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President Bush Meets with General Petraeus, Discusses War in Iraq

The Oval Office

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9:44 A.M. EDT

THE PRESIDENT: It's my high honor to welcome General David Petraeus back to the Oval Office, and I appreciate Deputy Secretary England and General Pace joining us. General Petraeus has taken on a very important assignment for the security of our country, and for the peace of the world, and that is to help this young Iraqi democracy become stable, evolve into a country that can defend itself and govern itself, and serve as an ally in this war against extremists and radicals who wish to do us harm.

General Petraeus has been there for a brief period of time, on his second tour. About a little over half of the troops -- around half of the troops he's requested have arrived on the scene. These troops are all aimed at helping the Iraqi government find the breathing space necessary to do what the people want them to do, and that is to reconcile and move forward with a government of and by and for the Iraqi people. So General Petraeus, we welcome you here.



GENERAL PETRAEUS: Thank you.

THE PRESIDENT: It's a tough time there, as the General will tell the Congress. He's here not only to check in with me and other members of my team, but also he'll be going up to the Hill, going up to the joint session of the Congress to brief the members, both Republican and Democrat, about what's going right and what's not going right. He's a straightforward man who is implementing a very good plan to achieve our strategic objectives.

As the General will tell the folks on Capitol Hill, there's been some progress. There's been some horrific bombings, of course. There's also a decline in sectarian violence. And I appreciate you coming, and I really thank you and your family for your service to our country.

I'll answer a couple of questions. Deb.

Q Mr. President, Senator Reid says you're in denial about Iraq, and that Congress is going to pass a bill that includes a fair and reasonable timetable for withdrawal. Could you compromise? Could you accept anything that looks like that, at all?

THE PRESIDENT: I believe strongly that politicians in Washington shouldn't be telling generals how to do their job. And I believe artificial timetables of withdrawal would be a mistake. An artificial timetable of withdrawal would say to an enemy, just wait them out; it would say to the Iraqis, don't do hard things necessary to achieve our objectives; and it would be discouraging for our troops. And therefore I will strongly reject an artificial timetable withdrawal and/or Washington politicians trying to tell those who wear the uniform how to do their job.

I will, of course, be willing to work with the Congress, both Republicans and Democrats, on a way forward. That's what I said during the Cabinet Room. But I also made it clear that no matter how tough it may look, that for the Congress to micromanage this process is a mistake.

Steve.

Q The Attorney General is still getting a lot of criticism over the U.S. attorneys situation. Was his explanation sufficient, or is there more he needs to do to try to turn things around?

THE PRESIDENT: The Attorney General went up and gave a very candid assessment, and answered every question he could possibly answer, honestly answer, in a way that increased my confidence in his ability to do the job.

One of the things that's important for the American people to understand is that the Attorney General has a right to recommend to me to replace U.S. attorneys. U.S. attorneys serve at the pleasure of the President. In other words, we have named them, and I have the right to replace them with somebody else. And as the investigation, the hearings went forward, it was clear that the Attorney General broke no law, did no wrongdoing. And some senators didn't like his explanation, but he answered as honestly as he could. This is an honest, honorable man, in whom I have confidence.

Thank you all for coming. General, it's good to have you here.

GENERAL PETRAEUS: Great to be here, Mr. President. Thank you.

END 9:49 A.M. EDT

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