

A PROPOS DE L'IRAK ET DE LA GUERRE

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...Earlier this year, I laid out a new strategy for Iraq. I wasn't pleased with what was taking place on the ground. I didn't approve of what I was seeing. And so I called together our military and said, can we design a different strategy to succeed? And I accepted their recommendations. And this new strategy is different from the one we were pursuing before. It is being led by a new commander, General David Petraeus -- and a new ambassador, Ryan Crocker. It recognizes that our top priority must be to help the Iraqi government and its security forces protect their population from attack -- especially in Baghdad, the capital. It's a new mission. And David Petraeus is in Iraq carrying it out. Its goal is to help the Iraqis make progress toward reconciliation -- to build a free nation that respects the rights of its people, upholds the rule of law, and is an ally against the extremists in this war.

And it's in our interests, it's in our national interests to help them succeed. America has sent reinforcements to help the Iraqis secure their population. In other words, one of the decisions I had to make was, what should our troop levels be? I asked the military what they thought the troop levels ought to be. That's what you expect from your Commander-in-Chief, to consult closely with the United States military in times of war. They made recommendations, and I sent the reinforcements in to help the Iraqis secure their population, to go after terrorists, insurgents, and militias that incite sectarian violence and to help get this capital of Iraq under control.

The last of the reinforcements arrived in Iraq earlier this month -- and the full surge has begun. One of our top commanders, Ray Odierno, puts it this way: "We are beyond a surge of forces, and we're now into a surge of operations." Today I am going to give you an update on how these operations are proceeding. I'll talk about the progress and challenges regarding reconciliation at both the national and local levels. I'm going to outline some of the criteria we will be using to tell us if we are succeeding.

Let me begin with Anbar province. You can see here on the map, Anbar is a largely Sunni province that accounts for nearly a third of Iraqi territory. It's a big place. Anbar stretches from the outskirts of Baghdad to Iraq's borders with Jordan and Syria. It was al Qaeda's chief base of operations in Iraq. Remember, when I mention al Qaeda, they're the ones who attacked the United States of America and killed nearly 3,000 people on September the 11th, 2001. They're part of the enemy. They're extremists and radicals who try to impose their view on the world.

According to a captured document -- in other words, according to something that we captured from al Qaeda -- they had hoped to set up its -- a government in Anbar. And that would have brought them closer to their stated objective of taking down Iraq's democracy, building a radical Islamic empire, and having a safe haven from which to launch attacks on Americans at home and abroad. This is what the enemy said. And I think it is vital that the United States of America listen closely to what the enemy says.

Last September, Anbar was all over the news. It was held up as an example of America's failure in Iraq. The papers 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."

About the same time some folks were writing off Anbar, our troops were methodically clearing Anbar's capital city of Ramadi of terrorists, and winning the trust of the local population. In parallel with these efforts, a group of tribal sheiks launched a movement called "The Awakening" -- and began cooperating with American and Iraqi forces. These sheiks, these leaders were tired of murder and tired of mayhem that al Qaeda had brought to their towns and communities. They knew exactly who these folks were.

To capitalize on this opportunity, I sent more Marines into Anbar. And gradually they have been helping the locals take back their province from al Qaeda.

These operations are showing good results. Our forces are going into parts of Anbar where they couldn't operate before. With the help of Iraqi and coalition forces, local Sunni tribes have driven al Qaeda from most of Ramadi -- and attacks there are now down to a two-year low. Recruiting of Iraqi police forces now draws thousands of candidates, compared to a few hundred just a few months ago. This month, Anbar opened its first police academy. And as the slide shows, overall attacks in Anbar are sharply down from this time last year.

Despite successes, Anbar province remains a dangerous place. Why? Because al Qaeda wants their base of operations back, and it is working to assassinate sheiks and intimidate the local population. We've got to prepare ourselves for more violence and more setbacks. But a province that had been written off as hopeless now enjoys a level of peace and stability that was unimaginable only a few months ago.

