

The President's News Conference With Prime Minister Ayad Allawi of Iraq September 23, 2004

President Bush. Thank you all for coming. I'm honored to stand with the Prime Minister of a free and sovereign Iraq. Welcome, Mr. Prime Minister. I applaud your leadership and your courage. It's my honor to welcome a friend to the White House.

Prime Minister Allawi. Thank you.

President Bush. Mr. Prime Minister, you've accomplished a great deal in less—in the 3 months since the transition to a free Iraq that is governed by Iraqis. These have been months of steady progress, despite persistent violence in some parts of your country. Iraqis and their leaders are engaged in a great and historic enterprise to establish a new democracy at the heart of a vital region.

As friends of liberty, the new leaders of Iraq are friends of America and all civilized nations. As enemies of tyranny and terror, the people of Iraq and the American troops and civilians supporting their dreams of freedom have been the target of acts of violence. The enemies of freedom are using suicide bombing, beheadings, and other horrific acts to try to block progress. We're sickened by the atrocities, but we'll never be intimidated. And freedom is winning.

Mr. Prime Minister, America will stand with you until freedom and justice have prevailed. America's security and Iraq's future depend on it.

The Iraqi people are showing great courage and great determination. As terrorists have attacked Iraqi security forces, still more brave Iraqis have come forward to volunteer to serve their country. As killers have attempted to assassinate Government officials, Iraq's leaders have refused to be intimidated, and the vast majority of Iraqis remain committed to democracy.

The path to our safety and to Iraq's future as a democratic nation lies in the resolute defense of freedom. If we stop fighting the terrorists in Iraq, they would be free

to plot and plan attacks elsewhere, in America and other free nations. To retreat now would betray our mission, our word, and our friends. Mr. Prime Minister, America will keep its commitments.

The path ahead is difficult because a free Iraq has deadly enemies. Remnants of the old regime and terrorist groups want to prevent Iraq's elections and demoralize Iraq's allies. Because of that, Prime Minister Allawi and I believe terrorist violence may well escalate as the January elections draw near. The terrorists know that events in Iraq are reaching a decisive moment. If elections go forward, democracy in Iraq will put down permanent roots, and terrorists will suffer a dramatic defeat. And because Iraq and America and our coalition are standing firm, the Iraqi people and not the terrorists will determine Iraq's future.

There's much at stake. Mr. Prime Minister, you recently said, "The war in Iraq now is not only an Iraqi war. It is a war for the civilized world to fight terrorists and terrorism, and there is no route but the route of winning." Prime Minister Tony Blair recently called the struggle in Iraq the crucible in which the future of global terrorism will be determined. I share the view of these strong leaders that Iraq is a central front in the war on terror, and our only option is victory.

We're making steady progress in implementing our five-step plan toward the goal we all want, completing the mission so that Iraq is stable and self-governing and American troops can come home with the honor they have earned.

The first step was achieved on June 28th, not only on time but ahead of schedule, when the coalition transferred full sovereignty to a Government of Iraqi citizens.

The second step is to help Iraq's new Government establish stability and security. Iraq must be able to defend itself, and

Iraqi security forces are taking increasing responsibility for their country's security. Nearly 100,000 fully trained and equipped Iraqi soldiers, police officers, and other security personnel are working today, and that total will rise to 125,000 by the end of this year. The Iraqi Government is on track to build a force of over 200,000 security personnel by the end of next year.

With the help of the American military, the training of the Iraqi army is almost halfway complete. And in Najaf and other important areas, Iraqi military forces have performed with skill and success. In Najaf, Iraqi and coalition forces effectively surrounded, isolated, and engaged enemy militias. Prime Minister Allawi and his Government reached out to the local population to persuade citizens the path to a better future would be found in political participation and economic progress. The Interim Government then negotiated from a position of strength to end the standoff.

Serious problems remain in several cities. Prime Minister Allawi believes this combination of decisive action and outreach to peaceful citizens is the most effective way to defeat terrorists and insurgents and secure the peace of Iraq. And America stands with him.

The third step in our plan is to continue improving Iraq's infrastructure. On television sets around the world, we see acts of violence; yet in most of Iraq, children are about to go back to school, parents are going back to work, and new businesses are being opened. Over 100 companies are now listed on the Iraqi stock exchange, and an average of 5 new companies are joining each week. Electricity has been restored above prewar levels. Telephone service has increased dramatically. More than 2,000 schools have been renovated, and millions of new textbooks have been distributed.

