

together to solve their problems. We had five rounds of discussions, but unfortunately, they came to an end. But I hope that all the steps that we take in the future with respect to regional peace will yield results and we can work together with the United States with determination to achieve peace in the region. Thank you.

We are discussing all these issues. The step to be taken by the U.N. Security Council and the Geneva process are important. We will continue to assess that between us.

Thank you.

President Obama. Thank you, everybody. Thank you. Thank you, guys.

NOTE: The President's news conference began at 12:48 p.m. in the Rose Garden at the

White House. In his remarks, the President referred to Ermine Erdogan, wife, and Esre and Sümeyye, daughters, of Prime Minister Erdogan; Steven T. Miller, former Deputy Commissioner for Services and Enforcement, and Daniel Werfel, Acting Commissioner, Internal Revenue Service; and Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration J. Russell George. He also referred to the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) insurgent group. Prime Minister Erdogan referred to Minister of Foreign Affairs Ahmet Davutoglu of Turkey. Prime Minister Erdogan and some reporters spoke in Turkish, and their remarks were translated by an interpreter.

Remarks Following a Meeting on Preventing Sexual Assault in the Armed Forces

May 16, 2013

Well, I appreciate all of you coming in just for a second. We have gathered here all the top people in not just our military, but our entire national security operation. And I want to start off by thanking all the people sitting around this table and in this room for the extraordinary service that they've rendered this country.

And I want to also remind everybody that we have folks active in theater right now—men and women in uniform—who are making heroic sacrifices on behalf of our security. And our thoughts and prayers are with them and their families, because they are dealing with a whole lot to make sure that we are safe.

We have focused this conversation, though, on something that is at the core of our effectiveness as a military. So I told all these people that one of the great honors of my life is serving as Commander in Chief to what I consider to be the best military in the history of the world. And I am in awe of the work that the vast majority of our men and women in uniform do.

But the reason we are so good is not because of the fancy equipment. It's not because of our incredible weapon systems and technology. It's because of our people. And the capacity for

our men and women in uniform to work as a team, a disciplined unit looking out for each other in the most severe of circumstances, is premised, as Ray Odierno said, on trust. It comes down to, do people trust each other and do they understand that they're all part of a single system that has to operate under whatever circumstances effectively?

The issue of sexual assault in our Armed Forces undermines that trust. So not only is it a crime, not only is it shameful and disgraceful, but it also is going to make and has made the military less effective than it can be. And as such, it is dangerous to our national security. So this is not a sideshow. This is not, sort of, a second-order problem that we're experiencing. This is—goes to the heart and the core of who we are and how effective we're going to be.

Now, the good news is, I am absolutely confident that everybody in this room and our leadership, starting with Chuck Hagel and Marty Dempsey and the Joint Chiefs, as well as our top enlisted men and women, they care about this. And they're angry about it. And I heard directly from all of them that they're ashamed by some of what's happened.

But it's not fixed yet, and that's clear. So, even though I think there's a level of concern and interest that is appropriate, we haven't actually been able to ensure that our men and women in uniform are not experiencing this and if they do experience it, that there's serious accountability.

So what I've done is, I've asked Secretary of Defense Hagel and Marty Dempsey to help lead a process to continue to get at this. That starts with accountability, and that means at every level. And that includes accountability not just for enforcing the law, but also training our personnel effectively, putting our best people on this challenge.

I think Secretary of the Army McHugh made a very good point, which is, I'm not sure we've incentivized some of our top people to understand, this is as core to our mission as anything else. And we've got to reward them, not think of this as a sideline for anything else that they do, but incentivize ambitious folks in the ranks to make sure that they understand this is important. So that's part of accountability.

Empowering victims: We've got to create an environment in which victims feel that they're comfortable coming forward and they know people have their backs and that they will work through this process in a way that keeps the focus on justice and making right what's been wrong as opposed to, suddenly, they're on trial, it may weaken their position, it may compromise their ability to advance. That's going to be important. They've got to know that they should have no fear of retaliation, no fear of stigma, no damage to their careers, and certainly no protection for criminals.

Third thing is justice for the victims. When victims do come forward, they deserve justice. Perpetrators have to experience consequences. And I'm pleased that Secretary Hagel has proposed reforms that would restrict the ability of commanders to overturn convictions after trial. Those reforms have my full support.

