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time. Reform will be repaid many times over in the relief of poverty and rising national wealth and stability for their countries.

The 16 chosen in this round are showing the way, are showing what is possible, are serving as a bright light in the developing world. You have taken the first courageous steps toward greater independence and greater wealth and greater hopes for the people you serve.

I want to thank you all for being here. I congratulate you on your work. And may God bless your countries and the people in the countries. Thank you for coming.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:35 a.m. in the East Room at the White House.

Remarks Following a Meeting With the National Security Team and Military Leaders in Arlington, Virginia

May 10, 2004

Mr. Secretary, thank you for your hospitality, and thank you for your leadership. You are courageously leading our Nation in the war against terror. You're doing a superb job. You are a strong Secretary of Defense, and our Nation owes you a debt of gratitude.

I've just completed a meeting here at the Pentagon with members of my national security team as well as a meeting with generals on the ground in Iraq. We discussed the needs of our military personnel, the status of current operations in Iraq, and the progress of that nation towards security and sovereignty.

The United States has a vital national interest in the success of free institutions in Iraq as the alternative to tyranny and terrorist violence in the Middle East. As we carry out this mission, we are confronting problems squarely, and we are making changes as needed.

Our priorities, however, remain the same, the protection of our country, the security of our troops, and the spread of freedom throughout the world. Like other generations of Americans, we have accepted a difficult and historic task.

We have made clear commitments before the world, and America will keep those commitments. First, we will take every necessary measure to assure the safety of American and coalition personnel and the security of Iraqi citizens. We're on the offensive against the killers and terrorists in that country, and we will stay on the offensive. In and around Fallujah, U.S. marines are maintaining pressure on Saddam loyalists and foreign fighters and other militants. We're keeping that pressure on to ensure that Fallujah ceases to be an enemy sanctuary. In northern sectors of the city, elements of the 1st Marine Expeditionary Force are prepared to strike at terrorist fighters and prevent a resurgence of violence and chaos. South of the city, the marines are disrupting enemy attacks on our supply routes and routing out anticoalition fighters.

In the towns of Ramadi and Husabayah and Karmah, marines are on the offensive, conducting hundreds of patrols and raids every day. The enemy in Fallujah is hiding behind an innocent civilian population and calculating that our coalition's use of force will alienate ordinary Iraqis. Yet, every day our troops are responding with precision and discipline and restraint. We're taking every precaution to avoid hurting the innocent as we deliver justice to the guilty.

We're helping to build Iraqi forces that can take responsibility for security, and our forces are also helping to ensure the delivery of humanitarian supplies to families that suffer as a result of the chaos in certain communities created by the terrorists and those who want to halt the advance of freedom. In Najaf, a major Shi'a population center and a holy site, our military is systematically dismantling an illegal militia that has attempted to incite violence and seize control. Soldiers from the 2nd Light Cavalry Regiment are conducting reconnaissance to learn the precise strength and location of enemy forces. The 1st Armored Division is steadily defeating these enemy forces while seeking to protect the people and holy sites of that city.

Elements of this militia have been ejected from the Najaf Governor's office, and a legitimate Governor has been appointed. The people of Najaf and Shi'a leaders oppose the

occupation by this illegal militia and are putting pressure on the militia to withdraw. We're encouraged to see more Iraqis take responsibility for resolving the standoff in Najaf.

In all these ongoing operations, our troops continue to face serious danger, and this Government is giving them every means of protecting themselves and every means necessary to gain victory. We're fielding the most technologically advanced military forces ever assembled, forces that are agile and flexible, able to strike in darkness and in light.

Supplying and protecting our forces in Iraq is a long-term responsibility, so I've asked Congress to provide an additional $25 billion for a contingency reserve fund that can be used for ongoing operations in Iraq. I have pledged, as has the Secretary of Defense, to give our troops everything that is necessary to complete their mission with the utmost safety, and I urge Congress to join me in fulfilling this important commitment.

Our military, from this building to the streets of Fallujah, is performing with exceptional skill and courage. They and their families are making tremendous sacrifices for the security of our Nation and for the freedom of others. And all the hardships and sacrifices are not behind us. Our Nation is caring for the wounded and grieving for the lost, praying for families who live in sorrow. We will always remember the ones who have died, and we will honor their sacrifice by completing the mission.

Our second great commitment in Iraq is to transfer sovereignty to an Iraqi Government as quickly as possible. Decades of oppression destroyed every free institution in Iraq but not the desire to live in freedom. Like any proud country, the Iraqi people want their independence. The Iraqi people need to know that our coalition is fully committed to their independence, and we're fully committed to their national dignity. This is a reason the June 30th transfer of sovereignty is vital. The Iraqi people and men and women across the Middle East are watching closely, and they will see America keep its word.

