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GEORGE W. BUSH

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## President Discusses War on Terror and Upcoming Iraqi Elections

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THE PRESIDENT: Thank you all. (Applause.) Thank you. Thanks for the warm welcome. Thank you for the chance to come and speak to the Philadelphia World Affairs Council. This is an important organization that has, since 1949, has provided a forum for debate and discussion on important issues. I've come to discuss an issue that's really important, and that is victory in the war on terror.

And that war started on September the 11th, 2001, when our nation awoke to a sudden attack. Like generations before us, we have accepted new responsibilities, we're confronting dangers with new resolve. We're taking the fight to those who attacked us and to those who share their murderous vision for future attacks. We will fight this war without wavering, and we'll prevail.

The war on terror will take many turns, and the enemy must be defeated on many -- 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 to 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 is the central front in the war on terror.



Last month, my administration released a document called the "National Strategy for Victory in Iraq" -- and in recent weeks I've been discussing our strategy with the American people. At the U.S. Naval Academy, I spoke about our efforts to defeat the terrorists and train Iraqi security forces so they can provide safety for their own citizens. Last week before the Council on Foreign Relations, I explained how we are working with Iraqi forces and Iraqi leaders to help Iraqis improve security and restore

order, to rebuild cities taken from the enemy, and to help the national government revitalize Iraq's infrastructure and economy. Today I'm going to speak in depth about another vital element of our strategy: our efforts to help the Iraqi people build a lasting democracy in the heart of the Middle East. I can think of no better place to discuss the rise of a free Iraq than in the heart of Philadelphia, the city where America's democracy was born.

I want to thank the -- Buntzie Churchill and Bill Sasso for letting me come. Thank you all for welcoming me. I got something to say, I'm looking forward to saying it here. I'm traveling with United States Senators -- they're always quick to hop a ride on Air Force One. (Laughter.) Particularly when they don't have to reimburse the government. (Laughter.) But I'm proud to be a friend of Arlen Specter and Rick Santorum. They're fine, honorable members of the United States Senate. (Applause.) I'm also pleased that Jim Gerlach and Mike Fitzpatrick and Joe Pitts of the United States Congress are with us. Thanks for serving. Thanks for being here. (Applause.)

A few blocks from here stands Independence Hall, where our Declaration of Independence was signed and our Constitution was debated. From the perspective of more than two centuries, the success of America's democratic experiment seems almost inevitable. At the time, however, that success didn't seem so obvious or assured.

The eight years from the end of the Revolutionary War to the election of a constitutional government were a time of disorder and upheaval. There were uprisings, with mobs attacking courthouses and government buildings. There was a planned military coup that was defused only by the personal intervention of General Washington. In 1783, Congress was chased from this city by angry veterans demanding back-pay, and they stayed on the run for six months. There were tensions between the mercantile North and the agricultural South that threatened to break apart our young republic. And there were British loyalists who were opposed to independence and had to be reconciled with America's new democracy.



Our founders faced many difficult challenges -- they made mistakes, they learned from their experiences, and they adjusted their approach. Our nation's first effort at governing -- a governing charter, the Articles of Confederation, failed. It took years of debate and compromise before we ratified our Constitution and inaugurated our first president. It took a four-year civil war, and a century of struggle after that, before the promise of our Declaration was extended to all Americans.

It is important to keep this history in mind as we look at the progress of freedom and democracy in Iraq. No nation in history has made the transition to a free society without facing challenges, setbacks, and false starts. The past two-and-a-half years have been a period of difficult struggle in Iraq, yet they've also been a time of great hope and achievement for the Iraqi people.

Just over two-and-a-half years ago, Iraq was in the grip of a cruel dictator who had invaded his

neighbors, sponsored terrorists, pursued and used weapons of mass destruction, murdered his own people, and for more than a decade, defied the demands of the United Nations and the civilized world. Since then, the Iraqi people have assumed sovereignty over their country, held free elections, drafted a democratic constitution, and approved that constitution in a nationwide referendum. Three days from now, they go to polls for the third time this year, and choose a new government under the new constitution.

It's a remarkable transformation for a country that has virtually no experience with democracy, and which is struggling to overcome the legacy of one of the worst tyrannies the world has known. And Iraqis achieved all this while determined enemies use violence and destruction to stop the progress. There's still a lot of difficult work to be done in Iraq, but thanks to the courage of the Iraqi people, the year 2005 will be recorded as a turning point in the history of Iraq, the history of the Middle East, and the history of freedom.

As the Iraqi people struggle to build their democracy, adversaries continue their war on a free Iraq. 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're 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, and we're encouraged that many Sunnis plan to actively participate in this week's election.



