

them where they hide. And just like in Iraq, we're going to have our special forces stay on the hunt. And we'll continue training at the same time.

There's a lot of work to be done in this war on terror, but the American people can be—rest assured this administration understands the task and understands the challenges and understands our obligation to protect you, to protect the American people.

During the past year, we lost some really good folks who wore the uniform of the United States of America. We pray for their loved ones. We pray for the comfort of those who had a sorrowful holiday season because a seat at the table was empty. And we vow to those that we will complete our mission: We will lay that foundation of peace for generations to come, that we'll do our duty to protect this country by not only bringing justice to an enemy that wants to do us harm but by spreading freedom and democracy.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:24 a.m. at the Pentagon. In his remarks, he referred to Gov. Joe Manchin III of West Virginia; Gen. John P. Abizaid, USA, combatant commander, U.S. Central Command; Gen. George W. Casey, Jr., USA, commanding general, Multi-National Force—Iraq; Lt. Gen. Martin E. Dempsey, USA, commander, Multi-National Security Transition Command—Iraq and NATO Training Mission—Iraq; U.S. Ambassador to Iraq Zalmay Khalilzad; senior Al Qaida associate Abu Musab Al Zarqawi; Ayman Al-Zawahiri, founder of the Egyptian Islamic Jihad and senior Al Qaida associate; and President Hamid Karzai of Afghanistan. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

Statement on the Health of Prime Minister Ariel Sharon of Israel

January 4, 2006

Laura and I share the concerns of the Israeli people about Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's health, and we are praying for his recovery. Prime Minister Sharon is a man of courage and peace. On behalf of all Americans, we send our best wishes and hopes to the Prime Minister and his family.

Remarks Following a Meeting With Military and Diplomatic Leaders

January 5, 2006

It's been my honor to host former Secretaries of State and Secretaries of Defense from Republican administrations and Democratic administrations here at the White House. I've asked Secretary Rice and Secretary Rumsfeld and Ambassador Khalilzad and General Casey to bring these men and women up to date on our strategy for victory in Iraq.

I've also had a chance to listen to their concerns, their suggestions about the way forward. Not everybody around this table agree with my decision to go into Iraq. And I fully understand that. But these are good, solid Americans who understand that we've got to succeed now that we're there. And I'm most grateful for the suggestions that have been given. We take to heart the advice. We appreciate your experience, and we appreciate you taking time out of your day.

We have a dual-track strategy for victory. On the one hand, we will work to have a political process that says to all Iraqis, "The future belongs to you." And on the other hand, we'll continue to work on the security situation there. The main thrust of our success will be when the Iraqis are able to take the fight to the enemy that wants to stop their democracy, and we're making darn good progress along those lines.

Again, I want to thank you all for coming. I appreciate your interests. I appreciate you being such a solid citizen of our country.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:31 a.m. in the Roosevelt Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Gen. George W. Casey, Jr., USA, commanding general, Multi-National Force—Iraq. Participating in the meeting were former Secretaries of State Colin L. Powell, Madeleine K. Albright, Lawrence S. Eagleburger, James A. Baker III, George P. Shultz, and Alexander M. Haig, Jr.; and former Secretaries of Defense William S. Cohen, William J. Perry, Frank C. Carlucci, Harold Brown, James R. Schlesinger, Melvin R. Laird, and Robert S. McNamara.