

for very limited purposes, would still be required to withdraw next year, regardless of the situation in Iraq. The consequences of imposing such an artificial timetable would be disastrous.

Here is what Secretary of Defense Robert Gates recently told Congress: Setting a fixed date to withdraw would “essentially tell the enemy how long they would have to wait until we’re gone.” If American forces were to step back from Baghdad before it is more secure, the scale and scope of attacks would increase and intensify. A contagion of violence could spill out across the entire country, and, in time, this violence would engulf the region. The enemy would emerge from the chaos emboldened with new safe havens, new recruits, new resources, and an even greater determination to harm America. Such an outcome would be a nightmare for our country.

Second, the bill would cut funding for the Iraqi security forces if Iraqi leaders did not meet rigid conditions set by Congress. This makes no sense. Members of Congress have often said that the Iraqis must step forward and take more responsibility for their own security, and I agree. Yet Members of Congress can’t have it both ways. They can’t say that the Iraqis must do more and then take away the funds that will help them do so. Iraq is a young democracy that is fighting for its survival in a region that is vital to American security. To cut off support for their security forces at this critical moment would put our own security at risk.

Third, the bill would add billions of dollars in domestic spending that is completely

unrelated to the war. For example, the House bill would provide \$74 million for peanut storage, \$48 million for the Farm Service Agency, and \$35 million for NASA. These programs do not belong in an emergency war spending bill. Congress must not allow debate on domestic spending to delay funds for our troops on the frontlines. And Members should not use funding our troops as leverage to pass special interest spending for their districts.

We are a nation at war, and the heaviest responsibilities fall to our troops in the field. Yet we in Washington have responsibilities as well. General Petraeus was confirmed by the Senate without a single vote in opposition, and he and his troops need these resources to succeed in their mission. Many in Congress say they support the troops, and I believe them. Now they have a chance to show that support in deed as well as in word. Congress needs to approve emergency funding for our troops, without strings and without delay. If they send me a bill that does otherwise, I will veto it.

Thank you for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 7:50 a.m. on March 16 in the Cabinet Room at the White House for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on March 17. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on March 16, but was embargoed for release until the broadcast. In the address, the President referred to Gen. David H. Petraeus, USA, commanding general, Multi-National Force—Iraq. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of this address.

Remarks on the Fourth Anniversary of the Invasion of Iraq *March 19, 2007*

Good morning. Four years ago today, coalition forces launched Operation Iraqi Freedom to remove Saddam Hussein from

power. They did so to eliminate the threat his regime posed to the Middle East and to the world. Coalition forces carried out

that mission with great courage and skill. Today, the world is rid of Saddam Hussein, and a tyrant has been held to account for his crimes by his own people.

Nearly 12 million Iraqis have voted in free elections under a democratic Constitution that they wrote for themselves. And their democratic leaders are now working to build a free society that upholds the rule of law, that respects the rights of its people, that provides them security, and is an ally in the war on terror.

At this point in the war, our most important mission is helping the Iraqis secure their capital. Until Baghdad's citizens feel secure in their own homes and neighborhoods, it will be difficult for Iraqis to make further progress toward political reconciliation or economic rebuilding, steps necessary for Iraq to build a democratic society.

So with our help, Iraq's Government is carrying out an aggressive plan to secure Baghdad. And we're continuing to train the Iraqi security forces so that they ultimately take full responsibility for the security of their own people.

I've just received an update on the situation from Iraqi Prime Minister Maliki. My conversation with the Prime Minister followed a briefing earlier this morning that included Secretary Rice and Secretary Gates, along with General Petraeus and Ambassador Khalilzad, who participated by video conference from Iraq.

Prime Minister Maliki and General Petraeus emphasized that the Baghdad security plan is still in its early stages, and success will take months, not days or weeks. Yet those on the ground are seeing some hopeful signs. The Iraqi Government has completed the deployment of three Iraqi Army brigades to the capital, where they've joined the seven Iraqi Army brigades and nine National Police brigades that were already in the area.