The Saddamists are former regime loyalists who harbor dreams of returning to power, and they're trying to foment anti-democratic sentiment amongst the larger Sunni community. Yet they lack popular support, and over time, they can be marginalized and defeated by the people and 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 stated his allegiance to Osama bin Laden. The terrorists' stated objective is to drive U.S. and coalition forces out of Iraq and gain control of that country, and then use Iraq as a base from which to launch attacks against America, overthrow moderate governments in the Middle East, and establish a totalitarian Islamic empire that reaches from Spain to Indonesia.

The terrorists in Iraq share the ideology of the terrorists who struck the United States on September the 11th. They share the ideology with those who blew up commuters in London and Madrid, murdered tourists in Bali, and killed workers in Riyadh, and slaughtered guests at a wedding in Amman, Jordan. This is an enemy without conscience, and they cannot be appeased. If we were not fighting and destroying this enemy in Iraq, they would not be leading quiet lives as good citizens. They would be plotting and killing our citizens, across the world and here at home. 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. (Applause.)

We are pursuing a comprehensive strategy 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 in Iraq has three elements: On the economic side, we're helping the Iraqis restore their infrastructure, reform their economy, and build the prosperity that will give all Iraqis a stake in a free and peaceful Iraq. On the security side, coalition and Iraqi forces are on the offense against the enemy. We're working together to clear out areas controlled by the terrorists and Saddam loyalists, and leaving Iraqi forces to hold territory taken from the enemy. And as we help Iraqis fight these enemies, we are 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.

We're making steady progress. The Iraqi forces are becoming more and more capable. They're taking more responsibility for more and more territory. We're transferring bases to their control so they can take the fight to the enemy. And that means American and coalition forces can concentrate on training Iraqis, and hunting down the high-value targets like the terrorist Zarqawi and his associates.

Today, I want to discuss the political element of our strategy: our efforts to help the Iraqis build inclusive democratic institutions that will protect the interests of all the Iraqi people. By helping Iraqis to build a democracy, we will win over those who doubted they had a place in a new Iraq, and undermine the terrorists and Saddamists. By helping Iraqis to build a democracy, we will gain an ally in the war on terror. By helping Iraqis build a democracy, we will inspire reformers across the Middle East. And by helping Iraqis build a democracy, we will bring hope to a troubled region, and this will make the American people more secure.

From the outset, the political element of our strategy in Iraq has been guided by a clear principle: Democracy takes different forms in different cultures. Yet in all cultures, successful free societies are built on certain common foundations -- rule of law, freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, a free economy, and freedom to worship. Respect for the belief of others is the only way to build a society where compassion and tolerance prevail. Societies that lay these foundations not only survive, but thrive. Societies that do not lay these foundations risk backsliding into tyranny.

When our coalition arrived in Iraq, we found a nation where almost none of these basic foundations existed. Decades of brutal rule by Saddam Hussein had destroyed the fabric of Iraqi civil society. Under Saddam, Iraq was a country where dissent was crushed. A centralized economy enriched a dictator instead of the people; secret courts meted out repression instead of justice; and Shia Muslims,

and Kurds and other groups were brutally oppressed. And when Saddam Hussein's regime fled Baghdad, they left behind a country with few civic institutions in place to hold Iraq society together.

To fill the vacuum after liberation, we established the Coalition Provisional Authority. The CPA was ably led by Ambassador Jerry Bremer, and many fine officials from our government volunteered to serve in the CPA -- CPA. While things did not always go as planned, these men and women did a good job under extremely difficult and dangerous circumstances -- helping to restore basic services, making sure food was distributed, and reestablishing government ministries.

One of the CPA's most important tasks was bringing the Iraqi people into the decision-making process of their government after decades of tyrannical rule. Three months after liberation, our coalition worked with the United Nations and Iraqi leaders to establish an Iraqi Governing Council. The Governing Council gave Iraqis a voice in their own affairs, but it was unelected. It was subordinate to the CPA and, therefore, it did not satisfy the hunger of Iraqis for self-government. Like free people everywhere, Iraqis wanted to be governed by leaders they had elected, not foreign officials.

So in the summer of 2003, we proposed a plan to transfer sovereignty to the Iraqi people. Under this plan, the CPA would continue to govern Iraq while appointed Iraqi leaders drafted a constitution, put that constitution before the people, and then held elections to choose a new government. Only when that elected government took office would the Iraqis regain their sovereignty.

This plan met with the disapproval of the Iraqis. They made it clear that they wanted a constitution that was written by elected leaders of a free Iraq, and they wanted sovereignty placed in Iraqi hands sooner. We listened, and we adjusted our approach. In November of 2003, we negotiated a new plan with the Governing Council, with steps for an accelerated transition to Iraqi self-government. Under this new plan, a Transitional Administrative Law was written by the Governing Council and adopted in March of 2004. This law guaranteed personal freedoms unprecedented in the Arab world, and set forth four major milestones to guide Iraq's transition to a constitutional democracy.

