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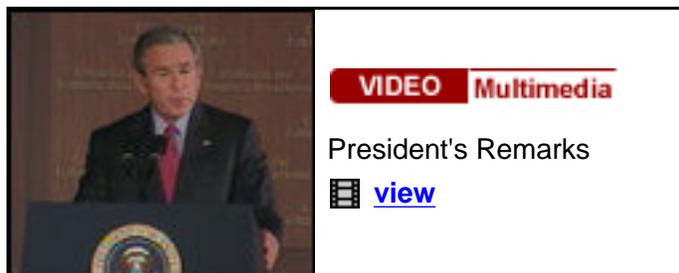
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President Discusses War on Terror and Rebuilding Iraq

Omni Shoreham Hotel
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10:44 A.M. EST



THE PRESIDENT: Thank you, all. Richard, thanks for the invitation. Thanks for letting me come by and address the Council on Foreign Relations. The Council is one of America's oldest and most admired foreign policy organizations, and I appreciate the chance to come and talk about foreign policy.

Richard is a good man, and he's doing a fine job as the President of the Council on Foreign Relations. And I appreciate your service to the country. I want to thank Nancy Roman. I want to thank the board members of the Council. And I want to thank you all for being here today.



Today we mark the anniversary of a fateful day in American history. On December the 7th, 1941, our peaceful nation awoke to an attack plotted in secret, and executed without mercy. The strike on Pearl Harbor was the start of a long war for America -- a massive struggle against those who attacked us, and those who shared their destructive ambitions. Fortunately for all of us, a great generation of Americans was more than equal to the challenge. Our nation pulled together -- and despite setbacks and battlefield defeats, we did not waver in freedom's cause. With courage and determination, we won a war on two fronts: we liberated millions, we aided the rise of democracy in Europe and Asia we watched enemies become allies, and we laid the foundation of peace for generations.

On September the 11th, 2001, our nation awoke to another sudden attack. In the space of just 102 minutes, more Americans were killed than we lost at Pearl Harbor. Like generations before us, we accepted new responsibilities, and we confronted new dangers with firm resolve. Like generations before us, we're taking the fight to those who attacked us -- and those who share their murderous vision for future attacks. Like generations before us, we've faced setbacks on the path to victory -- yet

we will fight this war without wavering. And like the generations before us, we will prevail.

Like earlier struggles for freedom, this war will take many turns, and the enemy must be defeated on every battlefield -- from the streets of Western cities, to the mountains of Afghanistan, to the tribal regions of Pakistan, to the islands of Southeast Asia and the Horn of Africa. Yet the terrorists have made it clear that Iraq is the central front in their war against humanity. So we must recognize Iraq as the central front in the war on terror.

Last week at the Naval Academy, I gave the first in a series of speeches outlining our strategy for victory in Iraq. I explained that our strategy begins with a clear understanding of the enemy we face. The enemy in Iraq is a combination of rejectionists and Saddamists and terrorists. The rejectionists are ordinary Iraqis, mostly Sunni Arabs, who miss the privileged status they had under the regime of Saddam Hussein -- they reject an Iraq in which they are no longer the dominant group. We believe that, over time, most of this group will be persuaded to support a democratic Iraq led by a federal government that is strong enough to protect minority rights.

The Saddamists are former regime loyalists who harbor dreams of returning to power -- and they're trying to foment anti-democratic sentiment among the larger Sunni community. Yet they lack popular support -- and over time, they can be marginalized and defeated by security forces of a free Iraq.

The terrorists affiliated with or inspired by al Qaeda are the smallest but most lethal group. Many are foreigners coming to fight freedom's progress in Iraq. They are led by a brutal terrorist named Zarqawi -- al Qaeda's chief of operations in Iraq -- who has pledged his allegiance to Osama bin Laden. The terrorists' stated objective is to drive U.S. and coalition forces out of Iraq and to gain control of the country. They would then use Iraq as a base from which to launch attacks against America, overthrow moderate governments in the Middle East, and try to establish a totalitarian Islamic empire that reaches from Indonesia to Spain.

