staff at the White House and upon all public buildings and grounds, at all military posts and naval stations, and on all naval vessels of the Federal Government in the District of Columbia and throughout the United States and its Territories and possessions until sunset on such day. I also direct that the flag shall be flown at half-staff for the same period at all United States embassies, legations, consular offices, and other facilities abroad, including all military facilities and naval vessels and stations.

In Witness Whereof, I have hereunto set my hand this twelfth day of July, in the year of our Lord two thousand seven, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and thirty-second.

George W. Bush

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NOTE: This proclamation will be published in the *Federal Register* on July 17.

The President's News Conference
July 12, 2007

The President. Good morning. Thank you. Yesterday America lost an extraordinary First Lady and a fine Texan, Lady Bird Johnson. She brought grace to the White House and beauty to our country. On behalf of the American people, Laura and I send our condolences to her daughters, Linda and Luci, and we offer our prayers to the Johnson family.

Before I answer some of your questions, today I'd like to provide the American people with an update on the situation in Iraq. Since America began military operations in Iraq, the conflict there has gone through four major phases. The first phase was the liberation of Iraq from Saddam Hussein. The second phase was the return of sovereignty to the Iraqi people and the holding of free elections. The third phase was the tragic escalation of sectarian violence sparked by the bombing of the Golden Mosque in Samarra.

We've entered a fourth phase: deploying reinforcements and launching new operations to help Iraqis bring security to their people. I'm going to explain why the success of this new strategy is vital for protecting our people and bringing our troops home, which is a goal shared by all Americans. I'll brief you on the report we are sending to Congress. I'll discuss why a drawdown of forces that is not linked to the success of our operations would be a disaster.

As President, my most solemn responsibility is to keep the American people safe. So on my orders, good men and women are now fighting the terrorists on the frontlines in Iraq. I've given our troops in Iraq clear objectives. And as they risk their lives to achieve these objectives, they need to know they have the unwavering support from the Commander in Chief, and they do. And they need the enemy to know that America is not going to back down. So when I speak to the American people about Iraq, I often emphasize the importance of maintaining our resolve and meeting our objectives.

As a result, sometimes the debate over Iraq is cast as a disagreement between those who want to keep our troops in Iraq and those who want to bring our troops home. And this is not the real debate. I don't know anyone who doesn't want to see the day when our brave service men and women can start coming home.

In my address to the Nation in January, I put it this way: If we increase our support at this crucial moment, we can hasten the day our troops begin coming home. The real debate over Iraq is between those who think the fight is lost or not worth the cost and those who believe the fight can be won and that, as difficult as the fight is, the cost of defeat would be far higher.

I believe we can succeed in Iraq, and I know we must. So we're working to defeat Al Qaida and other extremists and aid the rise of an Iraqi Government that can protect its people, deliver basic services, and be an ally in the war against these extremists and radicals. By doing this, we'll create the conditions that would allow our troops to begin coming home, while securing our long-term national interest in Iraq and in the region.

When we start drawing down our forces in Iraq, it will because our military commanders say the conditions on the ground are right, not because pollsters say it will be good politics. The strategy I announced in

January is designed to seize the initiative and create those conditions. It's aimed at helping the Iraqis strengthen their Government so that it can function even amid violence. It seeks to open space for Iraq's political leaders to advance the difficult process of national reconciliation, which is essential to lasting security and stability. It is focused on applying sustained military pressure to rout out terrorist networks in Baghdad and surrounding areas. It is committed to using diplomacy to strengthen regional and international support for Iraq's democratic Government.

But doing all these things is intended to make possible a more limited role in Iraq for the United States. It's the goal outlined by the bipartisan Iraq Study Group. It's the goal shared by the Iraqis and our coalition partners. It is the goal that Ambassador Crocker and General Petraeus and our troops are working hard to make a reality.

Our top priority is to help the Iraqis protect their population. So we have launched an offensive in and around Baghdad to go after extremists, to buy more time for Iraqi forces to develop, and to help normal life and civil society take root in communities and neighborhoods throughout the country.

We're helping enhance the size, capabilities, and effectiveness of the Iraqi security forces so the Iraqis can take over the defense of their own country. We're helping the Iraqis take back their neighborhoods from the extremists. In Anbar Province, Sunni tribes that were once fighting alongside Al Qaida against our coalition are now fighting alongside our coalition against Al Qaida. We're working to replicate the success in Anbar and other parts of the country.

Two months ago, in the supplemental appropriations bill funding our troops, Congress established 18 benchmarks to gauge the progress of the Iraqi Government. They required we submit a full report to Congress by September the 15th. Today my administration has submitted to Congress an interim report that requires us to assess—and I quote the bill—"whether satisfactory progress toward meeting these benchmarks is or is not being achieved."

Of the 18 benchmarks Congress asked us to measure, we can report that satisfactory progress is being made in 8 areas. For example, Iraqis provided the three brigades they promised for operations in and around Baghdad. And the Iraqi Government is spending nearly $7.3 billion from its own funds this year to train, equip, and modernize its forces. In eight other areas, the Iraqis have much more work to do. For example, they have not done enough to prepare for local elections or pass a law to share oil revenues. And in two remaining areas, progress was too mixed to be characterized one way or the other.