The first milestone was the transfer of sovereignty to an Iraqi interim government by the end of June 2004. The second was for Iraqis to hold free elections to choose a transitional government by January of 2005. The third was for Iraqis to adopt a democratic constitution, which would be drafted no later than August 2005, and put before the Iraqi people in a nationwide referendum no later than October. And the fourth was for Iraqis to choose a government under that democratic constitution, with elections held December 2005.

The first milestone was met when our coalition handed over sovereignty to the Iraqi leaders on June 28th, 2004 -- two days ahead of schedule. In January 2005, Iraqis met the second milestone when they went to the polls and chose their leaders in free elections. Almost eight-and-a-half million Iraqis defied the car bombers and assassins to cast their ballots, and the world watched in awe as jubilant Iraqis danced in the street and held ink-stained fingers and celebrated their freedom.

The January elections were a watershed event for Iraq and the Middle East, yet they were not without flaws. One problem was the failure of the vast majority of Sunni Arabs to vote. When Sunnis saw a new 275-member parliament taking power in which they had only 16 seats, many realized that their

failure to participate in the democrat process had hurt their chances and hurt their groups -- it hurt their constituencies. And Shia and Kurdish leaders who had won power at the polls saw that for a free and unified Iraq to succeed, they needed Sunni Arabs to be part of the government. We encouraged Iraq's leaders to reach out to Sunni leaders, and bring them into the governing process. When the transitional government was seated in the spring of this year, Sunni Arabs filled important posts, including a vice president, a minister of defense, and the speaker of the National Assembly.

The new government's main political challenge -- next political challenge was to meet the third milestone, which was adopting a democratic constitution. Again, Iraq's leaders reached out to Sunni Arabs who had boycotted the elections and included them in the drafting process. Fifteen Sunni Arab negotiators and several Sunni Arab advisors joined the work of the constitutional drafting committee. After much tough debate, representatives of Iraq's diverse communities drafted a bold constitution that guarantees the rule of law, freedom of assembly, property rights, freedom of speech and the press, women's rights, and the right to vote. As one Arab scholar put it, the Iraqi constitution marks "the dawn of a new age in Arab life."

The document that initially emerged from the committee did not unify Iraqis, and many Sunnis on the constitutional committee did not support the draft. Yet Iraq's leaders continued working to gain Sunni support. And thanks to last-minute changes -- including a new procedure for considering amendments to the constitution next year -- a deal was struck four days before the Iraqis went to the polls. The revised constitution was endorsed by Iraq's largest Sunni party. It was approved in referendum that attracted over a million more voters than in the January elections. Many Sunnis voted against the constitution, but Sunnis voted in large numbers for the first time. They joined the political process. And by doing so, they reject the violence of the Saddamists and rejectionists. Through hard work and compromise, Iraqis adopted the most progressive, democratic constitution in the Arab world.

On Thursday, Iraqis will meet their fourth milestone. And when they do go to the polls and choose a new government under the new constitution, it will be a remarkable event in the Arab world. Despite terrorist violence, the country is buzzing with signs and sounds of democracy in action. The streets of Baghdad, and Najaf and Mosul, and other cities are full of signs and posters. The television and radio air waves are thick with political ads and commentary. Hundreds of parties and coalitions have registered for this week's elections, and they're campaigning vigorously. Candidates are holding rallies and laying out their agendas and asking for the vote.

Our troops see this young democracy up close. First Lieutenant Frank Shriley of Rock Hall, Maryland, says, "It's a cool thing riding around Baghdad and seeing the posters -- it reminds me of being home during election time. After so many years of being told what to do, having a real vote is different."

Unlike the January elections, many Sunnis are campaigning vigorously for office this time around. Many Sunni parties that opposed the constitution have registered to compete in this week's vote. Two major Sunni coalitions have formed, and other Sunni leaders have joined national coalitions that cross religious, ethnic, and sectarian boundaries. As one Sunni politician put it, this election "is a vote for Iraq; we want a national Iraq, not a sectarian one."

To encourage broader participation by all Iraqi communities, the National Assembly made important

changes in Iraq's electoral laws that will increase Sunni representation in the new assembly. In the January elections, Iraq was one giant electoral district, so seats in the transitional assembly simply reflected turnout. Because few Sunnis voted, their communities were left with little representation. Now, Iraq has a new electoral system, where seats in the new Council of Representatives will be allocated by province and population -- much like our own House of Representatives. This new system is encouraging more Sunnis to join in the democratic process because it ensures that Sunnis will be well-represented, even if the terrorists and Saddamists try to intimidate voters in the provinces where most Sunnis live.

