

Q. Are you satisfied with the pace with which the U.S. troops are being armed in Iraq?

The President. Are you talking about the armored vehicle issue, for example?

Q. That and others.

The President. Well, I have looked at the statistics on that, and we have stepped up the production of armored Humvees significantly. And the other issue is the rearmament of existing—of vehicles that are now in theater, vehicles that require a different armament structure than that which they initially were manufactured with. And I am told that those vehicles will be armed up by mid-summer of 2005. And what I know is, is that the Defense Department is working expeditiously with private contractors and with our military to get these vehicles armed up.

Well, listen, thank you all for coming by. I'm sorry to disrupt your day, but I felt like it was important to talk about what is going to be one of the major natural disasters in world history. And it's important for the world to know that our Government is focused and will continue to respond to help those who suffer.

Thank you.

New Year's Eve

Q. Any plans for New Year's Eve?

The President. Early to bed.

Q. New Year's resolutions?

The President. I'll let you know. Already gave you a hint on one, which is my waistline. I'm trying to set an example.

Thank you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:38 a.m. at the Bush Ranch. In his remarks, he referred to President Ghazi al-Ujayl al-Yawr and Prime Minister Ayad Allawi of the Iraqi Interim Government; Usama bin Laden, leader of the Al Qaida terrorist organization; U.S. Ambassador to Iraq John D. Negroponte; Deputy Chief of Mission James Franklin Jeffrey, U.S. Embassy Baghdad, Iraq; Gen. George W. Casey, Jr. USA, commanding general, Multi-National Force—Iraq; President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga of Sri Lanka; and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh of India. A reporter referred to Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder of Germany. A portion of these remarks could not be verified because the tape was incomplete. The related proclamation of January 1, 2005, honoring the memory of the victims of the Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunamis, was published in the *Federal Register* at 70 FR 1157.

Statement on the Indian Ocean Earthquake and Tsunamis December 30, 2004

All Americans are shocked and saddened by the tragic loss of life and the destruction around the Indian Ocean. In this hour of critical need, America is joining with other nations and international organizations to do everything possible to provide assistance and relief to the victims and their families.

Already cargo aircraft, support personnel, naval units, and aid shipments have been dispatched. To coordinate this massive relief effort, firsthand assessments are needed

by individuals on the ground. On Sunday, January 2, I will send a delegation of experts to the affected areas to meet with regional leaders and international organizations to assess what additional aid can be provided by the United States. The delegation will be led by Secretary of State Colin Powell and Governor Jeb Bush, who has extensive experience in the State of Florida with relief, rehabilitation, and reconstruction efforts following natural disasters. I

look forward to receiving the delegation's assessment of the relief efforts so that our Government can best help those in need.

NOTE: The related proclamation of January 1, 2005, was published in the *Federal Register* at 70 FR 1157.

Statement on the Indian Ocean Earthquake and Tsunamis December 31, 2004

The disaster around the Indian Ocean continues to grow both in size and scope. I have been monitoring closely the developments and our recovery and relief effort underway. I also look forward to the detailed report of the official delegation led by Secretary Powell and Governor Jeb Bush that will travel to the region very soon.

The United States has already provided an initial, substantial effort through existing emergency response resources, the formation of the core group, and military assets. To help coordinate the massive relief effort, disaster response officials are on the ground, and we have established a Support Center in Thailand that is manned and operational. More than 20 patrol and cargo aircraft have been made available to assess the disaster and deliver relief supplies. Many of those aircraft are on the scene. We have dispatched the aircraft carrier *Abraham Lincoln*, the maritime prepositioning squadron from Guam, and an amphibious ship carrying a Marine Expeditionary Unit. They will soon be in position to support relief efforts to include the generation of clean water. We are leading an international coalition to help with im-

mediate humanitarian relief, rehabilitation, and long-term reconstruction efforts. India, Japan, and Australia have pledged to help us coordinate these relief efforts, and I am confident many more nations will join this core group in short order. Reports of strong charitable donations are also very encouraging and reflect the true generosity and compassion of the American people.

Initial findings of American assessment teams on the ground indicate that the need for financial and other assistance will steadily increase in the days and weeks ahead. Because of this information and based on the recommendation of Secretary Powell and Administrator Natsios, I am today committing \$350 million to fund the U.S. portion of the relief effort. Our contributions will continue to be revised as the full effects of this terrible tragedy become clearer.

Our thoughts and prayers are with all those affected by this epic disaster.

NOTE: The related proclamation of January 1, 2005, was published in the *Federal Register* at 70 FR 1157.

Message on the Observance of New Year's Day, 2005 December 31, 2004

As we begin the New Year, our prayers go out to the people who have lost so much to the recent series of disasters in the Indian Ocean region. The past few days have brought loss and grief to the world that

is beyond our comprehension. America will continue to stand with the affected governments to bring aid to those in need. Together the world will cope with the loss and prevail over this destruction.