The Iraqi Government has also lifted restrictions that once prevented Iraqi and coalition forces from going into areas like

Sadr City. American and Iraqi forces have established joint security stations. Those stations are scattered throughout Baghdad, and they're helping Iraqis reclaim their neighborhoods from the terrorists and extremists.

Together, we've carried out aggressive operations against both Shi'a and Sunni extremists, carried out operations against Al Qaida terrorists. We've uncovered large caches of weapons and destroyed two major car bomb factories that were located on the outskirts of Baghdad.

I want to stress that this operation is still in the early stages; it's still in the beginning stages. Fewer than half of the troop reinforcements we are sending have arrived in Baghdad. The new strategy will need more time to take effect. And there will be good days, and there will be bad days ahead as it—as the security plan unfolds.

As we help the Iraqis secure their capital, their leaders are also beginning to meet the benchmarks they have laid out for political reconciliation. Last month, Iraq's Council of Ministers approved a law that would share oil revenues among Iraqi people. The Iraqi legislature passed a \$41 billion budget that includes \$10 billion for reconstruction and capital improvements. And last week, Prime Minister Maliki visited Ramadi, a city in the Sunni heartland, to reach out to local Sunni tribal leaders.

There's been good progress. There's a lot more work to be done. And Iraq's leaders must continue to work to meet the benchmarks they have set forward.

As Iraqis work to keep their commitments, we have important commitments of our own. Members of Congress are now considering an emergency war spending bill. They have a responsibility to ensure that this bill provides the funds and the flexibility that our troops need to accomplish their mission. They have a responsibility to pass a clean bill that does not use funding for our troops as leverage to get special interest spending for their districts. And they have a responsibility to get

this bill to my desk, without strings and without delay.

It can be tempting to look at the challenges in Iraq and conclude our best option is to pack up and go home. That may be satisfying in the short run, but I believe the consequences for American security would be devastating. If American forces were to step back from Baghdad before it is more secure, a contagion of violence could spill out across the entire country. In time, this violence could engulf the region. The terrorists could emerge from the chaos with a safe haven in Iraq to replace the one they had in Afghanistan, which they used to plan the attacks of September the 11th, 2001. For the safety of the American people, we cannot allow this to happen.

Prevailing in Iraq is not going to be easy. General Petraeus says that the environment in Iraq is the most challenging that he has seen in his more than 32 years of service. He also says that he has been impressed by the professionalism and the skill and determination of our men and women in uniform. He sees in our troops, quote, “a true will to win and a sincere desire to help our Iraqi partners achieve success.”

Four years after this war began, the fight is difficult, but it can be won. It will be won if we have the courage and resolve to see it through. I’m grateful to our service men and women for all they’ve done and for the honor they’ve brought to their uniform and their country. I’m grateful to our military families and for all the sacrifices they have made for our country. We also hold in our hearts the good men and women who’ve given their lives in this struggle. We pray for the loved ones they have left behind.

The United States military is the most capable and courageous fighting force in the world. And whatever our differences in Washington, our troops and their families deserve the appreciation and the support of our entire Nation.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:30 a.m. in the Roosevelt Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates; and Gen. David H. Petraeus, USA, commanding general, Multi-National Force—Iraq. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

Remarks Honoring the 2006 NCAA Football Champion University of Florida Gators

March 19, 2007

Please be seated. This isn’t exactly “The Swamp.” [Laughter] This weekend, it would have been “The Ice Rink.” Today it is the White House that welcomes the National Champion Florida Gators.

So you might remember, one of my family members held elected office in Florida. Yes, that was—[applause]—I hope he’s found work. [Laughter] And so I said: “You know, I had the privilege of welcoming the Texas Longhorns to the White House.” He said: “One of these days, you’re going to

be welcoming a Florida team.” And he’s right. One year after the Longhorns came, here comes the mighty Gators. And we welcome you, and we’re glad you’re here.

So you might call it Gator country. This is the 100th anniversary of college football at the University of Florida. It’s a pretty fine way to celebrate the 100th year.

I want to thank Coach Urban Meyer and Shelley for joining us. I appreciate Dr. Machen, the president of the University of Florida, and his wife Chris. Manny