

down the street and have people not gesturing with all five fingers. It's a way for people to draw, you know, attention; I don't know what the guy's cause is. But one thing is for certain: He caused you to ask me a question about it. I didn't feel the least bit threatened by it. These journalists here were very apologetic; they were—said, “This doesn't represent the Iraqi people.” But that's what happens in free societies, where people try to draw attention to themselves. And so I guess he was effective, because he caused you to say something about it.

Now, in terms of the agreements, this is a major achievement. Is it the end? Absolutely not. There is more work to be done. And all this basically says is we made good progress, and we'll continue to work together to achieve peace. That's what we want: freedom and peace. And so, no, I'm honored to be back here. It's my fourth visit to Iraq and—as a sitting President, and I have been looking forward to this visit. It's very kind of you, Mr. Prime Minister, to have invited me here.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:03 p.m. at the Prime Minister's Palace. In his remarks, he referred to Lt. Gen. Raymond T. Odierno, USA, commanding general, Multi-National Force—Iraq; and President-elect Barack Obama. Prime Minister Maliki and a reporter spoke in Arabic, and their remarks were translated by an interpreter. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

Remarks to Military Personnel at Camp Victory in Baghdad

December 14, 2008

Audience members. U.S.A.! U.S.A.! U.S.A.!

The President. There you go. Thank you for coming out to say hello. General, thank you for the introduction; I am honored to be at Camp Victory.

Audience members. Hooah!

The President. Laura and I have been having a lot of Christmas parties at the White House, so I thought it would be kind of neat to change the scenery.

I would rather be with the men and women of the United States military than with anybody else.

So as you can see I decided to fly over, and in the spirit of the season we renamed Air Force One to “Rudolph One.”

Thanks for coming. I bring greetings from a proud and grateful nation; Merry Christmas to you, happy holidays. Congratulations on your inspiring accomplishments here in Iraq. And above all, thank you very much for volunteering to defend our country in a time of danger.

This is a time of year to give thanks for our many blessings. And the greatest blessing we have is freedom and the fact that we've got a United States military to defend that freedom.

So, General, thank you very much for your leadership. I'm proud to be with you again. I appreciate the leadership of General Austin as well. Ambassador Crocker and Christine are with us today. I had the pleasure of meeting Sergeant—Command Sergeant Major Lawrence Wilson, Command Sergeant Major Joe Allen, Major General Hammond—

Audience members. Hooah!

The President. Put it together for Hammond. [Laughter]

Audience members. Hooah!

The President. Command Sergeant Major Gioia—

Audience members. Hooah!

The President. There you go. Major General Oates; have you ever heard of—how about, have you ever heard of a guy named Redmore?

Audience members. Hooah!

The President. There you go. Thanks for coming out. I am thrilled to be here with the diplomats and Embassy personnel that are so critical to our success.

I want to thank the Iraqi citizens who are here with us today. I appreciate your courage. I know there are members of the coalition who are here with us. There have been a lot of troops from around the world who have come to help this young democracy survive and thrive. And so I want to thank the citizens of those country and the troops who have served here before us.

This is my fourth trip to Iraq, and you've probably heard I'm heading into retirement—[laughter]—so it's going to be my last trip as the President. But thanks to you, the Iraq we stand in tonight is dramatically freer, dramatically safer, and dramatically better than the Iraq we found 8 years ago.

And as a result of the sacrifices of our troops, America is safer, and America is more secure.

I want to take you back to what life was like 8 years ago here in Iraq. Iraq had a record of supporting terror, a record of developing and using weapons of mass destruction, was routinely firing at American military personnel, systematically violating United Nations resolutions. Life for the Iraqi people was a nightmare, with Saddam Hussein torturing and murdering anyone who did not support his repressive rule. Iraq was a sworn enemy of the United States at the heart of the Middle East; the region was a serious threat to us.

After the attacks of September the 11th, 2001, America concluded we could not tolerate a regime like this in a pivotal region of the world. I gave Saddam Hussein a chance to peacefully resolve the question as to whether or not he had weapons of mass destruction. You might remember, I went to the United Nations, where the—that body said, “Disarm, disclose, or face serious consequence.” It was his choice to make, and he made the wrong choice. And so the United States military, with a vast coalition removed this man from power, and the world is better off for it.

Audience members. Hooah! U.S.A.! U.S.A.! U.S.A.!

The President. I doubt in his worst nightmares, he ever would have dreamt that we'd be standing in one of his palaces.

Thanks to you, 25 million Iraqis are free. Thanks to you, Iraq is no longer sponsoring terror, it is fighting terror. It's making American people safer as a result.

The enemies of freedom in Iraq are determined, and this fight has been tough. Two years ago, the situation had grown dire; the political process was frozen, and sectarian violence was spiraling out of control. Some of you were here then. Many said the mission was hopeless; many called for retreat. Retreat

would have meant failure, and failure is never an option.

