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Television Address to the Iraqi People

Remarks as delivered by Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld, Baghdad, Iraq, Friday, December 5, 2003.

I am delighted to be back in Iraq. This is my third visit to your country since liberation. Each time I return, I see more signs of progress. Schools and universities are open. A new currency is in circulation. Baghdad is bustling with commerce. Slowly, but surely, you - the Iraqi people - are taking back your country, building a free society from the remains of Saddam Hussein's tyranny.

Still the security situation remains difficult, as remnants of the defeated regime seek to derail this progress and stop Iraq's transition from tyranny to freedom and self-government. They will not be permitted to do so. The Coalition is dealing forcefully with them. And at the forefront of the fight are many thousands of brave Iraqis, who have stepped forward to defend their country.

Today, in Kirkuk and Baghdad, I had a chance to meet with some of the courageous Iraqi fighters who have volunteered to serve in the Iraqi Civil Defense Corps. They are impressive. They are serving alongside many other brave Iraqis, who have joined the new Iraqi Army, as well as the border guard, police and facilities protection service - and the equally courageous civilians, who are serving in local and national governing institutions, paving the way for the establishment of a transitional government next year, a new Iraqi constitution and free elections.

Since liberation, more than 145,000 Iraqis have stepped forward to take up arms against the terrorists. So many of your countrymen have volunteered to serve that today Iraq has now become the single largest contributor of forces to the Coalition. That is something all Iraqis can be proud of.

Increasingly, Iraqis are taking the lead in security operations, with U.S. and Coalition forces playing a supporting role. This is fitting and appropriate -- because this is your country, and while Coalition forces can help, its future is in your hands.

The battle in Iraq today is not a fight between Iraqis and foreign forces -- it is a battle between free Iraqis and the last remnants of a defeated regime, who still do not realize that their cause is lost.

One day, when the history of Iraq's liberation is written, young Iraqis will study that history. And they will learn that foreign troops were not the only ones who fought and died for the liberation of Iraq.

They will read about the heroism of so many brave Iraqis who struggled and sacrificed, and gave their lives, for their country's freedom.

They will look with pride on their service and sacrifice -- and honor their vital role in bringing the

era of Ba'athist terror to an end.

But let me be clear: Our Coalition of 34 nations will not abandon Iraq. We will leave only when the task is finished -- but not a moment sooner.

As President Bush said here in Baghdad last week, "we did not charge hundreds of miles into the heart of Iraq, pay a bitter cost in casualties, defeat a brutal dictator and liberate 25 million people, only to retreat before a band of thugs and assassins."

The Coalition intends to stay in Iraq as long as it takes to finish the job. We will not be intimidated. We will not cut and run. We will stay the course, and help you secure a future of freedom for your children - so that for them, Ba'athist terror will be not a daily reality, but rather a sad chapter in the history books they read in school.

Thank you for listening.



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