



THE WHITE HOUSE  
PRESIDENT  
GEORGE W. BUSH

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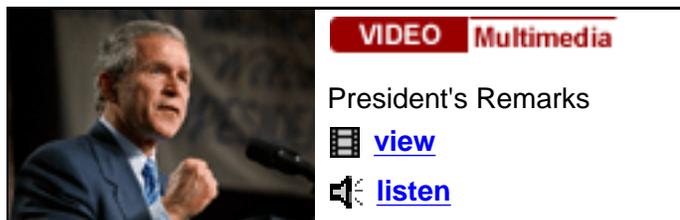
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## President Discusses Iraq and North Korea with Reporters

The Coffee Station  
Crawford, Texas

12:50 P.M. CST

THE PRESIDENT: Hi, guys. Happy New Year to everybody. Laura and I wish all our fellow Americans a prosperous and peaceful and a happy new year. We are really happy to be spending New Year here in Crawford, Texas. We'll be having our New Year's hamburger here in a minute. (Laughter.)



I'll be glad to answer a few questions -- Ron and Patsy and Mike.

Q Sir, I'd like to ask you if I could, why are you not considering military action against a defiant, unstable, unpredictable, nuclear-armed North Korea?

THE PRESIDENT: I view the North Korean situation as one that can be resolved peacefully, through diplomacy. The international community -- particularly those countries close to North Korea -- understand the stakes involved. I had a very good visit with President-elect Roh of South Korea. I've obviously talked to Jiang Zemin right here in Crawford about a nuclear weapons-free Peninsula.

There is strong consensus, not only amongst the nations in the neighborhood and our friends, but also with international organizations, such as the IAEA, that North Korea ought to comply with international regulations. I believe this can be done peacefully, through diplomacy, and we will continue to work that way. I take -- all options, of course, are always on the table for any President, but by working with these countries we can resolve this.

Q So you're not currently contemplating military action?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, Ron, I believe this is not a military showdown; this is a diplomatic showdown. And we can resolve this peacefully.

Q Sir, you --

THE PRESIDENT: Hold on a second, please.

Q Sorry, excuse me.

THE PRESIDENT: And intend to work to resolve it peacefully. We've got good progress in talking to our friends. And I look forward to the fact that President-elect Roh is sending some people over here and then he, himself, will come after he's been inaugurated.

Patsy, then John.

Q Sir, why should we be more worried about Saddam Hussein, who has no nuclear weapons, than Kim Chong-il, who is unstable and does have nuclear weapons?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, first of all, I think it's important to remember that Saddam Hussein was close to having a nuclear weapon. We don't know whether or not he has a nuclear weapon. We do expect him to disarm his weapons of mass destruction, that's what we expect.

Secondly, the international community has been trying to resolve the situation in Iraq through diplomacy for 11 years. And for 11 years, Saddam Hussein has defied the international community. And now we've brought the world together to send a clear signal: we expect him to disarm, to get rid of his weapons of mass destruction. The first step in determining whether or not he will do that was discouraging. His declaration was short. And the international community recognized that, that he wasn't forthcoming.

Again, I hope this Iraq situation will be resolved peacefully. One of my New Year's resolutions is to work to deal with these situations in a way so that they're resolved peacefully. But thus far, it appears that, first look, that Saddam Hussein hasn't heard the message.

Q Sir, can I ask a follow-up?

THE PRESIDENT: Yes.

Q Your budget directors put the possible cost of a war with Iraq at in line with the first Gulf War. Why shouldn't Americans view this possible war as possibly crippling our economy, that's already very slow?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, an attack from Saddam Hussein or a surrogate of Saddam Hussein would cripple our economy. My biggest job and most important job is to protect the security of the American people, and I am going to do that. And I had made the case and will continue to make the case that Saddam Hussein -- a Saddam Hussein with weapons of mass destruction is a threat to the security of the American people.

Q But can this economy afford to fight a war?

