

coalition forces will make every effort to spare innocent civilians from harm.

A campaign on harsh terrain in a vast country could be longer and more difficult than some have predicted. And helping Iraqis achieve a united, stable, and free country will require our sustained commitment. Yet, whatever is required of us, we will carry out all the duties we have accepted.

Across America this weekend, the families of our military are praying that our men and women will return safely and soon. Millions of Americans are praying with them for the safety of their loved ones and for the protection of all the innocent. Our entire Nation appreciates the sacrifices made by military families, and many citizens who live near military families are showing their support in practical ways, such as by helping with child care or home repairs. All families with loved ones serving in this war can know this: Our forces will be coming home as soon as their work is done.

Our Nation entered this conflict reluctantly, yet with a clear and firm purpose. The people of the United States and our friends and allies will not live at the mercy of an outlaw regime that threatens the peace with weapons of mass murder. Now that conflict has come, the only way to limit its duration is to apply decisive force. This will not be a campaign of half-measures. It is a fight for the security of our Nation and the peace of the world, and we will accept no outcome but victory.

Thank you for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 11:10 a.m. on March 21 in the Cabinet Room at the White House for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on March 22. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on March 21 but was embargoed for release until the broadcast. In his remarks, the President referred to President Saddam Hussein of Iraq. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of this address.

## Remarks on Operation Iraqi Freedom and an Exchange With Reporters March 23, 2003

*The President.* I am pleased with the progress that we're making in the early stages of a—of the war to rid Iraq of its weapons of mass destruction and to free the Iraqi people from the clutches of a brutal dictatorship.

Today in our church service, Laura and I prayed for the coalition forces, those in the coalition forces who lost their lives. We pray for their families. We ask God's comfort for those who mourn today. And we thank all the coalition forces for their bravery and courage in Operation Iraqi Freedom.

It is evident that it's going to take a while to achieve our objective, but we're

on course, we're determined, and we're making good progress.

I'll answer a few questions.

Q. Sir, have you seen the tape—

Q. Mr. President—

*The President.* One at a time, please. Scott [Scott Lindlaw, Associated Press]. Thank you.

### *Prisoners of War*

Q. What do you know about the prisoners—anything, sir?

*The President.* I've been briefed, I'm constantly briefed by the Pentagon and through the National Security Office. I would—I don't know all the details yet.

I do know that we expect them to be treated humanely, just like we'll treat any prisoners of theirs that we capture humanely.

I think it's an interesting contrast that a lot of their soldiers welcome American troops. They're surrendering gleefully, happily. And they'll be treated well. And I ask you to ask the Defense Department for further details.

Patsy [Patricia Wilson, Reuters].

*Saddam Hussein/Operation Iraqi Freedom*

Q. Sir, what do you know about Saddam Hussein and his fate, if anything?

*The President.* I know that Saddam Hussein is losing control of his country, that we're slowly but surely achieving our objective.

It's important for the American people to realize that this war has just begun, that it may seem like a long time because of all the action on TV, but in terms of the overall strategy, we're just in the beginning phases, and that we're executing a plan which will make it easier to achieve objective and, at the same time, spare innocent life.

And I'm most proud of our troops and coalition troops for showing their bravery and skill.

Larry [Larry McQuillan, USA Today].

Q. Mr. President, you know—at this point, can you tell Americans, I mean, is the war progressing the way you expected it to?

*The President.* Yes, Larry, it is. It is, and I—the air campaign is achieving its objective, and the ground campaign is also achieving objective. We're slowly but surely taking control of that country so that we can free the people of Iraq and eventually clear that country of weapons of mass destruction. We've made good progress.

One of the big concerns early on was the southern oilfields. As you all remember, we had discussions about that. There was a lot of speculation about whether or not coalition forces would be able to get to the southern oilfields in time, before—so

that Saddam Hussein wouldn't destroy them. As a matter of fact, I had frequently talked about the southern oilfields or oilfields in general in my declaratory policy. Tommy Franks put a plan in place that moved on those oilfields quickly, and at least in the south, they are secure. And that is positive news for all of us.

Most of the south is now in coalition hands. Obviously, there's pockets of resistance in a place like Basra. We're making great progress—in the west, we're making great progress. The area, the launch sites for the scuds, while certainly not 100 percent secure, but we've made good progress.

And so I can assure the American people we're making good progress, and I also can assure them that this is just the beginning of a tough fight.

*Prisoners of War*

Q. Sir, have you specifically been told that American POWs have been executed? And even—

*The President.* I have not been told that. I have been told that we have a problem with potential capture. I'm waiting to—when I get back upstairs, I'll talk back to the Pentagon again. I was told early this morning that perhaps our troops were captured. Maybe between the time I left Camp David and here I'll learn more. But I am concerned about our troops. Obviously, anytime one of our soldiers loses a life, I grieve with their parents and their loved ones. And if there is somebody captured—and it looks like there may be—I expect those people to be treated humanely.

*Regime Change*

Q. What is your level of confidence that the Iraqi regime will surrender or collapse before U.S. forces need to be engaged in a fight in Baghdad?

*The President.* I—all I know is we've got a game plan, a strategy to free the Iraqi people from Saddam Hussein and rid his

country of weapons of mass destruction, and we're on plan.

