

## Remarks at the Iftaar Dinner October 4, 2007

Thank you all for coming. Please be seated. *Ramadan Mubarak*. Laura and I are pleased to have you here for our seventh Iftaar dinner. Tonight we celebrate traditions of Islamic faith, which brings hope and comfort to more than a billion people. For Muslims around the world, the holy month of Ramadan is a special time of prayer and fasting. It is a time for charity and service to those less fortunate. It's a time to celebrate Islam's learned and vibrant culture, which has enriched civilization for centuries.

Ramadan is also a good time for Americans of all faiths to reflect on the values we hold in common, including love of family, gratitude to the Almighty, devotion to community, and a commitment to religious liberty. The freedom of worship is central to the American character. It's the first protection in the Bill of Rights. It holds together the fabric of American society, supporting every individual's right to practice his or her beliefs without fear.

Today, our world is at war with violent extremists who seek to tear the fabric of our society and stop the advance of freedom in Muslim societies around the world. They attack holy sites, destroy mosques and minarets, and kill innocent men, women, and children, including Muslims who do not share their radical views. They believe that by spreading chaos and violence they can frustrate the desire of Muslims to live in freedom and peace. We say to them, you don't represent Muslims, you do not represent Islam, and you will not succeed.

America is standing with mainstream citizens across the broader Middle East. We stand with nearly 12 million Iraqis who voted for a democratic future for their children. We're standing with Afghan people as they defend their young democracy against the Taliban and Al Qaida. We're

standing with the Lebanese people, who raised the banner of a Cedar Revolution to reclaim their freedom and independence. We're standing with all who seek the blessings of liberty and the peace that freedom brings.

Americans have a history of standing with Muslims facing suffering and hardship, and it's a proud history. Our country defended Muslims in Bosnia and Kosovo after the breakup of Yugoslavia. We supported Kuwait after it was invaded by Saddam Hussein. Americans came to the aid of victims of devastating earthquakes in Pakistan, India, and Iran. Americans responded with urgency and compassion to the wreckage of the tsunami in Indonesia and Sri Lanka and Thailand. We're rallying the world to confront the genocide in Sudan and deliver humanitarian aid for those in dire need. And we support the establishment of a Palestinian democracy to live side by side with Israel in peace.

As you break your Ramadan fast at this Iftaar dinner, let us renew our faith in the universality of freedom. Let us celebrate the millions of Muslims that we are proud to call American citizens. And let us honor the many Muslim nations that America is proud to call friends.

Laura and I are grateful you're here. Thank you for coming. We wish you a blessed Ramadan. And now I ask the Imam to say the blessing.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:16 p.m. in the State Dining Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Lt. Cmdr. Abuhena M. Saifulislam, USN, Navy Chaplain Corps.

## Interview With Elie Nakouzi of Al Arabiya October 4, 2007

*Mr. Nakouzi.* Mr. President, it's nice to see you. It's nice to meet you. And how are you doing?

*The President.* Welcome. Come on in the Oval Office. I'm doing great. Thank you. I welcome you here. And I thank you for the opportunity to talk to you about some of the decisions that I have made right here in this Oval Office. I'm honored you've come.

### *President's Decisionmaking*

*Mr. Nakouzi.* Actually, I want to tell the people of the Middle East that this is the place where big decisions are made. This is the office. But here it comes to my mind that how hard it is on you, Mr. President, to take like—a big decision like war, for example—is it that easy to take a decision such like war—

*The President.* No, it's the hardest decision a President can make. And when I campaigned for office, I never really thought about the decision to put men and women in harm's way. I never thought that that would happen. Circumstances changed, of course, and I had to make some very difficult decisions about how to protect our homeland and take action necessary to—the actions that, I think, will yield the peace.

And so whether it be in Afghanistan or Iraq, I was—I have made those decisions. And I will tell you, they're hard decisions, because I understand the consequences. One of the hardest things for me is to meet with a mother. I met with a mother yesterday in Pennsylvania who lost her son in combat. And you know, those can be very tearful and emotional moments, and I understand that. And my—the only thing I try to do is provide as much comfort as I can and to assure the mom, in this case, that I thought the decision was necessary for peace and necessary for our secu-

rity, and that I valued the fact that her son would volunteer, and that I vowed to honor that sacrifice by achieving our objectives.

Anyway, this is the room where I make the decisions.

### *War on Terror*

*Mr. Nakouzi.* But would these moments—I mean, these emotional moments, would they make you reconsider or rethink about what's going on in our area now?

*The President.* Not really. As a matter of fact, I leave most of the meetings reassured that the loved one, in this case, fully understanding what we were doing. See, I believe that, one, it's noble to liberate 25 million people from a tyrant; two, that we cannot allow Iraq to be a safe haven for people who have sworn allegiance to those who have attacked us. In other words, I believe we must defeat the extremists there so we don't have to face them here at home. And three, I believe the spread of liberty will yield peace. And I believe the Middle East is plenty capable of being a part of the world where liberty flourishes. That's what I believe people want.

And so I leave those meetings saddened by the fact that a person has pain in her heart—and yesterday she had pain in her heart—but encouraged by the fact that her son died for a noble cause and a necessary cause. And that's exactly what she told me.

### *Islam/Religious Freedom*

*Mr. Nakouzi.* Actually, I want to thank you again, Mr. President, for giving us the opportunity to talk for the first time to the Arab world, to address them with the big concerns. I know we have a great deal of questions. I know you have a very tight schedule—