

Remarks to Wilson Center
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THE PRESIDENT
HAS SEEN
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Thank you for that warm welcome.

I am delighted to be here with the men and
women of the Wilson Center.

According to
your mission statement, the Center was

created to bring together two groups –

political leaders and scholars.

I look around,
and I see a lot of political leaders.

I assume
you've invited me here to hold up the

scholars' end.

I have come to discuss an issue of vital
importance to the American people: Victory
in the war on terror. On September 11,
2001, our Nation awoke to a sudden attack
– and we accepted new responsibilities.
We are confronting new dangers with new
resolve. We are hunting down the terrorists
and their supporters. We will fight this war
without wavering – and we will prevail.

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In the war on terror, Iraq is now the
central front – and over the last few weeks,
I have been discussing our political,
economic, and military strategy for victory in
that country. | A historic election will take
place tomorrow in Iraq. | And as millions of
Iraqis prepare to cast their ballots, I will talk
today about why we went into Iraq ...
why we have stayed in Iraq ... and why we
cannot – and will not – leave Iraq until
victory is achieved.

Acknowledgments

- Ambassador Joe Gildenhorn,
Chairman, Board of Trustees,
Woodrow Wilson Center (introduced you)
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(D-IN), President and Director,
Woodrow Wilson Center
(former Vice Chairman, 9/11 Commission)

- Secretary Condi Rice,
Department of State
- Secretary Don Rumsfeld,
Department of Defense
- ~~Attorney General Al Gonzales~~,
~~Department of Justice~~
- Secretary Mike Chertoff,
Department of Homeland Security

- ~~Congressman Pete Hookstra (R-MI),~~
~~Chairman, House Permanent Select~~
~~Committee on Intelligence~~
- ~~Other~~ Members of Congress
- Members of the Diplomatic Corps

We are living through a watershed
moment in the story of freedom. Most of
the focus now is on this week's elections –
and rightly so. Iraqis will go to the polls to
choose a government that will be the only
constitutional democracy in the Arab world.
Yet we need to remember that these
elections are also a vital part of a broader
strategy for protecting the American people
against the threat of terrorism.

We saw the future the terrorists intend
for our Nation on the morning of September
11, 2001. That day we learned that vast
oceans and friendly neighbors are no
longer enough to protect us.

September 11th changed our country – and

it changed the policy of our government.

We adopted a new strategy to protect the

American people: We would hunt down the

terrorists wherever they hide ... we would

make no distinction between the terrorists

and those who harbor them ... and we

would advance our security at home by

advancing freedom in the Middle East.

September 11th also changed the way I
viewed threats like Saddam Hussein. We
saw the destruction terrorists could cause
with airplanes loaded with jet fuel – and we
imagined the destruction they could cause
with even more powerful weapons.

At the time, the leaders of both political
parties recognized this new reality:

We cannot allow the world's most
dangerous men to get their hands on the
world's most dangerous weapons.

In an age of terrorism and weapons of
mass destruction, if we wait for threats to
fully materialize, we will have waited too
long.

We removed Saddam Hussein from
power because he was a threat to our
security. / He had pursued and used
weapons of mass destruction. / He
sponsored terrorists. / He ordered his
military to shoot at American and British
pilots patrolling the no-fly zones. / He
invaded his neighbors, and fought a war
against America and a great Coalition. / He
had declared the United States
to be his enemy.

Over the course of a decade,
Saddam Hussein refused to comply with
more than a dozen United Nations
resolutions – including demands that he
respect the rights of the Iraqi people,
disclose his weapons, and abide by the
terms of the 1991 ceasefire. He deceived
international inspectors – and denied them
the unconditional access they needed to do
their jobs.

And when a unanimous Security Council
gave him one last chance to disclose and
disarm – or face serious consequences –
he refused that final opportunity. | At any
point along the way, Saddam could have
avoided war by complying with the just
demands of the international community. |
The United States did not choose war –
the choice of war was Saddam's.

When we made the decision to go into
Iraq, many intelligence agencies around the
world judged that Saddam possessed
weapons of mass destruction.

This judgment was shared by the
intelligence agencies of governments who
did not support our decision to remove
Saddam. It is true that much of the
intelligence turned out to be wrong.

As President, I am responsible for the
decision to go into Iraq – and I am
responsible for fixing what went wrong by
reforming our intelligence capabilities, and
we are doing that.

At the same time, we must remember that
an investigation after the war by chief
weapons inspector Charles Duelfer found
that Saddam was using the UN oil-for-food
program to influence countries and
companies in an effort to undermine
sanctions – with the intent of restarting his
weapons programs once the sanctions
collapsed and the world looked away.