Bill [Bill Plante, CBS News], and then Mike [Mike Allen, Washington Post].

#### *Prisoners of War*

Q. Iraqi TV has shown what appear to be American POWs and also what appear to be American dead. Your reaction?

*The President.* I expect them to be treated—the POWs I expect to be treated humanely. And—just like we're treating the prisoners that we have captured humanely. If not, the people who mistreat the prisoners will be treated as war criminals.

Mike.

#### *Saddam Hussein*

Q. Mr. President, do you retain hope that Saddam Hussein will go into exile, and are there any active negotiations about that?

*The President.* You know, Mike, I—he had his chance to go into exile. I gave him a 48-hour ultimatum to leave the country so that we could disarm Iraq peacefully. He chose not to go into exile.

#### *Turkey*

Q. Mr. President, how concerned are you about the situation in the north and Turkey's statement that they will send troops in there and that Americans might get caught in some kind of crossfire up there?

*The President.* We have got more troops up north, and we're making it very clear to the Turks that we expect them not to come into northern Iraq. We're in constant touch with the Turkish military as well as Turkish politicians. They know our policy, and it's a firm policy. And we've made it very clear to them we expect them not to go into northern Iraq as well as—and they know we're working with the Kurds to make sure there's not an incident that would cause there to be an excuse to go into northern Iraq.

#### *Prisoners of War/Casualties*

Q. Mr. President, what are you saying to the families of those U.S. soldiers who appear to be killed or captured and are paraded on television—

*The President.* I say to the families, thank—I thank them for the sacrifice they make, and we pray with them. I pray for God's comfort and God's healing powers to anybody, coalition force, American, Brit, anybody who loses a life in this—in our efforts to make the world more peaceful and more free.

Ed [Ed Chen, Los Angeles Times].

#### *Weapons of Mass Destruction*

Q. Mr. President, are you surprised the enemy has not used any weapons of mass destruction?

*The President.* I am thankful the enemy has not used any weapons of mass destruction. And we will continue employing a strategy to make it difficult for the enemy to use weapons of mass destruction.

A couple more; then I've got to go.

#### *Funding for Operation Iraqi Freedom*

Q. Mr. President, what will you be telling the congressional leaders tomorrow about the cost—

*The President.* Wait until I talk to them. It's probably best they hear it directly from me.

#### *Prisoners of War*

Q. Mr. President, to your knowledge, is there any hope of getting these soldiers back?

*The President.* What?

Q. To your knowledge, is there any chance of getting these soldiers back?

*The President.* Of course.

#### *Humanitarian Aid for Iraq*

Q. Mr. President, how swiftly do you expect to get humanitarian aid—

*The President.* Good question. I appreciate you asking that question. The question is on humanitarian aid. In the south of

Iraq, coalition forces have worked hard to make the port area secure, to make the transit of humanitarian aid as safe as possible. As—I was told this morning in my briefings that humanitarian aid should begin moving—massive amounts of humanitarian aid should begin moving within the next 36 hours. And that's going to be very positive news for a lot of people who have suffered a long time under Saddam Hussein.

We've got a massive ground assault going on, and right behind it will be a massive movement of humanitarian aid to help the people of Iraq. We have made that promise to the people of this country that we will do everything we can to protect innocent life. And we're doing that. And we'll do everything we can to help the Iraqi people. First thing, of course, that will help the Iraqi people is to rid them from a brutal dictator, somebody who has stayed in power through mutilation and rape and torture, somebody who has starved his own people so he could build palaces. When

free from that dictatorship, life will be a lot better.

But we also understand we have an obligation—and this is just not America; it's coalition forces—have an obligation to put food and medicine in places so the Iraqi people can live a normal life and have hope. And that's exactly what's going to happen shortly when the area is completely—safe enough to move the equipment forward.

Listen, thank you all.

*President's Stamina*

Q. How are you holding up, sir?

*The President.* I feel just fine. Thank you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1 p.m. on the South Lawn at the White House upon his return from Camp David, MD. In his remarks, he referred to President Saddam Hussein of Iraq. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

Remarks at the Pentagon in Arlington, Virginia  
*March 25, 2003*

Thank you all. Please be seated. Well, good morning. Thanks for coming. I've just met with our leaders here at the Pentagon, who are monitoring the course of our battle to free Iraq and rid that country of weapons of mass destruction. Our coalition is on a steady advance. We're making good progress.

We're fighting an enemy that knows no rules of law, that will wear civilian uniforms, that is willing to kill in order to continue the reign of fear of Saddam Hussein. But we're fighting with bravery and courage.

We cannot know the duration of this war. Yet we know its outcome: We will prevail. The Iraqi regime will be disarmed. The

Iraqi regime will be ended. The Iraqi people will be free, and our world will be more secure and peaceful.

The people of our military and their families are showing great courage, and some have suffered great loss. America is grateful to all those who have sacrificed in our cause.

Our coalition is strong. It's bound together by the principle of protecting not only this Nation but all nations from a brutal regime that is armed with weapons that could kill thousands of innocent people. America has more than 200,000 men and women engaged in Operation Iraqi Freedom.