Those who believe that the battle in Iraq is lost will likely point to the unsatisfactory performance on some of the political benchmarks. Those of us who believe the battle in Iraq can and must be won see the satisfactory performance on several of the security benchmarks as a cause for optimism. Our strategy is built on a premise that progress on security will pave the way for political progress. So it's not surprising that political progress is lagging behind the security gains we are seeing. Economic development funds are critical to helping Iraq make this political progress. Today I'm exercising the waiver authority granted me by Congress to release a substantial portion of those funds.

The bottom line is that this is a preliminary report, and it comes less than a month after the final reinforcements arrived in Iraq. This September, as Congress has required, General Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker will return to Washington to provide a more comprehensive assessment. By that time, we hope to see further improvement in the positive areas, the beginning of improvement in the negative areas. We'll also have a clearer picture of how the new strategy is unfolding and be in a better position to judge where we need to make any adjustments.

I will rely on General Petraeus to give me his recommendations for the appropriate troop levels in Iraq. I will discuss the recommendation with the Secretary of Defense and the Joint Chiefs of Staff. I will continue consultations with Members of the United States Congress from both sides of the aisle, and then I'll make a decision.

I know some in Washington would like us to start leaving Iraq now. To begin withdrawing before our commanders tell us we are ready would be dangerous for Iraq, for

the region, and for the United States. It would mean surrendering the future of Iraq to Al Qaida. It would mean that we'd be risking mass killings on a horrific scale. It would mean we'd allow the terrorists to establish a safe haven in Iraq to replace the one they lost in Afghanistan. It would mean increasing the probability that American troops would have to return at some later date to confront an enemy that is even more dangerous.

The fight in Iraq is part of a broader struggle that's unfolding across the region. The same region in Iran—the same regime in Iran that is pursuing nuclear weapons and threatening to wipe Israel off the map is also providing sophisticated IEDs to extremists in Iraq who are using them to kill American soldiers. The same Hizballah terrorists who are waging war against the forces of democracy in Lebanon are training extremists to do the same against coalition forces in Iraq. The same Syrian regime that provides support and sanctuary for Islamic Jihad and Hamas has refused to close its airport in Damascus to suicide bombers headed to Iraq. All these extremist groups would be emboldened by a precipitous American withdrawal, which would confuse and frighten friends and allies in the region.

Nations throughout the Middle East have a stake in a stable Iraq. To protect our interests and to show our commitment to our friends in the region, we are enhancing our military presence, improving our bilateral security ties, and supporting those fighting the extremists across the Middle East. We're also using the tools of diplomacy to strengthen regional and international support for Iraq's democratic Government.

So I'm sending Secretary Gates and Secretary Rice to the region in early August. They will meet with our allies, reemphasize our commitment to the International Compact of Sharm el-Sheikh, reassure our friends that the Middle East remains a vital strategic priority for the United States.

There is a conversion of visions between what Iraqi leaders want, what our partners want, and what our friends in the region want and the vision articulated by my administration, the Iraq Study Group, and others here at home. The Iraqis do not want U.S. troops patrolling their cities forever, any more than the American people do. But we need to ensure that when U.S. forces do pull back, that terrorists and extremists cannot take control.

The strategy that General Petraeus and the troops he commands are now carrying out is the best opportunity to bring us to this point. So I ask Congress to provide them with the time and resources they need. The men and women of the United States military have made enormous sacrifices in Iraq. They have achieved great things, and the best way to begin bringing them home is to make sure our new strategy succeeds.

And now I'll be glad to answer a few questions, starting with Ms. Thomas [Helen Thomas, Hearst Newspapers].

War on Terror in Iraq

Q. Mr. President, you started this war, a war of your choosing, and you can end it alone, today, at this point—bring in peacekeepers, U.N. peacekeepers. Two million Iraqis have fled their country as refugees. Two million more are displaced. Thousands and thousands are dead. Don't you understand, you brought the Al Qaida into Iraq.

The President. Actually, I was hoping to solve the Iraqi issue diplomatically. That's why I went to the United Nations and worked with the United Nations Security Council, which unanimously passed a resolution that said disclose, disarm, or face serious consequences. That was the message, the clear message to Saddam Hussein. He chose the course.

Q. But didn't we go into Iraq——

The President. It was his decision to make. Obviously, it was a difficult decision for me to make, to send our brave troops, along with coalition troops, into Iraq. I firmly believe the world is better off without Saddam Hussein in power. Now the fundamental question facing America is, will we stand with this young democracy? Will we help them achieve stability? Will we help them become an ally in this war against extremists and radicals that is not only evident in Iraq, but it's evident in Lebanon, the Palestinian Territories, and Afghanistan?

We're at the beginning stages of a great ideological conflict between those who yearn for peace and those who want their children to grow up in a normal, decent society and

radicals and extremists who want to impose their dark vision on people throughout the world. Iraq is obviously—Helen, it's got the attention of the American people, as it should. This is a difficult war, and it's a tough war. But as I have consistently stated throughout this Presidency, it is a necessary war to secure our peace.

I find it interesting that as this young democracy has taken hold, radicals and extremists kill innocent people to stop its advance. And that ought to be a clear signal to the American people that these are dangerous people. And their ambition is not just contained to Iraq; their ambition is to continue to hurt the American people. My attitude is, we ought to defeat them there so we don't have to face them here, and that we ought to defeat their ideology with a more hopeful form of government.

