AUTHENTICATED
U.S. GOVERNMENT
INFORMATION
GPO

Deputy President Hashimi. I would like to express my sincere thanks to Mr. President for the invitation, first of all, and too when he expedites my visit to the States, which left a really positive message to the Iraqi people that the American administration, while they are revising their strategy, they are looking for a balance and fair analysis from diversified leaders in Iraq.

So this visit coming after the visit of Mr. Hakim, I would like also to express my appreciation to the unique and unforgettable commitment of the President when he said, and continued saying that we are committed to the success in Iraq. And I share his views and aspirations that there is no way but success in Iraq.

We have no other option in Iraq but to achieve that success. And with the cooperation with our friends and Mr. President and the American administration, we will join forces to achieve that success in the foreseeable future.

There is a chance, and I can assure you there is a great and real chance to get out of this present dilemma. It is a hard time that the Iraqis face in time being, but there is a light in the corridor. There is a chance, but we need a good will and a strong determination, the same strong determination that the Mr. President has. There will be a chance for the country and for Iraq to succeed.

During my discussion and dialog with the Mr. President, I had really a frank and positive dialog and conversation. We tackled key issues. And hopefully at the end of the day, I would like to see my comments and observations welcomed, because at the end of the day, what I say to Mr. President is achieving—or could be seen as a genuine and—[*inaudible*]—part in the way of achieving the success.

I thank Mr. President again for the time given to myself and to my colleagues. And I leave United States with a great hope that we do have friends in Washington, that they are very much interested, in fact, to help us in these very difficult times, and to achieve the unforgettable, the long-waited success. Whatever the sacrifices, my family and the country, at the end of the day, we have no other option but to maintain this momentum and to struggle until we meet that success, *inshallah*.

President Bush. Thank you, sir. Thank you very much. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:51 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. Deputy President Hashimi referred to Abdul Aziz Al-Hakim, chairman, Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq.

Remarks Following a Meeting With Senior Department of Defense Officials and an Exchange With Reporters in Arlington, Virginia

December 13, 2006

The President. I've just concluded a very productive meeting with the Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs Pete Pace, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Vice President. I thank these men who wear our uniform for a very candid and fruitful discussion about the—about how to secure this country and how to win a war that we now find ourselves in.

We spent a lot of time talking about a new way forward in Iraq, to help the Iraqi Government confront and defeat the enemies of a free Iraq. We all agree it's in our Nation's interest that we help this Government succeed. We recognize that there are enemies that would like to topple this young democracy so they could have safe haven from which to plot and plan attacks against moderate nations in the Middle East, as well as attacks against the United States. It's in our interest that we help this Government succeed.

There have been a lot of violence in Iraq, and the violence has been horrific. Scores of innocent men, women, and children are being brutally killed by ruthless murderers. Our troops are engaged in offensive operations, and we mourn the loss of life. We are saddened by the loss of every single life amongst our service men and women. Our folks are very active in Al Anbar and in Baghdad, which is where the enemy is concentrated.

Our commanders report that the enemy has also suffered. Offensive operations by Iraqi and coalition forces against terrorists

and insurgents and death squad leaders have yielded positive results. In the months of October, November, and the first week of December, we have killed or captured nearly 5,900 of the enemy.

While the enemy is far from being defeated, there should be no doubt in anybody's mind that every day and night, the Iraqi Government and our brave men and women of the Armed Forces are taking the fight to the enemy; that in spite of the fact that I am conducting a strategic review of the best way forward in Iraq, there are a lot of operations taking place, day and night.

Yesterday, the Secretary and the Vice President and General Pace and I were on the SVTS with General Casey, and he's talking about the hard work our troops and Iraqi troops are doing to defeat these enemies.

I do want to say something to those who wear our uniform. The men and women in uniform are always on my mind. I am proud of them. I appreciate their sacrifices. And I want them to know that I am focused on developing a strategy that will help them achieve their mission. Oh, I know there's a lot of debate here at home, and our troops pay attention to that debate. They hear that I am meeting with the Pentagon or the State Department or outside officials, that my national security team and I are working closely with Iraqi leaders, and they wonder what that means. Well, I'll tell you what it means: It means I am listening to a lot of advice to develop a strategy to help you succeed.

