



THE WHITE HOUSE

PRESIDENT GEORGE W. BUSH

[Home](#) > [News & Policies](#) > [Press Secretary Briefings](#)

For Immediate Release
Office of the Press Secretary
June 16, 2004

Press Gaggle by Scott McClellan

Aboard Air Force One
En Route Tampa, Florida

- [President's Schedule](#)
- [Iraqi Poll](#)
- [American Hostage in Saudi Arabia](#)
- [Iraq/Zarqawi](#)

9:13 A.M. EDT

MR. McCLELLAN: **The President had his usual briefings** before we departed. Here shortly on board Air Force One, the President is going to participate in a roundtable interview with some veterans service organizations publications. Let me just tell you what publications those are, so you have that.

It will include The American Legion Magazine, VFW Magazine, The Military Officers Association of America Magazine, The Disabled American Veterans Magazine, The -Paraplegia News, and The National Guard Magazine, and The Voice, which is the retired enlisted association. Secretary Principi is on board, as well, traveling with us today. He'll be there, in addition to the President.

Following that, we will land at MacDill Air Force Base. The last time the President was at MacDill was during the first week of Operation Iraqi Freedom and I gave you a little bit of a readout on his remarks yesterday, so I'll skip over that. He'll make remarks to the military personnel there, and remember that it will be fed, via satellite, to military personnel who are in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as carried on Armed Forces Radio and TV.

Just as a reminder, MacDill Air Force Base, it is home to the 6th Air Mobility Wing and it is also home to the Central Command and the Special Operations Command. There are about 6,500 military personnel located there. And Central Command's area of responsibility includes 27 nations in the Middle East and South and Central Asia. And the coalition village is also at Central Command, which houses liaisons from more than 60 nations who are involved in the global war on terrorism.

Following the remarks to the military men and women there at MacDill Air Force Base, the President will receive a briefing -- or participate in a briefing from Central Command and the Special Operations Command. We've got pool coverage at the top of that. Then following that briefing, the President will meet with some families of fallen soldiers. I think right now we expect there will be 11 different families represented there, and it includes fallen from Iraq as well as Afghanistan. I think there are at least four families of fallen from Afghanistan that will be present for that meeting.

And then we return back to the White House. That's the President's schedule. I'll just go straight to your

questions.

Q Have you seen the poll that was commissioned by the former governing authority, taken last month in Iraq, that shows overwhelming number of Iraqis wish we would leave?

MR. MCCLELLAN: No, I haven't seen the specific poll, but I think we've -- the President has previously said on a number of occasions that no one wants to be occupied. We don't want to be occupiers. That's why we're moving forward on the President's five point plan for transitioning to self-government in Iraq. And we're making good progress on the President's five point plan for success in Iraq. And I think he's going to be talking about some of that in his remarks. And he will be giving an update about how we're moving forward on that five point plan.

He'll talk about how the Iraqis are assuming more and more responsibility for their future as we move toward transferring sovereignty. And I expect he'll talk about how the coalition is working to equip and train Iraqi security forces so that, ultimately, they'll be in a position to provide for their security in the future.

I think in his remarks he'll touch on the challenges that remain, as well, and talk about how every step we get closer to moving forward on the transfer of sovereignty and moving forward on the election process, the terrorists will become more desperate and seek to become more violent. And, you know, we have a responsibility to help Iraqis as they move forward on the transition to a democratically elected representative government. So we'll be there to help them address these security threats as we move forward.

Q What's the administration doing about Paul Johnson, the American held hostage in Saudi Arabia?

MR. McCLELLAN: Well, I think any time there is an American citizen involved in a situation like this it's a high priority for the administration. We are in close contact with Saudi officials and working closely with Saudi officials. We're in close contact with Mr. Johnson's family, as well. The President is being briefed and kept informed of the situation on a regular basis. And that's where things stand.

Q Has he been in touch with his family, at all?

MR. McCLELLAN: No, but we are in close contact with the family.

Q Did you ask if the President was in touch?

Q Yes.

MR. McCLELLAN: No, but we are -- officials are in close contact with his family.

Q There are several Americans who were killed -- three, I believe, from the Tampa area who were killed Monday morning in Iraq. I believe they were contractors. Has the President ever met with any of the civilian families, aside from the families of the fallen soldiers?

MR. McCLELLAN: Let me get you -- I didn't bring the -- I can get you a list of -- or I can provide you more information on some of the fallen that the President has met with. I know he's met on -- today's visit with family of fallen soldiers will probably mark about I think around the eleventh or twelfth time he has visited with families of fallen from Iraq and Afghanistan.

But, obviously, any time an American citizen loses their life in a situation like Iraq, our thoughts and prayers are with their families. And there are a number of Americans who are not in the military who are working in Iraq to help the Iraqi people realize a brighter future, and we are grateful for their sacrifices, as well.

Q Do you know whether the President has met in the past with any of the civilian families?

MR. McCLELLAN: I don't remember off the top of my head. I'll double-check it.

Q **The President, the last few times he's talked about Iraq, has mentioned Zarqawi.** Do you think he'll mention him today, and his links to terrorism and pre-war Iraq?

MR. McCLELLAN: Well, you'll be there for his remarks. But, certainly, we know that Zarqawi is someone who was in Iraq prior to the decision to go in and remove the regime from power. And he remains in Iraq. He is one of the enemies of freedom who are seeking to derail the transition to a free and democratic Iraq. But like the other enemies of freedom, he will not prevail.

You know, I think the Iraqi people recognize the importance of taking decisive action against those who would seek to undermine a brighter future for the Iraqi people. And that's why you have strong comments from Prime Minister Allawi, saying that those terrorists do not represent the Iraqi people and that they are prepared to take decisive action to go after these terrorists.

But the President will talk about in his remarks how, as we move each step closer to self-government in Iraq, the terrorists will become more desperate and seek to become more violent, because they recognize how high the stakes are. The stakes are high in Iraq. And this will be a critical blow to the terrorists, when we realize a free and democratic Iraq.

Q Will he discuss the issue of long deployments and the effect it has on morale?

MR. McCLELLAN: In his remarks?

Q Yes.

MR. McCLELLAN: I think -- well, part of his remarks is focused on thanking our men and women in the military who are serving in Iraq and Afghanistan. They are making tremendous sacrifices, as are their families, in defense of freedom. And I think that our men and women in the military recognize the importance of the job that they are undertaking and that they have undertaken in both Iraq and Afghanistan. It is part of winning the war on terrorism and advancing freedom in the world.

But I think he will talk about their service and sacrifice and thank them for that service and sacrifice.

Q Scott, are there any members of Congress on board?

MR. McCLELLAN: No. I'll try to double-check to see who might be present at the event, though.

THE PRESS: Thank you.

END 9:23 A.M. EDT