There are a range of ideas that are being proposed on Capitol Hill, and I know that Chuck and Marty are both engaged with those Members of Congress. But what I've said to

them is, I want to leave no stone unturned and I want us to explore every good idea that's out there in order to fix this problem. And I'm pleased to say that Secretary Hagel is not only consulting with Congress, but is also looking at militaries around the world—the Canadians or the Israelis or others—that may have designed systems that get at this to see if there are any lessons learned in terms of best practices.

And Vice President Biden, who has been a champion for issues—around issues of domestic violence for 20 years or more, he made an important point, which is, is that we've got to make sure that advocates and professionals who are in the civilian system and have been working on this problem for a long time, that we're listening to them as well; that we don't assume that the military has to completely recreate the wheel. And I think that's a very important point.

So I want to thank all the work that Congress is doing, especially our friends in the Senate. All of us here are committed to working with them.

The last point I'm going to make, and that is that there is no silver bullet to solving this problem. This is going to require a sustained effort over a long period of time. And that's why I'm very pleased to know that Secretary Hagel is going to be having weekly meetings on this. And I want us to make sure that we've got effective metrics and feedback loops so that we are continually evaluating how well we're doing.

One point that was made around the table is that a sign that we're actually getting at this problem may initially be increased reporting rather than less reporting. We may see more reporting of incidents, in part because even outside of our military, traditionally, these problems of sexual assault are vastly underreported. And so over the next several months and years, if I start seeing a—data that shows that in fact we are seeing more reports, that may actually indicate to me that people are becoming more confident about moving forward.

On the other hand, I would then want those trend lines to start going down because that indicates that we're also starting to fix the

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problem and we've highlighted it and people who are engaging in despicable behavior, they get fully punished for it.

So again, I want to emphasize: Everybody in this room has heard from me directly. They've heard from Secretary Hagel, and they've heard from Marty Dempsey. They all understand this

is a priority and we will not stop until we've seen this scourge, from what is the greatest military in the world, eliminated. All right?

Thank you very much, everybody.

NOTE: The President spoke at 4:53 p.m. in the Cabinet Room at the White House.

Statement on Senate Confirmation of Ernest J. Moniz as Secretary of Energy May 16, 2013

I am pleased that today, by a unanimous vote, the Senate confirmed Ernest Moniz as our next Energy Secretary. Dr. Moniz is a world-class scientist with expertise in a range of energy sources and a leader with a proven record of bringing prominent thinkers and innovators together to advance new energy solutions. He also shares my conviction that the United States must lead the world in developing more sustainable sources of energy

that create new jobs and new industries and in responding to the threat of global climate change. I am thrilled that Ernie is joining my team, and I look forward to his counsel on these issues as my administration continues to increase our Nation's energy security, strengthen our nuclear security, develop the next generation of clean energy technologies, and compete for the jobs of the 21st century.

Remarks at Ellicott Dredges, LLC, in Baltimore, Maryland May 17, 2013

The President. Hello, Baltimore! Well, it is wonderful to see all of you. Give Duncan a big round of applause for the great introduction. I want to thank all of you for the warm welcome, the great hospitality. And I tell you what, I'm going to return the favor by hosting your Super Bowl Champion Baltimore Ravens at the White House this summer. So we'll have Ray Lewis in the China Room. What could go wrong? [*Laughter*]

I want to thank your CEO, Peter Bowe, and your plant manager, Robert Croom, and your entire team for showing me around this great facility. I was told that one of your customers once named a dredge after President Clinton, so I've got my fingers crossed. [*Laughter*] Never had a dredge named after me, so I'm looking after—looking forward to that.

I've come here today to talk about our single most important priority as a country right now. And that is reigniting the true engine of our economic growth, and that is a rising, thriving middle class. And as I said in my State of the

Union Address this year, that's our north star. That's what we have to focus on. That's what has to guide all our efforts.

And we've got some great people who are championing middle class families every single day. First of all, your outstanding Governor—come on—Martin O'Malley. Your outstanding mayor, Madam Mayor. You've got some outstanding Members of Congress, led by your senior Senator, Barbara Mikulski. And your own leader in the House of Representatives, he is doing a great job every single day, and he loves this State: Steny Hoyer.

The—so we've got just some extraordinary folks here. Every—let me make sure I've—Elijah Cummings is here. But more importantly, Elijah's mom is here. And we are so proud of Elijah, but his mom apparently prays for me every day, so I'm very grateful for her as well.

And the—all of these, all of your Members of Congress, every single day, are working, fighting on behalf—on your behalf in terms of making sure that we're growing an economy