

OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM

IRAQ: SPECIAL REPORT

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Office of the Press Secretary
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President Discusses the Future of Iraq

Remarks by the President on Operation Iraqi Freedom
Ford Community and Performing Arts Center
Dearborn, Michigan

1:46 P.M. EDT



VIDEO Multimedia

President's Remarks

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THE PRESIDENT: Thank you for that warm welcome; I'm glad to be here. I regret that I wasn't here a few weeks ago when the statue came down. (Applause.) I understand you had quite a party. I don't blame you. A lot of the people in the Detroit area had waited years for that great day.

Many Iraqi Americans know the horrors of Saddam Hussein's regime firsthand. You also know the joys of freedom you have found here in America. (Applause.) You are living proof the Iraqi people love freedom and living proof the Iraqi people can flourish in democracy. (Applause.) People who live in Iraq deserve the same freedom that you and I enjoy here in America. (Applause.) And after years of tyranny and torture, that freedom has finally arrived. (Applause.)



I have confidence in the future of a free Iraq. The Iraqi people are fully capable of self-government. Every day Iraqis are moving toward democracy and embracing the responsibilities of active citizenship. Every day life in Iraq improves as coalition troops work to secure unsafe areas and bring food and medical care to those in need.

America pledged to rid Iraq of an oppressive regime, and we kept our word. (Applause.) America now pledges to help Iraqis build a prosperous and peaceful nation, and we will keep our word again. (Applause.)

Mr. Mayor, thanks, I appreciate you greeting me once again here in Dearborn. I appreciate your leadership. If you've got any problems with the garbage or the potholes, call the mayor. (Laughter.)

I want to thank members of the congressional delegation who have joined us today. Thank you all for coming. Michigan is well represented in the halls of the United States Congress. (Applause.) I want to thank the folks from the state government who have joined us today and local governments. I appreciate so very much the CEOs of the major automobile manufacturing companies who are based here in Detroit who are here: Rick Wagoner, Bill Ford and Deter Zetsche. Thank you all for coming. I look forward to discussing things with you later. (Applause.)

Right before I came in here I had the opportunity to meet with some extraordinary men and women, our fellow Americans who knew the cruelties of the old Iraq. And like me, they believed deeply in the promise of a new Iraq.

I spoke with Najda Egaily, a Sunni Muslim from Basra who moved to the United States five years ago. Najda learned the price of descent in Iraq in 1988, when her brother-in-law was killed after laughing at a joke about Saddam Hussein in a house that was bugged.

In Iraq, Najda says, we could never speak to anyone about Saddam Hussein -- we had to make sure the windows were closed. (Applause.) The windows are now open in Iraq. (Applause.) Najda and her friends will never forget seeing the images of liberation in Baghdad. Here's what she said: we called each other and we were shouting; we never believed that Saddam Hussein would be gone.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: He's gone. (Applause.)

THE PRESIDENT: Like Najda, a lot of Iraqis -- a lot of Iraqis -- feared the dictator, the tyrant would never go away. You're right -- he's gone. (Applause.)

AUDIENCE MEMBERS: USA! USA!

AUDIENCE MEMBER: (Inaudible) back in the (inaudible). (Applause.)

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Because of you, Mr. President, so can you.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: (Inaudible).

THE PRESIDENT: We love free speech in America. (Laughter and applause.)

I talked to Tarik Daoud, a Catholic from Basra who now lives in Bloomfield Hills. (Applause.) When the dictator regime fell, here's what Tariq said, he said: I am more hopeful today than I've been since 1958. We need to take the little children in Iraq and hold their hands and really teach them what freedom is all about. He says: the new generation could really make democracy work.

He's right to be optimistic. From the beginning of this conflict we have seen brave Iraqi citizens taking part in their own liberation. Iraqis have warned our troops about land mines and enemy hideouts and military arsenals.