The terrorists in Iraq share the same ideology as the terrorists who struck the United States on September the 11th, blew up commuters in London and Madrid, and murdered tourists in Bali, killed workers in Riyadh, and slaughtered guests at a wedding in Amman, Jordan. This is an enemy without conscience -- they cannot be appeased. If we're not fighting and destroying the enemy in Iraq, they would not be leading the quiet lives of good citizens. They would be plotting and killing our citizens -- across the world and within our own borders. By fighting the terrorists in Iraq, we are confronting a direct threat to the American people -- and we will accept nothing less than complete victory.

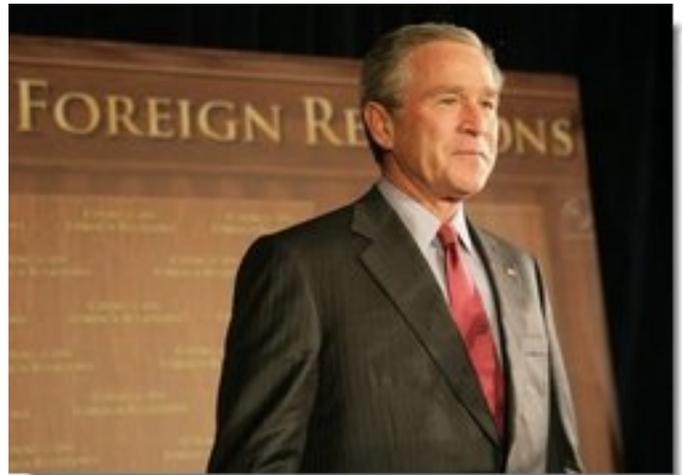
We're pursuing a comprehensive strategy in Iraq. Last week, my administration released a document called the "National Strategy for Victory in Iraq." Our goal is victory -- and victory will be achieved when the terrorists and Saddamists can no longer threaten Iraq's democracy, when the Iraqi security forces can provide for the safety of their own citizens, and when Iraq is not a safe haven for terrorists to plot



new attacks against our nation.

Our strategy to achieve that victory has three elements. On the political side, we're helping the Iraqis build inclusive democratic institutions that will protect the interests of all Iraqis. We're working with the Iraqis to help them engage those who can be persuaded to join the new Iraq, and to marginalize those who never will. In two-and-a-half years, the Iraqi people have made amazing progress. They've gone from living under the boot of a brutal tyrant, to liberation, to free elections, to a democratic constitution. A week from tomorrow, they will go to the polls to elect a fully constitutional government that will lead them for the next four years. By helping Iraqis continue to build their democracy, we will gain an ally in the war on terror; by helping them build a democracy, we will inspire reformers from Damascus to Tehran; and by helping them build a democracy, we'll make the American people more secure.

On the security side, coalition and Iraqi security forces are on the offense against the enemy. We're clearing out areas controlled by the terrorists and Saddam loyalists, leaving Iraqi forces to hold territory taken from the enemy, and following up with targeted reconstruction to help Iraqis rebuild their lives. And as we fight the terrorists, we're working to build capable and effective Iraqi security forces, so they can take the lead in the fight -- and eventually take responsibility for the safety and security of their citizens without major foreign assistance.



As Iraqi forces become more capable, they're taking responsibility for more and more Iraqi territory; we're transferring bases for their control, to take the fight to the enemy. That means American and coalition forces can concentrate on training Iraqis and hunting down high-value targets like Zarqawi.

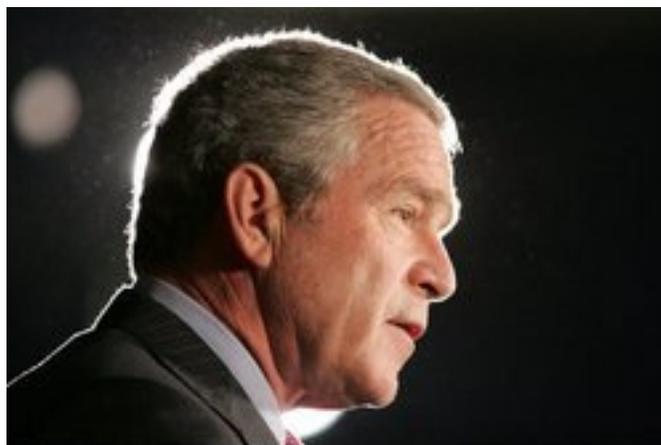
On the economic side, we're helping the Iraqis rebuild their infrastructure, and reform their economy, and build the prosperity that will give all Iraqis a stake in a free and peaceful Iraq. In doing this, we have involved the United Nations, other international organizations, our coalition partners, and supportive regional states.