There is much more work to be done. We've already spent more than a billion dollars on urgent reconstruction projects in areas threatened by the insurgency. In the next several months, over \$9 billion will

be spent on contracts that will help Iraqis rebuild schools, refurbish hospitals and health clinics, repair bridges, upgrade the electricity grid, and modernize the communications system. Prime Minister Allawi and I both agree that the pace of reconstruction should be accelerated. We're working toward that goal.

The fourth step in our plan is to enlist additional international support for Iraq's transition to democracy. The multinational force of some 30 nations continues to help secure a free Iraq. We honor the service men and women of Great Britain, Bulgaria, Denmark, El Salvador, Estonia, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, the Netherlands, Poland, Slovakia, Spain, Thailand, and Ukraine who've died, besides Iraqis and Americans, for the cause of freedom and security of the world.

Our coalition is grateful that the United Nations has reestablished its mission in Baghdad. We're grateful to the G-8 countries and the European Union for pledging support to the new Iraqi Government. We're grateful to the NATO Alliance for helping to train Iraqi forces. We're grateful to many of Iraq's creditors, which have agreed to a further reduction of Iraq's debt. Because all nations have an interest in the success of a free Iraq, I urge all nations to join in this vital cause.

The fifth and most important step in our plan is to help Iraq conduct free national elections no later than next January. An Iraqi electoral commission is now up and running and has already hired personnel and is making key decisions about election procedures. Just this week, the commission began a public education campaign to inform Iraqis about the process and encourage them to become voters. United Nations electoral advisers are on the ground in Iraq, though more are needed. Prime Minister Allawi and I have urged the U.N. to send sufficient personnel to help ensure the success of Iraqi elections.

At every stage in this process of establishing self-government, the Iraqi people and their leaders have met the schedules

they set, and have overcome their challenges with confidence. And under this good man's leadership, they will continue to do so.

The war for Iraq's freedom is a fight against some of the most ruthless and brutal men on Earth. In such a struggle, there will be good days and there will be difficult days, but every day our resolve must remain firm.

Prime Minister, today I want to leave you and the nation you serve with a clear message: You have not faltered in a time of challenge, and neither will America. Thank you for your leadership. You honor us with your visit.

Prime Minister Allawi. Thank you.

Mr. President, thank you for those kind words. It is an honor to be here today in your Nation's Capital. It is a great honor to share this platform with you, a leader who worked tirelessly for the liberation of my country.

These last few days have been difficult for us Iraqis, for you Americans, and for all our allies. Let me start by saying that my thoughts and prayers are with the families of those fighting today in Iraq and, in particular, with the families of those who have lost loved ones at the hands of the terrorists or the insurgents.

Like this nation, which is—which in the face of such brutality is standing strong against terrorism, so we Iraqis will not be cowed by the terrorists. Your Government and my Government understand what is at stake today in Iraq. Today, we face a concentrated campaign by terrorists and by the enemies of all the values which we hold dear, a campaign to shake our resolve and to prevent Iraq and Iraqis from attaining the freedom and democracy which we have dreamed of for more than the last 30 years. These terrorists understand all too well that success in Iraq will be an enormous blow for terrorism worldwide and an enormous step forward for peace and stability in the Middle East and in the wider world.

I thank you, Mr. President, for your determination to stand firm with us in Iraq and for the unflinching message which you are delivering to our enemies.

Mr. President, I stand here today as a Prime Minister of a country emerging finally from dark ages of tyranny, aggression, and corruption. Like you, I knew how evil Saddam Hussein and his regime truly were. Like you, I knew the damage he had brought on his country. Like you, I knew of the wars he had started and the dangers he posed to my region and the world, or at least I thought I knew. For I, like millions of other Iraqis, were forced into exile, realizing that we could only fight Saddam from outside Iraq. Even then we were not safe, as I myself can testify.

But when I returned to Iraq, following the liberation of my country, I was truly shocked by just how much damage Saddam had done to—in his 30 years of rule. Iraq is a deeply scarred society in a very troubled region. Today, we are witnessing all too vividly the true extent of the damage which Saddam inflicted on our society.

Mr. President, Iraqis thank God, thank America, and thank our allies that Saddam is gone. We are safer; the region is safer; the world is safer without him. But the scars will take time to—determination to—time and determination to heal.

Again, Mr. President, I thank you for your leadership. We had an excellent meeting today, building on the talks we had on Tuesday in New York. We discussed the challenges ahead of us and how to confront them. We discussed the plan to take Iraq through these difficulties and to ensure that democratic elections take place on time next year. And we discussed the importance of maintaining the strength of the coalition and the support of the international community in helping us to succeed. As we discussed, the plan focuses on building democracy, defeating the insurgency, and improving the quality of life for the ordinary Iraqis.

