

There are those who debate whether Iraq was the right place to use military force. I agree with Senator John McCain who recently said, “our choice wasn’t between a benign status quo and the bloodshed of war. It was between war and a graver threat.”

As the Senator explained further, “There was no status quo to be left alone. The years of keeping Saddam in a box were coming to a close. The international consensus that he be kept isolated and unarmed had eroded to the point that many critics of military action had decided the time had come again to do business with Saddam, despite his near daily attacks on our pilots, and his refusal, until his last day in power, to allow the unrestricted inspection of his arsenal.”

The success of democracy in Iraq is the terrorists’ greatest fear—“suffocation” as I mentioned Zarqawi calls it. For success in Iraq will have effects far beyond its borders. As Senator McCain said, “Our efforts may encourage the people of a region that has never known peace or freedom or lasting stability that they may someday possess these rights.”

When they possess those rights, it will be one more step in pushing the extremist ideology they espouse to the margins of civilized society. As the President said last week, “The terrorists know that a vibrant, successful democracy at the heart of the Middle East will discredit their radical ideology of hate. They know that men and women with hope and purpose and dignity do not strap bombs on their bodies and kill the innocent.”

Winning in Iraq and Afghanistan is imperative, but it is only part of the larger war on terrorism. Winning in each of the geographical theaters I’ve mentioned is only part of the victory. Victory in the war on terror requires sowing the seeds of hope, expanding the appeal of freedom, particularly in the broader Middle East. That is why, in his speech marking the 20th anniversary of the National Endowment for Democracy last November, the President said that we must work with our partners in the Greater Middle East and around the world to promote tolerance, rule of law, political and economic openness, and the extension of greater opportunities so that all people—men and women alike, Muslim and non-Muslim—can realize their full potential.

As democracy grows in the Middle East, it becomes easier for peacemakers to succeed throughout the region. There are so many wonderful Muslims who are our best allies in fighting this ideological battle. They are not just Muslims, they are devout Muslims, and we need to use a terminology that doesn’t put them on the other side—to our people or to theirs. Let me tell you briefly about three whom I know personally.

One of them is the new Prime Minister of Pakistan. Another one is the former President of Indonesia. The third is the former Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia, who was released last week, having served six years in jail as a political prisoner.

These are three of the most wonderful human beings in public life anywhere. It is men and women like them who will lead change throughout the Muslim world.

Of course, there will be skeptics, like those who reported from Europe in 1946. They will say: It can’t be done,” and “Arabs don’t do democracy.” But, I remember a time, some 20 years ago, when I worked for President Reagan on East Asian and Pacific matters—first as his Assistant Secretary of State for that region, and then as his ambassador to Indonesia, the country with the