A week ago at the Naval Academy, I spoke about our efforts to train the Iraqi security forces. I described the changes we've made in the way these forces are trained and the resulting gains the Iraqi forces have made in the past year. Today, I'm going to talk about how we're working with those Iraqi forces and Iraq's leaders to improve security and restore order, to help Iraqis rebuild their cities, and to help the national government in Baghdad revitalize Iraq's infrastructure and economy.

Over the course of this war, we have learned that winning the battle for Iraqi cities is only the first step. We also have to win the "battle after the battle" -- by helping Iraqis consolidate their gains and keep the terrorists from returning. Used to be that after American troops cleared the terrorists out of a city and moved onto the next mission, there weren't enough forces, Iraqi forces, to hold the area. We found that after we left, the terrorists would re-enter the city, intimidate local leaders and police, and eventually retake control. This undermined the gains of our military, it thwarted our efforts to help Iraqis rebuild

and led local residents to lose confidence in the process and in their leaders.

So we adjusted our approach. As improvements in training produced more capable Iraqi security forces, those forces have been able to better hold onto the cities we cleared out together. With help from our military and civilian personnel, the Iraqi government can then work with local leaders and residents to begin reconstruction -- with Iraqis leading the building efforts, and our coalition in a supporting role.



This approach is working. And today, I want to describe our actions in two cities where we have seen encouraging progress -- Najaf and Mosul.

The city of Najaf is located about 90 miles south of Baghdad, and it's the home to one of Shia Islam's holiest places, the Imam Ali Shrine. As a predominantly Shia city, Najaf suffered greatly during Saddam's rule. Virtually every element of infrastructure and basic services had been crippled by years of insufficient maintenance. In 1991, thousands of Najaf residents were killed during a brutal crackdown by the dictator. Our troops liberated Najaf in 2003 -- yet about a year later, the city fell under the sway of a radical and violent militia. Fighting in the streets damaged homes and businesses, and the local economy collapsed as visitors and pilgrims stopped coming to the shrine out of fear for their lives.

In the summer of 2004, we discussed the growing problem in Najaf with Iraq's political leaders -- and the coalition and Iraqi government decided to retake control of the city. And we did. Together, coalition and Iraqi forces routed out the militia in tough, urban fighting. It was an intense battle, our guys performed great, and so did the Iraqi forces. Together with the Iraqi government and the Shia clerical community, we forced the militia to abandon the shrine and return it to legitimate Iraqi authority. The militia forces agreed to disarm and leave Najaf.

As soon as the fighting in Najaf ended, targeted reconstruction moved forward. The Iraqi government played an active role, and so did our military commanders and diplomats and workers from the U.S. Agency for International Development. Together, they worked with Najaf's governor and other local officials to rebuild the local police force, repair residents' homes, refurbish schools, restore water and other essential services, reopen a soccer stadium, complete with new lights and fresh sod. Fifteen months later, new businesses and markets have opened in some of Najaf's poorest areas, religious pilgrims are visiting the city again, construction jobs are putting local residents back to work. One of the largest projects was the rebuilding of the Najaf Teaching Hospital, which had been looted and turned into a military fortress by the militia. Thanks to the efforts by Iraqi doctors and local leaders, and with the help of American personnel, the hospital is now open and capable of serving hundreds of patients each day.

Najaf is now in the hands of elected government officials. An elected provincial council is at work -- drafting plans to bring more tourism and commerce to the city. Political life has returned, and

campaigns for the upcoming elections have begun, with different parties competing for the vote. The Iraqi police are now responsible for day-to-day security in Najaf. An Iraqi battalion has consumed [sic] control of the former American military base, and our forces are now about 40 minutes outside the city.