Terry [Terence Hunt, Associated Press].

Congressional Opinion on Iraq

Q. Mr. President, you're facing a rebellion from Republican—key Republican Senators who want you to change course and begin reducing the U.S. combat role. Given the mixed report that you present today, how do you persuade Republicans to stick with you as they look ahead to the next elections?

The President. A couple of things—first of all, I respect those Republicans that you're referring to. I presume you're referring to friends of mine, like Lugar—or Senator Lugar, Domenici, yes. These are good, honorable people. I've spoken to them, and I listen very carefully to what they have to say.

First of all, they share my concern that a precipitous withdrawal would embolden Al Qaida. And they also understand that we can't let Al Qaida gain safe haven inside of Iraq. I appreciate their calls, and I appreciate their desire to work with the White House to be in a position where we can sustain a presence in Iraq.

What I tell them is this—just what I've told you—is that as the Commander in Chief of the greatest military ever, I have an obligation, a sincere and serious obligation, to hear out my commander on the ground. And I will take his recommendation, and as I mentioned, to talk to Bob Gates about it, as well as the Joint Chiefs about it, as well as consult with Members of the Congress, both Republicans and Democrats, as I make a decision about the way forward in Iraq.

And so I—you know, I value the advice of those Senators. I appreciate their concerns about the situation in Iraq, and I am going to continue listening to them.

Toby [Tabassum Zakaria, Reuters].

Public Opinion on Iraq/Progress in Iraq

Q. Mr. President, in addition to members of your own party, the American public is clamoring for a change of course in Iraq. Why are you so resistant to that idea, and how much longer are you willing to give the surge to work before considering a change in this policy?

The President. First, I understand why the American people are—you know, they're tired of the war. There is—people are—there is a war fatigue in America. It's affecting our psychology. I've said this before. I understand that this is an ugly war. It's a war in which an enemy will kill innocent men, women, and children in order to achieve a political objective. It doesn't surprise me that there is deep concern amongst our people.

Part of that concern is whether or not we can win, whether or not the objective is achievable. People don't want our troops in harm's way if that which we are trying to achieve can't be accomplished. I feel the same way. I cannot look a mother and father of a troop in the eye and say, "I'm sending your kid into combat, but I don't think we can achieve the objective." I wouldn't do that to a parent or a husband or a wife of a soldier.

I believe we can succeed, and I believe we are making security progress that will enable the political tract to succeed as well. And the report, by the way, which is, as accurately noted, is being submitted today, is written a little less than a month after the full complement of troops arrived.

I went to the country in January and said, I have made this decision. I said what was happening on the ground was unsatisfactory in Iraq. In consultation with a lot of folks, I came to the conclusion that we needed to send more troops into Iraq, not less in order to provide stability, in order to be able to enhance the security of the people there. And David asked for a certain number of

troops—David Petraeus asked for a certain number—General Petraeus asked for a certain number of troops, and he just got them a couple of weeks ago.

Military—it takes awhile to move our troops, as the experts know. You just can't load them all in one airplane or one big ship and get them into theater. We had to stage the arrival of our troops. And after they arrived in Iraq, it took awhile to get them into their missions. Since the reinforcements arrived, things have changed.

For example, I would remind you that Anbar Province was considered lost. Maybe some of you reported that last fall. And yet today, because of what we call bottom-up reconciliation, Anbar Province has changed dramatically. The same thing is now beginning to happen in Diyala Province. There are neighborhoods in Baghdad where violence is down. There are still car bombs, most of which have the Al Qaida signature on them, but they're declining. In other words, so there's some measurable progress.

And you asked, how long does one wait? I will repeat, as the Commander in Chief of a great military who has supported this military and will continue to support this military, not only with my—with insisting that we get resources to them but with—by respecting the command structure, I'm going to wait for David to come back—David Petraeus to come back and give us the report on what he sees. And then we'll use that data that—his report to work with the rest of the military chain of command and Members of Congress to make another decision if need be.

Yes, Martha [Martha Raddatz, ABC News].

War on Terror Strategy

Q. You talk about all the troops now being in place and only in place the last 3 weeks or a month. Yet three-quarters of the troops for the surge were in place during the period when this July interim report was written. Are you willing to keep the surge going, no matter what General Petraeus says, if there is no substantial Iraqi political progress by September?

The President. Thank you. You're asking me to speculate on what my frame of mind will be in September, and I would just ask that you give General Petraeus to come back and brief me. And then, of course, I'll be glad to answer your questions along that line.

Q. But there has been no substantial political progress, even with three-quarters of the troops in there.

The President. Well, as I mentioned——

Q. So will you keep that going through September even if there isn't?

The President. Martha, as I mentioned in my opening remarks, we have felt all along that the security situation needed to change in order for there to be political progress. It's very hard for a young democracy to function with the violence that was raging. Secondly, there's a lot of the past that needs to be worked through the system. I mean, there's—living under the brutal tyrant Saddam Hussein created a lot of anxiety and a lot of tensions and a lot of rivalry, and it's just—it's going to take awhile to work it through. But they couldn't work through those tensions and rivalries in the midst of serious violence.

And so the strategy was, move in more troops to cause the violence to abate. And that's what David Petraeus will be reporting on.

Yes, Jim [Jim Axelrod, CBS News].

