



THE WHITE HOUSE  
PRESIDENT  
GEORGE W. BUSH

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## President Discusses Democracy in Iraq with Freedom House

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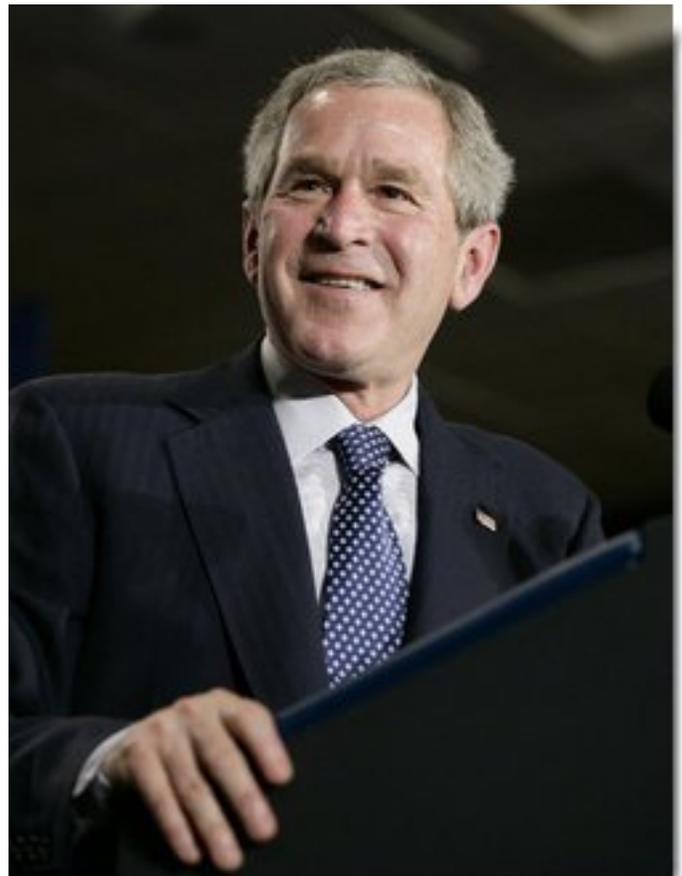
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THE PRESIDENT: Thank you. Please be seated. I shouldn't be so instructive to the Diplomatic Corps. (Laughter.) Peter, thank you for your warm introduction. Thank you for your commitment to freedom. It turns out freedom runs pretty deep in Peter's family. I don't know if you know this, or not, but his son is a Marine First Lieutenant, named Elliot Ackerman. He fought in the battle of Fallujah. I know you're proud of your son, and I'm proud to be the Commander-in-Chief of men and women who volunteer to defend our own freedom.

I appreciate very much the men and women of Freedom House. For more than 60 years, this organization has been a tireless champion for liberty. You've been a clear voice for the oppressed across the world. At Freedom House you understand that the only path to lasting peace is the expansion of freedom and liberty.

Free societies are peaceful societies. When governments are accountable to their own citizens, when people are free to speak and assemble, when minorities are protected, then justice prevails. And so does the cause of peace.

Freedom House was founded on the principle that no nation is exempt from the demands of human dignity. And you're carrying that message across the world, from Africa to China to Belarus and beyond. At Freedom House, you also understand free societies do not take root overnight, especially in countries that suffer from decades of tyranny and repression. You understand that



free elections are an instrument of change; yet they're only the first step. So as you press for democratic change across the world you're helping new democracies build free institutions they need to overcome the legacies of tyranny and dictatorship.

I want to thank you for your work. You're making a significant contribution to the security of our country. I'm also honored that we've got distinguished members of the legislative body with us, particularly Senator John Warner, who is the Chairman of the Armed Services Committee; Senator Dick Lugar, who is the Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee; and, of course, Senator Ted Stevens. I thank the members from the House and Senate who have joined these distinguished senators. I appreciate you taking time to come and listen to me. Just listen to me a little more often. (Laughter.)

I particularly want to pay homage to Ambassador Max Kampelman. Thank you very much. (Applause.) I was telling the Ambassador, right before I came over I was having a little visit with my Chief of Staff-to-be, Josh Bolten. It turns out that Josh's dad and the Ambassador were lifelong friends. And as I came over here, he said, you make sure that you say hello to one of the finest men our country has ever produced. So, Mr. Chairman, on behalf of a grateful President and a grateful Chief of Staff-to-be, thank you for serving our country. (Applause.)

I appreciate the other members of the Freedom House Board of Trustees, and I thank the Diplomatic Corps for joining us, as well.

We meet at a time of war, but also at a moment of great hope. In our world, and due in part to our efforts, freedom is taking root in places where liberty was unimaginable a couple of years ago. Just 25 years ago, at the start of the 1980s, there were only 45 democracies on the face of the Earth. Today, Freedom House reports there are 122 democracies, and more people now live in liberty than ever before.



The advance of freedom is the story of our time, and we're seeing new chapters written before our eyes. Since the beginning of 2005, we've witnessed remarkable democratic changes across the globe. The people of Afghanistan have elected their first democratic parliament in more than a generation. The people of Lebanon have recovered their independence and chosen their leaders in free elections. The people of Kyrgyzstan have driven a corrupt regime from power and voted for democratic change. The people of Liberia have overcome decades of violence and are now led by the first woman elected as a head of state in any African nation. And the courageous people of Iraq have gone to the polls not once, not twice, but three times, choosing a transitional government, a democratic constitution, and a new government under that constitution.

Each of these countries still faces enormous challenges that will take patience and the support of the international community to overcome. Yet, Freedom House has declared the year 2005 was one of the most successful years for freedom since the Freedom House began measuring world freedom more than 30 years ago. From Kabul to Baghdad to Beirut and beyond, freedom's tide is rising, and we

should not rest, and we must not rest, until the promise of liberty reaches every people and every nation.

In our history, most democratic progress has come with the end of a war. After the defeat of the Axis powers in World War II and the collapse of communism in the Cold War, scores of nations cleared away the rubble of tyranny and laid the foundations of freedom and democracy.

Today, the situation is very different. Liberty is advancing not in a time of peace, but in the midst of a war, at a moment when a global movement of great brutality and ambition is fighting freedom's progress with all the hateful violence they can muster. In this new century, the advance of freedom is a vital element of our strategy to protect the American people, and to secure the peace for generations to come. We're fighting the terrorists across the world because we know that if America were not fighting this enemy in other lands, we'd be facing them here in our own land.

On September the 11th, 2001, we saw the violence and the hatred of a vicious enemy, and the future that they intend for us. That day I made a decision: America will not wait to be attacked again. We will confront this mortal danger. We will stay on the offensive. America will defend our freedom.



We're pursuing the terrorists on many battlefronts. Today, the central front in the war on terror is Iraq. This month I've given a series of speeches on recent events in Iraq and how we're adapting our approach to deal with the events on the ground. At George Washington University I reported on the progress we have made in training the Iraqi security forces, the growing number of Iraqi units that are taking the lead in the fight, the territory we're handing over to them, and the performance they turned in after the bombing of the Golden Mosque in Samarra.

Last week in Cleveland, I told the American people about the northern Iraqi city of Tal Afar, which was once a key base of operations for al Qaeda and is now a free city that gives us reason to hope for a free Iraq. I explained how the story of Tal Afar gives me confidence in our strategy, because in that city we see the outlines of the Iraq we've been fighting for, a free and secure people who are getting back on their feet, who are participating in government and civic life, and are becoming allies in the fight against the terrorists.

Today, I'm going to discuss the stakes in Iraq and 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.

In the wake of recent violence in Iraq, many Americans are asking legitimate questions: Why are Iraqis so divided? And did America cause the instability by removing Saddam Hussein from power? They ask, after three elections, why are the Iraqi people having such a hard time coming together? And can a country with so many divisions ever build a stable democracy? They ask why we can't bring our

troops home now and let the Iraqis sort out their differences on their own.