THE PRESIDENT: This economy cannot afford to stand an attack. And I'm going to protect the

American people. The economy is strong, it's resilient. Obviously, so long as somebody is looking for work, we've got to continue to make it strong and resilient. My most important job is to protect America and Americans, and I take that job seriously. And that's exactly what this administration is going to do.

John.

Q Sir, are you concerned about the report that had five people have come across the Canadian border illegally? Are you concerned that there's any -- there are any new threats to the American security right now, as we go into this new year?

THE PRESIDENT: I have authorized the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the FBI, to put out an all-points bulletin for five individuals who we believe have been smuggled into the country. We need to know why they have been smuggled into the country, what they're doing in the country. And if anybody has any information about the five, I would hope they would contact their local authorities.

John, we don't have any idea of what their intentions may be, but we are mindful that there are still some out there who would try to harm America and harm Americans. And so, therefore, we take every threat seriously and every piece of evidence seriously. And the American people need to know there's a lot of good people working hard, whether it be on New Year's Eve or any other time, to protect the American people.

Mike, you got anything?

Q Yes. Good afternoon, Mr. President.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you.

Q What effect do you think that --

THE PRESIDENT: That's plenty. No. (Laughter.)

Q What effect do you think that the attention to Senator Lott's comment has had on the image of the Republican Party across the country? And what do you plan to do to repair any damage?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, first of all, I think that most people understand that their Republican Party cares deeply about each individual, regardless of the color of their skin or their religion. And I will continue to promote policies that enable the American individual to achieve his or her dreams. I believe in equal access to the greatness of America. And this administration is committed to that and will continue to work toward that goal.

Yes. I'll show you how generous I am. (Laughter.)

Q Mr. President, looking ahead here, with a possible war with Iraq looming, North Korea nuclear conflict as well as Osama bin Laden still at large, is the world safer as we look ahead to 2003?

THE PRESIDENT: Yes, it's a lot safer today than it was a year ago, and it's going to be safer after this year than it was this year because the United States of America will continue to lead a vast coalition of freedom loving countries to disrupt terrorist activities, to hold dictators accountable, particularly those who ignore international norm and international rule. And the American -- this government will continue lead the world toward more peace. And the American people need to be mindful of the fact that our government is committed to peace and committed to freedom.

And we hope to resolve all the situations in which we find ourselves in a peaceful way. And so that's my commitment, to try to do so peacefully. But I want to remind people that, Saddam Hussein, the choice is his to make as to whether or not the Iraqi situation is resolved peacefully.

You said we're headed to war in Iraq -- I don't know why you say that. I hope we're not headed to war in Iraq. I'm the person who gets to decide, not you. I hope this can be done peacefully. We've got a military presence there to remind Saddam Hussein, however, that when I say we will lead a coalition of the willing to disarm him if he chooses not to disarm, I mean it. And we will continue to work to resolve the situation on the Korean Peninsula in a peaceful way.

And it was right here in Crawford, Texas, where I had a meaningful and good discussions with Jiang Zemin. Heck, it wasn't all that long ago that a U.S. leader never spoke to the Chinese leader. And right here in Crawford we had a dialogue where we both committed ourselves to working in a way to convince Kim Chong-il that it's not in his country's interests to arm up with nuclear weapons. And I believe that can be resolved peacefully.

Listen, thank you all. I'm thinking about a little nature walk in a couple of days. Anybody interested?

Q How far is it, how long is it?

THE PRESIDENT: About four miles. I know you're interested.

Q I have a question for you.

THE PRESIDENT: Yes, Patsy.

Q Did you keep last year's resolution to eat less cheeseburgers?

THE PRESIDENT: A matter of fact, it's an interesting question she asked: did I keep last year's resolution to eat less cheeseburgers. (Laughter.) And the answer is, yes, to the extent that I'm now comfortable in having a cheeseburger today. (Laughter.)

I hope you all are enjoying yourself here.

MRS. BUSH: Happy New Year, everybody.

END 12:57 P.M. CST

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