the procedures. That's all we're saying. I'm confident that when it's all said and done, he will stay in jail. I just want to be assured.

Listen, we've got -- we're over there for a reason. We're over there to make our country more secure, and one way to do so was to make sure Saddam Hussein was not in power. Secondly, we're there to help the Afghan -- I mean, the Iraqi people. We want to make sure that he doesn't come back to power. And so, therefore, it's a legitimate question to ask of the interim government -- how are you going to make sure he stays in jail? And that's the question I'm asking. And when we get the right answer -- which I'm confident we will, we will work with them to do so -- then we'll all be satisfied.

Wendell.

Q Mr. President --

Q How about the second part?

PRESIDENT BUSH: The second part was what? I forgot. It was so long ago that you asked it --

Q I know, I apologize, I was long-winded.

PRESIDENT BUSH: Oh, why did they stand back -- look, the Iraqi people are going to have to figure out how to make sure their country is secure enough for a free government to emerge. And what you're watching is a government -- learning how to protect itself. The transfer of sovereignty to Iraq means not only will they have the freedom to make decisions on behalf of their people, but they will have to secure their own country. And you're watching this happen. You also heard the comments of Prime Minister Allawi, who made it very clear that these types of acts are terrorist acts against the

Iraqi people.

Wendell.

Q Mr. President, how do you explain why the success we've had in Afghanistan appears to be alluding us in Iraq? Is it possible that the

Afghan people objected to the Taliban more strongly than the Iraqi people objected to the reign of Saddam Hussein?

PRESIDENT BUSH: No, that's not possible. The Iraqi people objected to the reign of Saddam Hussein, and you would, too, if you lived there -- where you couldn't express yourself, where you got tortured, where there was mass

graves.

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This is hard work. And it wasn't easy work in Afghanistan, by the way. I mean, it seems easy now that we're standing here, Wendell, after several years of working together with this great leader, but it was hard work. And it was out of kind of the desperate straits that the Afghan people found themselves in now a welcoming society beginning to grow. And the same thing is going to happen in Iraq.

These aren't easy tasks. I mean, somehow there's expectation, well, all this is supposed to have happened yesterday. That's just not the way it works when you go from a society that has -- that was subjugated to a tyrant,

by a tyrant, to a free society. And the President will tell you, it's hard work. It may look easy, in retrospect, but it's not easy. And that's why it's very important for us to speak clearly to the people of Afghanistan and in Iraq that the United States will help them, will stay and help them fulfill the mission, which is a free and peaceful Afghanistan, a free and peaceful Iraq, which are in our nation's interests.

First, it's in our interests that we defeat terrorists there than to fight them here. That's our short-term security interest.

Secondly, it's in our long-term interests that we work for free societies in parts of the world that are desperate for freedom. And the reason I keep saying that, Wendell, is because I know that a free society is a peaceful society. And America is interested in working with friends to promote the peace. And that's what we're doing. The short-term solution for our security problem is to find the terrorists and bring them to justice before they hurt Americans again; is to deny them training bases; is to deny them affiliates and allies in the war on terror. That's what we have done in Afghanistan and Iraq.

The long-term solution is to promote free societies that are able to defeat the forces of pessimism, darkness, intolerance and hatred.

Okay, a couple more questions. Yes. Let me work my way through the TV readers.

Q On another issue, have you been --

PRESIDENT BUSH: Which one, you or Sanger?

Q Me. (Laughter.)

PRESIDENT BUSH: Okay.

Q On another issue, have you been called to answer questions regarding the CIA leak? And have you retained the attorney --

PRESIDENT BUSH: You need to call -- you need to call -- you need to talk to the counsel over there.

Yes, Elisabeth.

Q -- Ron Reagan's remarks at the former President's funeral --

PRESIDENT BUSH: I didn't hear them.

Q He said that politicians should not wear religious faith on their sleeve. And a lot of Republicans interpreted those remarks as being critical of you and your position on stem cell. I'd like to ask you about that.