A U.S. Army sergeant explains our role this way: "We go down there if they call us. And that doesn't happen very often. Usually, we just stay out of their way." Residents of Najaf are also seeing visible progress -- and they have no intention of returning to the days of tyranny and terror. One man from Najaf put it this way: "Three years ago we were in ruins. One year ago we were fighting in the streets ... [Now] look at the people shopping and eating and not in fear."

There is still plenty of work left to be done in Najaf. Like most of Iraq, the reconstruction in Najaf has proceeded with fits and starts since liberation - it's been uneven. Sustaining electric power remains a major challenge -- and construction has begun on three new substations to help boost capacity. Because there is a shortage of clean water, new water treatment and sewage units are being installed. Security in Najaf has improved substantially, but threats remain. There are still kidnappings, and militias and armed gangs are exerting more influence than they should in a free society. Local leaders and Iraqi security forces are confronting these problems -- and we're helping them.

Another area that has seen tremendous gains is the ancient city of Mosul. Mosul is one of Iraq's largest cities, and it's the home of a diverse population of Sunni Arabs, Kurds, and other ethnic groups. Mosul is also the city where our troops brought justice to Saddam's sons in the summer of 2003. In the months after liberation, Mosul was relatively quiet -- and so we began to redeploy our forces elsewhere in the country. And when the terrorists and Saddamists infiltrated the city, the Iraqi police were not up to the task of stopping them. These thugs intimidated residents, and overwhelmed the police.

By late last year, terrorists and Saddamists had gained control of much of Mosul, and they launched a series of car bombings and ambushes -- including an attack on a coalition mess tent that killed 14 American service members. The terrorists and Saddamists killed innocent Iraqi civilians, and they left them in the streets with notes pinned to their bodies threatening others. American and Iraqi forces responded with a series of coordinated strikes on the most dangerous parts of the city. Together we killed, captured, and cleared out many of the terrorists and Saddamists -- and we helped the Iraqi police and legitimate political leaders regain control of the city. As the Iraqis have grown in strength and ability, they have taken more responsibility for Mosul's security -- and coalition forces have moved into a supporting role.

As security in Mosul improved, we began working with local leaders to accelerate reconstruction. Iraqis upgraded key roads and bridges over the Tigris River, rebuilt schools and hospitals, and started refurbishing the Mosul Airport. Police stations and firehouses were rebuilt, and Iraqis have made major improvements in the city's water and sewage network.

Mosul still faces real challenges. Like Najaf, Mosul's infrastructure was devastated during Saddam's reign. The city is still not receiving enough electricity, so Iraqis have a major new project underway to expand the Mosul power substation. Terrorist intimidation is still a concern. This past week, people hanging election posters were attacked and killed. Yet freedom is taking hold in Mosul, and residents are making their voices heard. Turnout in the -- for the October referendum was over 50 percent in the

province where Mosul is located. That's more than triple the turnout in the January election. And there's heavy campaigning going on in Mosul for next week's election.

In places like Mosul and Najaf, residents are seeing tangible progress in their lives. They're gaining a personal stake in a peaceful future, and their confidence in Iraq's democracy is growing. The progress of these cities is being replicated across much of Iraq -- and more of Iraq's people are seeing the real benefits that a democratic society can bring.

Throughout Iraq, we're also seeing challenges common to young democracies. Corruption is a problem at both the national and local levels of the Iraqi government. We will not tolerate fraud -- so our embassy in Baghdad is helping to demand transparency and accountability for the money being invested in reconstruction. We've helped the Iraqi people establish institutions like a Commission on Public Integrity and a stronger Supreme Board of Audit to improve oversight of the rebuilding process. Listen, the Iraqi people expect money to be spent openly and honestly -- and so do the American people.

Another problem is the infiltration of militia groups into some Iraqi security forces -- especially the Iraqi police. We're helping Iraqis deal with this problem by embedding coalition transition teams in Iraqi units to mentor police and soldiers. We're also working with Iraq leaders at all levels of government to establish high standards for police recruiting. In a free Iraq, former militia members must shift their loyalty to the national government, and learn to operate under the rule of law.