Our political plan is to isolate the terrorists from the communities in which they operate. We are working hard to involve as many people as we can in the political process, to cut the ground from under the terrorists' feet. Of course, we know that terrorism cannot be defeated with political tools alone, but we can weaken it. Ending local support helps us to tackle the enemy head on, to identify, isolate, and eradicate this cancer.

Our military plan will enable us to build and maintain security across Iraq. Ordinary Iraqis are anxious to take over entirely this role and to shoulder all the security burdens of our country as quickly as possible. We do not want the multinational force to stay in Iraq any more than you want to remain there. But for now, we need you. We need the help of our American and multinational partners while we continue to accelerate the training of Iraqi security forces.

The Iraqi Government now commands almost 100,000 trained and combat-ready Iraqis, including police, national guard, and army. The Government have accelerated the development of Iraqi special forces and established a counterterrorist strike force to address the specific problems caused by the insurgency. Our intelligence is getting better every day. You have seen that in the successful resolution of the Najaf crisis and in the targeted attacks against insurgents in Fallujah.

Finally, our economic plan is to improve the everyday lives of Iraqis as we deliver both political and security progress. Here, thanks to a large extent to the generous security and reconstruction funding approved by the United States Congress, work is underway. Oil pipelines are being repaired, basic services improved, streets and homes rebuilt, schools, hospitals, and clinics reopened. Thousands of Iraqis have new jobs. Salaries have been increased dramatically, in many cases five or four times over. Iraq's economy, freed from the stran-

glehold of a failed Ba'athist ideology, has finally started to flourish.

Mr. President, we also discussed the importance of holding free and fair national and local elections this coming January as planned. I know that some have speculated, even doubted whether this date can be met, so let me be absolutely clear that elections will occur in Iraq on time in January, because Iraqis want election on time. In 15 out of 18 Iraqi provinces, the security situation is good for elections to be held tomorrow. Here, Iraqis are getting on with their daily lives, hungry for the new political and economic freedoms they are enjoying. Although this is not what you see in your media, it is a fact.

The Iraqi elections may not be perfect. They may not be the best elections that Iraq will ever hold. They will no-doubtedly be an excuse for violence from those who despair and despise liberty, as we—as were the first elections in Sierra Leone, South Africa, and Indonesia. But they will take place, and they will be free and fair.

Finally, Mr. President, a word about international resolve. Iraq cannot accomplish this alone. The international forces of tyranny and oppression are lined up against us. Iraq is now the main battleground between the forces of hope and the forces of fear. This is a struggle which will shape the future of our world.

Already, Iraq has many partners. More than two dozen countries are represented in Iraq with troops on the ground. We Iraqis are grateful for each and every one of these courageous men and women. The United Nations, the European Union, the G-8 have lent their strong support. NATO, just yesterday, increased its commitment to Iraq. Many more nations have committed to Iraq future in the form of economic aid. I am grateful for the support. I look to my Arab brothers to join us fully.

I know it is difficult, but the coalition must stand firm. When governments negotiate with terrorists, everyone in the free world suffers. When political leaders sound

the sirens of defeatism in the face of terrorism, it only encourages more violence. Working together, we will defeat the killers, and we'll do this by refusing to bargain about our most fundamental principles.

I understand why, faced with the daily headlines, there are those doubts. I know too that there are—there will be many more setbacks and obstacles to overcome. But these doubters underestimate our country, and they risk fueling the hopes of terrorism.

Mr. President, there are those who want to divide our world. I appeal to you, who have done so much already to help us, to ensure they don't succeed.

Thank you.

President Bush. We'll take a couple of questions now. Terry [Terence Hunt, Associated Press].

Support for the U.S. Military/Terrorists in Iraq

Q. Mr. President, two more Americans have been beheaded. More than 300 Iraqis have been killed in the last week. Fallujah is out of Government control. And U.S. and Iraqi forces have been unable to bring security to diplomatic and commercial centers of Baghdad. Why haven't U.S. forces been able to capture or kill Al Zarqawi, who's blamed for much of the violence? And what's your answer to General John Abizaid's statement that, "I think we will need more troops than we currently have"?

President Bush. If that's what he says—he was in my office this morning. He didn't say that to me, but if he were to say that, I'd listen to him, just like I've said all along, that when our commanders say that they need support, they'll get support, because we're going to succeed in this mission.