So instead of pulling troops out, we sent more troops in—called the surge. And because of you and because of your courage, the surge is one of the greatest successes in the history of the United States military.

Terrorists who once held safe havens across the country are being driven out of their strongholds. The political process that was once stalled is moving forward. Iraqi citizens once afraid to leave their homes are going back to school and shopping in markets and leading a more normal life. And American troops are returning home because of success.

The dramatic turnaround you led in Iraq culminated in two agreements completed last month, which the Prime Minister and I affirmed in a ceremony earlier today.

These agreements formalize the ties between our two democracies in areas ranging from security and diplomacy to culture and trade. These agreements show the way forward toward a historic day, when American forces withdraw from a democratic and successful Iraq, and the war in this land is won.

There's more hard work to do before we reach that day. But if there is any—but if there is no doubt—but there is no doubt in my mind, there's just no doubt that we're going to reach that day. I am confident because our cause is just and freedom is universal. I'm confident because the Iraqi people are showing unshakable determination and courage.

And above all, I am confident because I know the character and the strength of those who wear the uniform of the United States military.

Over the past 5 years, you have shown the world some unmistakable truths. You have shown that when America is tested, we rise to meet the test. You have shown that the desire for freedom is more powerful than the intimidation of terrorists. You have shown that there is no task too difficult for the United States military.

And so I have a message for you and all who serve our country: I want to thank you for making the noble choice to serve and to protect your fellow Americans. Sometimes it can be hard to tell when history is being

made, particularly if you're in the middle of the action. What you're doing in Iraq is as important and courageous and selfless as what American troops did in places like Normandy and Iwo Jima and Korea. Your generation is every bit as great as any that came before it. And the work you do every day will shape history for generations to come.

I guess what I'm telling you is, your grandchildren some day are going to say, "Thank God you showed up and served."

America now has a strong friend and a partner in the fight against extremism in the heart of the Middle East, and that is historic.

People across this troubled region of the world now have an example for a more hopeful path, a model of liberty that can prevail over tyranny and terror. Killers who wanted to take the lives of Americans back home have been brought to justice before they reached our shores.

Because of you all who worked to protect this Nation—and all who work to protect the Nation, America has done something many said was impossible: We have gone 7 years without a terrorist attack.

We think of those who have laid down their lives for freedom here in Iraq. Their children are growing up without a mom or a dad. But all the—of our children are growing up with something else: the promise of a safer America and a better world. And that is the lasting memorial of all who have sacrificed here in Iraq. And thanks to you, that memorial will be achieved, and their sacrifice will not be in vain.

We think of your comrades who have been wounded. And this Nation pledges that we will give them all the care and all the support they need to recover.

We think of all your families back home. I know many of you have a sweetheart who misses you, or a daughter who longs for her dad, or a mom who worries about you day and night. For many of you, it won't be your first holiday away, and that certainly doesn't make it easier. So I'm going to give you an order: When you get out of here, call home or e-mail home; you tell your families you love them; and you tell the Commander in Chief came by to thank them for their sacrifice along with yours.

Audience members. Hooah!

The President. Thanks for coming by to let me say hello. Thanks for serving the United States of America. They ask me what I'm going to miss as the President. I'll tell you what I'm going to miss: being the Commander in Chief of such a fabulous group of folks. May God bless you, and God bless America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:10 p.m. at Al Faw Palace. In his remarks, he referred to Lt. Gen. Raymond T. Odierno, USA, commanding general, Multi-National Force—Iraq, who introduced the President; Lt. Gen. Lloyd Austin, USA, commander, Multi-National Corps—Iraq; Christine Barnes, wife of U.S. Ambassador to Iraq Ryan C. Crocker; Command Sgt. Maj. Lawrence Wilson, USA, Multi-National Force—Iraq; Command Sgt. Maj. Joseph R. Allen, USA, Multi-National Corps—Iraq; Maj. Gen. Jeffery Hammond, USA, commander, Multi-National Division—Baghdad and 4th Infantry Division; Command Sgt. Maj. John Gioia, USA, Multi-National Division—Baghdad and 4th Infantry Division; Command Sgt. Maj. James W. Redmore, USA, Multi-National Division—Center; Maj. Gen. Michael Oates, USA, commander, Multi-National Division—Center; and Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki of Iraq.

Interview With Members of the White House Press Pool

December 14, 2008

Audience Disruption at the Signing Ceremony With Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki of Iraq

Q. Quick ducking there, sir.

The President. I was worried about you. I thought you were going to have a heart attack.

Q. I thought I was too. [*Laughter*] I'm with you on that.

The President. Okay, my opening statement: I didn't know what the guy said, but I saw his sole. [*Laughter*] You were more concerned than I was. I was watching your faces.

Q. I saw something black and round go by my face.

Q. Just to see that—

The President. —his first—other than shoes. [*Laughter*]

Q. —to duck. [*Laughter*]