Earlier this month, Iraqis helped Marines locate the seven American prisoners of war, who were then rescued in Northern Iraq. (Applause.) One courageous Iraqi man gave Marines detailed layouts of a hospital in An Nasiriyah, which led to the rescue of American soldier Jessica Lynch. (Applause.)

Iraqi citizens are now working closely with our troops to restore order to their cities, and improve the life of their nation. In Basra, hundreds of police volunteers have joined with coalition forces to patrol the streets. In Baghdad, more than a thousand citizens are doing joint patrols with coalition troops. And residents are also working with coalition troops to collect unexploded munitions from neighborhoods, and repair the telephone system. People are working to improve the lives of the average citizens in Iraq. (Applause.)

I want you to listen to what an Iraqi engineer said who was working with U.S. Army engineers to restore power to Baghdad. He said: We are very glad to work with the Americans to have power for the facilities. The Americans are working to help us. (Applause.) Iraqi Americans, including some from Michigan, are building bridges between our troops and Iraqi civilians. Members of the free Iraqi forces are serving as translators for our troops, and are delivering humanitarian aid to the citizens.



One of these volunteers, an Iraqi American who fled Saddam Hussein's regime in 1991, recently returned to his homeland with the 101st Airborne Division. A few weeks ago, when he first saw the cheering crowds of Iraqis welcome coalition troops in Hillah he wept. He said people could hardly believe what was happening, and he told them: believe it -- liberation is coming. (Applause.)



Yes, there were some in our country who doubted the Iraqi people wanted freedom, or they just couldn't imagine they would be welcome -- welcoming to a liberating force. They were mistaken, and we know why. The desire for freedom is not the property of one culture, it is the universal hope of human beings in every culture. (Applause.)

Whether you're Sunni or Shia or Kurd or Chaldean or Assyrian or Turkoman or Christian or Jew or Muslim -- (applause) -- no matter what your faith, freedom is God's gift to every person in every nation. (Applause.) As freedom takes hold in Iraq, the Iraqi people will choose their own leaders and their own government. America has no intention of imposing our form of government or our culture. Yet, we will ensure that all Iraqis have a voice in the new government and all citizens have their rights protected. (Applause.)

In the city of An Nasiriyah, where free Iraqis met recently to discuss the political future of their country, they issued a statement beginning with these words: Iraq must be democratic. (Applause.)

AUDIENCE MEMBER: USA! USA! USA! (Applause.)

THE PRESIDENT: That historic declaration expresses the commitment of the Iraqi people and their friends, the American people. The days of repression from any source are over. Iraq will be democratic. (Applause.)

The work of building a new Iraq will take time. That nation is recovering not just from weeks of conflict, but from decades of totalitarian rule.

In a nation where the dictator treated himself to palaces with gold faucets and grand fountains, four out of ten citizens did not even have clean water to drink. While a former regime exported milk, and dates, and corn, and grain for its own profit, more than half a million Iraqi children were malnourished. As Saddam Hussein let more than \$200 million worth of medicine and medical supplies sit in warehouses, one in eight Iraqi children were dying before the age of five. And while the dictator spent billions on weapons, including gold-covered AK-47s, nearly a quarter of Iraqi children were born underweight. Saddam Hussein's regime impoverished the Iraqi people in every way.

Today, Iraq has only about half as many hospitals as it had in 1990. Seventy percent of its schools are run-down and over-crowded. A quarter of the Iraqi children are not in a school at all. Under Saddam's regime, the Iraqi people did not have a power system they could depend on. These problems plagued Iraq long before the recent conflict. We're helping the Iraqi people to address these challenges, and we will stand with them as they defeat the dictator's legacy. (Applause.)

Right now, engineers are on the ground working with Iraqi experts to restore power, and fix broken water pipes in Baghdad and other cities. We're working with the International Red Cross, the Red Crescent Societies, the International Medical Corps and other aid agencies to help Iraqi hospitals get safe water and medical supplies and reliable electricity. Our coalition is cooperating with the United Nations to help restart the ration distribution system that provides food at thousands of sites in Iraq. And coalition medical facilities have treated Iraqis from everything from fractures and burns to symptoms of stroke.