These are fair questions, and today, I'll do my best to answer them. I'll discuss some of the reasons for the instability we're seeing in Iraq, why democracy is the only force that can overcome these divisions, why I believe the vast majority of Iraqis want to live in freedom and peace, and why the security of our nation depends on the success of a free Iraq.

Today, some Americans ask whether removing Saddam caused the divisions and instability we're now seeing. In fact, much of the animosity and violence we now see is the legacy of Saddam Hussein. He is a tyrant who exacerbated sectarian divisions to keep himself in power. Iraq is a nation with many ethnic and religious and sectarian and regional and tribal divisions. Before Saddam Hussein, 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's often only one mosque where Sunni and Shia worship together. Inter-marriage is also common with mixed families that include Arabs and Kurds and Sunnis and Shia and Turkmen, Assyrians, and Chaldeans.



To prevent these different groups from coming to challenge his regime, Saddam Hussein undertook a deliberate strategy of maintaining control by dividing the Iraqi people. He stayed on top by brutally repressing different Iraqi communities and pitting them one against the other. He forced hundreds of thousands of Iraqis out of their homes using expulsion as a weapon to subdue and punish any group that resisted his rule. By displacing Iraqi communities and dividing the Iraqi people, he sought to establish himself as the only force that could hold the country together.

In Saddam's campaign of repression and division, no Iraqi group was spared. In the late 1980s, Saddam Hussein unleashed a brutal ethnic cleansing operation against Kurds in northern Iraq. Kurdish towns and villages were destroyed. Tens of thousands of Kurds disappeared or were killed. In his effort to terrorize the Kurds into submission, Saddam dropped chemical weapons on scores of Kurdish villages. In one village alone, a town called Halabja, his regime killed thousands of innocent men and women and children, using mustard gas and nerve agents. Saddam also forcibly removed hundreds of thousands of Kurds from their homes, and then he moved Arabs into those homes and onto the properties of the people who were forced to leave. As a result of this strategy deep tensions persist to this day.

Saddam also waged a brutal campaign of suppression and genocide against the Shia in the south of Iraq. He targeted prominent Shia clerics for assassination. He destroyed Shia mosques and holy sites. He killed thousands of innocent men, women and children. He piled their bodies into mass graves. After the 1991 Persian Gulf War, Saddam brutally crushed a Shia uprising. Many Shia fled to the marshes of southern Iraq. They hid in the wetlands that could not be easily reached by Saddam's army.

The wetlands, by the way, were also home to the Marsh Arabs, an ancient civilization that traces its roots back 5,000 years. So Saddam destroyed the Marsh Arabs, and those who hid in the marshes, by draining the marshes where they lived. In less than a decade, the majority of these lush wetlands were turned into barren desert, and most of the Marsh Arabs were driven from their ancestral home. It is no wonder that deep divisions and scars exist in much of the Shia population.

Saddam also oppressed his fellow Sunnis. One of the great misperceptions about Iraq is that every Sunni enjoyed a privileged status under Saddam's regime. In truth, Saddam trusted few outside his family and his tribe. He installed his sons and his brothers and his cousins in key positions. Almost everyone was considered suspect, and often those suspicions led to brutal violence.

In one instance, Saddam's security services tortured to death a pilot from a prominent Sunni tribe, and then dumped his headless body in front of his family's house. It caused riots that he then brutally suppressed. In the mid-1990s, Saddam rounded up scores of prominent Sunni economists and lawyers and retired army officers and former government officials. Many were never heard from again.

It is hard to overstate the effects of Saddam's brutality on the Iraqi nation. Here's what one Marine recalls when he was on the streets of the Iraqi capital. He said, quote, "I had an Iraqi citizen come up to me. She opened her mouth and she had no tongue. She was pointing at the statue. There were people with no fingers waving at the statue of Saddam, telling us he tortured them. People were showing us scars on their back." Iraq is a nation that is physically and emotionally scarred by three decades of Saddam's tyranny, and these wounds will take time to heal. As one Marsh Arab put it, "Saddam did everything he could to kill us. You cannot recover from that right away."

These are the kinds of tensions Iraqis are dealing with today. They are the divisions that Saddam aggravated through deliberate policies of ethnic cleansing and sectarian violence. As one Middle East scholar has put it, Iraq under Saddam Hussein was "a society slowly and systematically poisoned by political terror. The toxic atmosphere in today's Iraq bears witness to his terrible handiwork."

The argument that Iraq was stable under Saddam and that stability is now in danger because we removed him is wrong. While liberation has brought its own set of challenges, Saddam Hussein's removal from power was the necessary first step in restoring stability and freedom to the people of Iraq.

Today some Americans are asking why the Iraqi people are having such a hard time building a democracy. The reason is that the terrorists and former regime elements are exploiting the wounds inflicted under Saddam's tyranny. The enemies of a free Iraq are employing the same tactics Saddam used -- killing and terrorizing the Iraqi people in an effort to foment sectarian division.

For the Saddamists, provoking sectarian strife is business as usual. And we know from the terrorists' own words that they're using the same tactics with the goal of inciting a civil war. Two years ago, we intercepted a letter to Osama bin Laden from the terrorist Zarqawi, in which he explains his plan to stop the advance of democracy in Iraq. Zarqawi wrote: "If we succeed in dragging the Shia into the arena of sectarian war, it will become possible to waken the inattentive Sunnis as they feel imminent danger.

The only solution is for us to strike the religious and military and other cadres among the Shia with blow after blow."

The terrorists and Saddamists have been brutal in the pursuit of this strategy. They target innocent civilians; they blow up police officers; they attack mosques; and they commit other acts of horrific violence for the cameras. Their objective is to stop Iraq's democratic progress. They tried to stop the transfer of sovereignty. They tried to stop millions of Iraqis from voting in the January 2005 elections. They tried to stop Sunnis from participating in the October referendum on the constitution. And they tried to stop millions from voting in the December elections to form a government under that constitution.

And in each case, they failed. With every election, participation was larger and broader than the one that came before. And in December, almost 12 million people -- more than 75 percent of eligible voters -- defied the terrorists to cast their ballots. With their votes, the Iraqi people have spoken and made their intentions clear: They want to live in liberty and unity, and they're determined to chart their own destiny.

Now the elements of a free Iraq are trying to stop the -- the enemies of a free Iraq are trying to stop the formation of unity government. They've learned they cannot succeed by facing coalition and Iraqi forces on the battlefield, so they've taken their violence to a new level, by attacking one of Shia Islam's holiest sites. They blew up the Golden Mosque in Samarra in the hope that this outrageous act would provoke the Shia masses into widespread reprisals which would provoke Sunnis to retaliate and drag the nation into a civil war.

Yet, despite massive provocations, Iraq has not descended into civil war. Most Iraqis have not turned to violence. The Iraqi security forces have not broken up into sectarian groups waging war against each other. Instead, Sunni, Shia, and Kurdish soldiers stood together to protect religious sites, enforce a curfew, and restore civil order.

In recent weeks, these forces passed another important test when they successfully protected millions of Shia pilgrims who marched to the cities of Karbala and Najaf for an annual religious holiday. In 2004, the terrorists launched coordinated strikes against the pilgrims, killing scores of innocent worshipers. This year, the pilgrimage was largely peaceful, thanks to the courage and the unity of the Iraqi security forces. In the midst of today's sectarian tension, the ability of Iraqis to hold a peaceful gathering by millions of people is a hopeful sign for the future of Iraq.

In these last few weeks, we've also seen terrible acts of violence. The kidnappings and brutal executions and beheadings are very disturbing. There's no place in a free and democratic Iraq for armed groups operating outside the law. It's vital to the security of a free Iraq that the police are free of militia influence. And so we're working with Iraqi leaders to find and remove leaders from the national police who show evidence of loyalties to militias. We're partnering U.S. battalions with Iraqi national police to teach them about the role of a professional police force in a democratic society. We're making clear to Iraqi leaders that reining in the illegal militias must be a top priority of Iraq's new government when it takes office.