Congressional Input Into the War on Terror Strategy

Q. Thank you, Mr. Bush. A question for you about the process you're describing of your decisionmaking as Commander in Chief. Have you entertained the idea that at some point, Congress may take some of that sole decisionmaking power away through legislation? And can you tell us, are you still committed to vetoing any troop withdrawal deadline?

The President. You mean in this interim period? Yes, absolutely. I don't think Congress ought to be running the war; I think they ought to be funding our troops. I'm certainly interested in their opinion, but trying to run a war through resolution is a prescription for failure, as far as I'm concerned, and we can't afford to fail.

I'll work with Congress; I'll listen to Congress. Congress has got all the right to appropriate money. But the idea of telling our military how to conduct operations, for example, or how to deal with troop strength is—I don't think it makes sense. I don't think it makes sense today, nor do I think it's a good precedent for the future. And so the role of the Commander in Chief is, of course, to consult with Congress.

Q. So if Reed-Levin or anything like it were to pass and set a——

The President. Well, I would hope they wouldn't pass, Jim. But I——

Q. But what if they've got——

The President. Let me make sure you understand what I'm saying. Congress has all the right in the world to fund. That's their main involvement in this war, which is to provide funds for our troops. What you're asking is whether or not Congress ought to be basically determining how troops are positioned or troop strength. And I just—I don't think that would be good for the country.

David [David Gregory, NBC News].

CIA Director Michael V. Hayden/ Situation in Iraq

Q. Mr. President, you've said many times this war at this stage is about the Iraqi Government creating a self-sustaining, stable government. Last November, your own CIA Director, according to the Washington Post, told you about that government, quote: "The inability of the Government to govern seems irreversible." He could not point to any milestone or checkpoint where we can turn this thing around. And he said, in talking about the Government, that it's balanced, but it cannot function.

The President. Yes.

Q. When you heard that, since that point, you think of how many hundreds of soldiers have been killed, how much money has been spent. Why shouldn't people conclude that you are either stubborn, in denial, but certainly not realistic about the strategy that you've pursued since then?

The President. You know, it's interesting; it turns out, Mike Hayden—I think you're quoting Mike Hayden there—was in this morning to give me his weekly briefing, and I asked him about that newspaper article from which you quote. His answer was—his comments to the Iraq Study Group were a little more nuanced than the quotation you read.

He said that he made it clear the current strategy in Iraq wasn't working—this is his recollection of the briefing to the Iraq Study Group. He briefed them to the fact it wasn't working and that we needed a change of direction. He also said that those who suggest that we back away and let the Iraqi Government do it—this is in November 2006—let the Iraqis handle it, don't understand the inability of the Iraq Government at that time to take on that responsibility.

He then went on to say—this is what he—his recollection of his conversation—was that our strategy needed to help get the violence down so that there could be political reconciliation from the top down as well as the bottom up.

There has been political reconciliation, Martha, from the bottom up. Anbar Province is a place where the experts had—an expert had said that it was impossible for us to achieve our objective. This was the part of the country of Iraq where Al Qaida had made it clear that they would like to establish a safe haven from which to plan, plot further attacks and to spread their ideology throughout the Middle East. Since then, since this November 2006 report and since that statement to the Iraq Study Group, things have changed appreciably on the ground in Anbar Province.

And they're beginning to have the same change, because the people on the ground there are sick and tired of violence and being threatened by people like Al Qaida, who have no positive vision for the future. And there's been a significant turn, where now Sunni sheikhs and Sunni citizens are working with the coalition to bring justice to Al Qaida killers. And that same approach is being taken in Diyala.

And so there's a lot of focus, and should be, frankly, on oil laws or elections. But remember, there's another political reconciliation track taking place as well, and that's the one that's taking place at the grassroots level. Mike Hayden talked about that as well.

Q. But you think you've been realistic about the strategy and what's possible?

The President. Well—thank you for the followup—nothing has changed in the new room. Anyway—yes. I mean, as I told you last November, right about this time, I was part of that group of Americans who didn't approve of what was taking place in Iraq because it looked like all the efforts that we had taken to that point in time were about to fail. In other words, sectarian violence was really raging. And I had a choice to make, and that was to pull back, as some suggested, and hope that the chaos and violence that might occur in the capital would not spill out across the country or send more troops in to prevent the chaos and violence from happening in the first place, and that's the decision I made. So it was a realistic appraisal, by me.

What's realistic, as well, is to understand the consequences of what will happen if we fail in Iraq. In other words, people aren't just going to be content with driving America out of Iraq. Al Qaida wants to hurt us here. That's their objective. That's what they would like to do. They have got an ideology that they believe that the world ought to live under, and that one way to help spread that ideology is to harm the American people, harm American interests. The same folks that are bombing innocent people in Iraq were the ones who attacked us in America on September the 11th, and that's why what happens in Iraq matters to the security here at home.

So I've been realistic about the consequences of failure. I have been realistic about what needs to happen on the ground in order for there to be success. And it's been hard work, and the American people see it as hard work. And one of the reason it is hard work is because on our TV screens are these violent killings perpetuated by people who have done us harm in the past. And that ought to be a lesson for the American people, to understand that what happens in Iraq and overseas matters to the security of the United States of America.

Yes, ma'am.