Given Saddam's history and the lessons of
September 11, my decision to remove
Saddam Hussein was the right decision.
Saddam was a threat – and the American
people are safer, and the world is better off,
because he is no longer in power.

We are in Iraq today because our goal
has always been more than the removal of
a brutal dictatorship – it is to leave a free
and democratic Iraq in its place / As I stated
in a speech in the lead up to the war, a
liberated Iraq could show the power of
freedom to transform the Middle East by
bringing hope and progress to the lives of
millions.

So we are helping the people of Iraq build a
lasting democracy that is peaceful,
prosperous, and an example for the
broader Middle East. | The terrorists
understand this – and that is why they have
now made Iraq the central front in the war
on terror.

OF Freedom

The enemy in Iraq is a combination of
rejectionists, Saddamists, and terrorists.

The rejectionists are ordinary Iraqis, mostly
Sunni Arabs, who miss the privileged status
they had under the regime of Saddam
Hussein. 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 are encouraged by
the indications that many Sunnis intend to
participate in this week's elections.

The Saddamists are former regime
loyalists who harbor dreams of returning to
power – and they are 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 the security
forces of a free Iraq.

The terrorists affiliated with or inspired
by al-Qaeda are the smallest but most
lethal group. 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 want to stop the advance of
freedom. They want to make Iraq what
Afghanistan was under the Taliban –
a safe haven from which they can plot
attacks against our people.

There is no limit to their brutality. They kill
the innocent to achieve their aims. This is
an enemy without conscience – and against
such an enemy, there is only one effective
response: We will never back down, we will
never give in, and we will never accept
anything less than complete victory.

Last month, my Administration released
a document called the "National Strategy
for Victory in Iraq" – and in recent weeks, I
have been discussing our strategy with the
American people.

At the U.S. Naval Academy,

I spoke about how we changed our

approach to training the Iraqi Security Forces

~~Forces~~, so they can take the fight to the

enemy and eventually take responsibility for

the security of their citizens without major

foreign assistance. | Iraqi forces are

becoming more and more capable.

At this time last year, there were only a
handful of Iraqi battalions ready for combat.
Now, there are more than 125 Iraqi Army
and Police combat battalions in the fight
against the terrorists – typically comprised
of between 350 and 800 Iraqi forces.

Of these, more than 70 Iraqi battalions are
fighting side-by-side with coalition forces,
and more than 50 others are taking the lead
in the fight. So far in December, there have
been more than 900 combat operations in
Iraq at the company level or above – and
75 percent of these involved Iraqi Security
Forces either in the lead or fighting side by
side with our Coalition.

As these Iraqi forces grow in size and strength, American and Coalition forces can concentrate on training Iraqis, and hunting down high-value targets like the terrorist Zarqawi and his associates.

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Last week before the Council on Foreign
Relations, I explained how we changed our
approach to help Iraqis hold and rebuild
cities taken from the enemy – and revitalize
Iraq's infrastructure and economy.

^{MANY}
Today cities like Mosul and Najaf are
coming back to life – and Iraq's economy is
growing. Thousands of new businesses
have opened in Iraq. Personal income is
up. And according to one survey,
seven in 10 Iraqis say their own lives are
going well, and nearly two-thirds expect
things to improve in the year ahead.

Earlier this week at the Philadelphia
World Affairs Council, I spoke in depth
about how we changed our approach to
helping the Iraqis build their democracy. At
the request of Iraqi leaders, we accelerated
the transition to Iraqi self-government.

We set four major milestones to guide Iraq's

transition to a constitutional democracy:

The transfer of sovereignty ... elections for

a transitional government ... the adoption of

a democratic constitution ... and elections

for a new government under that

constitution.

In spite of the violence, Iraqis have met every milestone – and this is changing the political landscape in Iraq. Sunni Arabs who failed to participate in the January elections are now campaigning vigorously in this week's elections – and we expect a higher turnout of Sunni voters. As Sunnis join the political process, Iraqi democracy is becoming more inclusive – and the terrorists and Saddamists are becoming marginalized.

Each of the changes we have made in
our approach in Iraq is helping us meet the
hard realities and facts on the ground. We
have adapted our tactics ... we have fixed
what was not working ... and we have
listened to those who know best: our
military commanders – and the Iraqi people.

Our tactics continue to change, but our
goal in Iraq has not changed – a free and
democratic Iraq. I strongly believe that a
democratic Iraq is a crucial part of our
strategy to defeat the terrorists – because
only democracy can bring freedom and
reconciliation to Iraq and peace to this
troubled part of the world.