The violence we're seeing is showing the 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 the path forward. Our Ambassador to Iraq, Zal Khalilzad, is helping Iraq's leaders reach out across political and religious and sectarian lines, so they can form a government that will earn the trust and the confidence of all Iraqis.

Putting aside differences to build a democracy that reflects the country's diversity is a difficult thing to do. It's even more difficult when enemies are working daily to stop your progress and divide your nation. Yet Iraqis are rising to the moment. They deserve enormous credit for their courage, and their determination to succeed.

Iraqi leaders are coming to grips with an important truth: The only practical way to overcome the divisions of three decades of tyranny is through democracy. Democracy is the only form of government where every person has a say in the governance of a country. It's the only form of government that will yield to a peaceful Middle East. So Iraqis are working to overcome past divisions and build a free society that protects the rights of all its citizens. They're undertaking this progress with just a year's experience in democratic politics.

Many of the institutions and traditions we take for granted here in America -- from party structures to centuries' experience with peaceful transitions of power -- are new to Iraq, so we should not be surprised if Iraqis make mistakes or face setbacks in their efforts to build a government that unites the Iraqi people.

We're beginning to see the signs of progress. Earlier this month, Iraqi leaders announced they had reached an agreement on the need to address critical issues such as de-Baathification in the operation of security ministries, and the distribution of oil revenues in the spirit of national unity. They agreed to form a new national security council that will improve coordination within the government on these and other difficult issues. This council will include representatives from all major political groups, as well as leaders from Iraq's executive, judicial and legislative branches. As a result of this council's considered advice, the Iraqi government that emerges will be more effective and more unified.

Another important sign of progress is that Saddam Hussein is now being called to account for his crimes by the free citizens of a free Iraq. Millions of Iraqis are seeing their independent judiciary in action. At the former dictator's trial, Iraqis recently saw something that's got to be truly amazing to them. When Saddam Hussein stood up and began to give a political speech, the presiding judge gaveled him down. Saddam growled at the judge, declaring, "I'm the head of state." The judge replied, "You used to be the head of the state. And now you're a defendant."

Three years ago any Iraqi who addressed Saddam in this way would have been killed on the spot. Now 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.

Finally, some Americans are asking if it's time to pull out our troops and leave the Iraqis to settle their own differences. I know the work in Iraq is really difficult, but I strongly feel it's vital to the security of our country. The terrorists are killing and maiming and fighting desperately to stop the formation of a

unity government because they understand what a free Iraq in the heart of the Middle East means for them and their ideology. They 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. So they're determined to stop the advance of a free Iraq, and we must be equally determined to stop them.

The irony is that the enemy seems to have a much clearer sense of what's at stake than some of the politicians here in Washington, D.C. One member of Congress who has proposed an immediate withdrawal of American forces in Iraq recently explained that what would happen after American forces pulled out was this: He said, "They'll fight each other, somebody will win, they'll settle it for themselves." While it might sound attractive to some, it would have disastrous consequences for American security. The Iraqi government is still in transition, and the Iraqi security forces are still gathering capacity. If we leave Iraq before they're capable of defending their own democracy, the terrorists will win. They will achieve their stated goal. This is what the terrorists have told us they want to achieve. They will turn Iraq into a safe haven. They will seek to arm themselves with weapons of mass destruction. They will use Iraq as a base to overthrow moderate governments in the Middle East. They will use Iraq as a base from which to launch further attacks against the United States of America.

Mindful of recent history, I ask you to think about what happened in Afghanistan. In the 1980s, the United States helped Afghan freedom fighters drive the Soviet Red Army from Kabul, and once the Soviets withdrew, we decided our work was finished and left the Afghans to defend [sic] for themselves. Soon the terrorists moved in to fill the vacuum. They took over the country; they turned it into a safe haven from which they planned and launched the attacks of September the 11th.

If we leave Iraq before the job is done, the terrorists will move in and fill the vacuum, and they will use that failed state to bring murder and destruction to freedom-loving nations.

I know some in our country disagree with my decision to liberate Iraq. Whatever one thought about the decision to remove Saddam from power, I hope we should all agree that pulling our troops out prematurely would be a disaster. If we were to let the terrorists drive us out of Iraq, we would signal to the world that America cannot be trusted to keep its word. We would undermine the morale of our troops by betraying the cause for which they have sacrificed. We would cause the tyrants in the Middle East to laugh at our failed resolve and tighten their repressive grip. The global terrorist movement would be emboldened and more dangerous than ever. For the security of our citizens and the peace of the world, we will not turn the future of Iraq over to the followers of a failed dictator, or to evil men like bin Laden and Zarqawi.

America will leave Iraq, but we will not retreat from Iraq. We will leave because Iraqi forces have gained in strength, not because America's will has weakened. We will complete the mission in Iraq because the security of the American people is linked to the success in Iraq.

We're pursuing a clear strategy for victory. Victory requires an integrated strategy: political, economic and security. These three elements depend on and reinforce one another. By working with Iraqi leaders to build the foundations of a strong democracy, we will ensure they have the popular support they need to defeat the terrorists. By going after the terrorists, coalition and Iraqi forces are creating the conditions that allow the Iraqi people to begin rebuilding their lives and their country. By helping

Iraqis with economic reconstruction, we're giving every citizen a real stake in the success of a free Iraq. And as all this happens, the terrorists, those who offer nothing but death and destruction, are becoming isolated from the population.

I wish I could tell you the violence in Iraq is waning and that all the tough days in the struggle are behind us. They're not. There will be more tough fighting ahead with difficult days that test the patience and the resolve of our country. Yet, we can have faith in the final outcome because we've seen freedom overcome the darkness of tyranny and terror and secure the peace before. And in this century, freedom is going to prevail again.

In 1941, the year the Freedom House began its work, the future of freedom seemed bleak. There were about a dozen lonely democracies in the world. The Soviet Union was led by the tyrant Stalin who massacred millions. Hitler was leading Nazi Germany in a campaign to dominate Europe and eliminate the Jewish people from the face of the Earth. An imperial Japan launched a brutal surprise attack on America. Today, six decades later, the Soviet empire is no more; Germany and Japan are free nations, and they are allies in the cause of peace; and the majority of the world's governments are democracies.

There were doubters six decades ago who said that freedom could not prevail. History has proved them wrong. In this young century, the doubters are still with us; but so is the unstoppable power of freedom. In Afghanistan and Iraq and other nations, that power is replacing tyranny with hope, and no one should bet against it.

One of the greatest forces for freedom in the history of the world is the United States Armed Forces. In the past four-and-a-half years, our troops have liberated more people than at any time since World War II. Because of the men and women who wear our nation's uniform, 50 million people in Iraq and Afghanistan have tasted freedom, and their liberation has inspired millions more across the broader Middle East to believe that freedom is theirs, as well.

This is going to be freedom's century. Thank you for giving me a chance to come and visit with you. May God bless. (Applause.)

Okay, sit down, please. All right, I'll be glad to answer some questions.

Yes, sir. Yes, please.

Q I have a question. I am from Mali. A couple of years ago, the Millennium Challenge Account was created to help countries that were already on the path to democracy. Looking at a country like Mali in West Africa, where just yesterday we celebrated 15 years of freedom, we haven't seen any money yet. (Laughter.)

THE PRESIDENT: I like a good lobbyist. (Laughter.)

Q Well, isn't it cheaper and easier for people -- people from Mali and all throughout Africa, who already

are in love with America, and isn't it easier politically to you and show to your critics that, look, in Iraq, maybe we need some -- we're in there, but in places like Mali that have freedom, we can step in and help them without expecting something back? Thank you.

