

Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2024

Remarks Prior to a Meeting With the Joint Chiefs of Staff and Combatant Commanders and an Exchange With Reporters

May 15, 2024

The President. Well, hello, everyone. Welcome to the Cabinet Room. Welcome. And it's great to see you all.

We've got some important meeting and business to do in a minute. But I do want to kick it off with one comment: Thank you, thank you, thank you, thank you.

You know, first, I want to thank you for your leadership. I know it's—I may not look it, but I've seen it for a while. I've been around—I know I don't look like I've been around very long. *[Laughter]* I know that part. But never before have I seen the Nation ask so much of our military in so many parts of the world at the same time.

In Europe, you're equipping and training Ukrainian troops as they defend their freedom against Russia's vicious onslaught.

In Africa, you're working with our partners to take terrorists off the battlefield.

In the Indo-Pacific, you're building on alliances with Australia, Philippines, Japan, and Republic of Korea and improving our relationship with India as well and putting our Nation in the strongest position we can possibly be in.

In the Middle East, you have stepped up to defend against a range of unprecedented attacks on U.S. Forces, Israel, and our partners across the region.

And I look forward to discussing—I think you've been remarkable. I look forward to discussing all these issues this afternoon.

Next, I want to thank you for your commitment. I know last year hasn't been easy. I know, as you've faced crisis abroad, you've also faced unnecessary chaos here at home: polarized politics, which I'm sure doesn't confuse you at all, but it does me sometimes; and potential shutdowns, performative stunts that impact on morale and readiness and too many military families.

But you keep going. And you keep showing every person, with the most heart to serve, you're made up of an incredible group of men and women. And I know I've said it before, but I mean it—I don't think there's any comparable counterargument—you're the greatest fighting force the world has ever seen. And that's a fact.

And you know, I've had a vow since I've been a young Senator, and that is that, you know, we have a lot of obligations, but only one—only one—overwhelming obligation: to prepare those we send into harm's way with all they need and to take care of them and their families when they come home and when they don't come home.

And you've made progress on this front as well, over the last year, in particular.

I'm proud that, for the first time in nearly a decade, rates of sexual assault and harassment are—within Active Duty forces are down. They're down. And that's because of your leadership.

And finally, as I said a moment ago, I know I've asked a lot of you, but—and everyone in this room, but I have one more request: Please pass along my deepest thanks to all the service men and women under your control and under your charge. And I really mean it.

Right now all across the world, we're defending our Nation—they're defending it. And every day, they're risking their own safety for the safety of their fellow citizens.

So this afternoon I look forward to discussing a whole range of things and how I can continue to help support your needs and what you're doing for us.

So I want to thank you again for being here. And I'm going to ask the press to leave, and we get down to business.

Thank you.

Q. President Trump——

Q. Mr. President, why debate in June? Why do you want to debate in June? Are you worried about your position in the polls, sir?

Q. President Biden——

Q. Why do you want to debate so early, sir?

Q. Did you see Trump says he'll do a third debate? Would you? Why not—why not debate a third time?

2024 Presidential Election

Q. Are you looking forward to the debates, Mr. President? Are you looking forward to the debates, Mr. President?

The President. I am.

Come on.

Q. You don't want to debate RFK, Jr.? [*Laughter*]

NOTE: The President spoke at 4:42 p.m. in the Cabinet Room at the White House. A reporter referred to Independent Presidential candidate Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. The transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on May 16.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Joint Chiefs of Staff and combatant commanders, meeting with President; Interviews With the News Media : Exchanges with reporters, White House.

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