Al Qaida in Iraq

But, sir, on that point, what evidence can you present to the American people that the people who attacked the United States on September the 11th are, in fact, the same people who are responsible for the bombings taking place in Iraq? What evidence can you present? And also, are you saying, sir, that Al Qaida in Iraq is the same organization being run by Usama bin Laden himself?

The President. Al Qaida in Iraq has sworn allegiance to Usama bin Laden. And the guys who had perpetuated the attacks on America—obviously, the guys on the airplane are dead, and the commanders, many of those are either dead or in captivity, like Khalid Sheikh Mohammed. But the people in Iraq, Al Qaida in Iraq, has sworn allegiance to Usama bin Laden. And we need to take Al Qaida in Iraq seriously, just like we need to take Al Qaida anywhere in the world seriously.

Let's see here. Working my way around here. Sheryl [Sheryl Gay Stolberg, New York Times].

Confidence in the Iraqi Government

Q. Mr. President, in Jordan in November, you stood by Prime Minister Maliki and said, he's the right guy for Iraq. Given this report card today and given the lack of top-down political reconciliation, can you tell the American people that you still believe he's the right guy for Iraq?

The President. I believe that he understands that there needs to be serious reconciliation, and they need to get law passed; firmly believe that. I have had a series of conference calls with the Prime Minister as well as the Presidency Council. The Presidency Council, you would have the President, Talabani, you'd have the two Vice Presidents, Al-Mahdi and Hashimi, as well as the Prime Minister. And I have urged them to work together to get law passed. It's not easy to get law passed through certain legislatures, like theirs. There's a lot of work that has to be done. And I will continue to urge, but——

Q. Do you have confidence in them?

The President. Let me—I'm almost through with the first one; I'll come back to the second one.

And so I'll continue to urge the Iraqis to show us that they're capable of passing legislation. But it's not just us; it's the Iraqi people. And what really matters is whether or

not life is improving for the Iraqi people on the ground.

And, yes, I've got confidence in them, but I also understand how difficult it is. I'm not making excuses, but it is hard. It's hard work for them to get law passed. And sometimes it's hard work for people to get law passed here. But that doesn't mean that we shouldn't continue to work to achieve an objective, which is a government that is able to provide security for its people and to provide basic services and, as importantly, serve as an ally against these extremists and radicals.

Yes, sir.

I. Lewis Libby

Q. Thank you, Mr. President——

The President. No, not you. Michael [Michael Abramowitz, Washington Post].

Q. Oh. [*Laughter*]

The President. Okay. Was that harsh?

Q. Yes.

The President. Like the new hall, I should have been more gentle. [*Laughter*] Do we ever use "kinder and gentler"? No.

Go ahead, Michael. And then you're next.

Q. If I could just switch subjects for a second to another big decision you made recently, which was in the Scooter Libby case.

The President. Yes.

Q. You spoke very soberly and seriously in your statement about how you weighed different legal questions in coming to your decision on that commutation. But one issue that you did not address was the issue of the morality of your most senior advisers leaking the name of a confidential intelligence operator. Now that the case is over—it's not something you've ever spoken to—can you say whether you're at all disappointed in the behavior of those senior advisers? And have you communicated that disappointment to them in any way?

The President. Michael, I—first of all, the Scooter Libby decision was, I thought, a fair and balanced decision. Secondly, I haven't spent a lot of time talking about the testimony that people throughout my administration were forced to give as a result of the Special Prosecutor. I didn't ask them during the time, and I haven't asked them since.

I'm aware of the fact that perhaps somebody in the administration did disclose the name of that person, and I've often thought about what would have happened had that person come forth and said, "I did it." Would we have had this, you know, endless hours of investigation and a lot of money being spent on this matter? But it's been a tough issue for a lot of people in the White House, and it's run its course, and now we're going to move on.

Wendell [Wendell Goler, Fox News Channel].

War on Terror in Iraq

Q. Mr. President, you have spoken passionately——

The President. Oh, I'm sorry, Jon [Jon Ward, Washington Times]. Okay, yes.

Q. Are you taking it away from me?

The President. I am. This is——

Q. After doing the "fair and balanced," you're going to take it away from me. [*Laughter*].

Q. Ohhh. [*Laughter*]

Q. That was just a tease.

Q. You're going to come back to me, sir?

The President. You got the mike, then, Jon, you're next—a possession deal, you know what I'm saying? [*Laughter*]

Q. Thank you, sir. You have spoken passionately about the consequences of failure in Iraq. Your critics say you failed to send enough troops there at the start, failed to keep Al Qaida from stepping into the void created by the collapse of Saddam's army, failed to put enough pressure on Iraq's Government to make the political reconciliation necessary to keep the sectarian violence the country is suffering from now from occurring. So why should the American people feel you have the vision for victory in Iraq, sir?

The President. Those are all legitimate questions that I'm sure historians will analyze. I mean, one of the questions is, should we have sent more in the beginning? Well, I asked that question, "Do you need more?" to General Tommy Franks. In the first phase of this operation, General Franks was obviously in charge—and during our discussions in the runup to the decision to remove Saddam Hussein after he ignored the Security Council resolutions. My primary question to

General Franks was, do you have what it takes to succeed? And do you have what it takes to succeed after you succeed in removing Saddam Hussein? And his answer was, yes.