More Sunnis are involved because they see Iraqi democracy succeeding. They have learned a lesson of democracy: They must participate to have a voice in their nation's affairs. A leading Sunni who had boycotted the January vote put it this way: "The Sunnis are now ready to participate." A Sunni sheik explains why Sunnis must join the process: "In order not to be marginalized, we need power in the National Assembly." As more Sunnis join the political process, the Saddamists and remaining rejectionists will be marginalized. As more Sunnis join the political process, they will protect the interests of their community.

Like the Shia and Kurds, who face daily attacks from the terrorists and Saddamists, many Sunnis who join the political process are being targeted by the enemies of a free Iraq. The Iraqi Islamic Party -- a Sunni party that boycotted the January vote and now supports elections -- has seen its offices bombed. And a party leader reports that at least 10 members have been killed since the party announced it would field candidates in Thursday's elections. Recently a top Sunni electoral official visited the Sunni stronghold of Baquba. He went to encourage local leaders to participate in the elections. During his visit, a roadside bomb went off. It rattled his convoy, but it didn't stop it. He says this about the attempt on his life: "The bomb is nothing [compared to] what we're doing. What we're doing is bigger than the bomb."

By pressing forward and meeting their milestones, the Iraqi people have built momentum for freedom and democracy. They've encouraged those outside the process to come in. At every stage, there was enormous pressure to let the deadlines slide, with skeptics and pessimists declaring that Iraqis were not ready for self-government. At every stage, Iraqis proved the skeptics and pessimists wrong. At every stage, Iraqis have exposed the errors of those in our country and across the world who question the universal appeal of liberty. By meeting their milestones, Iraqis are defeating a brutal enemy, rejecting a murderous ideology, and choosing freedom over terror.

This week elections won't be perfect, and a successful vote is not the end of the process. Iraqis still have more difficult work ahead, and our coalition and the new Iraqi government will face many challenges, including in four critical areas: ensuring Iraqi security, forming an inclusive Iraqi government, encouraging Iraqi reconciliation, and maintaining Iraqi democracy in a tough neighborhood.

The first key challenge is security. As democracy takes hold in Iraq, the terrorists and Saddamists will continue to use violence. They will try to break our will and intimidate the Iraqi people and their leaders. These enemies aren't going to give up because of a successful election. They understand what is at stake in Iraq. They know that as democracy takes root in that country, their hateful ideology will suffer a devastating blow, and the Middle East will have a clear example of freedom and prosperity and hope.

So our coalition will continue to hunt down the terrorists and Saddamists. We'll continue training Iraqi security forces to take the lead in the fight, and defend their new democracy. As the Iraqi security forces stand up, coalition forces can stand down. And when victory is achieved, our troops will then return home with the honor they have earned.

The second key challenge is forming an inclusive government that protects the interests of all Iraqis, and encourages more in the rejectionist camp to abandon violence and embrace politics. Early next year, Iraq's new parliament will come to Baghdad and select a prime minister, and a presidency council, and a cabinet of ministers. Two-thirds of the new parliament must agree on the top leadership posts, and this will demand negotiation and compromise. It will require patience by America and our coalition allies. This new government will face many tough decisions on issues such as security and reconstruction and economic reform. Iraqi leaders will also have to review and possibly amend the constitution and ensure that this historic document earns the broad support of all Iraqi communities. By taking these steps, Iraqi leaders will build a strong and lasting democracy. This is an important step in helping to defeat the terrorists and the Saddamists.

The third key challenge is establishing rule of law and the culture of reconciliation. Iraqis still have to overcome longstanding ethnic and religious tensions, and the legacy of three decades of dictatorship. During the regime of Saddam Hussein, Shia, Kurds and other groups were brutally oppressed, and for some there is now a temptation to take justice into their own hands. Recently, U.S. and Iraqi troops have discovered prisons in Iraq where mostly Sunni men were held, some of whom have appeared to have been beaten and tortured. This conduct is unacceptable, and the Prime Minister and other Iraqi officials have condemned these abuses, an investigation has been launched, and we support these efforts. Those who committed these crimes must be held to account.

We will continue helping Iraqis build an impartial system of justice that protects all of Iraq's citizens. Millions of Iraqis are seeing their independent judiciary in action, as their former dictator, Saddam Hussein, is put on trial in Baghdad. The man who once struck fear in the hearts of Iraqis has heard his victims recount the acts of torture and murder that he ordered. One Iraqi watching the proceedings said: "We all feel happiness about this fair trial." Slowly but surely, with the help of our coalition, Iraqis are replacing the rule of a tyrant with the rule of law, and ensuring equal justice for all their citizens.