Our efforts to advance freedom in Iraq are
driven by our vital interests and our deepest
beliefs. America was founded on the
principle that all men are created equal –
and we believe that the people of the
Middle East desire freedom as much as we
do. History has shown that free nations are
peaceful nations. And ^{as} ~~when~~ Iraqi
democracy takes hold, Iraqi citizens will
have a stake in a common and peaceful
future.

As we advance the cause of freedom in
Iraq, our Nation can proceed with
confidence – because we have done this
work before. After World War II,
President Truman believed that the best
way to help bring peace and prosperity to
Asia was to plant the seeds of freedom and
democracy in Japan.

Like today, there were many skeptics and
pessimists, who said that the Japanese
were not ready for democracy. Fortunately,
President Truman did not listen to them.
He believed, as I do, in freedom's power to
transform an adversary into an ally.

And because he stayed true to this

conviction, today Japan is one of the

world's freest and most prosperous nations

– and one of America's closest allies. The

in keeping the peace

spread of freedom to Iraq and the Middle

East requires the same confidence and

persistence – and it will lead to the same

results.

The people of Iraq are now seeing some
of the tangible benefits of their new
democracy. They see that as freedom
advances, their lives are improving. Iraqis
have approved 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.

They see their freedom increasingly being
defended by their own soldiers and police –
instead of foreign forces. | And they see that
freedom is bringing opportunity and a better
life. | The Iraqis still face many challenges,
including security, reconstruction, and
economic reform.

But they are building a strong democracy
that can handle these challenges – and that
will be a new model for the Middle East.

Freedom in Iraq will inspire reformers from
Damascus to Tehran. This new Iraq shares
our deepest values – and it shares our most
determined enemies. By helping Iraqis
build a new nation that can govern itself,
sustain itself, and defend itself, we will gain
an ally in the war on terror – and a partner
for peace in the Middle East.

The stakes in Iraq are high – and we will
not leave until victory has been achieved.

Today there is intense debate about the
importance of Iraq to the war on terror. | The
constant headlines about car bombings and
killings have led some to ask whether our
presence in Iraq has made America less
secure. | This view presumes that if we were
not in Iraq, the terrorists would be leaving
us alone. | The reality is that the terrorists
have been targeting Americans for years –
long before we ever set foot in Iraq.

We were not in Iraq in 1993, when the
terrorists tried to blow up the World Trade
Center in New York. We were not in Iraq in
1998, when the terrorists bombed our
embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. We
were not in Iraq in 2000, when the terrorists
killed 17 American sailors aboard the
USS Cole. And there was not a single
American soldier in Iraq on September 11,
2001 – when the terrorists murdered nearly
three thousand people in the worst attack
on our home soil since Pearl Harbor.

These acts are part of a grand strategy
by the terrorists. Their stated objective is to
drive U.S. and Coalition forces out of the
Middle East – so they can gain control of
Iraq and use that country 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.

Hear the words of the terrorists. In a letter
to the terrorist leader Zarqawi, the al Qaeda
leader Zawahiri has outlined plans that will
unfold in several stages: Quote, "... Expel
the Americans from Iraq. ... Establish an
Islamic authority over as much territory as
you can to spread its power in Iraq...
Extend the jihad wave to the secular
countries neighboring Iraq." End quote.

To achieve these goals, the terrorists
are targeting innocent men, women, and
children. The enemy has only one weapon
~~the~~ their ability to create chaos for the
cameras with spectacular acts of violence.
They know they cannot defeat us militarily.

So they are trying to break our will in the
hopes of getting America to leave the
battlefield early -- and they cite Vietnam as
a reason they can prevail. | Zawahiri 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. There is only one way

the terrorists can prevail: If we lose our

nerve and leave before the job is done.

That will not happen on my watch.

Some in Washington are calling for a
rapid and complete withdrawal of our forces
in Iraq. They say that our presence there is
the cause of instability in Iraq – and that the
answer is to set a deadline to withdraw.
without regard to conditions on the ground.

I disagree. I have listened carefully to all
the arguments – and there are four reasons
why I believe that setting an artificial
deadline would be a recipe for disaster.

First, setting an artificial deadline would
send the wrong message to the Iraqis. / As
Iraqis are risking their lives for democracy,
it would tell them that America is more
interested in leaving than helping them
succeed. / And it would put at risk all of the
democratic progress they have made over
the past year.

Second, setting an artificial deadline
would send the wrong message to the
enemy. It would tell them that if they wait
long enough, America will cut and run. It
would vindicate the terrorists' tactics of
beheadings and suicide bombings and
mass murder. And it would embolden the
terrorists and invite new attacks on
America.