THE PRESIDENT: No, I appreciate that. I -- he's referring to a foreign policy initiative of mine called the Millennium Challenge Account. I want to thank the members of Congress who have been strong supporters of the Millennium Challenge Account. I would hope they would continue to support the Millennium Challenge Account.

The Millennium Challenge Account, the idea behind it was, is that nations are capable of defeating corruption; they are capable of investing in health and education for their citizens; and they are capable about supporting market-oriented economies. If you believe that, then why shouldn't our aid say, you get aid in return for fighting corruption, investing in the health and education of your citizens, and putting market-oriented economic measures in place?

We started the process recognizing that a lot of people would raise their hands, including Mali, by saying we'll start with the poorest nations first. I must confess that our Millennium Challenge Account, while funded in its first year, was a little slow to get going. We've changed the structure to make sure money gets out the door, so that other nations such as Mali will be eligible for application and consideration.

I can remember when I first put in the Millennium Challenge Account. People were somewhat aghast that the United States would dare ask for conditions for its money. Those are the defeatists in the world, those who believe that certain people can't fight corruption. We believe opposite of that in America. We believe in high standards, and the taxpayers sure believe in accountability for our foreign dollars.

So thank you for bringing it up. I appreciate a man who is willing to stand up and defend his country in front of the President and all the cameras. (Laughter.)

Yes, sir.

Q Mr. President, I'm from The Economist Magazine. I understand, Mr. President, you met with President Obasanjo of Nigeria today. I wonder if you could tell us what you discussed, and also if --

THE PRESIDENT: No, but keep going. (Laughter.)

Q Okay. Are you now confident --

THE PRESIDENT: I can tell you what I discussed.

Q Are you now confident that Charles Taylor, the recently recaptured Liberian warlord, will stand trial?

THE PRESIDENT: I am much more confident today than I was yesterday. (Laughter.) This is what we

call embedding. (Laughter.) I talked to the President about a variety of things, one of which, of course, was Charles Taylor. There is a process to get Charles Taylor to the court in the Netherlands. Such a process will require a United Nations Security Council resolution. Secretary Rice, who was in the meeting, told me that she thought that might happen relatively quickly. And so, therefore, I think he is headed for where he belongs, which is trial.

I spoke to President Sirleaf about this issue, as well. She was deeply concerned that Charles Taylor could be in a position to disturb this young democracy. I must tell you that I was most impressed by the leader from Liberia. I think America is going to be -- should be very anxious to work with her and help this country overcome years of violence.

But I do believe that he is headed for trial. We certainly will do our efforts in the diplomatic channels to see to it that that's the case.

We also talked about Sudan. I'm deeply worried about the human conditions in Darfur. Ours is a government that spoke out about genocide, and we meant it. I thanked President Obasanjo for the AU presence in the Sudan. I told him, however, I did not think the presence was robust enough. I do believe there needs to be a blue helmeting of not only the AU forces, but additional forces with a NATO overlay. And the reason I believe that NATO ought to be a part of the operation is twofold: One, to provide logistical and command and control and airlift capability, but also to send a clear signal to parties involved that the West is determined to help a settlement -- to help affect in a settlement, that this is serious business, that we're just not playing a diplomatic holding game, but that when we say, genocide, we mean that the genocide needs to be stopped.

Secondly, we talked about the need for a parallel track, a peace process to go forward, that there needs to be unity amongst the rebel groups. The President told me he has met with the rebel groups, trying to come up with a focused message that can then be used to negotiate with the government of Sudan. There is a pretty good template to go by, a resource-sharing arrangement. There's a governing structure that, if implemented, would be -- in the north/south -- because of the north/south agreement, could be a go-by for the Darfur region. But those are the two main things I talked to him about.

Yes, sir. Are you embedded? (Laughter.)

Q From Australia. I've got a question about global warming -- in the Australian Parliament, Tony Blair called for greater action. And this seems to be something that the U.S. President could make a major difference on. There's a virtual consensus that the planet is warming. If you addressed issues like emissions, fuel efficiency, issues to do with alternative energy in your last few years as President, it could make a significant difference I think to the --

THE PRESIDENT: I appreciate you bringing that up.

Q -- and I suppose I want to know, what is your plan?

THE PRESIDENT: Good. We -- first of all, there is -- the globe is warming. The fundamental debate: Is it manmade or natural. Put that aside. It is in our interests that we use technologies that will not only

clean the air, but make us less dependent on oil. That's what I said in my State of the Union the other day. I said, look -- and I know it came as quite a shock to -- for people to hear a Texan stand up and say, we've got a national problem, we're addicted to oil. But I meant what I said.

Being addicted to oil is a problem for our economy. In a global economy, when burgeoning economies like India and China use more fossil fuels, it affects the price of gasoline here in America. In a world in which sometimes people have got the oil we need, or don't like us -- it's kind of a undiplomatic way of putting it -- it means we've got a national security issue.

I have -- much of my position was defined early on in my presidency when I told the world I thought that Kyoto was a lousy deal for America. And I tell you why it was a lousy deal for America. It meant that we had to cut emissions below 1990 levels, which would have meant I would have presided over massive layoffs and economic destruction. I believe the best way to put technologies in place that will not only achieve national objectives like less addiction to oil, but also help clean the air, is to be wealthy enough to invest in technologies, and then to share those technologies with parts of the world that were excluded from the Kyoto Protocol.

And so I guess I should have started differently when I first became President, and said, we will invest in new technologies that will enable us to use fossil fuels in a much wiser way. And what does that mean? Well, it means that we've got to figure out how to use ethanol more in our cars. Ethanol is produced mainly by cane and corn. But we're near some breakthroughs that we can use sawgrass and biomass to be able to produce ethanol

That means we got to continue investing in hybrid batteries. Ours is a country where many people live in urban centers, like Washington, D.C., and it's possible to have a hybrid battery breakthrough which says that the first 40 miles of an automobile can be used by electricity alone. Right now the hybrid vehicles, as you know, switch between gasoline and electrical power. But that consumes gasoline, which means we're still reliant upon oil. The idea is to get off of oil.

On the electricity front, we need to be using nuclear power more in this country, in my judgment. It is a renewable source of energy that has zero gas emissions. We've got a great natural resource here in America called coal. We have 250-plus years of coal reserves. But we also recognize that by -- burning coal causes environmental problems, and so we're spending billions on research to come up with clean coal technologies. And we'd like to share those technologies with other nations of the world that are beginning to grow so that they are good stewards of the environment, as well.

And so I got a comprehensive plan that uses technologies to help this nation from a national and economic perspective, but also will help improve the global economy -- the environment from those new, burgeoning economies that are -- like China and India, to be exact.

Yes.

Q Mr. President, first, thank you for your remarks and your commitment to advance freedom and the courage to use your office to follow through with it. My question is about Iraq. And I wonder if you could tell us, to what degree do you think the insurgency inside Iraq is dependent -- dependent on foreign

support, particularly from regional powers --

THE PRESIDENT: Yes.

Q -- and what are we doing, or what could we do more to prevent that?

THE PRESIDENT: There are three elements of the insurgency. One are the rejectionists. Those are the Sunnis that didn't feel like they were going to get a fair shake in what they viewed would be a Shia-led government. They are slowly but surely recognizing that democracy is their best hope. Then there are the Saddamists. Those are the folks that received enormous privilege under Saddam Hussein, and they're furious that they don't have those privileges. And the last group, of course, is al Qaeda. Now, al Qaeda has stated clearly what I told you during the speech. They have made it abundantly clear that their ambitions are to drive us from the country. They're the ones that we worry about were receiving foreign assistance -- money, as well as safe haven.

The two countries that worry us the most, of course, are the two neighboring countries next to Iraq. That would be Syria and Iran. And we are making it abundantly clear to both that we think it's in their interests to let an Iraqi democracy develop.