We are hoping to replicate the success we have had in Anbar in other parts of Iraq -- especially in areas in and around Baghdad. In the months since I announced our new strategy, we have been moving reinforcements into key Baghdad neighborhoods and the areas around the capital to help secure the population. I told you what the mission was, and that's what we're doing. Now we have launched a wider offensive, called Operation Phantom Thunder, which is taking the fight to the enemy in the capital as well as its surrounding regions. This operation focuses on defeating al Qaeda terrorists, the insurgents, and militias, denying the extremists safe havens, and breaking up their logistics, supply, and communications.

This map shows Baghdad and its surrounding areas. In January, I explained that 80 percent of Iraq's sectarian violence occurs within 30 miles of the capital. Although some of the violence that plagues Baghdad is home-grown, a good part of it originates from terrorists operating in the surrounding areas. If we can clear these strongholds of al Qaeda and death squads, we can improve life for the citizens of the areas -- and inhibit the enemy's ability to strike within the capital. And this is what Phantom Thunder is designed to do.

I am going to describe some of the operations that are unfolding in different areas around the capital:

To the north of Baghdad, our forces have surged into Diyala province. The primary focus is the provincial capital of Baqubah, which is just an hour's car ride from Baghdad. There, masked gunmen enforce their brutal rule with prisons and torture chambers and punish crimes like smoking.

In one building, our forces discovered a medical facility for the terrorists that tells us the enemy was preparing itself for a sustained and deadly fight. They had burrowed in. There was no resistance. They were trying to export their violence to the capital. Iraqi and American

troops are now fighting block by block. The colonel leading the assault says we have denied al Qaeda a major bastion. The city is cleared. The challenge, of course, is going to be for coalition and Iraqi forces to keep it that way. But we're making progress in Operation Phantom Thunder.

To the southeast of Baghdad, we are going after al Qaeda in safe havens they established along the Tigris River. These safe havens include areas like Salman Pak and Arab Jabour -- areas well known for sending car and truck bombs into Baghdad. Extremists in many of these areas are being confronted by U.S. and Iraqi forces for the first time in three years. We can expect determined resistance. They don't like to be confronted. But General Petraeus says, in order to accomplish the mission, we're going to confront them with the finest military ever assembled on the face of the Earth. That's the U.S. military. Our forces are determined, and we're going to take those safe havens away from al Qaeda and the extremists.

To the west and northwest of Baghdad, Operation Phantom Thunder is going after al Qaeda's remaining outposts in Anbar. We're taking the fight to areas around Karmah -- it's a known transit point for al Qaeda fighters. One example of what we are now seeing, U.S. and Iraqi forces in Fallujah seized 25,000 gallons of nitric acid -- a critical ingredient for car bombs and truck bombs. The deputy commander of U.S. forces west of Baghdad says we have largely succeeded in driving the terrorists out of Anbar's population centers. He says, "The surge has given us the troops we needed to really clear up those areas, so we cleared them and we stayed."

Within Baghdad itself, the surge in forces has allowed us to establish a presence in areas where the terrorists and insurgents had embedded themselves among the people. In the past two weeks alone, our troops in Baghdad have captured five militia cells. And some of the names you will be hearing in the next few months will include places like Adamiyah, Rashid, and Mansour. These areas are important, because they represent so-called sectarian fault lines -- locations where Shia extremists and al Qaeda terrorists are attempting to reignite sectarian violence through murder, and kidnappings, and other violent activities. Until these areas and others like them are secured, the people of Baghdad can't be protected; they can't go about their lives.

Right now, we're at the beginning stage of the offensive. We finally got the troops there. Americans have got to understand it takes a while to mobilize additional troops and move them from the United States to Iraq. And we got them there. And now we're beginning to move. And there are hopeful signs. Last week our commanders reported the killing of two senior al Qaeda leaders north of Baghdad -- one who operated a cell that helped move foreign fighters into Iraq, and another who served as a courier for the same cell.