Third, setting an artificial deadline would
send the wrong message to the region and
to the world. It would tell our friends and
supporters that America is a weak and
unreliable ally – and that when the going
gets tough, America will retreat.

Finally, setting an artificial deadline
would send the wrong message to the most
important audience: our troops on the front
lines. | It would tell them that America is
abandoning the mission they are risking
their lives to achieve – and that the sacrifice
of their comrades killed in this struggle has
been in vain. | I make this pledge to the
families of the fallen: We will carry on their
fight ... we will complete their mission
... and we will win.

Victory will be achieved by meeting
certain ~~clear~~ objectives: when the terrorists
and Saddamists can no longer threaten
Iraq's democracy ... when the Iraqi Security
Forces can protect their own people ... and
when Iraq is not a safe haven for terrorists
to plot new attacks against our Nation.

These objectives, not timelines set by
politicians in Washington, will drive our
force levels in Iraq. As Iraqis stand up, we
will stand down. And when victory is
achieved, our troops will come home with
the honor they have earned.

One of the blessings of our free society
is that we can debate these issues openly,
even in a time of war. Most of the debate
has been a credit to our democracy – but
some have launched irresponsible charges.
They say that we are in Iraq because of oil
... because of Israel ... or because we
misled the American people.

Some of the most irresponsible comments
about manipulating intelligence have come
from politicians who saw the same
intelligence we saw – and then voted to
authorize the use of force against Saddam
Hussein. These charges are pure politics –
and they hurt the morale of our troops.

Whatever our differences in Washington,
our men and women in uniform deserve to
know that once our politicians vote to send
them into harm's way, our support will be
there on good days and bad – and we will
settle for nothing less than complete victory.

Before this victory comes, we still have
difficult work ahead. | We have made real
progress in the past two and a half years.
The terrorists see this progress, and they
are determined to stop it. | These enemies
are not going to give up because of a
successful election. | They know that as
democracy takes root in Iraq, their hateful
ideology will suffer a devastating blow. | So
we can expect violence to continue.

We can also expect that the elections
will be followed by days of uncertainty.

We may not know for certain who has won
the elections until the early part of January
– and even after the results are known, it
will take some time for a government to
form.

The work ahead will require the patience of
the Iraqi people – and it will require our
patience as well. Yet we must remember
that a free Iraq is in our interests, because
a free Iraq will be a beacon of hope and
freedom in the Middle East. And as the
Middle East grows in liberty, the American
people will be safer and our Nation will be
more secure.

The work ahead will also require
continued sacrifice. Yet we can be
confident, because history has shown the
power of freedom to overcome terror and
tyranny. We can be confident because we
have on our side the greatest force for
freedom in human history: the men and
women of the United States Armed Forces.

One of these men was a
Marine lieutenant named Ryan McGlothlin,
from Lebanon, Virginia. Ryan was a bright
young man who had everything going for
him and always wanted to serve his Nation.
He was valedictorian of his high school
class ... he graduated from William & Mary
with a near-perfect grade average ... and
he was on a full scholarship at Stanford,
where he was working toward a doctorate
in chemistry.

Two years

After the attacks of September the 11th,

the young man who had the world at his
feet came home from Stanford for a visit.

He told his dad, "I just don't feel like I'm
doing something that matters. I want to
serve my country. I want to protect our
lands from terrorists, so I joined the
Marines."

When his father asked if there were some
other way to serve, Ryan replied that he felt
a special obligation to step up, because he
had been given so much. Ryan did not
support me in the last election – but he
supported our mission in Iraq. And he
supported his fellow Marines.

Ryan was killed last month fighting the
terrorists near Iraq's Syrian border. In his
pocket was a poem that Ryan had read at
his high school graduation, and it
represented the spirit of this fine Marine.
The poem was called "Don't Quit."

In our fight to keep America free, we will
never quit. We have lost wonderful
Americans like Ryan McGlothlin. We
cherish the memory of each one ... we
bring to
comfort the loved ones they have left
behind ... and we count it a privilege to be
citizens of the country they served.

We also honor them by acknowledging that
their sacrifice has brought us to this
moment: The birth of a free and sovereign
Iraqi nation that will be a friend of the
United States, and a force for good in a
troubled region of the world.

The story of freedom has just begun in
the Middle East. And when the history of
these days is written, it will tell how America
once again defended its own freedom by
using liberty to transform nations from bitter
foes to strong allies ... and history will say
that this generation, like generations before,
laid the foundation of peace for future
generations.

Thank you. God bless you all. And may
God continue to bless the United States of
America.