Syria has been a -- Syria is a complicated issue because of Lebanon. It's not complicated, actually, it's quite clear what needs to be done. Our first focus with Syria, besides stopping cross-border infiltration -- that, frankly, has required our -- required us to adjust our tactics on the ground and spend a lot of time training people to stop the cross-border infiltration, because there's some doubt as to whether or not we're getting much cooperation on the other side of the border. But we spend a lot of time working with particularly France in making it abundantly clear we expect the Syrians to allow the Lebanese democracy to evolve.

I guess it's kind of hard to give up on a country on which you've had a stranglehold. There was a troop withdrawal, as you know. My main concern is to whether or not they withdraw more than just troops, whether they withdraw intelligence services, and people that were in a position to influence the future of the country.

It is very important that there be full cooperation in the investigation of the death of Mr. Hariri. But our message to Bashar Asad is that we expect -- if they want to be a welcomed country into the world, that they have got to free [sic] Lebanon, shut down cross-border infiltration, and stop allowing Hezbollah, PIJ and other terrorist groups to meet inside the country.

The Iranian issue is more -- in dealing with Iran, we're dealing with more than just influence into the formation of a national unity government. I happen to believe that ultimately the Iraqis will say, we want to have our own government. We want to be on our own feet. We've had a little problem with Iran in the past and, therefore, let us kind of manage our own affairs. No question right now we're concerned, however, about influencing the formation of the government, but also, obviously, we're deeply concerned about whether or not the Iranians have the wherewithal and/or the knowledge about building a nuclear weapon.

My negotiation strategy on this issue is that I believe it is better for the Iranians to hear from more than one voice as to whether or not the world accepts them as a viable nation in the international affairs. And so we have asked Germany and France and Great Britain to take the lead, to send a clear message to the Iranian government.

It's difficult to negotiate with non-transparent societies. It's easier for a non-transparent society to try to negotiate with countries in which there's a free press and a free political opposition and a place where people can express their opinions, because it sometimes causes people to play their cards publicly. In negotiating with non-transparent societies, it's important to keep your counsel.

But I am pleased with the progress we have made on the diplomatic front. As you know, there are now talks of a presidential letter out of the United Nations, and my Secretary of State, working with Ambassador John Bolton, are constructing such a letter and trying to make sure that there is common consensus, particularly amongst the P5 plus Germany. As a matter of fact, Condi leaves I think today, if not tomorrow, for Europe to sit down with the P5 plus Germany to continue keeping people knitted up on our strategy. Obviously, there's some cross pressures to some members of the P5. There's a lot of politics in Europe -- which is a good thing, by the way, that people are questioning whether or not it's worth it to try to stop the Iranians from having a nuclear weapon. I just believe strongly it's worth it. Now is the time to deal with these problems before they become acute.

I'm troubled by a non-transparent regime having a weapon which could be used to blackmail freedom-loving nations. I'm troubled by a president who has declared his intentions to destroy our ally Israel. And we need to take these admonitions and these threats very seriously in order to keep the peace.

So issues around Iraq are complicated and necessary, and that's why my administration spends a lot of time on them.

Yes, sir. You're going to ask me if I read the book. (Laughter.)

Q Mr. President, as you noted at the beginning -- I'm with Freedom House, and I gave the President a copy of our annual report, Freedom in the World, before he took the stage. And as you noted, our reports have --

THE PRESIDENT: Little print, no pictures. Go ahead. (Laughter.)

Q It's the bible of freedom, yes. (Laughter.)

THE PRESIDENT: I'm the funny guy. Go ahead. (Laughter.)

Q Our publications have confirmed that freedom is advancing overall in the world during the years of your administration. There is one big important country, however, in which freedom has declined year-by-year the last several years, and that's Russia.

THE PRESIDENT: Correct.

Q You have a big summit coming up in July with the G8 in St. Petersburg. There's been an increasing crackdown on civil society and political parties in Russia, and I'm wondering if in the time between now and the St. Petersburg summit, what you and the administration can do to raise these issues and try to help the defenders of freedom in Russia.

THE PRESIDENT: I appreciate that. The G8 will raise the issue. That's the interesting thing about kind of meetings and moments. And I have worked very hard to convince Vladimir Putin that it's in his interest to adopt Western-style values and universal values -- rule of law, freedom of religion, the right to people to assemble, political parties, free press.

My strategy with Vladimir Putin is to be in a position where I can talk frankly to him. I've heard some say, don't go to the G8. I think that would be a mistake for the United States not to go to the G8. I remember very -- because I need to be in a position where I can sit down with him and be very frank about our concerns.

I remember meeting with the human rights groups in Russia. And I asked them what strategy should I take as the President of the United States. Should I be in a position where I can engage the President in frank discussion? Or should I publicly scold him, in which case he may turn a deaf ear? And the universal consensus for them kind of played to my own instincts, which is that I think it's important for the United States to be in a position to be able to express our concerns.

Listen, we work with Russia on a variety of issues. Nunn-Lugar is an issue where we work with Russia, for example. But I spend a lot of time with the President making it clear that he should not fear democracy on his border, nor should he fear democracy within his borders. I like to make the case to him that democracies don't war with each other. You don't need to remind him about the brutal history that the Soviet Union went through in World War II. But I do think it's illustrative to point out -- like I pointed out in the speech -- that Europe is now free, whole and at peace, and there's a reason why.

It's what Americans have got to understand. We tend to forget. Ours is a society where things are like instant, so therefore, history almost is like so far back it doesn't count. But it counts when you really think about life lost on the continent of Africa and wonder why they're no war today. And there's a reason why there's no war today. And that's because history has proven democracies don't war with each other.

And so in my explanation to different events that are taking place to the President, I try to point to historical truths, that it's in an interest of a country like Russia to understand and welcome democracy. It's in an interest for the country to give people the freedom to express themselves.

I do spend time with him in private talking about issues like the NGO law. And as you noticed, we changed the laws -- obviously now the -- how laws get implemented matters. But I'm confident that will be a topic of discussion.

I haven't given up on Russia. I still think Russia understands that it's in her interest to be West, to work with the West, and to act in concert with the West. Nobody is saying to Russia, you must look like the

United States of America. But we are saying there's just some basic institutions that ought to be adopted. And I will continue making that case.

I do think it's important for me to go to the G8 so I can make the case. One of the things that I find is that nations oftentimes approach me at these different meetings we go to and say, hey, pass the message for me, will you? We need you to pass a message, Mr. President. You're the person who can best make the case. And so I'm pretty confident in these countries' interest that I be in a position where I'm able to walk into the room with the President of Russia and him not throw me out. And, in fact, that he -- you know, we've got a relationship -- personal relationship such that there is the possibility for candid conversation.

The other big opportunity for democracy, of course, is China. President Hu Jintao is coming to our country, as you know. I will continue to remind him ours is a complex relationship and that we would hope that he would not fear a free society, just like it doesn't appear that he's fearing a free market. I happen to believe free markets eventually yield free societies. One of the most -- one of the most pure forms of democracy is the marketplace, where demand causes something to happen. Excess demand causes prices to -- the supply causes prices to go up, and vice versa. That stands in contrast to governments that felt like they could set price and control demand.

One of the things that I think should be a part of any foreign policy is to shine the spotlight, is to open societies. You heard me talk about what it's like to deal with non-transparent societies. I think a useful tool of foreign policy for our country is, try to let the sun shine in. I think China has recently read the book on Mao. It's an amazing history of a couple of things -- one, about how fooled much of the world was, and how brutal this country was. And yet, now there's more transparency into China.