The first part of the question was, how come we haven't found Zarqawi? We're looking for him. He hides. He is—he's got a effective weapon, and that is terror. I said yesterday that our military cannot be defeated by these thugs, that—but what they do is behead Americans so they can

get on the TV screens. And they're trying to shake our will and trying to shake the Iraqis' will. That's what they're trying to do.

And like all Americans, I'm disgusted by that kind of behavior, but I'm not going to yield. We're not going to abandon the Iraqi people. It's in our interests that we win this battle in the war on terror. See, I think that the Iraq theater is a part of the war on terror. That's what the Prime Minister said as well. He believes the same thing. He understands what's going on there. After all, he lives there.

And I believe that if we wilt or leave, America's security will be much worse off. I believe that if Iraq—if we fail in Iraq, it's the beginning of a long struggle. We will not have done our duty to our children and our grandchildren. And so that's why I'm consistently telling the Iraqi citizens that we will not be intimidated. That's why my message to Mr. Zarqawi is: You cannot drive us out of Iraq by your brutality.

It's tough work. Everybody knows that. It's hard work. But we must not allow the actions of a few—and I emphasize that, I say that because there are 25 million Iraqis, by far the vast majority of whom want to live in a free society—and we cannot allow the actions of a few to determine the fate of these good people as well as the fate of the security of the United States.

Prime Minister Allawi. May I, Mr. President?

President Bush. Sure.

Prime Minister Allawi. I just have a few words to say to this question.

We cannot really substitute Iraq for Fallujah. Fallujah is a small part of Iraq. There are insurgents and terrorists who are active there for geographical reasons. The people of Fallujah are adamant that they should—whenever they are capable—to get rid of the insurgents. We have been talking to them. I have been talking to them, engaged in dialog. My deputy met with the

Fallujah tribes 2 days ago. Things are moving in the right direction, and we are hitting insurgents and terrorists in this part of the world.

To have more troops, we don't need. What we need really is to train more Iraqis, because this is ultimately for Iraqis, for Iraqi security forces to take responsibility for their own security and to defend the rest of the civilized world. What is happening, sir, in Iraq is, really, Iraq is becoming a frontline for a global fight against terrorists. So that's why Zarqawi is not alone. There are other groups similar to Zarqawi. There are groups who are insurgents who have stained their hands with the murders of the Iraqi people, who are Saddam's loyalists. They are working together. We assure you that we are going to defeat these evil forces, in Iraq and throughout the world.

President Bush. Steve [Steve Holland, Reuters].

U.S. Strategy in Iraq

Q. Mr. President, John Kerry is accusing you of colossal failures of judgment in Iraq and having failed to level with the American people about how tough it is there. How do you respond to him?

President Bush. It's hard work in Iraq. Everybody knows that. We see it on our TV. My message is that we will stay the course and stand with these people so that they become free. It's in our national interest we do so. I believe this is a central part in the war on terror. I believe that when we succeed in Iraq, that America will be more secure. I also know that a free Iraq will send a clear message to the part of the world that is desperate for freedom.

It's hard work. The American people know that. But I believe it's necessary work, and I believe a leader must be consistent and clear and not change positions when times get tough. And the times have been hard. These are hard times. But I understand that—what mixed messages do. You can embolden an enemy by sending

a mixed message. You can dispirit the Iraqi people by sending mixed messages. You send the wrong message to our troops by sending mixed messages. That's why I will continue to lead with clarity and in a resolute way, because I understand the stakes. These are high stakes, and we'll succeed.

Is anybody here from the Iraqi media? Why don't we—yes, please, sir. Standing next to a fine man in Deans [Bob Deans, Cox Newspapers].

Reconstruction of Iraq

[*At this point, a question was asked in Arabic.*]

President Bush. I'm not so sure I agree with that. [*Laughter*]

[*The interpreter then translated the question as follows.*]

Q. The question to the U.S. President: What are the plans to accelerate the arrival of the fund donated by various countries around the world, the countries that are contributing to the rebuilding of Iraq, in order to encourage investments in Iraq, particularly with a very high unemployment rate?

President Bush. Right. There are at least three aspects to the reconstruction projects. One is our own money. And as I mentioned in my remarks, there's \$7 billion committed. We've got more money to spend, and we will spend it when contracts are let and when there's enough security in certain neighborhoods to be able to spend the money wisely.

Secondly, part of making sure that the Iraq balance sheet is in good shape is to continue to work on debt reductions. I named former Secretary Jim Baker to go around to the creditor nations. He received some commitments. And I believe that the world will make its decision later on this year as to how much debt reduction there will be in Iraq.

