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Office of the Press Secretary
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President's Radio Address

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THE PRESIDENT: Good morning.

This week, my Administration submitted to Congress an interim report on the situation in Iraq. This report provides an initial assessment of how the Iraqi government is doing in meeting the 18 benchmarks that Congress asked us to measure. This is a preliminary report. In September, General Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker will return to Washington to provide a more comprehensive assessment.

The interim report released this week finds that the Iraqis have made satisfactory progress in eight areas -- such as providing the three brigades they promised for the surge, establishing joint security stations in Baghdad neighborhoods, and providing \$10 billion of their own money for reconstruction. In eight other areas, the progress was unsatisfactory -- such as failing to prepare for local elections or pass a law to share oil revenues. In two remaining areas, the progress was too unclear to be characterized one way or the other.

Those who believe that the battle in Iraq is lost are pointing to the unsatisfactory performance on some of the political benchmarks. Those of us who believe the battle in Iraq can and must be won see the satisfactory performance on several of the security benchmarks as a cause for optimism. Our strategy is built on the premise that progress on security will pave the way for political progress. This report shows that conditions can change, progress can be made, and the fight in Iraq can be won.

The strategy we are now pursuing is markedly different from the one we were following last year. It became clear that our approach in Iraq was not working. So I consulted my national security team, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and military commanders and diplomats on the ground. I brought in outside experts to hear their ideas. And after listening to this advice, in January I

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announced a new way forward -- sending reinforcements to help the Iraqis protect their people, improve their security forces, and advance the difficult process of reconciliation at both the national and local levels.

Our recent experience in Anbar Province shows what we hope to achieve throughout Iraq. As recently as last September, Anbar was held up as an example of America's failure in Iraq. Around the same time, the situation began to change. Sunni tribes that had been fighting alongside al Qaeda against our coalition came forward to fight alongside our coalition against al Qaeda. So I sent reinforcements to take advantage of this opportunity. And together we have driven al Qaeda from most of Anbar's capital city of Ramadi -- and attacks there are now at a two-year low.

We are now carrying out operations to replicate the success in Anbar in other parts of the country -- especially in the regions in and around Baghdad. We are starting to take the initiative away from al Qaeda -- and aiding the rise of an Iraqi government that can protect its people, deliver basic services, and be an ally in the war against extremists and radicals. By doing this, we are creating the conditions that will allow our troops to begin coming home. When America starts drawing down our forces in Iraq, it will be because our military commanders say the conditions on the ground are right -- not because pollsters say it would be good politics.

Some people say the surge has been going for six months and that is long enough to conclude that it has failed. In fact, the final reinforcements arrived in Iraq just a month ago -- and only then was General Petraeus able to launch the surge in full force. He and the troops who have begun these dangerous operations deserve the time and resources to carry them out.

To begin to bring troops home before our commanders tell us we are ready would be dangerous for our country. It would mean surrendering the future of Iraq to al Qaeda, risking a humanitarian catastrophe, and allowing the terrorists to establish a safe haven in Iraq and gain control of vast oil resources they could use to fund new attacks on America. And it would increase the probability that American troops would have to return at some later date to confront an enemy that is even more dangerous.

Most Americans want to see two things in Iraq: They want to see our troops succeed, and they want to see our troops begin to come home. We can do both, and we will. Our troops in Iraq are serving bravely. They're making great sacrifices. Changing the conditions in Iraq is difficult, and it can be done. The best way to start bringing these good men and women home is to make sure the surge succeeds.

Thank you for listening.

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