Now, history is going to look back to determine whether or not there might have been a different decision made. But at the time, the only thing I can tell you, Wendell, is that I relied upon our military commander to make the proper decision about troop strength. And I can remember a meeting with the Joint Chiefs, who said, "We've reviewed the plan." I remember—and seemed satisfied with it. I remember sitting in the PEOC, or the Situation Room, downstairs here at the White House, and I went to commander and commander that were all responsible of different aspects of the operation to remove Saddam. I said to each one of them, do you have what it takes? Are you satisfied with the strategy? And the answer was, yes.

We have worked hard to help this country reconcile. After all, they do have a modern Constitution, which is kind of a framework for reconciliation. And after all, there was a significant series of votes where the people were given a chance to express their desire to live in a free society. As a matter of fact, 12 million Iraqis went to the polls.

Wendell, what happened then, of course, is that the enemy, Al Qaida, attacks the Samarra mosque, which, of course, created anxiety and anger amongst the Shi'a. And then all of a sudden, the sectarian violence began to spiral. Reconciliation hadn't taken hold deep enough in society to prevent this violence from taking hold. And so I have a—you know, I've got to decide whether or not it's okay for that violence to continue or whether or not it makes sense for us to try to send more troops in to quell the violence, to give the reconciliation process further time to advance.

My concern is, is that as a result of violence and killing, there would be chaos. Now, that's a state of affairs that thugs like Al Qaida need to survive. They like chaos. As a matter of fact, they like to create chaos in order to create conditions of fear and anxiety and doubt. And out of that chaos would come—could come a further escalation of violence in the Middle East. And this is what's important for the American people to understand: That violence and that chaos would embolden extremist groups, whether they be Shi'a or Sunni, and they would then begin into competition with each other.

Such chaos and violence would send a mixed signal to the Iranians, who have stated that they believe Israel ought to be wiped off the map. People would begin to wonder about America's resolve. Al Qaida would certainly be in a better position to raise money and recruit. And what makes all this scenario doubly dangerous is that they have proven themselves able to attack us and kill nearly 3,000 of our citizens. And they would like to do it again.

And therefore, the strategy has got to be to help this Government become an ally against these people. What happens in Iraq—and I understand how difficult it's been. It's been hard. I have received a lot of inspiration, however, from meeting with our troops, who understand the stakes of this fight, and meeting with their families. And we owe it to our troops to support our commanders, smart, capable people who are devising a strategy that will enable us to succeed and prevent the conditions I just talked about from happening.

Ed [Ed Chen, Bloomberg News]—no, Jon. Just kidding there.

Situation in Iraq

Q. Thank you, Mr. President. Your administration has cited Al Qaida leaders, such as Zawahiri, as saying that if we leave prematurely, it would be a glorious victory for Al Qaida. But the reason that we can't leave or haven't been able to leave is not because we're getting defeated in any way militarily; it's because the Iraqis can't get it together so far. So why can't we counter those messages and, obviously, not withdraw precipitously, but begin some sort of gradual withdrawal that prevents ethnic cleansing, but also allows our military to get out?

The President. Well, there's a lot of discussion about a scenario in which our troop posture would be to guard the territorial integrity of the country of Iraq, to embed and train, to help the Iraqi security forces deal with violent elements in their society, as well

as keep enough Special Forces there to chase down Al Qaida. As a matter of fact, that is something that I've spoken in public about, said that's a position I'd like to see us in. However, I felt like we needed to send more troops to be able to get the situation to quiet down enough to be able to end in that position.

And in terms of my own decisionmaking, as I mentioned earlier, I definitely need to be in consultation, and will be, with General David Petraeus, who asked for the additional troops in the first place, troops which have been in place—fully in place for about 3 weeks.

And so I would ask Members of Congress to give the general a chance to come back and to give us a full assessment of whether this is succeeding or not. And it's at that point in time that I will consult with Members of Congress and make a decision about the way forward, all aiming to succeed in making sure that Al Qaida and other extremists do not benefit from a decision I might have to make.

Mark [Mark Silva, Chicago Tribune].

Homeland Security/Democracy in the Middle East

Q. Yes, sir, Mr. President.

The President. Yes, sir——

Q. How——

The President. ——Mark. [*Laughter*]

Q. Thank you. Thank you, sir. How comfortable are you—sir, how comfortable are you with your Homeland Security Secretary saying, in the face of no credible intelligence of an imminent threat against the United States, that he has a gut feeling that one is coming this summer? And, sir, what does your gut tell you?

The President. My gut tells me that—which my head tells me as well—is that when we find a credible threat, I'll share it with people to make sure that we protect the homeland. My head also tells me that Al Qaida is a serious threat to our homeland, and we've got to continue making sure we've got good intelligence, good response mechanisms in place; that we've got to make sure we don't embolden them with—by failing in certain theaters of war where they're confronting us; that we ought to continue to keep the pressure on them. We need to chase them down and bring them to justice before they come home to hurt us again.

And so it's a—this is a serious issue that is going to outlast my Presidency. As I say, this is the beginning stages of what I believe is a ideological conflict that—where you've got a competing visions about what the world ought to be like. What makes this more difficult than previous conflicts is that there's the asymmetrical use of power. In other words, IEDs and suicide bombers are the main tactical device used by these thugs to try to achieve strategic objectives.