Oh, I know some fear the possibility that Iraq could break apart and fall into a civil war. I don't believe these fears are justified. They're not justified so long as we do not abandon the Iraqi people in their hour of need. Encouraging reconciliation and human rights in a society scarred by decades of arbitrary violence and sectarian division is not going to be easy and it's going to happen overnight. Yet the Iraqi government has a process in place to resolve even the most difficult issues through negotiate, debate and compromise. And the United States, along with the United Nations and the Arab League and other international partners, will support these efforts to help resolve these issues. And as Iraqis continue to develop the habits of liberty, they will gain confidence in the future, and ensure that Iraqi nationalism trumps Iraqi sectarianism.

A fourth key challenge is for Iraqis to maintain their newfound freedoms in a tough neighborhood. Iraq's neighbor to the east, Iran, is actively working to undermine a free Iraq. Iran doesn't want

democracy in Iraq to succeed because a free Iraq threatens the legitimacy of Iran's oppressive theocracy. Iraq's neighbor to the west, Syria, is permitting terrorists to use that territory to cross into Iraq. The vast majority of Iraqis do not want to live under an Iranian-style theocracy, and they don't want Syria to allow the transit of bombers and killers into Iraq -- and the United States of America will stand with the Iraqi people against the threats from these neighbors. (Applause.)

We'll continue to encourage greater support from the Arab world and the broader international community. Many Arab states have kept the new Iraq at arms' distance. Yet as more Arab states are beginning to recognize that a free Iraq is here to stay, they're starting to give Iraq's new government more support. Recently, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Jordan have welcomed the Iraqi Prime Minister on official visits. Last month, the Arab League hosted a meeting in Cairo to promote national reconciliation among Iraqis, and another such meeting is planned for next year in Baghdad.

These are important steps, and Iraq's neighbors need to do more. Arab leaders are beginning to recognize that the choice in Iraq is between democracy and terrorism, and there is no middle ground. The success of Iraqi democracy is in their vital interests because if the terrorists prevail in Iraq, they will then target other Arab nations.

International support for Iraq's democracy is growing, as well. Other nations have pledged more than \$13 billion in assistance to Iraq, and we call on them, those who have pledged assistance, to make good on their commitments. The World Bank recently approved its first loan to Iraq in over 30 years, lending the Iraqi government \$100 million to improve the Iraqi school system. The United Nations is playing a vital role in Iraq -- they assisted in last January's elections, and the negotiations for the constitution, and in the recent constitutional referendum. And at the request of the Iraqi government, the U.N. Security Council unanimously approved a resolution extending the mandate of the multinational force in Iraq through 2006. Earlier this year, the European Union co-hosted a conference for more than 80 countries and international organizations, so they can better coordinate their efforts to help Iraqis rebuild their nation. Whatever differences there were over the decision to liberate Iraq, all free nations now share a common interest -- building an Iraq that will fight terror, and be a source of stability and freedom in a troubled region of the world.

The challenges ahead are complex and difficult, yet Iraqis are determined to overcome them and build a free nation. And they require our support. Millions of Iraqis will put their lives on the line this Thursday in the name of liberty and democracy. And 160,000 of America's finest are putting their lives on the line so Iraqis can succeed. The American and Iraqi people share the same interests and the same enemies -- and by helping democracy succeed in Iraq, we bring greater security to our citizens here at home.

The terrorists know that democracy is their enemy, and they will continue fighting freedom's progress with all the hateful determination they can muster. Yet the Iraqi people are stepping forward to claim their liberty, and they will have it. When the new Iraqi government takes office next year, Iraqis will have the only constitutional democracy in the Arab world, and Americans will have a partner for peace and moderation in the Middle East.

People across the broader Middle East are drawing, and will continue to draw inspiration from Iraq's progress, and the terrorists' powerful myth is being destroyed. In a 1998 fatwa, Osama bin Laden

argued that the suffering of the Iraqi people was justification for his declaration of war on America. Now bin Laden and al Qaeda are the direct cause of the Iraqi people's suffering. As more Muslims across the world see this, they're turning against the terrorists. As the hope of liberty spreads in the Middle East, the terrorists will lose their sponsors, lose their recruits, and lose the sanctuaries they need to plan new attacks.

A free Iraq is not going to be a quiet Iraq -- it will be a nation full of passionate debate and vigorous political activity. It will be a nation that continues to face some level of violence. Yet Iraqis are showing they have the patience and the courage to make democracy work -- and Americans have the patience and courage to help them succeed.

We've done this kind of work before; we must have confidence in our cause. In World War II, the free nations defeated fascism and helped our former adversaries, Germany and Japan, build strong democracies -- and today, these nations are allies in securing the peace. In the Cold War, free nations defeated communism, and helped our former Warsaw Pact adversaries become strong democracies -- and today, nations of Central and Eastern Europe are allies in the war on terror.

