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STATEMENT BY
SECRETARY OF DEFENSE HAROLD BROWN
APRIL 25, 1980

As you by now know, we ordered last night the cancellation of an operation in Iran that was underway to prepare for a rescue of our hostages. The President has already provided the general background, and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and I are prepared to add some more detail.

Let me say at the outset that we all can be proud of the brave men who undertook this mission. They conducted themselves with skill and courage. And we are filled with sorrow for the eight men who gave their lives trying to rescue their fellow Americans.

Before we take your questions, I would like to give you a brief summary of the events.

On the late evening and early morning of April 24 and 25 (Iran time), approximately 90 U.S. military personnel, together with the air crews, embarked on an operation to prepare for a rescue of the U.S. citizens held hostage in Iran.

The 8 helicopters and associated transport aircraft were enroute to a remote landing site, 200 miltes from Tehran in the Iranian desert, that was to be used for refueling. Depending on the success of that and other steps, a later decision was to have been made on the actual rescue attempt.

Because we knew the long, arduous trip would tax the capacity of the helicopters, we added redundancy to assure we could continue if some became unusable. Two of the helicopters experienced problems en route. One landed in the desert and its crew

was picked up by another helicopter, which proceeded to the refueling point. The second helicopter reversed course and landed aboard the carrier Nimitz in the Arabian Sea. Upon arrival at the desert landing site, a third helicopter experienced a severe hydraulic malfunction which put it out of commission. The operations plan provided for termination of the mission if there were less than six helicopters operational at this point. Therefore, we decided to call off the operation.

As the aircraft were preparing to depart in complete darkness, a helicopter and a C-130 aircraft collided. Both immediately caught fire. Eight of our men were killed and four others suffered burns. To insure the safe evacuation of the rest of the party, the commander directed his men to leave the helicopters and depart on the remaining C-130s. This left behind the four functioning helicopters, the one inoperative helicopter and the burning wreckage of one helicopter and one C-130.

No Iranian military forces were encountered at any point during the mission. However, approximately 50 Iranian civilians, passing by in a bus, were detained at the site. When the decision was made to terminate the rescue effort, all the civilians were allowed to depart unharmed.

As you can see from this description, the mission was complex and difficult -- but it was the judgment of the Joint

Chiefs and myself that it was operationally feasible. This judgment was reached after a thorough assessment, which included many practice exercises. Our plan was carefully conceived and the training exhaustive. The plan provided for the possibility of terminating the operation because of any difficulties, such as mechanical failure or detection. The flight to the assembly point and the refueling had been carried out successfully, but we concluded, based on established criteria thoroughly considered earlier, that the number of helicopter failures reduced the chance of subsequent success to the point that dictated ending the mission.

I think you can understand why we felt that we had to try this difficult operation. In our opinion it represented the best course of action for getting our hostages our of Iran expeditiously. And it was also the course that raised the least risk of harming the Iranian people, and the least risk of causing instability in this troubled region.

We are disappointed that the mission failed, and saddened at the loss of our eight fellow Americans. But we will not rest until we have secured release of the hostages.