



For Immediate Release
Office of the Press Secretary
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President's Radio Address

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THE PRESIDENT: Good morning. Earlier this week, I traveled to Iraq's Anbar Province to visit our troops and see with my own eyes the remarkable changes they are making possible. If you want to see some photos from this trip, go to whitehouse.gov where you can view a slideshow of my visit.

Success in Anbar is critical to the democratic future of Iraq and to the war on terror. This largely Sunni province covers nearly a third of Iraq. It stretches from the outskirts of Baghdad to Iraq's borders with Jordan, and Syria, and Saudi Arabia. And until recently, Anbar was al Qaeda's chief base of operations in Iraq.

Last year at this time, Anbar was all over the news. Newspapers at the time cited a leaked intelligence report that was pessimistic about our prospects there. One columnist summed it up this way: "The war is over in Anbar province, and the United States lost." But local citizens soon saw what life under al Qaeda meant for them. The terrorists brutalized the people of Anbar and killed those who opposed their dark ideology. So the tribal sheiks of Anbar came together to fight al Qaeda. They asked for support from the Coalition and the Iraqi government, and we responded.

Together we have driven al Qaeda out of strongholds in Anbar. The level of violence is down. Local governments are meeting again. Young Sunnis are joining the police and army. And normal life is returning. The people of Anbar have seen that standing up to the terrorists and extremists leads to a better life. And Anbar has shown that improving security is the first step toward achieving economic progress and political reconciliation.

On my visit, I met with tribal sheiks who have fought with us against al Qaeda -- and who are now building a better future for their people and for all Iraqis. One Sunni sheik told me: "We have suffered a great deal from terrorism. We strongly support the democracy you have called for. The

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previous regime [of Saddam Hussein] should not be characterized as a Sunni regime -- it was a regime against the Sunnis, Shia, and the Kurds."

I also met with national leaders from Iraq's government: President Talabani and Prime Minister Maliki, Deputy Prime Minister Barham Salih, Vice President Abd al-Mahdi, Vice President Hashimi, and President Barzani of the Kurdish region. These men come from different religious and ethnic backgrounds. But they all understand the importance of succeeding in Anbar. And so they're reaching out to help, with positive steps such as sharing oil revenues with provincial leaders. I thanked the representatives of Iraq's government for their efforts to support the bottom-up progress in Anbar. And I told them that the American people expect them to meet their commitments and pass the legislation they've agreed on.

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While in Iraq, I also received a good briefing from General David Petraeus and Ambassador Ryan Crocker. They gave me an update on our military, and political, and economic efforts to support our Iraqi partners. They told me about the progress they're seeing across Iraq and their ideas for the way forward. In the next few days, they will come to Washington to give Congress their assessment of conditions on the ground. I urge the Members of Congress to listen to these two well-respected professionals -- before jumping to any conclusions.

Most importantly, during my visit, I met with our troops serving in Anbar. Every day, these fine men and women show courage under incredibly difficult circumstances. The work they're doing on the sands of Anbar is making us safer in the streets of America. Because of their bravery and sacrifice, our troops in Iraq are denying al Qaeda safe havens from which to plot and plan and carry out attacks against Americans both here and abroad. I know how hard it is for our men and women in uniform to be away from their families. I told them our Nation appreciates their willingness to serve and that the American people stand with them.

Next week, after consulting with the Joint Chiefs of Staff, my national security team, Members of Congress from both parties, and Iraqi leaders, I will speak directly to the Nation about the recommendations General Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker have presented to me. I will discuss the changes our strategy has brought to Iraq. I will lay out a vision for future involvement in Iraq -- one that I believe the American people and their elected leaders of both parties can support. By coming together on the way forward, we will strengthen Iraq's democracy, deal a blow to our enemies, secure interests in the Middle East, and make our Nation safer.

Thank you for listening.

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