As we help Iraq's leaders confront these challenges, we're also helping them rebuild a sound economy that will grow and deliver a better life for their people. Iraq is a nation with the potential for tremendous prosperity. The country has a young and educated workforce, they've got abundant land and water, and they have among the largest oil resources in the world. Yet for decades, Saddam Hussein used Iraq's wealth to enrich himself and a privileged few. As he built palaces, Saddam neglected the country's infrastructure. He ruined the economy, and he squandered the most valuable resource in Iraq -- the talent and the energy of the Iraqi people.

So we're helping the new Iraq government reverse decades of economic destruction, reinvigorate its economy, and make responsible reforms. We're helping Iraqis to rebuild their infrastructure and establish the institutions of a market economy. The entrepreneurial spirit is strong in Iraq. Our policies are aimed at unleashing the creativity of the Iraqi people.

Like our approach to training Iraqi security forces, our approach to helping Iraqis rebuild has changed and improved. When we started the reconstruction progress in the spring of 2003, our focus was on repairing and building large-scale infrastructure -- such as electrical plants and large water treatment facilities. We moved forward with some of those large projects, yet we found our approach was not meeting the priorities of the Iraqi people. In many places, especially those targeted by the terrorists and Saddamists, the most urgent needs were smaller, localized projects, such as sewer lines and city roads. Delivering visible progress to the Iraqi people required us to focus on projects that could be completed rapidly.

And so in consultation with the Iraqi government, we started using more resources to fund smaller,

local projects that could deliver rapid, noticeable improvements, and offer an alternative to the destructive vision of the terrorists. We increased the amount of money our military commanders had at their disposal for flexible use. We worked with Iraqi leaders to provide more contracts directly to Iraqi firms. And by adapting our reconstruction efforts to meet needs on the ground, we're helping Iraqi leaders serve their people, and Iraqis are beginning to see that a free life will be a better life.

Reconstruction has not always gone as well as we had hoped, primarily because of the security challenges on the ground. Rebuilding a nation devastated by a dictator is a large undertaking. It's even harder when terrorists are trying to blow up that which the Iraqis are trying to build. The terrorists and Saddamists have been able to slow progress, but they haven't been able to stop it.

In the space of two-and-a-half years, we have helped Iraqis conduct nearly 3,000 renovation projects at schools, train more than 30,000 teachers, distribute more than 8 million textbooks, rebuild irrigation infrastructure to help more than 400,000 rural Iraqis, and improve drinking water for more than 3 million people.

Our coalition has helped Iraqis introduce a new currency, reopen their stock exchange, extend \$21 million in micro-credit and small business loans to Iraqi entrepreneurs. As a result of these efforts and Iraq's newfound freedom, more than 30,000 new Iraqi businesses have registered since liberation. And according to a recent survey, more than three-quarters of Iraqi business owners anticipate growth in the national economy over the next two years.

This economic development and growth will be really important to addressing the high unemployment rate across parts of that country. Iraq's market-based reforms are gradually returning the proud country to the global economy. Iraqis have negotiated significant debt relief. And for the first time in 25 years, Iraq has completed an economic report card with the International Monetary Fund -- a signal to the world financial community that Iraqis are serious about reform and determined to take their rightful place in the world economy.

With all these improvements, we're helping the Iraqi government deliver meaningful change for the Iraqi people. This is another important blow against the Saddamists and the terrorists. Iraqis who were disillusioned with their situation are beginning to see a hopeful future for their country. Many who once questioned democracy are coming off the fence; they're choosing the side of freedom. This is quiet, steady progress. It doesn't always make the headlines in the evening news. But it's real, and it's important, and it is unmistakable to those who see it close up.

One of those who has seen that progress is Democratic Senator Joe Lieberman. Senator Lieberman has traveled to Iraq four times in the past 17 months, and the article he wrote when he returned from his most recent trip provides a clear description of the situation on the ground. Here's what Senator Lieberman wrote -- Senator Lieberman wrote about the Iraq he saw: "Progress is visible and practical. There are many more cars on the streets, satellite television dishes on the roofs, and literally millions more cell phones in Iraqi hands than before." He describes an Iraqi poll showing that, "two-thirds [of Iraqis] say they are better off than they were under Saddam Hussein."