Within Baghdad, our military reports that despite an upward trend in May, sectarian murders in the capital are now down substantially from what they were in January. We are finding arms caches at more than three times the rate a year ago. Although the enemy continues to carry out sensational attacks, the number of car bombings and suicide attacks has been down in May and June. And because U.S. and Iraqi forces are living among the people they secure, many Iraqis are now coming forward with information on where the terrorists are hiding.

On the ground, our forces can see the difference the surge is making. General Petraeus recently described what he called "astonishing signs of normalcy." He said that about Baghdad. He talks about professional soccer leagues, and amusement parks, and vibrant markets. In the mixed Shia-Sunni neighborhood of Rashid, our foot patrols discovered a wall with two Arabic sentences spray-painted on them. It's just a small example. It certainly didn't

get any news, but it says, "Yes, yes to the new security plan. No difference between Shia and Sunni."

The fight has been tough. It's a tough fight, and it is going to remain difficult. We have lost some good men and women. And even as our troops are showing some success in cornering and trapping al Qaeda, they face a lot of challenges. After all, the people of Iraq lived for decades under the brutal dictatorship that bred distrust. And so there's still sectarian tensions. The feelings are being exploited and they're being manipulated by outsiders. Iran, for example, continues to supply deadly IED explosives that are being used against American forces. It is also providing training in Iran, as well as funding and weapons for Iraqi militias. Meanwhile, Syria continues to be a transit station for al Qaeda and other foreign fighters on their way to Iraq.

The influx of foreign fighters and foreign support makes this job a lot tougher -- tougher on the Iraqis, tougher on our troops. We can expect more casualties as our forces enter enemy strongholds and push back against foreign interference. But General Petraeus and our commanders in Iraq have carefully laid out a plan that our forces are executing on the ground. It's a well conceived plan by smart military people, and we owe them the time and we owe them the support they need to succeed. (Applause.)

I fully agree with the military, that says this is more than a military operation. Have to be making tough decisions -- the Iraqis have got to be making tough decisions towards reconciliations. And that's why I will keep the pressure on Iraqi leaders to meet political benchmarks they laid out for themselves. At home, most of the attention has focused on important pieces of legislation that the Iraqi Parliament must pass to foster political reconciliation -- including laws to share oil revenues, hold provincial elections, and bring more people into the political process. I speak to the Prime Minister and I speak to the Presidency Council quite often, and I remind them we expect the government to function, and to pass law.

Many Americans have been frustrated by the slow pace of legislation, as have I. However, I think we ought to put the challenge into perspective. In a democracy, the head of government just can't decree the outcome. (Laughter.) I'm not saying that's what I'd like to do. (Laughter.) Some in Washington are suggesting that's what I'd like to do. The Iraqi Parliament is composed of members representing many different religions and ethnicities: Sunnis, Shia, Turkoman, Kurds, and others.

Even in a long-established democracy, it's not easy to pass important pieces of legislation in a short period of time. We're asking the Iraqis to accomplish all these things at a time when their country is being attacked. I make no excuses, we will continue to keep the pressure up. We expect there to be reconciliation. We expect them to pass law.

On the benchmarks not related to legislation, they're doing better. Prime Minister Maliki promised to provide three brigades to support the operations in Baghdad -- and he did. Iraqi leaders promised to give military commanders the authority they need to carry out our plans, and for the most part, they have. In addition, Iraqis have helped reduce sectarian violence and established joint security stations. The Iraqi Ministry of Defense is working hard to improve its logistical capabilities. It's going to spend nearly \$2 billion of its own funds this year to equip and modernize its forces. The Iraqi government appropriated \$2 billion so their force can become more modern, so their force is more ready to take the fight to the enemy.