I will make it clear, of course, to the President that our relationship is vital on a variety of fronts. One such front is the economy, and we expect that country to treat us fairly. We expect there to be strong adherence to intellectual property rights. We believe that we grow pretty good crops and grow good beef, and perhaps it's in their interest to open up their markets to our agricultural products. We expect our manufacturers to be treated fairly. We don't believe in state subsidization of industry to give unfair advantage to state-owned enterprise. In other words, there's a variety of things we'll talk about, and one of them is freedom.

I have been -- I don't hesitate to talk to him about my visits with the Dalai Lama who is -- comes and sees me in the White House; nor do I hesitate to talk about the concerns of the Catholic Church. I'm anxious to talk to him about the evangelicals' concerns inside of China, reminding him that a whole society is one that's just more than open markets. There's institutions and common values that are necessary.

Some, of course -- let me say, if I might make a philosophical statement about how I think. As Peter mentioned, there is a philosophical debate taking place in the world -- at least I think it is -- and that is whether freedom is universal, or whether, one way to put it, it just applies to only a handful of us. I believe in the universality of freedom. That's what I believe. Much of my foreign policy is driven by my firm belief that everybody desires to be free; that embedded in the soul of each man and woman on the face of the Earth is this deep desire to live in liberty. That's what I believe. I don't believe freedom is

confined just to the United States of America, nor do I believe that we should shy away from expressing our deep desire for there to be universal liberty.

You hear the debate, well, they're just imposing their values. That's all they're doing. Well, those are the folks who must not think that freedom is universal. They're not American values. There's something universal about the notion of liberty -- at least I think it is. And that's what's going to drive my foreign policy. I'll be unabashed about trying to work for more free societies. I believe that's the calling of the 21st century. I meant what I said, that in the 21st century, America ought to work to end tyranny in our world. It is a noble goal for the United States of America.

I'm concerned about isolationist tendencies in our country that would say, well, maybe this isn't -- maybe we're not up to this task. Well, if we're not up to the task, who is up to the task? I'm concerned about protectionist policies in our country, which says to me, we don't have the confidence to compete anymore. Let us withdraw within our borders. I strongly reject isolationism and protectionism. It's not in our country's interest, nor is it in the world's interest.

There's great talk about, what you do as the American President with American influence. I believe American Presidents ought to confidently use American influence for the good of the world, and that includes demanding universal liberty and human rights and human dignity.

Yes, sir.

Q Mr. President, I'm from the Public International Law and Policy Group. I'm also from Egypt and I aspire to one day go back there and join Egyptian politics. So my question is --

THE PRESIDENT: Go for President. (Laughter.)

Q I'm working on it, I'm working on it -- in 2017, everyone. (Laughter.) But my question is, would you support the regime of Gamal Mubarak if he takes over after President Mubarak?

THE PRESIDENT: That's a leading question. (Laughter.)

Q -- question.

THE PRESIDENT: No? That's a question I don't answer question. (Laughter.) I support a country which does not fear political movements, but is willing to compete with political movements. That's the kind of country I support.

There's a -- first of all, I appreciate the fact that there were elections in Egypt. That's positive. I think people in positions of responsibility like mine ought to say, if there seems to be a movement gaining ground on the streets, the question ought to be why; not how can we repress it, but what is taking place? What is it that's causing somebody to be in favor? What are they saying that I'm not saying, or what are they doing that I'm not doing?

Competition for ideas and the votes of people are very healthy in societies. As a matter of fact, it's one of the ways to defeat the terrorists. Terrorists feed on resentment. When people don't feel their voices are heard, they become resentful, and then they become eligible for recruitment. If people don't feel like they have a chance to express themselves and have the government listen to them, they're likely to turn to people -- the false prophets, people who subvert a great religion to play on people's frustrations and then use that false prophecy to kill.

And so I -- the answer to your question is, is that I support an openness in the political process. I think when -- I think Egypt is a -- has a chance to be one of the leaders of the freedom movement in the Middle East. I recognize that not everybody is going to embrace this concept of democracy and freedom as firmly as I'd like them to. But all of us have got to continue to advance progress.

One of the interesting debates we have about the freedom movement is whether or not institutions have to be right before there's elections. So in other words, kind of one of these interesting philosophical debates that's taking place. My answer -- you heard my answer -- my answer is, you got to have -- you can't wait for perfect, because it's an excuse for the status quo.

Elections start the process. They're not the end of the process. They're oftentimes the beginning of the process. And one of the reasons I respect the Freedom House is because you understand that you follow elections with institution-building and the creation of civil society. But for those who say, well, we can't have elections until everything is just right, or until we know the outcome of the elections, are those who provide excuse, in my judgment, for a foreign policy which in the past has said, it's okay, just so long as energy is priced okay; and okay so there's no ruffles on the -- the sea looks calm. My problem with that attitude is, beneath the surface, there's resentment and anger.

I'll also tell you another -- I'm not going to tell you your business in the Freedom House, but I think a movement that must be tapped into in order to advance freedom is the women's movement. I just -- there is something universal about the desire to be treated fairly and equally. And therefore, in societies in which women are not being treated fairly and equally provides great opportunities to advance the cause of freedom. We've got to be wise about how we do it in the United States. Sometimes the stamp of America obviously provides those who are trying to resist freedom, given them an excuse not to. I understand that. But it's -- there are great opportunities in the world.

The temptation in today's society is to say, it's not worth it. Or, certain people can't self-govern. It's really part of the debate in Iraq, isn't it, when you think about it -- is, can these people self-govern? And I can understand why some in America say they can't, because all they see is unbelievable violence. And we're a country of deep compassion. We care. One of the great things about America, one of the beauties of our country, is that when we see a young, innocent child blown up by an IED, we cry. We don't care what the child's religion may be, or where that child may live, we cry. It upsets us. The enemy knows that, and they're willing to -- they're willing to kill to shake our confidence. That's what they're trying to do.

They're not going to shake my confidence, I just want you to know. I understand their tactics and I know their designs. But I also believe that Iraqis can and want to self-govern. That's what I believe. And so when you see me make decisions, or make statements like I make, you've got to understand

it's coming from a basic set of beliefs. That's what I believe. And that's what a decision-maker ought to do. The decision-maker ought to make decisions based upon deep-seeded beliefs. You don't need a President chasing polls and focus groups in order to make tough decisions. You need Presidents who make decisions based upon sound principle.

Now, people may not agree with the decisions; I understand that. But I hope after this talk, those of you who didn't agree at least know I'm making my decisions based on something I believe deep in my soul, and something that's worked in the past. Democracies have yielded the peace. I believe 30 years from now, people are going to look back at this moment and say, thank goodness a generation of Americans stood up and said, we have faith in democracy, faith in democracy to lay the foundation for peace, and an American President will be discussing issues of peace with duly-elected leaders in the Middle East, and our children will be better off for it.

And I want to tell you one anecdote now that you've got me wound up. (Laughter.) I sit down at the table with Prime Minister Koizumi. I tell this story all the time, because one of my jobs is to go out and explain to the American people the consequences of the decisions that I have made and why I think it's in our interests. Koizumi and I are not only good friends, but we're partners in peace. We talk about a variety of issues -- North Korea is an issue, we talk -- you know, he's got 1,000 troops in Iraq. Isn't that amazing, when you think about it? Because he understands the benefits of democracy in the broader Middle East. We're close friends.

Sixty years ago -- it seems like an eternity for a lot of people, I recognize that, but it's not that long ago -- my dad fought the Japanese, and so did your relatives. They were the sworn enemy of the United States of America. I find it an unbelievable part of history that I am now sitting down at the table with the Prime Minister of Japan talking about the peace, and my dad fought them. And so what happened? What happened was, Japan adopted a Japanese-style democracy. That's what happened. And now they're peaceful. And they sit at the table with their former enemy. I think that's a lesson worth listening to and understanding.

