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Blair Calls for World to Unite

By JILL LAWLESS
Associated Press Writer
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LONDON -- Prime Minister Tony Blair tried to bridge the trans-Atlantic rift over Iraq, urging a "fractured, divided and uncertain" world to unite in the wake of President Bush's election victory.

Blair, Bush's strongest international ally in the invasion of Iraq, congratulated the president on his re-election -- and tried to nudge him toward re-engaging with the stalled Middle East peace process.

Speaking at his 10 Downing Street office Wednesday after talking to Bush by phone, Blair said working toward Israeli-Palestinian peace was "the single most pressing political challenge in our world today."

"Therefore we must be relentless in our war against terrorism and in resolving the conditions and causes on which the terrorists prey," Blair said. "We should work with President Bush on this agenda. It is one which all nations of goodwill would surely agree."

Those remarks appeared aimed at Britain's European neighbors, many of whom opposed the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq and were wary of a second Bush presidency.

Bush's perceived unilateralism, his refusal to sign the Kyoto Protocol on global warming, his rejection of an international criminal court and the incarceration of detainees at the U.S. military base in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba also have also to his unpopularity among Europeans, including many Britons.

Blair said Bush's re-election "comes at a critical time. A world that is fractured, divided and uncertain must be brought together to fight this global terrorism in all its forms, and to recognize it will not be defeated by military might alone."

The loyalty of the centrist Blair to the right-wing Republican Bush has angered many Britons, especially among left-wing sections of the governing Labour Party. Many Britons believe Blair slavishly follows U.S. foreign policy without exerting real influence, and he is frequently mocked as Washington's poodle.

Blair tried to dispel that image Wednesday, painting the trans-Atlantic relationship as a two-way street.

While pledging support for the U.S.-led war on terror, Blair also stressed the importance of bringing democracy to Iraq, as in Afghanistan, and to fighting poverty and injustice in Africa and elsewhere in the world.

And he called for renewed commitment to Israeli-Palestinian peace.

It is widely assumed in Britain that Blair backed Bush over Iraq in return for a pledge that Washington would push harder for peace in the Middle East. The "road map" peace plan for Israel and the Palestinians put forward by Bush last year has largely stalled.

Blair said he "have long argued that the need to revitalize the Middle East peace process is the single most pressing political challenge in our world today."

Blair's remarks were echoed by Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak and German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder, who appealed to the United States to push for the "road map" plan.

After meeting with Mubarak in Bonn, Schroeder said peace efforts would go more smoothly with cooperation from Europe, Russia "and above all, the United States of America, so that this process can be implemented better."

Blair called on Europe and the United States to "build anew their alliance" in the wake of Bush's victory.

"All of us in positions of leadership, not just President Bush, have a responsibility to rise to this challenge. It is urgent that we do so," Blair said.