Senator Lieberman goes on, "Does America have a good plan for doing this, a strategy for victory in

Iraq? Yes, we do. And it's important to make clear to the American people that the plan has not remained stubbornly still, but has changed over the years." The Senator says that mistakes have been made. But he goes on to say that he is worried about a bigger mistake. He writes, "What a colossal mistake it would be for America's bipartisan political leadership to choose this moment in history to lose its will and, in the famous phrase, to seize defeat from the jaws of the coming victory." Senator Lieberman is right.

There is an important debate going on in our nation's capital about Iraq, and the fact that we can debate these issues openly in the midst of a dangerous war brings credit to our democracy. In this debate, some are calling for us to withdraw from Iraq on a fixed timetable, without regard to conditions on the ground. Recently, one Democratic leader came out in support of an artificial deadline for withdrawal, and said an immediate withdrawal of our troops would, "make the American people safer, our military stronger, and bring some stability to the region." That's the wrong policy for our government. Withdrawing on an artificial deadline would endanger the American people, would harm our military, and make the Middle East less stable. It would give the terrorists exactly what they want.

In a letter to the terrorist leader Zarqawi, the al Qaeda leader Zawahiri has outlined his goals in Iraq with these steps: "Expel the Americans from Iraq I establish an Islamic authority over as much territory as you can to spread its power in Iraq extend the jihad wave." The terrorists hope America will withdraw before the job is done, so they can take over the country and turn it into a base for future attacks. Zawahiri called the Vietnam War as a reason to believe the terrorists can prevail. He wrote, "The aftermath of the collapse of American power in Vietnam -- and how they ran and left their agents -- is noteworthy." In the past, al Qaeda has said that American pullouts from Lebanon and Somalia showed them that America was weak and could be made to run. And now the terrorists think they can make America run in Iraq, and that is not going to happen so long as I'm the Commander-in-Chief. (Applause.)

We are not going to yield the future of Iraq to men like Zarqawi, and we're not going to yield the future of the Middle East to men like bin Laden. We will complete our mission in Iraq, and leave behind a democracy that can govern itself, sustain itself, and defend itself. Our military will continue to hunt down the terrorists in Iraq -- and to prepare the Iraqi security forces to take over more of the fight and control more of the territory on their own. We will continue to help the Iraqis rebuild their cities and their lives so they can enjoy the prosperity that freedom brings. We will continue to stand with the Iraqi people as they move forward on the path of democracy. And when victory is achieved, our troops will then come home with the honor they've earned.

Next week, I'll discuss the political element of our strategy in greater detail -- how we're helping Iraqis build a democracy that will be a strong ally in this global war against the terrorists. One of the great lessons of history is that free societies are peaceful societies, and free nations give their citizens a path to resolve their differences peacefully through the democratic process.

Democracy can be difficult and complicated and even chaotic. It can take years of hard work to build a healthy civil society. Iraqis have to overcome many challenges, including longstanding ethnic and religious tensions, and the legacy of brutal repression. But they're learning that democracy is the only way to build a just and peaceful society, because it's the only system that gives every citizen a voice in determining its future.

Before our mission in Iraq is accomplished, there will be tough days ahead. Victory in Iraq will require continued sacrifice by our men and women in uniform, and the continued determination of our citizens. There will be good days and there will be bad days in this war. I reject the pessimists in Washington who say we can't win this war. Yet every day, we can be confident of the outcome because we know that freedom has got the power to overcome terror and tyranny. We can be confident about the outcome because we know the character and strength of the men and women in the fight. Their courage makes all Americans proud.

This generation of Americans in uniform is every bit as brave and determined as the generation that went to war after the attack on our nation 64 years ago today. Like those who came before, they are defeating a dangerous enemy, bringing freedom to millions, and transforming a troubled part of the world. And like those who came before, they will always have the gratitude of the American people.

Our nation will uphold the cause for which our men and women in uniform are risking their lives. We will continue to hunt down the terrorists wherever they hide. We will help the Iraqi people so they can build a free society in the heart of a troubled region. And by laying the foundations of freedom in Iraq and across the broader Middle East, we will lay the foundation of peace for generations to come.

Thanks for giving me a chance to come and speak to you today. May God continue to bless our country. (Applause.)

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