

Remarks to United States Military Personnel at Al Asad Air Base September 3, 2007

The President. Thank you all. General, thank you very much. It's an honor to be with you.

As you know, today is Labor Day back home—

Audience members. Hooah!

President Bush. —so I thought I'd come by to thank you for all your hard work.

Audience members. Hooah!

President Bush. Every day—every day, you show bravery under incredibly difficult circumstances. Every day, you're doing work on the sands of Anbar that is making us safer in the streets of America. And every day, the United States of America is grateful for what you're doing. I want you to tell your families the Commander in Chief stopped by to say hello, and he said, I'm incredibly proud to be the Commander in Chief of such a great group of men and women.

I'm keeping pretty good company, as you can see. I brought out the A team so they could be with the folks who are making a significant difference in this war against these radicals and extremists. In Anbar, you're seeing firsthand the dramatic differences that can come when the Iraqis are more secure. In other words, you're seeing success.

You see, Sunnis who once fought side by side with Al Qaida against coalition troops now fighting side by side with coalition troops against Al Qaida. Anbar is a huge Province. It was once written off as lost. It is now one of the safest places in Iraq.

Audience members. Hooah!

President Bush. Because of your hard work, because of your bravery and sacrifice, you are denying Al Qaida a safe haven from which to plot and plan and carry out attacks against the United States of America. What

you're doing here is making this country safer, and I thank you for your hard work.

Audience members. Hooah!

President Bush. The surge of operations that began in June is improving security throughout Iraq. These military successes are paving the way for the political reconciliation and economic progress the Iraqis need to transform their country. When Iraqis feel safe in their own homes and neighborhoods, they can focus their efforts on building a stable civil society with functioning government structures at the local and Provincial and national levels. And that's important because a free Iraq, an Iraq that's an ally against these extremists and murderers will be a major defeat for the terrorists.

Earlier today I met with some of the tribal sheikhs here in Anbar. It was a really interesting meeting. And at the table were the leaders of the central Government as well. They told me that the kind of bottom-up progress that your efforts are bringing to Anbar is vital to the success and stability of a free Iraq. See, Iraqis need this stability to build a more peaceful future. And America needs this stability to prevent the chaos that allows the terrorists to set up bases from which they can plot and plan attacks on our homeland.

The very people that you helped the Iraqis defeat in Anbar swore allegiance to the man that ordered the attack on the United States of America. What happens here in Anbar matters to the security of the United States.

And so I thank you for your sacrifice. I thank you for volunteering in the face of danger. I thank you for your courage and your bravery. Every day you are successful here in Iraq draws nearer to the day when America can begin calling you and your fellow service men and women home.

But I want to tell you this about the decision—about my decision about troop levels. Those decisions will be based on a calm assessment by our military commanders on the conditions on the ground, not a nervous reaction by Washington politicians to poll results in the media.

Audience members. Hooah!

President Bush. In other words, when we begin to draw down troops from Iraq, it will be from a position of strength and success, not from a position of fear and failure. To do otherwise would embolden our enemies and make it more likely that they would attack us at home. If we let our enemies back us out of Iraq, we will more

likely face them in America. If we don't want to hear their footsteps back home, we have to keep them on their heels over here. And that's exactly what you're doing, and America is safer for it.

In Anbar, you're doing this hard work every day. We've all come to say thank you. We've come to tell you, the American people are standing with you. They're grateful for your sacrifice. As Commander in Chief, I'm proud to be in your presence on this Labor Day. I ask for God's blessings on you and your family, and may God continue to bless America. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:43 p.m.

The President's News Conference With Prime Minister John W. Howard of Australia in Sydney, Australia *September 5, 2007*

Prime Minister Howard. Mr. President, ladies and gentlemen, I'd like to welcome the media to this news conference. I'll say a couple of words, invite the President to speak briefly, and then we'll take a couple of questions from each of the press groups.

It's always a great pleasure, George, to welcome you to Australia. The United States President is always welcome in our country. We have no closer alliance with any country in the world than the one we have with the United States. Both historically and contemporaneously, the importance of the alliance between the United States of America and Australia is deeply embedded in the minds of millions of Australians.

And you, Mr. President, and I have shared a number of very special experiences over the past few years. I remember our first personal meeting was on the 10th of September of 2001. And of course, as a consequence of that meeting and the events that horrifically followed the other day, the paths of our two countries have

been parallel in so many ways, in the fight against terrorism and the promotion of democracy and freedom around the world. And in that context, as well as the more generic national context, I welcome you very warmly on a personal basis to my hometown of Sydney, Australia's largest city and, in my view, the most beautiful big city in the world.

But we had a very broad-ranging discussion. We talked extensively about Iraq, about the climate change aspects of APEC, the American perception towards conditions in the Middle East and in relation to Iran, and also the prospects for something we both hope for, and that is a lasting settlement between Israel and the Palestinian people which does justice to the right of the Israelis to exist unmolested as a free and proud nation and also the right of the people of Palestine to have a homeland.

On a bilateral basis, we have agreed to a number of new arrangements, including