



THE WHITE HOUSE
PRESIDENT
GEORGE W. BUSH

 [CLICK HERE TO PRINT](#)

For Immediate Release
Office of the Press Secretary
October 13, 2005

President Addresses U.S. Troops in Iraq in Video Teleconference

 [Fact Sheet: The President Participates in a Video Teleconference with U.S. Troops](#)

 [In Focus: National Defense](#)

 [In Focus: Renewal in Iraq](#)



9:54 A.M. EDT

THE PRESIDENT: Captain Kennedy?

CAPTAIN KENNEDY: Yes, Mr. President.

THE PRESIDENT: Well, it's good to see you. Thanks. Thanks for taking time out of your busy schedule to allow me to visit with you a little bit. I've got some questions for you here in a minute, but I do want to share some thoughts with you.

First, I want to thank the members of the 42nd Infantry Division and Task Force Liberty for serving our country with such distinction and honor. I want you to know that the mission you are on is vital to achieving peace and to protecting America. One of my most solemn duties, a duty that you have joined me on, is to protect the American people.

And we're facing an enemy that is ruthless and cold-blooded, an enemy that actually has a philosophy, and the philosophy is so opposite of ours, it is the exact opposite of what America stands for. We stand for religious freedom, and freedom to speak, and women's rights, and capacity for people to realize their dreams. They stand for a vision that is -- doesn't believe in freedom, that if you don't agree with their narrow point of view, that you're subject to reprisal.

And so I want to thank you for being a part of this global war. And Iraq is a part of the war, because the enemy understands that a free Iraq will be a blow to their vision and their strategy of spreading dominance throughout the broader Middle East. And so I want to thank you. When you email your



families, you tell them how proud the Commander-in-Chief is of their patience and their support, as well.

One of the tactics of the enemy is to shake our will. Part of their strategy is to use the killing of innocent people to get the American government to pull you out of there before the mission is complete. I'm going to assure you of this, that so long as I'm the President, we're never going to back down, we're never going to give in, we'll never accept anything less than total victory. It's important for you to know that; it's important for the enemy to know that, as well.

We got a strategy, and it's a clear strategy. On the one hand, we will hunt down these killers and terrorists and bring them to justice, and train the Iraqi forces to join us in that effort.

The second part of the strategy is a political strategy, based upon the knowledge that you defeat a backward, dark philosophy with one that's hopeful. And that hopeful philosophy is one based upon universal freedom. I'm very impressed that the Iraqi government has continued to work to have a constitution that attracts Sunnis and Shias and Kurds. They've worked hard to get a constitution, and now the people of Iraq are going to get to vote once again, on a constitution, in this case.

And I want to thank you for providing the security necessary for people to exercise their free will. You're part of an historic mission that is laying the foundation for peace. I am convinced that when we look back at this time in history, those who follow us -- whether it be in the armed services or in the political process -- will say, thank goodness the United States of America didn't lose our nerve or will; that we've put in motion something that can't be stopped, and that is the march of freedom.

So I want to thank you for giving me a chance to visit with you. You just got to know the American people are proud of you. You've got tremendous support here at home. And there's nobody more proud of you than I am.

Let me ask you some questions, Captain, if you don't mind. One of the, you know, questions I have is about the pre-election operations, about what you've been doing, and what are the -- what's your strategy, and how do you think it's going for -- to make sure the people have a chance to vote.

By the way, you're in Tikrit, as I understand it, as well. It's kind of an interesting place to be. It's Saddam's old stomping grounds.

CAPTAIN KENNEDY: Good morning, Mr. President, from Tikrit. I'm Captain Brent Kennedy. To my right is Sergeant Major Akeel from the 5th Iraqi Army Division. We're working together here with the Iraqis in Task Force Liberty for the upcoming referendum. We're surging an operation, called Operation Saratoga, that includes the securing of over 1,250 polling sites. We're working right alongside with the Iraqis as they lead the way in securing these sites.

THE PRESIDENT: That's good. And so, like -- I mean, and so the vote is in less than 48 hours -- or about 48 hours, I guess. And so how do you -- how would -- are you confident? I mean, how do you feel the operations are going?