Today in the Middle East, freedom is once again contending with a totalitarian ideology that seeks to sow anger and hatred and despair. And like fascism and communism before, the hateful ideologies that use terror will be defeated by the unstoppable power of freedom. (Applause.)

And the advance of freedom in the Middle East requires freedom in Iraq. By helping Iraqis build a lasting democracy, we will spread the hope of liberty across a troubled region, and we'll gain new allies in the cause of freedom. By helping Iraqis build a strong democracy, we're adding to our own security, and, like a generation before us, we're laying the foundation of peace for generations to come.

Not far from here where we gather today is a symbol of freedom familiar to all Americans -- the Liberty Bell. When the Declaration of Independence was first read in public, the Liberty Bell was sounded in celebration, and a witness said: "It rang as if it meant something." Today, the call of liberty is being heard in Baghdad and Basra, and other Iraqi cities, and its sound is echoing across the broader Middle East. From Damascus to Tehran, people hear it, and they know it means something. It means that the days of tyranny and terror are ending, and a new day of hope and freedom is dawning.

Thank you for letting me come. (Applause.)

I thought I might answer some questions. (Laughter.) Yes, ma'am.

Q Since the inception of the Iraqi war, I'd like to know the approximate total of Iraqis who have been killed. And by Iraqis I include civilians, military, police, insurgents, translators.

THE PRESIDENT: How many Iraqi citizens have died in this war? I would say 30,000, more or less, have died as a result of the initial incursion and the ongoing violence against Iraqis. We've lost about 2,140 of our own troops in Iraq.

Yes.

Q Mr. President, thank you --

THE PRESIDENT: I'll repeat the question. If I don't like it, I'll make it up. (Laughter and applause.)

Q -- Thank you for coming to the city where liberty was born. Central to your policy in Iraq is the role of the Iraqis. We hear widely different tales about how the Iraqis are doing in their own area of defense. Could you give us your perspective on how they're doing, how well the military is doing, what you feel the capability is to do the task that you want them to do, to include some of the widely different impressions that we hear about.

THE PRESIDENT: No, I appreciate that. When we first began training -- our strategy all along has been to train Iraqis so they can take the fight and succeed in what we're trying to do, which is a democracy -- a democracy which will serve as an example for others; a democracy which will join us in the fight on terror; a democracy which will help us prevent other countries from becoming safe haven for terrorists who still want to kill us. That's -- that was our objective. And all along we wanted the Iraqis to be able to do -- take the fight.

When we first got going we said we'll train an army that will be able to deal with external threats, and a civil defense corps that will be able to deal with internal threats. And the problem with that strategy was that the internal threats were a heck of a lot more severe than the external threats, and the army -- the civilian corps we trained was not properly trained and equipped.

So we adjusted. We trained everybody for the army and -- recognizing that the army is going to have to not only take the fight to the enemy -- or the new army take the fight to the enemy, but when we clear enemies out of places like Mosul, that there has to be an Iraqi army presence to earn the confidence of the people.

When the war first got going, we'd move into Mosul, clear out an enemy, leave, and the enemy would return. And so the Iraqi people had no confidence in the future. They were -- they didn't dare, for example, tell coalition forces or Iraqi forces the names of those who were killing their citizens because they didn't have the confidence there would be a force to protect them. And so we began the process of clearing out and holding with more and more trained Iraqi forces. And now the Iraqi forces are helping to rebuild these cities. Democracy is only going to succeed if people say, my life is going to be better. I mean, no different a campaign here -- you know, vote for me, I want to help improve your life.

And that's what -- and so the strategy has been to -- let me say, we adjusted our strategy, and there's about 200,000-plus capable units. Now, not all of them are ready to take the fight to the enemy. In order to have a division or a battalion ready to fight, you've got to be able to communicate, you've got to be able to move, you've got to be able to have logistical supplies. But more and more of the Iraqis are in the lead in the fight, and more and more Iraqis are being trained so they can hold the positions once we clear.

We are not completed -- we haven't completed the job of training the Iraqis. But what is beginning to

happen is, is that you're beginning to see our troops step back from the fight. I don't know if you realize, we had some 90 bases in Iraq, and I think we've closed about 40 -- or turned over -- closed or turned over 40 of those bases to the Iraqis. In other words, our profile is beginning to move back as the Iraqis get trained up -- so that we can continue working on training, and also help them chase down Zarqawi and his buddies. They're -- these guys are very tough and they're cold-blooded killers.

The enemy has got one weapon. See, they can't defeat us militarily. What they can do is they can -- and will -- kill innocent people in the hopes of trying to get the United States of America to leave the battlefield early. The only way we can lose is if we lose our nerve. And they know that. And they've stated that publicly.

