



For Immediate Release
Office of the Press Secretary
March 29, 2006

Fact Sheet: Strategy for Victory: Freedom in Iraq

[In Focus: Renewal in Iraq](#)

On March 29, 2006, President Bush Delivered Remarks At Freedom House And Discussed Critical Aspects Of Our Mission In Iraq. The President discussed the stakes in Iraq, our efforts to help the Iraqi people overcome past divisions and form a lasting democracy - and why it is vital to the security of the American people that we help them succeed. Free societies are peaceful societies, and the only path to lasting peace is the expansion of freedom and democracy.

- **The Advance Of Freedom Is The Story Of Our Time.** Just 25 years ago, there were only 45 democracies. Today, Freedom House reports there are 122 democracies, and more people live in liberty than ever before. Since the beginning of 2005, remarkable democratic change has occurred across the globe in places like Afghanistan, Lebanon, Kyrgyzstan, Liberia, and Iraq. Freedom House has declared 2005 "one of the most successful years for freedom since Freedom House began measuring world freedom" more than 30 years ago.

Iraqis Are Working To Overcome Past Divisions

Today, Iraqis Are Working To Resolve Tensions And Divisions That Saddam Hussein Aggravated Through Ethnic Cleansing And Sectarian Violence. The argument that Iraq was "stable" under Saddam - and stability is now in danger because we removed him - is wrong. While liberation has brought its own challenges, Saddam's removal from power was the necessary first step in restoring stability and freedom to Iraqis.

To Prevent Iraq's Different Groups From Coming Together To Challenge His Regime, Saddam Undertook A Deliberate Strategy Of Maintaining Power By Dividing The Iraqi People. He brutally repressed different Iraqi communities and pitted them against one another. By displacing communities and dividing Iraqis, Saddam sought to establish himself as the only force that could hold the country together.

- **No Iraqi Community Was Spared From Saddam's Campaign Of Repression And Division.** In the late 1980s, Saddam unleashed a brutal ethnic cleansing operation against Kurds in northern Iraq known as the Anfal campaign. Kurdish towns and villages were destroyed, and tens of thousands of Kurds disappeared or were killed. Chemical weapons were dropped on scores of Kurdish villages. In Halabja, thousands of innocent men, women, and children were killed using mustard gas and a nerve agent. Saddam also forcibly removed hundreds of

thousands of Kurds from their homes - moving Arabs into the homes and properties of those forced to leave. As a result, Saddam magnified tensions that still persist.

- **Saddam Waged A Brutal Campaign Of Suppression And Genocide Against Shia In Southern Iraq.** He targeted prominent Shia clerics for assassination, destroyed Shia mosques and holy sites, and killed thousands of innocent men, women, and children - piling their bodies into mass graves.
- **Saddam Oppressed His Fellow Sunnis.** One of the great misperceptions is that every Sunni enjoyed a privileged status under Saddam's regime. In truth, Saddam trusted few outside his family and tribe - installing his sons, brothers, and cousins in key positions. Almost everyone was considered suspect - and often those suspicions led to brutal violence. In the mid-1990s, Saddam rounded up scores of prominent Sunnis, and many were never heard from again.

We Know Iraqis Can Live Together Peacefully. Iraq is a nation with many ethnic, religious, sectarian, regional, and tribal divisions - and before Saddam, Iraqis from different communities managed to live together. Even today, many Iraqi tribes have both Sunni and Shia branches, and in many small towns with mixed populations, there is often only one mosque, where Sunnis and Shia worship together. Inter-marriage is common, with mixed families that include Arabs, Kurds, Sunnis, Shia, Turkmen, Assyrians, and Caldeans.

The Obstacles To Democracy Are Being Overcome

To Foment Sectarian Division, The Enemy Is Employing Saddam's Tactics - Killing And Terrorizing The Iraqi People.

