

officials, and leaders of both parties in Congress. I have benefited from their advice, and I have accepted General Petraeus's recommendations. I have directed General Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker to update their joint campaign plan for Iraq, so we can adjust our military and civilian resources accordingly. I have also directed them to deliver another report to Congress in March. At that time, they will provide a fresh assessment of the situation in Iraq and of the troop levels and resources we need to meet our national security objectives.

The principle guiding my decisions on troop levels in Iraq is "return on success." The more successful we are, the more American troops can return home. And in all we do, I will ensure that our commanders on the ground have the troops and flexibility they need to defeat the enemy.

Americans want our country to be safe and our troops to begin coming home from Iraq. Yet those of us who believe success in Iraq is essential to our security, and those who believe we should begin bringing our troops home, have been at odds. Now, because of the measure of success we are seeing in Iraq, we can begin seeing troops come home. The way forward I have described tonight makes it possible, for the first time in years, for people who have been on opposite sides of this difficult debate to come together.

This vision for a reduced American presence also has the support of Iraqi leaders from all communities. At the same time, they understand that their success will require U.S. political, economic, and security engagement that extends beyond my presidency. These Iraqi leaders have asked for an enduring relationship with America. And we are ready to begin building that relationship -- in a way that protects our interests in the region and requires many fewer American troops.

The success of a free Iraq is critical to the security of the United States. A free Iraq will deny al Qaeda a safe haven. A free Iraq will counter the destructive ambitions of Iran. A free Iraq will marginalize extremists, unleash the talent of its people, and be an anchor of stability in the region. A free Iraq will set an example for people across the Middle East. A free Iraq will be our partner in the fight against terror -- and that will make us safer here at home.

Realizing this vision will be difficult, but it is achievable. Our military commanders believe we can succeed. Our diplomats believe we can succeed. And for the safety of future generations of Americans, we must succeed.

If we were to be driven out of Iraq, extremists of all strains would be emboldened. Al Qaeda could gain new recruits and new sanctuaries. Iran would benefit from the chaos and would be encouraged in its efforts to gain nuclear weapons and dominate the region. Extremists could control a key part of the global energy supply. Iraq could face a humanitarian nightmare. Democracy movements would be violently reversed. We would leave our children to face a far more dangerous world. And as we saw on September the 11th, 2001, those dangers can reach our cities and kill our people.

Whatever political party you belong to, whatever your position on Iraq, we should be able to agree that America has a vital interest in preventing chaos and providing hope in the Middle East. We should be able to agree that we must defeat al Qaeda, counter Iran, help the Afghan government, work for peace in the Holy Land, and strengthen our military so we can prevail in the struggle against terrorists and