And -- but the training is going much better than it was in the first year. The -- and we've just got more to do, and we need to do it, because a free Iraq, again, will be an important ally in this war. This is a global struggle we're in. It's -- this isn't an enemy that is isolated, kind of angry group of people. These are people that have got a totalitarian vision. They've got designs and ambitions. They've laid out their strategy and they explained their tactics. And we've got to listen to them and take them seriously. And part of their tactics is to create vacuums so that their hateful ideology flows in.

They -- listen, the attack of September the 11th was a part of a broad strategy to get us to retreat from the world. And that -- people say, well, he's making it up that they want to establish a totalitarian empire that stretches from Spain to Indonesia. I'm telling you what they said; not me. This is what Zawahiri has said -- the number-two man in al Qaeda. It seems like to me we need to take it seriously when the enemy says something.

Kind of getting off subject, here, but -- yes, sir.

Q Mr. President, I'm a proud U.S. citizen, naturalized, and card-carrying Republican. I voted for you both times. I grew in India, a Sunni. In fact, the President of the Republic of India is a Sunni. And I think it's a great testimony to this nation that was -- the vision of which was laid out within a few -- half a mile of here, that somebody like me can be in a position of leadership and be successfully engaged in contributing to the current and future economic well-being of this nation. Mr. President, I support your efforts in Iraq. But I'd like to know what are we going to do in the broader battle in creating a favorable image and reaching out to people across the world, so that people like me all over the world can be passionate supporters of the United States.

THE PRESIDENT: Yes, I appreciate that. First of all, success will help the image of the United States. Look, I recognize we got an image issue, particularly when you got television stations, Arabic television stations that are constantly just pounding America, creating -- saying America is fighting Islam, Americans can't stand Muslims, this is a war against a religion. And we've got to, obviously, do a better job of reminding people that ours is not a nation that rejects religion; ours is a nation that accepts people of all faith, and that the great strength of America is the capacity for people to worship freely.

It's difficult. I mean, their propaganda machine is pretty darn intense. And so we're constantly sending out messages, we're constantly trying to reassure people, but we're also -- we're also acting. And that's what's important for our citizens to realize. Our position in the world is such that I don't think we can

retreat. I think we have a duty and an obligation to use our vast influence to help.

I cite two examples of where I think it will make a big -- of where American image in the Muslim world will be improved. One is the tsunami. The tsunamis hit; it was the United States military, through the USS Abraham Lincoln, that provided the logistical organization necessary to get the -- to get the -- to save a lot of lives. We moved. A lot of people kind of sat around and discussed; not us. We saw a problem and we moved.

Same in Pakistan. The earthquake in Pakistan is devastating. The United States of America was first on the scene. We got a lot of kids flying choppers all around that country providing help and aid.

And so I guess what I'm saying to you is, is that a proper use of influence that helps improve people's lives is the best way to affect -- to change the image of country, and to defeat the propaganda. Having said all that, a lot of people want to come to America. The image may be bad, but give them a chance, all you who want to come to America, raise your hand -- there's a lot wanting to come. That's another issue, which is immigration reform.

But thank you for that. One thing America must never do is lose our capacity to take people from all walks of life and help them become an American, first and foremost. That's what distinguishes us from other cultures and other nations. You can come from wherever you are, and I can come from Texas, and we both share the same deal -- we're Americans first and foremost. I happen to be a Methodist. You're a Sunni. (Laughter.)

Yes, ma'am.

Q Mr. President, I would like to know why it is that you and others in your administration keep linking 9/11 to the invasion of Iraq when no respected journalist or Middle Eastern expert confirmed that such a link existed.

THE PRESIDENT: What did she -- I missed the question. Sorry. I didn't -- I beg your pardon, I didn't hear you. Seriously.

Q I would like to know why you and others in your administration invoke 9/11 as justification for the invasion of Iraq --

THE PRESIDENT: Yes --

Q -- when no respected journalists or other Middle Eastern experts confirm that such a link existed.

THE PRESIDENT: I appreciate that. 9/11 changed my look on foreign policy. I mean, it said that oceans no longer protect us, that we can't take threats for granted; that if we see a threat, we've got to deal with it. It doesn't have to be militarily, necessarily, but we got to deal with it. We can't -- can't just hope for the best anymore.

And so the first decision I made, as you know, was to -- was to deal with the Taliban in Afghanistan because they were harboring terrorists. This is where the terrorists planned and plotted. And the second decision, -- which was a very difficult decision for me, by the way, and it's one that I -- I didn't take lightly -- was that Saddam Hussein was a threat. He is a declared enemy of the United States; he had used weapons of mass destruction; the entire world thought he had weapons of mass destruction. The United Nations had declared in more than 10 -- I can't remember the exact number of resolutions -- that disclose, or disarm, or face serious consequences. I mean, there was a serious international effort to say to Saddam Hussein, you're a threat. And the 9/11 attacks extenuated that threat, as far as I -- concerned.