With the help of our troops, the Iraqi security forces are growing in number, they are becoming more capable, and coming closer to the day when they can assume responsibility for defending their own country. Not all this progress is even, and we're going to keep

pressing the Iraqis to keep their commitments. Yet we must keep in mind that these benchmarks are aimed at improving life for the Iraqi people -- and that is the standard by which they should be judged.

To evaluate how life is improving for the Iraqis, we cannot look at the country only from the top down. We need to go beyond the Green Zone and look at Iraq from bottom up. This is where political reconciliation matters the most, because it is where ordinary Iraqis are deciding whether to support new Iraq or to sit on the fence, uncertain about the country's future. I'm encouraged, and more importantly, the people in Baghdad are encouraged by what we're seeing. Citizens are forming neighborhood watch groups. Young Sunnis are signing up for the army and police. Tribal sheiks are joining the fight against al Qaeda. Many Shia are rejecting the militias.

Much of the progress we are seeing is the result of the work of our Provincial Reconstruction Teams. These teams bring together military and civilian experts to help local Iraqi communities pursue reconciliation, strengthen moderates, and speed the transition to Iraqi self-reliance. PRTs in Anbar are working with Iraqi judges to restore the rule of law with new trials for terrorist detainees. The PRT in Ramadi helped the provincial council pass a budget that appropriates more than \$100 million for capital expenditures so people can begin rebuilding their province and people can begin work. PRT in Kirkuk is extending micro-loans to finance reconstruction and help stimulate job creation.

And the PRT in Ninewah has created more than 1,000 jobs through infrastructure projects that range from renovating a hospital to paving roads to building a new soccer field. This bottom-up approach to reconciliation and reconstruction is not headline-grabbing. You don't read a lot about it. But it is making a difference in the lives of Iraqi citizens, it is ongoing, and we need to make sure it continues.

We are also encouraged by the way Iraqis are responding to atrocities intended to inflame passions and provoke reprisals. In early 2006 -- things were going fine in 2005. You might remember at the end, we had an election where 12 million people showed up, an astonishing moment for the Middle East. And I frankly wasn't surprised, because I believe in the universality of freedom. I believe everybody wants to be free. That's what I believe. (Applause.)

I wasn't surprised, but I was pleased. I was pleased to hear the stories of Iraqis who got to vote, and their joy in voting. Al Qaeda wasn't pleased. As a matter of fact, they were frightened by the advance of democracy. You see, democracy is the opposite of their ideology. These folks believe something, it's just the opposite of what we believe. I remind people one of the great, precious gifts of America is the right for people to worship or not worship and be equally American; that we're all Americans -- (applause) -- that we're all Americans together, whether you're a Christian, Jew, Muslim or don't believe. It's the opposite of what al Qaeda believes. They believe if you don't worship the way they tell you to, they're likely going to kill you.

And so they didn't like the advance of democracy in 2005. And so in early 2006, they blew up the Golden Mosque in Samarra. It's one of Shia Islam's holiest sites. It set off a spiral of sectarian killing. Earlier this month, in an attack that had all the hallmarks of al Qaeda, the terrorists went back to their old playbook and blew up the minarets on the same mosque.

This time, Iraqi leaders united immediately in rejecting the attack. They took swift and aggressive actions to prevent a re-run of last year's violence. Prime Minister Maliki imposed a curfew, ordered additional security for holy places, and convened a meeting of Sunni, Shia, and Kurdish leadership. He traveled to Samarra with his Defense and Interior Ministers to

demonstrate their commitment to peace and reconciliation. Now, look, there are still some reprisals that have occurred, and it's too early to judge whether the government's efforts will be enough to prevent a spiral of violence that we saw after last year's attacks. But it is not too early to say that the response by the Iraqi leadership has been impressive -- and very different from what it was the last time around.