There's a lot of consultations taking place, and as I announced yesterday, I will be delivering my—my plans, after a long deliberation, after steady deliberation. I'm not going to be rushed into making a difficult decision, a necessary decision, to say to our troops, "We're going to give you the tools necessary to succeed and a strategy to help you succeed." I also want the new Secretary of Defense to have time to evaluate the situation, so he can provide serious and deliberate advice to me.

I do want our troops to understand this, though: that this Government and this group of military leaders are committed to a strategic goal of a free Iraq that is democratic, that can govern itself, defend itself, and sustain itself and be a strong ally in this war against radicals and extremists who would do us harm. Secondly, that our troops deserve the solid commitment of the Commander in Chief and our political leaders and the American people.

You have my unshakable commitment in this important fight to help secure the peace for the long term. I pledge to work with the new Congress to forge greater bipartisan consensus to help you achieve your mission. I will continue to speak about your bravery and your commitment and the sacrifices of your families to the American people. We're not going to give up. The stakes are too high and the consequences too grave to turn Iraq over to extremists who want to do the American people and the Iraqi people harm.

I thank you for your service. I'm proud to be your Commander in Chief. We'll honor the sacrifices you are making by making sure your children and grandchildren can grow up in a more peaceful world.

God bless.

I'll take a couple of questions. AP man [Ben Feller, Associated Press].

War on Terror Strategy

Q. Mr. President, thank you. You've been gathering advice, as you said, from leaders here and from leaders in Iraq. As you've gone through that extensive process, have you heard any new ideas at all, anything that would change your thinking?

The President. I've heard some ideas that would lead to defeat, and I reject those ideas—ideas such as leaving before the job is done; ideas such as not helping this Government take the necessary and hard steps to be able to do its job.

I've heard interesting ideas. I won't share them with you because I want to make sure I continue to collect those ideas and put them together in a strategy that our military and the commanders and our national security team understands will lead to an Iraq that can govern and sustain and defend itself.

I put off my speech—actually, I was quite flexible about when I was going to give my speech to begin with but—and one of the main reasons why is, I really do want the new Secretary of Defense to have time to get to know people and hear people and be a part of this deliberation. And he will not

be sworn in until next Monday. I also—one of the interesting things about this experience is that there's a lot of ideas and a lot of opinions. And I want to make sure I hear from as many of those ideas and opinions as possible.

Today I heard from some opinions that matter a lot to me, and these are the opinions of those who wear the uniform. These generals have spent a lot of time thinking about this issue. There's nobody who cares more about our troops than they do, and nobody who wants us to achieve more—than to achieve our objectives than they do. And it was a fascinating discussion we had. These are smart people and capable people and people whose judgment I listen to. And at the appropriate time, I will stand up in front of the Nation and say, "Here's where we're headed."

But one thing people got to understand is, we'll be headed toward achieving our objectives. And I repeat: If we lose our nerve, if we're not steadfast in our determination to help the Iraqi Government succeed, we will be handing Iraq over to an enemy that would do us harm, the consequences of which—of leaving Iraq before the job is done, for example, would be grave for the American citizens.

As we learned on September the 11th, the enemy has got the capacity to strike us. And there's no doubt in my mind, a failure in Iraq would make it more likely the enemy would strike us. It would certainly make it more likely that moderate people around the Middle East would wonder about the United States will. Moderate people—moderate governments in the Middle East would be making irrational decisions about their future. It would be a disaster for governments that have got energy resources to be in the hands of these extremists. They would use energy to extract blackmail from the United States. And when you couple all that with a regime that is—doesn't like the United States having a nuclear weapon, you can imagine a world of turmoil. And we're not going to let it happen.

Caren [Caren Bohan, Reuters].

Iraq Study Group Report

Q. Thank you, sir. You said you would reject plans that would lead to defeat. Would you put the Baker-Hamilton report in that category?

The President. No, my opinion of Baker-Hamilton hasn't changed. One, I appreciated their look. Secondly, I thought it was interesting that both Democrats and Republicans could actually work in concert to help achieve an objective. And the objective they stated, that was necessary in their report, was a government that could defend itself, govern itself, sustain itself and serve as an ally in the war on terror. I thought there were some good ideas in there. And I—as I told both Baker and Hamilton and the American people after I received the report, I take every one of their considerations seriously.

War on Terror Strategy

Q. As you give the new Defense Secretary time to get more in the mix, what is the strategy that you're looking to build? Is it a military strategy for success in Iraq or a political one?