And so we gave Saddam Hussein the chance to disclose or disarm, and he refused. And I made a tough decision. And knowing what I know today, I'd make the decision again. Removing Saddam Hussein makes this world a better place and America a safer country. (Applause.)

Last question. I've actually got something to do. (Laughter.) You're paying me all this money, I'd better get back to work. (Laughter.)

Hold on a second. Got a guy here.

Q Mr. President, I'm from the Phelps School; I'm a supporter of yours.

THE PRESIDENT: Oops, that kind of prejudices your question. (Laughter.)

Q Well I have a question for you. Do you feel that since invading Iraq, the threat of terrorism on U.S. soil has been reduced significantly?

THE PRESIDENT: I think it's been reduced; I don't think we're safe. What will really give me confidence to say that we're safe is when I can tell the American people we've got the capacity to know exactly where the enemy is moving. This is a different kind of war. These people hide. They -- they're patient and they're sophisticated. And that's why our intelligence-gathering is really important.

You know, occasionally they come out and want to fight like they're doing in Iraq. This guy, Zarqawi, has sworn his allegiance to bin Laden. He has -- he's declared his intentions. But there's a lot of them who lurk and hide. And what we've really got to do is continue to hone our intelligence-gathering to make sure that we can, as best as possible, understand their intents and watch their movements. And this requires international cooperation.

I will tell you the international cooperation, when it comes to sharing intelligence, is good. It requires us being able to cut off their money and move money around. They can't -- it turns out, they can't launch attacks without money. And so we're doing the best we can to work with others to find out where their money is moving. And that way, it will be a -- give us a chance to find out where they are.

The long run in this war is going to require a change of governments in parts of the world. It's -- and this is why it's very important for me to continue to remind the American people about what's taking

place in history. One of my favorite stories is to tell people about -- or go-bys -- is to tell people about my relationship with Koizumi, Prime Minister Koizumi of Japan. He's an interesting guy. He likes Elvis, for example, which is -- (laughter) -- interesting -- (laughter). He's a friend. He's also a friend when it comes to peace. He's a reliable, steady ally when it comes to dealing with North Korea. North Korea is a country that has declared boldly they've got nuclear weapons, they counterfeit our money, and they've starving their people to death. And it's good to have an ally that understands human rights and the condition of the human being are vital for this world and world peace.

And yet, 60 years ago, my dad fought against the Japanese -- many of your relatives did, as well. They were the sworn enemy of the United States. I find it amazing -- I don't know if you find it amazing -- I find it amazing that I sit down with this guy, strategizing about how to make the world a more peaceful place when my dad and others fought him.

And so what happened? Now, 60 years seems like a long time, particularly if you're 59, like me. (Laughter.) But it's not all that long in history, when you think about it. And what happened was a Japanese-style democracy emerged. Democracies yield the peace. That's what history has shown us. That's what I tried to say in my peroration in this speech. That's a long word. I'm doing it for Senator Specter here. (Laughter and applause.) Just showing off, Senator. Just trying to look good in front of the folks here at home. (Laughter.) But it's an accurate portrayal of what has happened. Democracies yield the peace.

So the fundamental question is, do we have the confidence and universal values to help change a troubled part of the world. If you're a supporter of Israel, I would strongly urge you to help other countries become democracies. Israel's long-term survival depends upon the spread of democracy in the Middle East. I recognize people have -- (applause) -- I fully recognize that some say it's impossible, that maybe only a certain kind of people can be -- can accept democracy. I just -- I reject that. I don't agree with that. I believe democracy -- the desire to be free is universal. That's what I believe. And if you believe that, then you've got to act on it. That doesn't mean militarily. But that means using the influence of the United States to work with others to help -- to help freedom spread.

And that's what you're seeing in Iraq. And it's hard. It's hard for a country that has come from dictatorship two-and-a-half years ago to become a democracy. It is hard work. There's a lot of resentment and anger and bitterness. But I believe it's going to happen. And the only way it won't happen is if we leave, if we lose our nerve, if we allow the terrorists to achieve their objective. The only way we can lose this is for us to say to the terrorists, maybe you aren't dangerous, after all -- you know, by leaving, maybe that you'll become hospitable, decent citizens of the world. That's not reality. And my job as the President is to see the world the way it is, not the way we hope it is. (Applause.)

I, again, want to thank you for giving me the chance to come and deliver this speech. I'm grateful for your interest. May God bless you all, and may God continue to bless America. (Applause.)

END 12:14 P.M. EST

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