CAPTAIN KENNEDY: Mr. President, I'm going to field that question to Captain Smith.

THE PRESIDENT: I didn't want to give you -- I didn't want to throw you a hardball there, Captain.

CAPTAIN SMITH: Morning, Mr. President. I'm Captain Dave Smith from Grand Rapids , Michigan. I'm representing the 3rd Brigade Combat Team here in -- headquartered in Baqubah.

THE PRESIDENT: Right.

CAPTAIN SMITH: I work directly with the Iraqi army. I am responsible for coordinating all their security responses in our area of operations.

Sir, our Iraqi partners have been conducting battalion and Brigade-size operations since April. They have been planning and coordinating with other Iraqi security forces, such as the Iraqi police and local government agencies, preparing for this referendum. Sir, we as coalition forces, we have taken a supporting role only as they prepare to execute this referendum.

THE PRESIDENT: How are they doing? Give us an assessment. One of the things, Captain, that people in America want to know is, one, do the Iraqis want to fight, and are they capable of fighting. And maybe somebody can give us an appraisal.

CAPTAIN KENNEDY: Mr. President, I'm going to field that question to Captain Pratt.

CAPTAIN PRATT: Good morning, Mr. President. My name is Captain Steven Pratt from Pocatello, Idaho, serving with the 116th Brigade Combat Team as the Iraqi army coordinator. The Iraqi army and police services, along with coalition support, have conducted many and multiple exercises and rehearsals. Recently we've conducted a command post exercise in which we brought together these Iraqi security forces with emergency service units, and the joint coordination center, in which we all sat around a model and discussed what each one would do at their specific location and what they would do at the referendum.

It was impressive to me to see the cooperation and the communication that took place among the Iraqi forces. Along with the coalition's backing them, we'll have a very successful and effective referendum vote.

THE PRESIDENT: Captain, thank you very much. Let me ask you something. As you move around, I presume you have a chance to interface with the civilians there in that part of the world. And a lot of Americans are wondering whether or not people appreciate your presence or whether or not the people are anxious to be part of the democratic process. Can you give us a sense for the reception of the people there in Tikrit toward coalition forces, as well as the Iraqi units that they encounter?

CAPTAIN KENNEDY: Mr. President, I'm going to field this question to Captain Williams.

CAPTAIN WILLIAMS: Mr. President, I'm Captain David Williams. I'm from Los Angeles, California. I'm

currently with the 1st Brigade Combat Team, attached to the Military Transition Team. Sir, in North-Central Iraq, voter registration is up 17 percent. That's 400,000 new voters in North-Central Iraq, and 100,000 new voters in the al-Salahuddin province. Sir, I was with my Iraqi counterpart in Tikrit, the city Tikrit last week, and he was going around, talking to the locals. And from what he told me that the locals told him, the Iraqi people are ready and eager to vote in this referendum.

THE PRESIDENT: That's good. It's pretty interesting. That's a pretty interesting concept for the people of Tikrit, when you really think about the fact that that was Saddam Hussein's hometown. They didn't get to vote too often when he was the leader there. Let me ask you about the progress. Most of you have been there for nearly a year, as I understand it.

And is it possible to give us a sense, kind of a calibration of what life was like when you first got there, and what it's like today?

CAPTAIN KENNEDY: Mr. President, Master Sergeant Lombardo will answer this question.

SERGEANT LOMBARDO: Good morning, Mr. President. I'm Master Sergeant Corine Lombardo, with the Headquarters 42nd Infantry Division and Task Force Liberty, from Scotia, New York. First, I'd like to say that this is a pleasure to speak with you again. We had the honor of your visit in New York City on November 11th, in 2001, when you recognized our Rainbow Soldiers for their recovery and rescue efforts at Ground Zero.

THE PRESIDENT: Were you there?

SERGEANT LOMBARDO: We began our fight against terrorism in the wake of 9/11, and we're proud to continue it here in North-Central New York -- North-Central Iraq.

