



THE WHITE HOUSE
PRESIDENT
GEORGE W. BUSH



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President Bush Discusses Fourth Anniversary of Operation Iraqi Freedom

Roosevelt Room

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11:30 A.M. EDT

THE PRESIDENT: Good morning. Four years ago today, coalition forces launched Operation Iraqi Freedom to remove Saddam Hussein from power. They did so to eliminate the threat his regime posed to the Middle East and to the world. Coalition forces carried out that mission with great courage and skill. Today the world is rid of Saddam Hussein and a tyrant has been held to account for his crimes by his own people.

Nearly 12 million Iraqis have voted in free elections under a democratic constitution that they wrote for themselves. And their democratic leaders are now working to build a free society that upholds the rule of law, that respects the rights of its people, that provides them security and is an ally in the war on terror.

At this point in the war, our most important mission is helping the Iraqis secure their capital. Until Baghdad's citizens feel secure in their own homes and neighborhoods, it will be difficult for Iraqis to make further progress toward political reconciliation or economic rebuilding, steps necessary for Iraq to build a democratic society.

So with our help, Iraq's government is carrying out an aggressive plan to secure Baghdad. And we're continuing to train the Iraqi security forces so that they ultimately take full responsibility for the security of their own people.

I've just received an update on the situation from Iraqi Prime Minister Maliki. My conversation with the Prime Minister followed a briefing earlier this morning that included Secretary Rice and Secretary Gates, along with General Petraeus and Ambassador Khalilzad, who participated by video conference from Iraq.

Prime Minister Maliki and General Petraeus emphasized that the Baghdad security plan is still in its

early stages, and success will take months, not days or weeks. Yet, those on the ground are seeing some hopeful signs. The Iraqi government has completed the deployment of three Iraqi army brigades to the capital, where they've joined the seven Iraqi army brigades and nine national police brigades that were already in the area.

The Iraqi government has also lifted restrictions that once prevented Iraqi and coalition forces from going into areas like Sadr City. American and Iraqi forces have established joint security stations. Those stations are scattered throughout Baghdad and they're helping Iraqis reclaim their neighborhoods from the terrorists and extremists.

Together, we've carried out aggressive operations against both Shia and Sunni extremists; carried out operations against al Qaeda terrorists. We've uncovered large caches of weapons and destroyed two major car bomb factories that were located on the outskirts of Baghdad.

I want to stress that this operation is still in the early stages, it's still in the beginning stages. Fewer than half of the troop reinforcements we are sending have arrived in Baghdad. The new strategy will need more time to take effect. And there will be good days, and there will be bad days ahead as the security plan unfolds.

As we help the Iraqis secure their capital, their leaders are also beginning to meet the benchmarks they have laid out for political reconciliation. Last month, Iraq's Council of Ministers approved a law that would share oil revenues among Iraqi people. The Iraqi legislature passed a \$41 billion budget that includes \$10 billion for reconstruction and capital improvements. And last week, Prime Minister Maliki visited Ramadi, a city in the Sunni heartland, to reach out to local Sunni tribal leaders.

There's been good progress. There's a lot more work to be done, and Iraq's leaders must continue to work to meet the benchmarks that have set forward.

As Iraqis work to keep their commitments, we have important commitments of our own. Members of Congress are now considering an emergency war spending bill. They have a responsibility to ensure that this bill provides the funds and the flexibility that our troops need to accomplish their mission. They have a responsibility to pass a clean bill that does not use funding for our troops as leverage to get special interest spending for their districts. And they have a responsibility to get this bill to my desk without strings and without delay.

It can be tempting to look at the challenges in Iraq and conclude our best option is to pack up and go home. That may be satisfying in the short run, but I believe the consequences for American security would be devastating. If American forces were to step back from Baghdad before it is more secure, a contagion of violence could spill out across the entire country. In time, this violence could engulf the region. The terrorists could emerge from the chaos with a safe haven in Iraq to replace the one they had in Afghanistan, which they used to plan the attacks of September the 11th, 2001. For the safety of the American people, we cannot allow this to happen.

Prevailing in Iraq is not going to be easy. General Petraeus says that the environment in Iraq is the most challenging that he has seen in his more than 32 years of service. He also says that he has been

impressed by the professionalism and the skill and determination of our men and women in uniform. He sees in our troops "a true will to win and a sincere desire to help our Iraqi partners achieve success."

Four years after this war began, the fight is difficult, but it can be won. It will be won if we have the courage and resolve to see it through. I'm grateful to our servicemen and women for all they've done and for the honor they brought to their uniform and their country. I'm grateful to our military families for all the sacrifices they have made for our country. We also hold in our hearts the good men and women who've given their lives in this struggle. We pray for the loved ones they have left behind.

The United States military is the most capable and courageous fighting force in the world. And whatever our differences in Washington, our troops and their families deserve the appreciation and the support of our entire nation.

Thank you.

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