And thirdly, as you mentioned, other nations have pledged help to the Iraqi people. And there will be a donors conference in

Japan, kind of an accountability conference for people to come and explain where they are in meeting their different promises.

Yes, NBC man, there—your name?

Q. Gregory [David Gregory, NBC News], sir.

President Bush. Gregory.

Saddam Hussein

Q. Mr. President, you say today that the work in Iraq is tough and will remain tough. And yet, you travel this country, and a central theme of your campaign is that America is safer because of the invasion of Iraq. Can you understand why Americans may not believe you?

President Bush. No. Anybody who says that we are safer with Saddam Hussein in power is wrong. We went into Iraq because Saddam Hussein defied the demands of the free world. We went into Iraq after diplomacy had failed. And we went into Iraq because I understand after September the 11th we must take threats seriously, before they come to hurt us.

And I think it's a preposterous claim to say that America would be better off with Saddam Hussein in power. I certainly know that that's the case for America, and I certainly know it's the case for the Iraqi people. These are the people who were tortured. This good man was abed in a London flat, and he wakes up with two Saddam henchmen there with axes, trying to cut him to pieces with an ax. And fortunately, he's alive today. Fortunately, we call him friend and ally. But he knows what it means to have lived under a society in which a thug like Saddam Hussein would send people with axes to try to kill him in bed in a London flat. No, this world is better off with Saddam Hussein in prison.

Q. Sir, may I just follow, because I don't think you're really answering the question. I mean, I think you're responding to Senator Kerry, but there are beheadings regularly, the insurgent violence continues, and there are no weapons of mass destruction.

My question is, can you understand that Americans may not believe you when you say that America is actually safer today?

President Bush. Imagine a world in which Saddam Hussein were still in power. This is a man who harbored terrorists, Abu Abbas, Abu Nidal, Zarqawi. This is a man who was a sworn enemy of the United States of America. This is a man who used weapons of mass destruction. Going from tyranny to democracy is hard work, but I think the argument that says that Saddam Hussein—if Saddam Hussein were still in power, we'd be better off is wrong.

King [John King, Cable News Network].

Decisionmaking on Troop Levels/National Intelligence Estimate

Q. Sir, I'd like you to answer Senator Kerry and other critics who accuse you of hypocrisy or opportunism when on the one hand you put so much stock in the CIA when it said Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction and now say it is just guessing when it paints a pessimistic picture of the political transition.

President Bush. Yes.

Q. And I like to, if you don't mind, follow on something the Prime Minister just said. If General Abizaid says he needs more troops and the Prime Minister says he does not want more troops, who wins?

President Bush. Let me talk to General Abizaid. As I said, he just came in to see me, and I want to make sure—I'm not suggesting any of the reporters here might be taking something out of context. That would never happen in America. But nevertheless, I do want to sit down and talk to him about it. Obviously, we can work this out. It's in the—if our commanders on the ground feel it's in the interest of the Iraq citizens to provide more troops, we'll talk about it. That's—that's why—they're friends—that's what we do about friends.

First part of the question—oh, yes, yes—

Q. They say you've been opportunistic—

President Bush. Yes, got it. Listen, the other day I was asked about the NIE, which is a National Intelligence Estimate. This is a report that talks about possibilities about what can happen in Iraq, not probabilities. I used an unfortunate word, "guess." I should have used "estimate." And the CIA came and said, "This is a possibility, this is a possibility, and this is a possibility." But what's important for the American people to hear is reality. And the reality is right here in the form of the Prime Minister, and he is explaining what is happening on the ground. That's the best report. And this report was written in July, and now we are here in September. And as I said, "estimate" would have been a better word.

Q. Mr. President—

President Bush. Hold on for a minute. Hold on for a minute, please, please. We've got other people from—hold on for a second.

Prime Minister Allawi. From the other—

President Bush. From Iraq. Are you from Iraq?

Q. No.

President Bush. Okay. No, hold on for a second. We need people from Iraq first, please. One journalist from Iraq. You're not from Iraq, Allen [Mike Allen, Washington Post], and neither are you, Elisabeth [Elisabeth Bumiller, New York Times].

Prime Minister Allawi. Give Al Arabiya—

President Bush. Is anybody here from CBS? Roberts [John Roberts, CBS News], there you are. Please.

Q. —happy to be here.

President Bush. Happy to be here, thank you. [Laughter]

Q. Sir, you—

President Bush. Terry [Terry Moran, ABC News], you're next.