The United Nations special envoy, Mr. Brahimi, is now back in Iraq, consulting with diverse groups of Iraqis. In the next few weeks, important decisions will be made on the makeup of the interim government. As of June 30th, Iraq's interim government will assume duties now performed by the coalition such as providing water and electricity and health care and education. A key strategic goal of our coalition is to help build a new Iraqi army and civil defense corps and police force and facilities protection service and a border guard capable of defending and securing the country.

Major General Dave Petraeus, who commanded the 101st Airborne in Iraq, has returned to oversee the training and equipping of these all-Iraqi forces. Once constituted, they will protect a free Iraq from external aggression and internal subversion. Yet, the vital mission of our military in helping to provide security will continue on July 1st and beyond. Having brought freedom to Iraq, America will make sure that freedom succeeds in Iraq, a nation we will be proud to call a friend and partner in the pursuit of peace.

Third, because America is committed to the equality and dignity of all people, there will be a full accounting for the cruel and disgraceful abuse of Iraqi detainees. The conduct that has come to light is an insult to the Iraqi people and an affront to the most basic standards of morality and decency. One basic difference between democracies and dictatorships is that free countries confront such abuses openly and directly.

In January, shortly after reports of abuse became known to our military, an investigation was launched. Today, several formal investigations led by senior military officials are underway. Secretary Rumsfeld has appointed several former senior officials to review the investigations of these abuses. Some soldiers have already been charged, and those involved will answer for their conduct in an orderly and transparent process. We will honor rule of law. All prison operations in Iraq will be thoroughly reviewed to make certain that such offenses are not repeated.

Those responsible for these abuses have caused harm that goes well beyond the walls of a prison. It has given some an excuse to question our cause and to cast doubt on our

motives. Yet, who can doubt that Iraq is better for being free from one of the most bloodiest tyrants the world has ever known? Millions of Iraqis are grateful for the chance they have been given to live in freedom, a chance made possible by the courage and sacrifice of the United States military.

We have great respect for the people of Iraq and for all Arab peoples, respect for their culture and for their history and for the contribution they can make to the world. We believe that democracy will allow these gifts to flourish, that freedom is the answer to hopelessness and terror, that a free Iraq will lead the way to a new and better Middle East, and that a free Iraq will make our country more secure.

I understand the difficulty of the mission of our men and women in uniform. They're facing an enemy in sand and heat and blasting winds, often unable to tell friend from foe. I know how painful it is to see a small number dishonor the honorable cause in which so many are sacrificing. What took place in the Iraqi prison does not reflect the character of the more than 200,000 military personnel who have served in Iraq since the beginning of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

All Americans know the goodness and the character of the United States Armed Forces. No military in the history of the world has fought so hard and so often for the freedom of others. Today, our soldiers and sailors and airmen and marines are keeping terrorists across the world on the run. They're helping the people of Afghanistan and Iraq build democratic societies. They're defending America with unselfish courage. And these achievements have brought pride and credit to this Nation.

I want our men and women in uniform to know that America is proud of you and that I'm honored to be your Commander in Chief.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:55 a.m. at the Pentagon. In his remarks, he referred to former President Saddam Hussein of Iraq; Adnan al-Zurufi, Governor of the Najaf province in Iraq; and Lakhdar Brahimi, Special Adviser to the U.N. Secretary-General.

Interview With American Forces Radio and Television Service

May 10, 2004

Pentagon Meeting

Q. Thanks for doing this, sir. Let's start with why you're at the Pentagon. You just met with your national security team and some top military officials, and you talked about the progress we've made in Iraq. Can you outline that for me, please?

The President. Sure. First, we got rid of Saddam Hussein. That in itself was tremendous progress for the people of Iraq. He was a tyrant. We discovered mass graves, torture rooms. I mean, this is a fellow who, you know, if you didn't agree with him politically, your life was in jeopardy. And as a result of getting rid of Saddam Hussein, the people of Iraq now have a chance to live in freedom.

Secondly, we have been on the offense against foreign fighters and former Saddam loyalists and the illegal militias that really are doing everything they can to stop freedom. These people can't stand the thought of a free society. A free society will be a defeat to their ideologies or way of thinking or their desires. And our military has performed brilliantly, and I got a briefing on the progress being made around parts of Iraq.

Thirdly, we're making progress in heading toward a transfer date of sovereignty. What that means is that at some point in time—not "some point"—on June 30th, a new Government will be stood up and they will be, then, responsible for making decisions that will benefit the Iraqi people. Of course, we will stay to help make sure the security situation will then be such that then they'll be able to have free elections.

One of the things we got briefed on today from General Abizaid and General Petraeus is that we are continuing to work with the Iraqis to develop a security—Iraqi security force, different elements of a security force, to fight off these terrorists and criminals, for that matter, and people coming into the country illegally—or people trying to blow up infrastructure. And that's been steady. Progress is steady. You've just got to understand, these people have come from a world in which a tyrant really ruled their life. And