Their objective is to impose their vision on the world. Their objective is to drive the United States out of parts of the world. They want safe haven. They love a society where women have no rights, just like the society that they worked to impose with the Taliban on the women of Afghanistan. That's their vision. And it's in our interests to defend ourselves by staying on the offense against them. And it's in our interest to spread an alternative ideology.

We have done this before in our Nation's history. We have helped people realize the blessings of liberty, even though they may have been our enemy. And freedom has an amazing way of helping lay the foundation for peace. And it's really important, as we head into this ideological struggle in the 21st century, that we not forget that liberty can transform societies.

Now, the interesting debate is whether or not a nation like Iraq can self-govern, whether or not these people even care about liberty. As you've heard me say before, I believe—strongly believe that freedom is a universal value, that freedom isn't just for Americans or Methodists, that freedom is universal in its application. And so when they voted in '05, I wasn't surprised; I was pleased that the numbers were as big as they were, to defy that many threats and car bombers, but I wasn't surprised.

And this is the real challenge we face. And Iraq is just a part of a broader war against these jihadists and extremists, Mark. It is a—we will be dealing with this issue for awhile, just like we dealt with other ideologies for awhile. It takes time for ideologies to take root.

I firmly believe that you'll see the democracy movement continue to advance throughout the Middle East if the United States doesn't become isolationist. That's why I've told you that I'm making sure that we continue to stay diplomatically involved in the region. Condi Rice and Bob Gates will be traveling there in early August to continue to remind our friends and allies that we're—one, we view them as strategic partners; and secondly, that we want them to work toward a freer societies and to help this Iraqi Government survive. It's in their interests that Iraq become a stable partner.

And I believe we can achieve that objective. And not only do I believe we can achieve; I know we've got to achieve the objective, so we will have done our duty. This is hard work. And one of the things I talked about in the opening comments was, do we do it now, or basically pull back, let the Gallup Poll, or whatever poll there are, decide the fate of the country? And my view is, is that if that were to happen, we would then have to go back in with greater force in order to protect ourselves, because one of the facts of the 21st century is that what happens overseas matters to the security of our country.

Ed.

President's Upcoming Meeting With General David H. Petraeus

Q. Good morning, Mr. President. Given the events on the ground in Iraq and the politics here at home, has U.S. military deployment to Iraq reached the ceiling, or can you allow any further military escalation?

The President. You're trying to do what Martha very skillfully tried to get me to do, and that was to——

Q. Can I have a followup?

The President. Yes, you can, because you're about to realize I'm not going to answer your question—[*laughter*]—except to say this: There's going to be great temptation to—not temptation, there would be—you won't be tempted; you will actually ask me to speculate about what David Petraeus will talk to us about when he comes home. And I just ask the American people to understand that the Commander in Chief must rely upon the wisdom and judgment of the military thinkers and planners. It's very important that there be that solid connection of trust between me and those who are in the field taking incredible risk.

And so, Ed, I'm going to wait to see what David has to say. I'm not going to prejudge what he may say. I trust David Petraeus, his judgment. He's an honest man. Those of you who have interviewed him know that he's a straight shooter; he's an innovative thinker. I was briefed by members of the CODEL that came back that said that it appeared to them that our troops have high respect for our commanders in Baghdad, as do I.

Now, do you have a followup, perhaps another subject, another area, another——

Public Opinion/President's Decisionmaking

Q. Same subject.

The President. Same questions?

Q. Different approach.

The President. Different approach. Yes, okay. [*Laughter*]

Q. How hard is it for you to conduct the war without popular support? For you personally, do you ever have trouble balancing between doing what you think is the right thing and following the will of the majority of the public, which is really the essence of democracy?

The President. Yes, it is. And, first of all, I can fully understand why people are tired of the war. The question they have is, can we win it? And of course I'm concerned about whether or not the American people are in this fight. I believe, however, that when they really think about the consequences if we were to precipitously withdraw, they begin to say to themselves, maybe we ought to win this; maybe we ought to have a stable Iraq.

Their question, it seems like to me, is, can we succeed? And that's a very important, legitimate question for anybody to ask. I think many people understand we must succeed, and I think a lot of people understand we've got to wait for the generals to make these military decisions. I suspect—I know this, Ed, that if our troops thought that I was taking a poll to decide how to conduct this war, they would be very concerned about the mission. In other words, if our troops said, "Well,

here we are in combat, and we've got a Commander in Chief who is running a focus group. In other words, politics would be—is more important to him than our safety and/or our strategy," that would dispirit our troops.

And there's a lot of constituencies in this fight. Clearly the American people, who are paying for this, is the major constituency. And I repeat to you, Ed, I understand that there—this violence has affected them. And a lot of people don't think we can win. There's a lot of people in Congress who don't think we can win as well, and therefore, their attitude is, get out.

My concern with that strategy—something that Mike Hayden also discussed—is that just getting out may sound simple, and it may affect polls, but it would have long-term, serious security consequences for the United States. And so, Ed, sometimes you just have to make the decisions based upon what you think is right. My most important job is to help secure this country, and therefore, the decisions in Iraq are all aimed at helping do that job. And that's what I firmly believe.

A second constituency is the military. And I repeat to you: I'm pretty confident our military do not want their Commander in Chief making political decisions about their future.