Iraqi Elections/Security Situation in Iraq

Q. You have been accused on the campaign trail in this election year of painting an overly optimistic portrait of the situation on the ground in Iraq. Yesterday, in Valley Forge, you said that there was a "handful" of people who were willing to kill to try to disrupt the process. Isn't that really understating the case, particularly when there are intelligence reports that hundreds if not thousands of foreign fighters are streaming across the border from Syria to take up the fight of the insurgency? And do you believe, given the situation on the ground in Fallujah and other northern cities in the Sunni Triangle, that elections are possible in 4 months?

President Bush. I do, because the Prime Minister told me they are. He is—he's interested in moving this country forward. And you heard his statement, and I believe him.

The first part of the question?

Q. The first question was, aren't you being—

President Bush. Yes, got it, got it. Yes. Yesterday—

Q. —disingenuous—

President Bush. Right. I said—look, what we're seeing on our TV screens are the acts of suicide bombers. They're the people that are affecting the daily—the nightly news. And they know its effect. I said that the enemy cannot defeat us militarily. What they can do is take acts of violence that try to discourage us and try to discourage the Prime Minister and the people of Iraq.

Look, I'm fully aware we're fighting former Ba'athists and Zarqawi network people. But by far, the vast majority of people, John, and—of 25 million people—want to live in freedom. My point is, is that a few people, relative to the whole, are trying to stop the march of freedom.

It is tough work. Everybody in America knows that, and the fundamental question is, are we going to allow the tough work to cause us to retreat, to waver? And my

answer to the American people and the Iraqi people and to the enemy is that we will complete our mission. We will do our duty. We will adjust strategies on the ground, depending upon the tactics of the enemy, but we're not going to allow the suiciders to drive us out of Iraq.

Terry.

Prime Minister Allawi. May I—

President Bush. Yes, please.

Prime Minister Allawi. Let me explain something which is very important. I have noticed—and the media have been neglected and omitted several times—in the Western media—Iraq is made out of 18 provinces, 18, 1-8. Out of these 18 provinces, 14 to 15 are completely safe; there are no problems. And I can count them for you, starting from Basra moving into Iraq Kurdistan. There are three areas, three provinces where there are pockets of insurgents, pockets of terrorists who are acting there and are moving from there to inflict damage elsewhere in the country.

So really, if you care to look at Iraq properly and go from Basra to Nasiriyah to Kut to Diyala to Najaf to Karbala to Diwaniya to Samarra to Kirkuk to Sulaymaniyah to Dahuk to Arbil, there are no problems. It's safe. It's good. There are problems in Fallujah. Fallujah is part of a province; the province is called Al Anbar. It's vast, very big. It has many other important towns such as Ana, such as Rawa, such as Ramadi. There is nothing there. In Ana and Rawa, indeed, there is nothing, no problem, except on a small pocket in Fallujah.

So really, I call upon the responsible media throughout the world, not only here, to look at the facts as they are in Iraq and to propagate these facts to the international community.

I am not trying to undermine that there are dangers. There are dangers in Iraq. There are problems, and we are facing international terrorist onslaught on Iraq. I, personally, receive every day a threat. In the last 4 weeks, they found four conspir-

acies to kill me. And likewise, they are killing people—they are killing officials; they are killing innocent people. But the Iraqis are not deterred, and we are not going to be deterred. I went the next day and saw our recruitment center for the police, after they killed, massacred 40, 45 people. I found hundreds of people coming to be volunteer—to volunteer to the police and to the army. I spoke to them. They are all upbeat. They are resolved to beat terrorism and to defeat the insurgents.

These are facts that one really needs to explain to you, and you need to explain it to the people.

President Bush. Terry.

Iraqi Support for Coalition Efforts

Q. Mr. President and Mr. Prime Minister, I'd like to ask about the Iraqi people. Both of you have spoken for them today, and yet, over the past several months, there have been polls conducted by the Coalition Provisional Authority, by the Oxford Institute, and other reputable organizations that have found very strong majorities do not see the United States as a liberator but as an occupier, are unhappy with American policy, and want us out. Don't the real voices of the Iraqi people, themselves, contradict the rosy scenarios you're painting here today?

President Bush. Let me start by that. You said the poll was taken when the CPA was there?

Q. One poll—

President Bush. Yes, okay, let me stop you. First of all, the Iraqi people now have got Iraqi leadership. Prime Minister Allawi and his Cabinet are making decisions on behalf of the Iraqi people. Secondly, I saw a poll that said the right track/wrong track in Iraq was better than here in America. [Laughter] It's pretty darn strong. I mean, the people see a better future.