The President. I think that our military cannot do this job alone. Our military needs a political strategy that is effective. And that includes things such as an oil law passed by the Iraqis that basically says to the people, "All of you, regardless of where you live or your religion, get to share in the bounty of our Nation." It requires a reconciliation effort, including a rational de-Ba'athification law.

Q. That's not something you can do with your new strategy, is it?

The President. Oh, absolutely. Absolutely, I can do that with my new strategy. I mean, it is—I can hold people to account. It's something the military recognizes that they're not—that's not their job; it's my job to convince the Maliki Government to make the hard decisions necessary to move his country forward.

But the good news is, he agrees. In my conversations with him, I have said, you know, "Are you going to promote a unity government or will you be so divisive in your approach that you can't achieve the objectives that the Iraqi people expect you to achieve?" How do I know they expect to

achieve? They voted; 12 million of them actually went to the polls and expressed their opinions.

And so there needs to be a political track; and we're working very hard with the Maliki Government to achieve that political track. That's what I've been doing the last couple of days. As a matter of fact, today on the telephone I spoke to the two Kurdish leaders. These men have been outspoken about the desire to have a moderate governing coalition, which we support. I met with the major Sunni leader yesterday, all talking about how we hope that there is political reconciliation and a commitment to a political process that says to the Iraqi people, "You count; you matter for the future of our country."

There needs to be an economic component. As you know, part of our successful strategies in parts of Iraq have been based upon a "clear, hold, and build." Well, "build" means getting projects up and running in key parts of the country, so that people see the benefits of either working with coalition forces and/or the benefits of supporting a government. And so this is much more than a military operation.

And finally, there's the foreign policy piece that's necessary. And we spend a lot of time in our Government talking to people like Saudi Arabia or Egypt or Jordan or Turkey and sending messages, clear messages, to countries like Syria and Iran. And I believe, for example, the Saudis are committed to a government that will bring peace and stability, and that's a unity government. It's in their interest they do so. And we're working hard with them to figure out a strategy to help the Maliki Government succeed.

I'm pleased when Iraqi leaders go to Saudi Arabia and talk to my friend, the King of Saudi Arabia, and talk about how they can work together to achieve stability. It's in Saudi's interest; it's in Jordan's interest; it's in the gulf coast countries' interest that there be a stable Iran, an Iran that is capable of rejecting Iranian influence—I mean Iraq that is capable of rejecting Iranian influence. It's in our interests that we succeed in Iraq so that we can continue to send a clear message to those in Iran that are desirous of a free society that freedom is possible in your neighborhood.

And so the stakes are high in this fight. Nobody knows that better than the gentlemen standing behind me. They clearly understand the stakes that are confronted—that confront this Nation. And I am proud to have listened to their points of view. And I'm proud to be working with them, as they help lead the greatest military ever assembled—a military, by the way, in which we've got brave volunteers, people who understand the stakes of this fight, saying, "I want to be in; I want to serve my country."

It's a remarkable period in American history right now. And as I deliberate the way forward, I keep in mind that we've got brave souls that need—to need to know that we're in this fight with a strategy to help them achieve the objectives that we've got.

Listen, thank you all very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:45 p.m. at the Pentagon. In his remarks, he referred to Gen. George W. Casey, Jr., USA, commanding general, Multi-National Force—Iraq; Secretary of Defense-designate Robert M. Gates; James A. Baker III and Lee Hamilton, cochairs, Iraq Study Group; Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki, President Jalal Talabani, and Deputy President Tariq al-Hashimi of Iraq; Masoud Barzani, president, Kurdistan region in Iraq; and King Abdallah bin Abd al-Aziz Al Saud of Saudi Arabia.

Statement on the Government of Syria

December 13, 2006

The United States supports the Syrian people's desire for democracy, human rights, and freedom of expression. Syrians deserve a government whose legitimacy is grounded in the consent of the people, not brute force.

The Syrian regime should immediately free all political prisoners, including Aref Dalila, Michel Kilo, Anwar al-Bunni, Mahmoud Issa, and Kamal Labwani. I am deeply troubled by reports that some ailing political prisoners are denied health care while others are held in cells with violent criminals.

Syria should disclose the fate and whereabouts of the many missing Lebanese citizens who "disappeared" following their arrest in