- **The Terrorists And Saddamists Are Failing To Stop Iraq's Democratic Progress.** The enemy tried to stop the transfer of sovereignty. They tried to stop millions from voting in the January 2005 elections. They tried to stop Sunnis from participating in the October constitutional referendum. And they tried to stop millions from voting in the December elections to form a government under that constitution. In each case, they failed. Every successive election has seen larger and broader participation. The Iraqi people have made clear they want to live in liberty and unity - and they are determined to chart their own destiny.
 - **The Enemy Is Trying To Stop The Formation Of A Unity Government.** The enemy has learned they cannot succeed by facing Coalition and Iraqi forces on the battlefield. So they have taken their violence to a new level by attacking one of Shia Islam's holiest sites. They blew up the Golden Mosque in Samarra hoping to provoke the Shia masses into widespread reprisals, which would provoke Sunnis to retaliate and drag the nation into civil war. Despite massive provocations, Iraq has not descended into civil war, most Iraqis have not turned to violence, and the Iraqi Security Forces have not broken up into

sectarian groups waging war against each other. In recent weeks, these forces passed another important test, successfully protecting millions of Shia pilgrims who marched to the cities of Karbala and Najaf for an annual religious holiday. In the midst of today's sectarian tension, the ability of Iraqis to hold a peaceful gathering of millions of people is a hopeful sign for the future.

- **There Is No Place In A Free And Democratic Iraq For Armed Groups Operating Outside Of The Law.** It is vital to Iraq's security that the police are free of militia influence. The Coalition is working with Iraqi leaders to find and remove any National Police leaders showing evidence of militia loyalties. American battalions are partnering with the Iraqi national police to teach them about the role of a professional police force in a democratic system.
- **Recent Violence Is Showing Iraqi Leaders The Danger Of Sectarian Division And Underscoring The Urgency Of Forming A National Unity Government.** Today, Iraqi leaders from every major ethnic and religious community are working to construct a path forward. Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad is helping Iraq's leaders reach across political, religious, and sectarian lines to form a government that will earn the trust and the confidence of all Iraqis.
- **There Are Signs Of Progress.** Earlier this month, Iraqi leaders announced an agreement on the need to address critical issues such as de-Ba'athification, the operation of security ministries, and the distribution of oil revenues in a spirit of national unity. They agreed to form a new national security council to improve government coordination on these and other difficult issues. This council will include representatives from all major political groups and leaders from Iraq's executive, judicial, and legislative branches. This council's advice will help make the Iraqi government that emerges more effective and unified.

The Free Citizens Of A Free Iraq Are Calling Saddam Hussein To Account. The former dictator is answering to a judge instead of meting out arbitrary justice - and Iraqis are replacing the rule of a tyrant with the rule of law.

Victory In Iraq Is Critical To American Security

Our Work In Iraq Is Difficult But Vital To Our Security. The terrorists know that when freedom sets root in Iraq, it will be a mortal blow to their aspirations to dominate the region and advance their hateful vision. They are determined to stop the advance of freedom in Iraq, and we must be equally determined to stop them.

If We Leave Iraq Before The Iraqi People Are Capable Of Defending Their Own Democracy, The

Terrorists Will Win. The Iraqi government is still in transition, and Iraqi Security Forces are still gathering capacity. If we leave Iraq before they are capable of defending their own democracy, the terrorists will achieve their stated goal: they will turn Iraq into a safe haven, seek to arm themselves with weapons of mass murder, and use Iraq as a base to overthrow moderate governments in the Middle East and launch more attacks against America and other free nations.

- **America Will Not Retreat From Iraq.** We will complete the mission, because the security of the American people is linked to the success of a free Iraq. And when victory is achieved, our troops will come home. There will be more tough fighting ahead, with difficult days that test the patience and resolve of our country. Yet we can have faith in the final outcome because we have seen freedom overcome the darkness of tyranny and terror and secure the peace before. In this century, freedom will prevail once again.

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