Talk to the leader. I agree; I'm not the expert on how the Iraqi people think, because I live in America, where it's nice and safe and secure. But I talk to this man.

One reason I'm optimistic about our ability to get the job done is because I talk to the Iraqi Prime Minister. I'm also optimistic that people will choose freedom over tyranny every time. That's what I believe.

But Mr. Prime Minister, you might answer the question on the polls. There's a lot of polls. Sometimes they show you up and sometimes they show you down, as you might remember.

Prime Minister Allawi. Let me take a minute to explain to you something, a factual event. I meet, personally, every now and then with the fringes of the so-called resistance to try and talk them into respecting law and order and withdraw their arms. And I ask them in a very honest, very open way, I say to them, "What do you want to achieve? Could you know exactly what you want to achieve? Do you want to bring Saddam back from the hole in the ground, living like a rat? Do you want to bring him back to rule Iraq? Or do you want to bring bin Laden or similar persons to bin Laden to rule Iraq? If you want to do this, we will fight you room to room, house to house. If you want to be part of the political process, you have to be part of the political process, you are welcome."

"If you do not want the multinational force in Iraq"—I was talking to Fallujah people recently, to tribes, ex-army officers, ex-Saddam loyalists—"if you want the multinational force out, win the elections. Go to the United Nations, talk to the Security Council, and tell them we don't need the multinational forces. But I tell you what is going to happen. If you ask the multinational force to leave prematurely"—this is me talking to the Fallujah people—"your country will be in ruins, and we cannot now, on our feet, stand and fight terrorism and global terrorism."

These are realities. And once you are in Iraq, I will be your* host. I can put you together with these people in my home, and you can talk to them. And you

* White House correction.

can find out yourselves that the Iraqis tremendously, by and large, respect the United States and respect the other partners in the coalition for helping Iraq, not only in liberation but now in helping Iraq to rebuild itself and to rebuild its institutions.

President Bush. Let me say one other thing about why I'm optimistic we'll succeed. By the way, you can understand it's tough and still be optimistic. You can understand how hard it is and believe we'll succeed.

I remember when some were talking about the possibility of success in Afghanistan in pretty stark terms. I don't know if you remember that period or not, but there was a period where some were saying that it wasn't possible for democracy to come forward in Afghanistan. Today, 10 million citizens have registered to vote, 41 percent of whom are women. It's a phenomenal statistic, I think. I think it shows what's possible if you believe—if you have certain beliefs from which you won't waver. And I believe people yearn to be free.

Again, I think if you look at polls—which sometimes I do, and sometimes I don't, admittedly, Moran—that by far the vast majority of Iraqis want to vote. They want to live in freedom. And the fundamental question is, do we—is this: Do we have the will to stay? Do we have the will to put smart strategy in place? I've laid out the strategy. We're implementing the strategy. But really, do we have the will to complete the mission? And my message to the Iraqi people and to the enemy and to our troops in harm's way and to our allies is: We'll complete the mission.

Listen, last question—Wendell [Wendell Goler, Fox News Channel]. And then we—I think it's probably time to head into the air-conditioning—

Q. Mr. President—

President Bush. Excuse me, ma'am. Wendell.

Impact of Mixed Signals on Coalition Efforts

Q. Thank you, sir. Mr. President, in the past couple of days you have been talking about the consequences of the mixed messages you say John Kerry sends. I want to ask you, sir, do you mean immediate consequences, not just if the Senator is elected? Do you mean that the messages being sent now have a negative effect on the effort in Iraq? And does making the war in Iraq a part of a campaign also have consequences on the situation there, sir?

President Bush. Well, I think—look, in a campaign, it's—the war of Iraq is going to be part of a campaign. It's—this is a major moment in American history. These are historic times, and I view it as a great opportunity to help secure our country. As I said before, Iraq is a central part of the war on terror, and I believe it's important for us to succeed there because of that.

See, 9/11 changed everything. September the 11th meant that we had to deal with a person like Saddam Hussein. Of course, I was hoping it could be done diplomatically. But diplomacy failed, and so the last resort of a President is to use force. And we did, and now we're helping the Iraqis.

The Prime Minister said something very interesting a while ago, and it's important for the American people to understand. Our strategy is to help the Iraqis help themselves. It's important that we train Iraqi troops. There are nearly 100,000 troops trained. The Iraqi^{*} national army is a part of the army. By the way, it was the Iraqi^{*} national army that went into Najaf and did the work there. There's a regular army being trained. There are border guards being trained. There are police being trained. That's a key part of our mission.