One reason it is different is that the Iraqis are beginning to understand that al Qaeda is the main enemy for Shia, Sunni, and Kurds alike. Al Qaeda is responsible for the most sensational killings in Iraq. They're responsible for the sensational killing on U.S. soil, and they're responsible for the sensational killings in Iraq. Here at home, we see the bloody aftermath of a suicide bombing in an Iraqi market -- and we wonder what kind of people could do that. That's what we wonder. We're good-hearted people. Our commanders tell me that 80 to 90 percent of these suicide bombings are the work of foreign fighters, people who don't like the advance of an alternative to their ideology, and they come in and murder the innocent to achieve their objectives.

And that's their strategy. Al Qaeda's strategy is to use human beings as bombs to create grisly images for the world to see. They understand that sensational images are the best way to overwhelm the quiet progress on the ground. They aim to cultivate a sense of despair about the future of a free Iraq. They hope to gain by the television screen what they cannot gain on the battlefield against U.S. and Iraqi forces.

Our success in Iraq must not be measured by the enemy's ability to get a car bombing into the evening news. No matter how good the security, terrorists will always be able to explode a bomb on a crowded street. In places like Israel, terrorists have taken innocent human life for years in similar attacks. The difference is that Israel is a functioning democracy that is not prevented from carrying out its responsibilities. And that's a good indicator of success that we're looking for in Iraq: the rise of a government that can protect its people, deliver basic services for all its citizens, and function as a democracy even amid violence.

We're involved in a broader war against these ideological killers. Iraq is just a theater in this war. The extremists under this, that if the Middle East knows -- if the Middle East know that the Iraqis succeed, it's going to be a terrible blow to their ambitions. That's what they see. But they also feel the same way about Afghanistan, where the Taliban, one-time allies of al Qaeda, is trying to murder its way back into power; or in Lebanon, where extremists are trying to bring down that nation's democratic government; or in the Palestinian territories, where terrorists have set off a suicidal war; or in Iran, where the government pursues nuclear weapons while its president declares that Israel must be wiped off the map. The stakes are high in the beginning stages of this global war against ideologues that stand for the exact opposite of what America stands for. And what makes the war even more significant is that what happens overseas matters to the security in the United States of America, as we learned on September the 11th, when killers were able to use a failed state to plot the deadly attack. And so if we withdraw before the Iraqi government can defend itself, we would yield the future of Iraq to terrorists like al Qaeda -- and we would give a green light to extremists all throughout a troubled region.

The consequences for America and the Middle East would be disastrous. In Iraq, sectarian violence would multiply on a horrific scale. Fighting could engulf the entire region in chaos. We would soon face a Middle East dominated by Islamic extremists who would pursue nuclear weapons, who would use their control of oil for economic blackmail, and who would be in a position to launch new attacks on the United States of America. September the 11th, we saw how a failed state, like I'd just told you, can affect the security at home. And so for the sake of our own security, for the sake of the security of the United States of America, the

United States must stand with millions of moms and dads throughout the Middle East who want a future of dignity and peace, and we must help them defeat a common enemy.

No one understands that better than the men and women in uniform. It is a huge honor to be the Commander-in-Chief of such a noble group of men and women. (Applause.) Our military is not only great, it's good, good-hearted people, all volunteers, who said, I want to serve in the face of danger. It's a remarkable country that can produce such good men and women.

I think of a fellow named Cory Endlich. Cory was an Ohio boy who wanted to join the Army so badly that his dad let him start training his senior year of high school. He was deployed to Iraq. It tells you something about his character that when his mom asked him if he needed anything, he said the only things he asked for -- she said the only things he asked for were coloring books, crayons, and candy for the Iraqi children he had befriended. Earlier this month, he was killed. Here's what his dad said: "He felt the war was justified and wanted to be there." That's what his dad said. "I am proud of him and the job he is doing." And so am I. (Applause.)