THE PRESIDENT: Let me ask you something. Were you there when I came to New York?

SERGEANT LOMBARDO: Yes, I was, Mr. President.

THE PRESIDENT: I thought you looked familiar.

SERGEANT LOMBARDO: Well, thank you.

THE PRESIDENT: I probably look familiar to you, too.

SERGEANT LOMBARDO: Yes, you do, Mr. President. I can tell you over the past 10 months we've seen a tremendous increase in the capabilities and the confidences of our Iraqi security force partners. We've been working side-by-side, training and equipping 18 Iraqi army battalions. Since we began our partnership, they have improved greatly, and they continue to develop and grow into sustainable forces. Over the next month, we anticipate seeing at least one-third of those Iraqi forces conducting independent operations.

THE PRESIDENT: That's important. The American people have got to know -- and I appreciate you bringing that up, Sergeant Major, about how -- what the progress is like. In other words, we've got a measurement system --

SERGEANT LOMBARDO: Well, together --

THE PRESIDENT: I'm sorry, go ahead.

SERGEANT LOMBARDO: I'm sorry, just, together with our coalition forces, we've captured over 50 terrorists, as well as detained thousands of others that have ties to the insurgency. And I believe it is these accomplishments and the numerous accomplishments from our task force that will provide a safe and secure environment for the referendum vote.

THE PRESIDENT: Well, I appreciate that. There's no question that we need to stay on the offense, and we need to stay on the offense with well-trained Iraqi forces, side-by-side the finest military ever -- ever to exist, and that's the United States military.

SERGEANT LOMBARDO: That it is, Mr. President. Thank you.

THE PRESIDENT: Yes. Sergeant Akeel, thanks for joining us. I appreciate -- appreciate your service. You've got something to say, Akeel?

SERGEANT AKEEL: Good morning, Mr. President. Thank you for everything. Thank very much for everything.

THE PRESIDENT: Yes, you're welcome.

SERGEANT AKEEL: I like you. (Laughter.)

THE PRESIDENT: Well, I appreciate that.

LIEUTENANT MURPHY: Good morning, Mr. President.

THE PRESIDENT: Go ahead.

LIEUTENANT MURPHY: I'm First Lieutenant Gregg Murphy from the 278th Regimental Combat Team, from the Volunteer State of Tennessee. I want to tell you, sir, that we appreciate you coming with us today for this interview, and hearing us express our confidence in the Iraqi security forces' role in the upcoming referendum. Sir, we are prepared to do whatever it takes to make this thing a success. But the important thing here is that the Iraqi army and the Iraqi security forces, they're ready, and they're committed. They're going to make this thing happen.

Back in January, when we were preparing for that election, we had to lead the way. We set up the coordination, we made the plan. We're really happy to see, during the preparation for this one, sir,

they're doing everything. They're making the plans, they're calling each other, they've got it laid out. So on Saturday, sir, we're going to be beside them, we're going to be there to support them through anything. But we can't wait to share in their success with them on Sunday.

Sir, from all of us here at Task Force Liberty here in Tikrit, we want to express our gratitude to you for spending a little time with us this morning, and thank you, sir, for hearing our assessment of the current situation here in Tikrit, Iraq.

THE PRESIDENT: Well, Lieutenant, thanks. It's been my honor. And, you know, I wish I could be there to see you face-to-face, to thank you personally. It's probably a little early for me to go to Tikrit, but one of these days perhaps the situation will be such that I'll be able to get back to Iraq to not only thank our troops, but to thank those brave Iraqis who are standing strong in the face of these foreign fighters and these radicals that are trying to stop the march of freedom.

Again, I want to thank you all for being so courageous and for stepping up when the United States of America needed you. I repeat what I said earlier: Please give your loved ones my deepest respect. And you've got to know, the American people are standing strong with you. We're proud of you. May God bless you all in your work and when you get back to the states, you know, if I'm hanging around, come by and say hello.

Thank you all.

END 10:09 A.M. EDT

Return to this article at:

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2005/10/20051013.html>



CLICK HERE TO PRINT