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March 5, 2005

## President's Radio Address

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THE PRESIDENT: Good morning. In the short time since I returned from my trip to Europe, the world has witnessed remarkable developments in the Middle East. In Lebanon, tens of thousands of people took to the streets in peaceful protest over the brutal assassination of former Prime Minister Hariri. For years, the Lebanese people have suffered from the aftermath of a horrific civil war and occupation by Syria. Lebanese citizens who have watched free elections in Iraq are now demanding the right to decide their own destiny, free of Syrian control and domination. Syria has been an occupying force in Lebanon for nearly three decades, and Syria's support for terrorism remains a key obstacle to peace in the broader Middle East.



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Today, America and Europe are standing together with the Lebanese people. The United States and France worked closely to pass U.N. Security Council Resolution 1559. This resolution demands that Lebanon's sovereignty be respected, that all foreign forces be withdrawn, and that free and fair elections be conducted without foreign influence. The world is now speaking with one voice to ensure that democracy and freedom are given a chance to flourish in Lebanon.

French President Chirac, British Prime Minister Blair, and German Chancellor Schröder have all called on Syria to withdraw from Lebanon. A Syrian withdrawal of all its military and intelligence personnel would help ensure that the Lebanese elections occur as scheduled in the spring, and that they will be free and fair.

At the same time, the Lebanese people were demonstrating against terrorism in Beirut, the elected leader of the Palestinian people, President Abbas, declared that his government is committed to chasing down and punishing those responsible for last weekend's terrorist attack in Tel Aviv. Such action is critical, because that attack is a reminder that there are still groups and individuals who will kill to prevent peace in the Middle East.

President Abbas made his remarks in London during an international meeting of world and Arab leaders, hosted by Prime Minister Blair. The leaders attending this meeting expressed their support for the Palestinians' efforts to reform their political institutions, their economy, and their security services. And the first reform must be the dismantling of terrorist organizations. Only by ending terrorism can we achieve our common goal of two democratic states, Israel and Palestine, living side-by-side in peace and freedom.

Today, people in a long-troubled part of the world are standing up for their freedom. In the last five months, we have witnessed successful elections in Afghanistan, the Palestinian Territory and Iraq; peaceful demonstrations on the streets of Beirut; and steps toward democratic reform in Egypt and Saudi Arabia. The trend is clear: In the Middle East and throughout the world, freedom is on the march. The road ahead will not be easy, and progress will sometimes be slow. But America, Europe and our Arab partners must all continue the hard work of defeating terrorism and supporting democratic reforms.

Freedom is the birthright and deep desire of every human soul, and spreading freedom's blessings is the calling of our time. And when freedom and democracy take root in the Middle East, America and the world will be safer and more peaceful.

Thank you for listening.

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