But I bet you after World War II there were great doubters as to whether or not Harry Truman was doing the right thing to help Japan become a democracy. I see Stevens nodding, he was there. Weren't you? (Laughter.) Well, I wasn't. (Laughter.) But I'm reading a lot about it. And I believe it's a lesson for all of us in this -- in the 21st century. Spreading democracy is hard work. It's hard to overcome sectarian division and torture. It's hard to overcome that. But it's worth it, for the sake of our children and grandchildren.

Yes. Yes, ma'am. I'll get you over there. (Laughter.) Here in the end zone. You're next.

Q Oh, I'm next.

THE PRESIDENT: No, you're not next -- she's next. (Laughter.)

Q I'm with Creative Associates, and we're one of the small companies that has the honor to work in Iraq, so today is a real honor to be here. As you were mentioning all the steps that we're going to have to go through in the near future, I'm still very concerned that we might not be concentrating on the

suffering of the children.

THE PRESIDENT: In Iraq?

Q In Iraq. So I would like to be sure that as the different programs get processed that we don't give up on the children.

THE PRESIDENT: Yes, thank you very much. Our soldiers are good Samaritans. They're unbelievable. I see pictures all the time from family members of our soldiers in Iraq of their loved one showing compassion to children. No question, I'm concerned about the children in Iraq, as well. So our -- we've got people in the field who care about the children, too. The truth of the matter is, if you care about the children of Iraq, then you would want to make sure that Iraq doesn't slip back into tyranny. Thousands of children lost their parents because of Saddam Hussein.

And so I want to thank you for your work. It's very important for the security situation to improve so that NGOs, people of compassion, are able to help lift lives. But there's a lot of work to be done. There's just a lot of work to be done. Same in Afghanistan. First of all, we've rebuilt thousands of schools in Iraq, as we have in Afghanistan, as well. And the world is more hopeful as the result of the liberation of these people. Afghanistan -- it's obvious -- when you have a society in which young girls weren't allowed to go to school because the Taliban thought it was like against humanity to send girls to school, and now they can, there's an amazing change in that society.

But I readily can see there's a lot of work left to be done. It's -- there's no such thing as instant success. I told you that -- and by the way, after World War II, Germany and Japan took a while to rebuild, and it took a while for those societies to become stable societies. It just takes a while.

Our march, by the way, between revolution, liberation, and Constitution wasn't all that smooth either. And, frankly, our adhering to the full extent of the liberties embedded in the Constitution and Declaration of Independence took a while. I realize that when I talk to my Secretary of State. We were -- we had people enslaved in the United States for a century. It takes a while. It's hard work. And the fundamental question the American people have to answer is, is it worth it? You've got my position. It absolutely is worth it.

Freedom is contagious, by the way. As liberty begins to spread in the Middle East more people will demand it. And we should not shirk our duty, nor should we be afraid to encourage reformers. The worst thing that could happen, in my judgment, for the peace of the world is for the United States to lose our nerve and retreat. And there's -- anyway.

Thank you. You've been very anxious. This better be a good one. Yes, you've been waving and yelling over there. (Laughter.) Waving, yelling, stomping your feet. It's a free society. That's what happens. (Laughter.)

Q I'm Iraqi-American.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you.

Q Thank you, Mr. President. I think based on what -- over 30 years of Saddam's oppression and the regime in Iraq, and also based on the belief that you have, as an Iraqi mother, Iraqi-American mother and a woman -- and I went back two years ago -- I worked for a year -- there's always that concern and still worrisome. These are beautiful messages, yet there's a big gap that crosses that ocean. It never gets to the Iraqi, to the simple man, Iraqis facing despair, disillusionments, all kinds of things. I speak to Iraqi friends and families on daily basis. This is what their message is. We hear of these things, but we don't see it. It doesn't get to us.

THE PRESIDENT: Yes, tangible results on the street, right.

Q But it's not only us, Mr. President. It's not only that. It doesn't reach them in any kind of media, unfortunately. So how can we do that? I've been wondering about this, and you are the only person, I think, who can maybe do something.

THE PRESIDENT: Talk to the Iraqi people?

Q Talk to someone, talk to the Iraqi, relay that message that we are honest, we have great beliefs, and we want to do something.

THE PRESIDENT: Well, I appreciate that. First of all, I've got great confidence in the people of Iraq. Iraqis are entrepreneurial, they're well-educated, they're peace-loving. Iraq mothers want their children to grow up in a peaceful world. That's what mothers want all over the world.

And so I -- what my concern is, is that the tangible benefits of democracy aren't reaching into people's pockets yet. I mean, there's got to be a direct correlation with someone's lifestyle, someone's standard of living, and a style of government. And that's one of the things that people who push freedom understand. I mean, there's got to be -- people got to see the direct benefits at some point in time about being free. One direct benefit is that there's not going to be a central government summarily pulling you out of society and killing you if need be. That's the biggest benefit.

But there also has to be tangible benefits on the street. I try to speak to the Iraqi people all the time. Sometimes the message gets through the filters, sometimes it doesn't. I want them to hear a couple of things. I want the Iraqi people to hear I've got great confidence in their capacity to self-govern. I also want to hear the -- the Iraqi people to hear it's about time you get a unity government going. In other words, Americans understand newcomers to the political arena, but pretty soon it's time to shut her down and get governing.

I want the Iraqi people to hear that we care deeply about the individuals in Iraq, regardless of their religion. That's what we care about. And we want them to worship freely. I like the fact in Iraq that there's a burgeoning free press, there's a lot of press, which is a positive sign. It's a healthy indication. I also want the Iraqis to hear that while there's a political debate going on here in America, I believe in what we're doing, and we're not going to leave prematurely; that we have got a mission, along with the Iraqis, and that is to secure a country for its democracy and help them defend themselves, deny al

Qaeda a safe haven, and have an ally in the war on terror.

And so I thank you for that admonition for me to speak out to the Iraqi people. I try to do it as much as I possibly can.

Yes, ma'am. Ambassador, you want to ask a question next?

Q Good afternoon, Mr. President. I'm glad to see you here speaking today. I have a question about the immigration issue that's going on right now. And I'm just curious -- the Senate will probably pass a measure, the House has already passed a measure. And I'm curious what kinds of components are you looking for in an immigration bill that you can support? And how do you reconcile a guest worker for undocumented residents who are here, versus those who are on line and in the system waiting five and 10 years to get here?

THE PRESIDENT: No, that's a great question. Thanks. It's obviously topic du jour. (Laughter.) Pretty fancy, huh? Topic du jour? (Laughter.) I don't want to ruin the image. (Laughter.)

I believe there ought to be three components to good immigration law. First of all, I hope we get a bill out of the Senate. There's one out of the House. It goes to what's called conference. And here's my suggestions: One, that we're a nation of law, and we ought to enforce our borders. Both the House and the Senate passed good border enforcement measures. We're modernizing or upgrading our border. We recognize that it's important to have more Border Patrol, which we do. But the Border Patrol needs additional tools in order to do their job. We're talking about long borders. It's a subject I'm quite familiar with since I was the governor of a state that had a long border with Mexico. And so the American people have got to know that we'll enforce law.

Secondly, we've got to enforce -- and by the way, part of enforcing law means to make sure that when somebody is caught coming into our country illegally, they're not let back out in society. We had a real issue with detention beds, particularly for non-Mexican illegal people coming in. We'd catch people from Central America. And people worked hard. They spotted people being smuggled across. They were detained -- the people being smuggled across. They said, check in with your immigration officer in 15 days, and nobody did. And so now we've added a number of detention beds and are working for expedited removal procedures with the countries in Central America. As far as the Mexican folks sneaking in the border, they're sent back very quickly back into their country.

Since 2001, believe it or not, we've stopped six million people trying to sneak into our country -- an amazing statistic. It's a lot. Secondly, there's got to be better interior enforcement. But it's very difficult to enforce -- get an employer to enforce the law when the employer is uncertain as to whether or not the documentation being presented for the needed worker is legal.