PRESIDENT BUSH: Whether or not a politician should wear their -- I've always said I think it's very important for someone not to try to take the speck out of somebody else's eye when they may have a log in their own. In other words, I'm very mindful about saying, you know, oh, vote for me, I'm more religious than my neighbor. And I think it's -- I think it's perfectly -- I think it's important for people of religion to serve. I think it is very important for people who are serving to make sure there is a separation of church and state.

Q Mr. President, questions are being raised about the legal status of U.S. military contractors in Iraq. Your administration is asking for them to be granted immunity by the incoming Iraqi government. If they aren't going to operate under Iraqi law, will they operate under U.S. civilian law, or under what legal jurisdiction?

PRESIDENT BUSH: I need to make sure I stay in touch with the lawyers on this subject. They are the ones who are raising the issue. We'll continue to work the issue.

Q So you haven't decided yet?

PRESIDENT BUSH: Right.

Mike.

Q Mr. President --

PRESIDENT BUSH: I'm getting distracted over here, there seems to be some noise.

Q The Vice President, who I see standing over there, said yesterday that Saddam Hussein has long-established ties to al Qaeda. As you know, this is disputed within the U.S. intelligence community. Mr. President, would you add any qualifiers to that flat statement? And what do you think is the best evidence of it?

PRESIDENT BUSH: Zarqawi. Zarqawi is the best evidence of connection to al Qaeda affiliates and al Qaeda. He's the person who's still killing. He's the person -- and remember the email exchange between al Qaeda leadership and he, himself, about how to disrupt the progress toward freedom?

Saddam Hussein also had ties to terrorist organizations, as well.

In other words, he was affiliated with terrorism -- Abu Nidal, the paying of families of suiciders to go kill innocent people. I mean, he was no doubt a destabilizing force. And we did the absolute right thing in removing him from power. And the world is better off with him not in power.

I look forward to the debate, for people saying, oh, gosh, the world would be better off if Saddam Hussein were still in power. I think we'd have trouble finding takers, particularly those in Iraq, as well. They're now living in a free society. And I repeat, it's hard work to go from Saddam Hussein to a free society. But we'll get there. And we'll get there because people want to be free, that's why we'll get there. People long to live in freedom. And the United States -- and I will continue to make it clear that we will not abandon those who are building free societies -- whether it be in Afghanistan or whether it be in Iraq.

Rich.

Q Mr. President, there have been some reports that the Afghan government has been cooperating with warlords, former warlords in Afghanistan, and I wondered if you talked about that with President Karzai today --

PRESIDENT BUSH: Yes, I did.

Q -- and how you feel about it?

PRESIDENT BUSH: I did, and he can answer the question, what he told me.

PRESIDENT KARZAI: Yes. See, Afghanistan is emerging from years of oppression to a free, democratic society. And in democracy, you are supposed to be talking to each other. You are supposed to be preparing the country for a better future by negotiating and by understanding each other. And as the Afghan President, it's my job to take that nation, the Afghan people, into a better future, through stability and peace, to a higher degree of democracy, to the elections. It's my job to do that peacefully. It's my job to keep stability and peace in Afghanistan. And I will talk to anybody that comes to talk to me about stability and peace, and about movement towards democracy.

No deals have been made; no coalitions have been made, and no coalition will be made. And they did not ask for it. First of all, we don't call them warlords. Some of those people are respected leaders of the Afghan resistance. Some of them are former presidents. And we respect them in Afghanistan. Yes, there are bad people in the country, as well, with whom we're not making a deal, with whom we are not talking. This country is moving forward. It's a society now emerging with a strong civil society sense in institutions. And that's what we are doing there.

PRESIDENT BUSH: Mr. President, thank you very much.

PRESIDENT KARZAI: Thanks very much.

PRESIDENT BUSH: Lunch awaits us.

PRESIDENT KARZAI: Lunch awaits us, indeed. Thank you.

END 12:00 P.M. EDT