A third constituency that matters to me a lot is the military families. These are good folks who are making huge sacrifices, and they support their loved ones. And I don't think they want their Commander in Chief making decisions based upon popularity.

Another constituency group that is important for me to talk to is the Iraqis. Obviously, I want the Iraqi Government to understand that we expect there to be reconciliation top-down, that we want to see laws passed. I think they've got that message. They know full well that the American Government and the American people expect to see tangible evidence of working together. That's what the benchmarks are aimed to do.

But they also need to know that I am making decisions based upon our security interests, of course, but also helping them succeed, and that a poll is not going to determine the course of action by the United States. What will determine the course of actions is, will the decisions that we have made help secure our country for the long run?

And finally, another constituency is the enemy, who are wondering whether or not America has got the resolve and the determination to stay after them. And so that's what I think about, Ed.

And, you know, I guess I'm like any other political figure; everybody wants to be loved, just sometimes the decisions you make and the consequences don't enable you to be loved. And so when it's all said and done, Ed, when you've—if you ever come down and visit the old, tired me down there in Crawford, I will be able to say, I looked in the mirror and made decisions based upon principle, not based upon politics. And that's important to me.

Thank you all for your time. I loved being here at this new building. Thank you.

Resurgence of Al Qaida

Q. Can we just ask you about the Al Qaida intelligence report, please?

The President. What was that?

Q. The intelligence——

The President. This is amazing.

Q. I know, I know.

The President. The new me. [*Laughter*] The Al Qaida intelligence report.

Q. The intelligence analysts are saying Al Qaida has reconstituted in areas of Pakistan, saying the threat to the West is greater than ever now, or as great as 2001. What's happening——

The President. Okay, here's——

Q. Okay, you tell us what the intelligence analysts say.

The President. I'm glad you asked; thank you. Thank you. I appreciate that opportunity to——

Q. Thank you for coming back, sir.

The President. I'm happy to do it. This is not the new me. I mean, this is just, like, an aberration. In other words——

Q. It's over next time.

The President. ——I'm not going to leave and then come back because somebody yells something at me.

Q. Like China.

The President. Yes, exactly. [*Laughter*] Thank you. Thank you, David. I appreciate that. Exactly.

There is a perception in the coverage that Al Qaida may be as strong today as they were prior to September the 11th. That's just simply not the case. I think the report will say, since 2001, not prior to September the 11th, 2001.

Secondly, that because of the actions we have taken, Al Qaida is weaker today than they would have been. They are still a threat. They are still dangerous. And that is why it is important that we succeed in Afghanistan and Iraq and anywhere else we find them. And that's our strategy, is to stay on the offense against Al Qaida.

Elaine [Elaine Quijano, Cable News Network] asked the question, is it Al Qaida in Iraq? Yes, it is Al Qaida, just like it's Al Qaida in parts of Pakistan. And I'm working with President Musharraf to be able to—he doesn't want them in his country; he doesn't want foreign fighters in his outposts of his country. And so we're working to make sure that we continue to keep the pressure on Al Qaida.

But no question, Al Qaida is dangerous for the American people, and that's why—as well as other people that love freedom—and that's why we're working hard with allies and friends to enhance our intelligence. That's why we need terrorist surveillance programs. That's why it's important for us to keep—another thing, I would hope Congress would modernize that bill. And that's why we're keeping on the offense.

Ultimately, the way to defeat these radicals and extremists is to offer alternative ways of life so that they're unable to recruit; that they can use—they like to use frustration and hopelessness. The societies that don't provide hope will become the societies where Al Qaida has got the capacity to convince a youngster to go blow himself up. What we need to do is help governments provide brighter futures for their people so they won't sign up.

And the fundamental question facing the world on this issue is whether or not it makes sense to try to promote an alternative ideology. I happen to think it does. They say, "He's idealistic." Yes, I'm idealistic, but I'm also realistic in understanding if there is not an alternative ideology presented, these thugs will be able to continue to recruit. They'll use hopelessness to be able to recruit. And so it's—thank you for asking that question.

Thank you all.

NOTE: The President's news conference began at 10:31 a.m. in the James S. Brady Press Briefing Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to U.S. Ambassador to Iraq Ryan C. Crocker; Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates; Usama bin Laden, leader of the Al Qaida terrorist organization; Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki, President Jalal Talabani, and Vice Presidents Adil Abd Al-Mahdi and Tariq al-Hashimi of Iraq; former Chief of Staff to the Vice President I. Lewis Libby; Gen. Tommy R. Franks, USA (Ret.), former combatant commander, U.S. Central Command; and President Pervez Musharraf of Pakistan. The President also referred to the amendment by Senators Harry Reid and Carl Levin to H.R. 2206. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of this news conference.

Proclamation 8161—Parents' Day, 2007

July 12, 2007

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

On Parents' Day, America honors our mothers and fathers for their extraordinary devotion and for the great sacrifices they make to provide a hopeful and promising future for their children.

The guidance and unconditional love of parents help create a nurturing environment so children can grow and reach their full potential. Parents work to impart to their children the strength and determination to follow their dreams and the courage to do what is right. They shape the character of their children by sharing their wisdom and setting a positive example. As role models, parents also instill the values and principles that help prepare children to be responsible adults and good citizens.

My Administration is committed to strengthening American families by supporting Federal, State, and faith-based and community programs that promote healthy marriages and responsible parenting. Parents