Thank you all. I know you will join me in asking a loving God to hold the families of those who have lost a loved one in His loving hand. We resolve to honor their sacrifice by finishing the work they have begun. That's the task ahead of us. And when we do, we'll see a true legacy of a man like Sergeant Endlich: a dawn of a new Middle East where leaders are at peace with their own people, where children enjoy the opportunities their parents only dreamed of, and where America has new allies in the cause of freedom.

Thanks for letting me come today. God bless your work, and God bless our country. (Applause.)

Thank you all. Be seated. I've enjoyed my stay so much, I thought I might answer some questions -- (laughter) -- if you've got any, particularly from the students who might be curious. Yes, sir. You're the guy. Are you the mic man, or are you the questioner? Well, you're the questioner. Mic man, okay. Yes, sir.

Q Mr. President, it was my great privilege to be a representative of the Royal Navy here at the Naval Command College class of 1994. It's a huge privilege, clearly, to be here today, as well. We support and admire your country's commitment and sacrifice in Iraq, Afghanistan and around the world in the war on terror. But it strikes me that what you described today is very much a land-orientated campaign. What, if any, impact is that land campaign focus likely to have on your propensity to invest in a maritime strategy in the future, please?

THE PRESIDENT: Yes, thanks. Yes. (Laughter.) Now who exactly invited you here? (Laughter.) Thank you, sir. Never mind, just kidding. (Laughter.) It is a land-based campaign, because that's where the enemy is. They hide in caves, and they hide in remote regions, and they try to destabilize countries. They try to create chaos. You've got to understand, chaos is the friend of these radicals. The more chaos there is, the more likely it is they'll be able to find a place to roost.

I know some people in our country just have trouble believing that they want to strike us again, but they do. That's what I live with every day. That's what Presidents do, they think about the threats, and they deal with them. And my attitude has been, let's keep the pressure on them. And the nation is going to have to do that. We're going to have to continually press. This means good intelligence, good special ops, working with allies like Great Britain -- who have been a fantastic country to work with, by the way, just got to pressure them. It's hard to plan and plot when you're on the move. And it takes a lot of work. It takes a lot of diplomacy,

it takes a lot of military action, it takes a lot of good intel, and it's going to take a lot of determination by the United States.

In the meantime, we're going through a transformation of our forces. And one of the most transformative branches has been the Navy. It's amazing how the Navy has been able to accomplish more with less. Perhaps that's what you've been able to -- that's less manpower, more mission, better use of equipment, the capacity to manage manpower better. No question we're increasing our army and Marines, which some claim is part of the Navy -- (laughter) -- he doesn't claim it, yes. (Laughter.) Well, we're not going there.

But our Navy is modern, and we'll keep it that way. The main thing for militaries, as we head into the 21st century, is constantly adjust to meet threat. And we've got a lot of money in our budget, and I hope that this new Congress keeps it that way for the Navy, as well as the rest of the military. It's really important. And it's important we continue to transform and become more interoperable. And that's really the challenge I presume you're studying this year at the university. Part of the strategic thought for our military is interoperability. And we're becoming much better at it -- at least that's what the commanders tell me. And that's important.

By the way, named a Navy man today, sent his name up to the Senate for confirmation as the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, Admiral Mullen; and Vice Chairman is going to be a Marine named "Hoss" Cartwright. They understand the need to continue to wage this war, and also to transform our military to meet the threats of the 21st century. And we're doing it.

One of the major transformative events we have done is we have begun to reposition our troops in Europe. The Cold War is over, it ended. And therefore the troop posture doesn't need to be the way it has been throughout the '50s, '60s and '70s. That's transformative. That also frees up money for capital investment, as well as different places where -- let me just say, the capacity to base out of home is going to save us a lot of money and save you a lot of wear and tear.

The volunteer army only works well if we take care of the wives and husbands; the spouses. (Applause.) And one way to do that is to reposition our forces to meet the threats of the 21st century. Well, it turns out, in many times -- it means they have to be based here, and be then in a capacity to move quickly to deal with the threats...