But Wendell, I think the world watches America. We're an influential nation, and everybody watches what we say. And I

think it's very important for the American President to mean what he says. That's why I understand that the enemy could misread what I say. That's why I try to be as clearly as I can. I don't want them to be emboldened by any confusion or doubt. I don't want them to think that, well, maybe all they've got to do is attack, and we'll shirk our duties. See, they've been emboldened before. They have caused certain nations to withdraw from coalitions as a result of their action, such action reinforcing the ability for suiciders, for example, to affect free societies. I know that. I've seen firsthand the tactics of these killers. And so therefore, I think it's very important for all of us involved in the process not to send mixed signals. I don't know what the enemy thinks today. But I do know they're watching America very carefully. I do know they want to affect other nations by their acts of murder. I do know they were emboldened when Spain withdrew from Iraq as a result of attacks and election.

And therefore, I have a duty to our troops, for starters—most importantly—not to send a mixed signal. I want our troops to know that the sacrifices they are making are worthwhile and necessary for the security of this country.

And I want—don't want the Iraqis to fear that, oh, all of a sudden there will be a change of heart, that there'll be tough times politically or that a poll might say something and, therefore, cause me to change my opinion. I don't want them to think that, because they have to make the hard choices for freedom. They have to go from a society that has been tortured by a brutal thug to a society in which they take responsibility for their daily lives.

I don't want the coalition forces to feel like we're wavering. And so I understand that people watch our words, and that's an explanation of why I say what I say.

Listen, thank you all very much.

Mr. Prime Minister, appreciate you. Good job.

^{*} White House correction.

Prime Minister Allawi. Okay. Thank you.
President Bush. Proud you're here.

NOTE: The President's news conference began at 12:06 p.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Prime Minister Tony Blair of the United Kingdom; Eugene Armstrong and Jack Hensley, American citizens who were killed in Iraq on September 20 and 21, respectively,

by militants led by senior Al Qaida associate Abu Musab Al Zarqawi; Gen. John P. Abizaid, USA, combatant commander, U.S. Central Command; James A. Baker III, former Presidential envoy on the issue of Iraqi debt; and former President Saddam Hussein of Iraq. Prime Minister Allawi referred to Usama bin Laden, leader of the Al Qaida terrorist organization.

Remarks in Bangor, Maine September 23, 2004

The President. Thanks for coming. I'm honored to be back in this beautiful State. I wasn't sure I'd be invited back after the last time I came; I didn't make my bed. [Laughter] What a beautiful day in such a glorious part of the world. I'm so honored you all came. I'm here to ask for the vote. That's what I'm doing.

I believe you got to get out amongst the people and ask for the vote and tell them why you're running. That's what I'm here to do today. I'm also here to ask for your help. I'd like for you to register your friends and neighbors. I'd like for you to remind people in the community in which you live, we have a responsibility in a free society to go to the polls.

When you're out there registering, make sure you register all Republicans. Make sure you register independents. Don't overlook discerning Democrats like Zell Miller. And then once you get them registered, get them headed to the polls. And when you get them headed to the polls, tell them, if they want a safer America, a stronger America, and a better America, to put me and Dick Cheney back in office.

My only regret is that Laura is not here with me. She was a public school librarian in Texas when I asked her to marry me. She said, "Fine, I'll marry you, just so long as I never have to give a political speech."

[Laughter] I said, "Okay." Fortunately, she didn't hold me to the promise. The other night in New York City, the American people got to see Laura at her best, her—decent, strong, compassionate woman. She's a great mom, a great wife. She needs to be the First Lady for 4 more years.

Audience members. Four more years!
Four more years! Four more years!

The President. I'm proud of my runningmate, Dick Cheney. Now, listen, I admit he doesn't have the waviest hair in the race. [Laughter] Some of you out there don't either. [Laughter] I didn't pick him for his hair. I picked him for his judgment. I picked him because he's a man of a lot of experience. I picked him because he can get the job done on behalf of the American people.

I want to thank Peter Cianchette, my chairman here in the State. I want to thank all of the grassroots activists, people like Pete who are putting up the signs and making the phone calls. It takes a lot of work to get this many people to show up here in Bangor, Maine. I want to thank all of those who helped turn out such a great crowd. I appreciate your effort. It means a lot.

I'm sorry the two United States Senators are—they're working for you. I appreciate their friendship. I'm proud to call Olympia