One Iraqi man who was given medical help with his wife and sister aboard the U.S. Navy ship Comfort, said: They treat us like family. There are babies in Iraq who are not cared for by their mothers as well as the nurses have cared for us.

Already, we are seeing important progress in Iraq. It wasn't all that long ago that the statue fell, and now we're seeing progress. (Applause.)

Rail lines are reopening, and fire stations are responding to calls. Oil -- Iraqi oil, owned by the Iraqi people -- is flowing

again to fuel Iraq's power plants. In Hillah, more than 80 percent of the city has now running water. City residents can buy meats and grains and fruits and vegetables at local shops. The mayor's office, the city council have been reestablished.

In Basra, where more than half of the water treatment facilities were not working before the conflict -- more than half weren't functioning -- water supplies are now reaching 90 percent of the city. The opulent presidential palace in Basra will now serve a new and noble purpose. We've established a water purification unit there, to make hundreds of thousands of liters of clean water available to the residents of the city of Basra. (Applause.)

Day by day, hour by hour, life in Iraq is getting better for the citizens. (Applause.) Yet, much work remains to be done. I have directed Jay Garner and his team to help Iraq achieve specific long-term goals. And they're doing a superb job. Congress recently allocated \$2.5 -- nearly \$2.5 billion for Iraq's relief and reconstruction. With that money, we are renewing Iraq with the help of experts from inside our government, from private industry, from the international community and, most importantly, from within Iraq. (Applause.)

We are dispatching teams across Iraq to assess the critical needs of the Iraqi people. We're clearing land mines. We're working with Iraqis to recover artifacts, to find the hoodlums who ravished the National Museum of Antiquities in Baghdad. (Applause.) Like many of you here, we deplore the actions of the citizens who ravished that museum. And we will work with the Iraqi citizens to find out who they were and to bring them to justice. (Applause.)

We're working toward an Iraq where, for the first time ever, electrical power is reliable and widely available. One of our goals is to make sure everybody in Iraq has electricity. Already, 17 major power plants in Iraq are functioning. Our engineers are meeting with Iraqi engineers. We're visiting power plants throughout the country, and determining which ones need repair, which ones need to be modernized, and which ones are obsolete, power plant by power plant. More Iraqis are getting the electricity they need.

We're working to make Iraq's drinking water clean and dependable. American and Iraqi water sanitation engineers are inspecting treatment plants across the country to make sure they have enough purification chemicals and power to produce safe water.

We're working to give every Iraqi access to immunizations and emergency treatment, and to give sick children and pregnant women the health care they need. Iraqi doctors and nurses and other medical personnel are now going back to work. Throughout the country, medical specialists from many countries are identifying the needs of Iraqis hospitals, for everything from equipment and repairs to water, to medicines.

We're working to improve Iraqi schools by funding a back to school campaign that will help train and recruit Iraqi teachers, provide supplies and equipment, and bring children across Iraq back into clean and safe schools. (Applause.)

And as we do that, we will make sure that the schools are no longer used as military arsenals and bunkers, and that teachers promote reading, rather than regime propaganda. (Applause.) And because Iraq is now free, economic sanctions are pointless. (Applause.) It is time for the United Nations to lift the sanctions so the Iraqis could use some resources to build their own prosperity. (Applause.)

Like so many generations of immigrants, Iraqi Americans have embraced and enriched this great country, without ever forgetting the land of your birth. Liberation for Iraq has been a long time coming, but you never lost faith. You knew the great sorrow of Iraq. You also knew the great promise of Iraq, and you shared the hope of the Iraqi people.

You and I both know that Iraq can realize those hopes. Iraq can be an example of peace and prosperity and freedom to the entire Middle East. (Applause.) It'll be a hard journey, but at every step of the way, Iraq will have a steady friend in the American people. (Applause.)

May God continue to bless the United States of America, and long live a free Iraq. (Applause.)

END 2:10 P.M. EDT