It turns out -- what's very interesting is that when you deny -- when you make something illegal and there's a demand for it, people find ways around it. That's why you've got a whole smuggling industry called coyotes. That's why you've got unbelievable document forging going on. That's why there's tunnels. I mean, there's imaginative ways by people -- by unscrupulous people to take advantage of people who are coming here to do an honest day's work.

Thirdly, my judgment is you cannot enforce the border without having a temporary guest worker program. The two go hand-in-hand. There are people doing jobs Americans will not do. Many people who have come into our country are helping our economy grow. That's just a fact of life. And I believe that we ought to say to somebody doing a job an American won't do, here is a tamper-proof identity card that will enable you to be here for a period of time. And if that person wants to become a citizen of the United States, because we're a nation of law, they get at the end of the line, not the beginning of the line.

I also believe -- and the Senate is working through different measures to say to the person getting in the line, there's a consequence for being here illegally. Now, if Congress believes that the line is too long, or that we should facilitate people's capacity to then get a green card and become a citizen, increase the number of green cards. But people who have been here legally should not be penalized by someone who's been here illegally.

And so I'd like to tell the American people we are a nation of law, but that doesn't preclude us from being a welcoming nation. I think a system which forces people underground and into the shadows of our society, which causes people to have to sneak across our border and risk their life, is a system that needs to be changed.

I also know -- and I used to tell this to people down there in Texas -- family values don't stop at the Rio Grande River. If you're a mother or a father who's worried about putting food on the table and you're living in an impoverished America and you know there's a job that Americans won't do here, you'll come to do it, for the sake of your family. And therefore, I think it makes sense to have a temporary worker program that says you're not an automatic citizen, to help, one, enforce the border, and two, uphold the decency of America. If our Border Patrol agents don't have to focus on people trying to sneak across to get a job, they will be able to be more focused on people smuggling drugs, smuggling guns, smuggling terrorists.

And so I look forward to the debate. I'm going to say again what I've said before on this debate. It's very important for all of us in this debate to conduct ourselves with the following principles in mind: One, we're a nation of immigrants; two, our soul is refreshed by newcomers to our society; three, we love the idea of people starting with nothing and ending up with something in America; four, we value family values, no matter where they may be; and five, we've got to be careful about the language we use when it comes to debating this important subject. People should not pit neighbor against neighbor, group of people against group of people in our country. Ours is a nation that's able to assimilate people because we believe in human rights and human dignity of all.

Final question.

Q Mr. President --

THE PRESIDENT: Okay, two questions. Please, ma'am. You're last. You're the last guy. You're the closer. (Laughter.) It's a baseball term. Yes, you're the closer. You've been persistent. (Laughter.)

Q Thank you, Mr. President, and I think I sprained my arm trying to get your attention. The main reason for that is because I think I speak for the unheard people. I'm a Palestinian. My name is Bushra (phonetic) and I come from a refugee camp and I'm currently working at the World Bank.

THE PRESIDENT: Welcome.

Q Thank you. What can I say to my cousins, my friends, people in the streets who are asking, why is the United States punishing us and cutting funds for people who choose fair and free elections? I think the National Endowment for Democracy has characterized it as the text book, fair and free elections. Then why are we punishing the people -- I don't mean the government -- the people of Palestine -- the refugees, the poor, the malnourished mothers and children?

THE PRESIDENT: Great question. Thank you for asking it. Just to step back, I believe I'm the first President to have articulated the -- my desires for there to be a Palestinian state living at peace with Israel. And I still think it's a real possibility for that to happen. I believe democracies don't war with each other, and I believe a Palestinian democracy is in the interests of the Palestinian people, the Israelis, and the rest of the world.

Secondly, I think that aid should go to suffering Palestinians, but nor should it go to a government, however, which has expressed its desire to destroy its neighbor. If the goal of the United States is two states living side-by-side in peace, and one government elected says, we want to destroy one of the parties, it makes no sense for us to support that government. We support the election process, we support democracy, but that doesn't mean we have to support governments that get elected as a result of democracy.

Now, the Palestinians must make a choice as to whether or not it makes sense for them to have a government that says they want to destroy their neighbor. I don't think it does. As a matter of fact, I think it's important for governments to say, we want to work out our differences in a peaceful way. But I am concerned about the suffering Palestinian people. I think the U.S. government has got aid that goes directly to people. And I know that we'll continue to call upon governments in the region to support the Palestinian people.

I weep about the suffering of the Palestinians. I particularly weep about the fact that the leadership has let them down for year after year after year. And now is the time for strong leaders to stand up and say, we want the people to -- we want the people to decide. And I was pleased that there was an election in the Palestinian territories, and I agree with you that the elections were good elections. And -- but now the government has to make a choice, and we will continue to watch very carefully about the choice they make.

Final question. Then I'm going down to be with the President of Mexico and the Prime Minister of Canada -- Cancun. (Laughter.) No Speedo suit here. (Laughter.) Thankfully. (Laughter.)

Q Ready?

THE PRESIDENT: Yes. Sorry to interrupt you. Just testing your concentration. (Laughter.)

Q Mr. President, I am on the board of trustees of Freedom House.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you for having me.

Q My -- you mentioned about Iraq.

THE PRESIDENT: Iraq?

Q About Iraq, the effect of leaving prematurely and the issue it would cause. Is there an opportunity right now to perhaps supplement the American forces and perhaps finally to replace them with a strong, large, broad-based troops, security forces of Muslim countries from North Africa, from Middle East, South Asia, Southeast Asia, who could go in there and then perhaps help in the situation? Because Iraq -- a disaster in Iraq is a disaster for the whole region.

THE PRESIDENT: That's a really good question. I think the preferred strategy is to spend time and efforts on getting the Iraqis stood up so they can defend themselves. At some point in time, the Iraqi citizens are going to have to make the conscious decision that democracy is worth defending. And I appreciate the efforts of some in the Arab world to help train Iraqi police, like the Jordanian academy. There is support for training amongst different Arab nations, as there is from NATO. And the fundamental question is, what will expedite the situation so that the Iraqis are fully prepared to do their job?

So the question -- I would reverse your question and say, are we prepared to have others help the Iraqis defend themselves? And the answer is, absolutely. But the Iraqis must be encouraged to continue to take the lead. And that's a measurable part of our progress on the ground, more territories controlled by Iraqis. The marsh I just described to you was policed by, or guarded by Iraqi units who were in the lead. That Tal Afar example I used the other day talked about the Iraqi divisions in the lead that helped secure this city.

The ultimate solution for Iraq is for there to be a unity government which brings people confidence, one that unites different factions, thereby marginalizing the rejectionists, but also making sure the Iraqi army is prepared to do what it needs to do, as well as a police force.

When we first got in there, we said, well, let's prepare an Iraqi army for an outside threat. It turns out it wasn't necessary. The biggest threat was inside the country. And so we adjusted our strategy and started training Iraqis so that they are prepared to be able to defend sectors of their country. And now the big -- Senator Warner came and briefed us at the White House the other day. He said -- and this is what the General is telling me, as well -- we've made good progress in training the Iraqi army. The problem is the Iraqi police force. And there is a national police force, which is more efficient than local police forces. It still needs to make sure there are coalition troops embedded in the police force to make sure that these police understand that there's -- you don't seek reprisal as a police force. You've got to earn the confidence of all people, no matter what their religion is. And we're still working with local police forces.

So in due respect, I think the question is, how do we expedite more Iraqis to earn the confidence of the Iraqi people. We're dealing with a shattered confidence. There's a sense that, they may leave us, or our guys aren't prepared to provide security. And the quicker we can get the Iraqis stood up and trained, the faster the Iraqi people will have confidence not only in their own security situation, but in their government.

And so thanks for the suggestion. Listen, I've enjoyed it, I hope you have. God bless. (Applause.)

END 2:22 P.M. EST

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