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President Bush Discusses Iraq

Colonnade

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THE PRESIDENT: Good morning. This has been a month of encouraging news from Iraq. Violence is down to its lowest level since the spring of 2004, and we're now in our third consecutive month with reduced violence levels holding steady. General Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker caution that the progress is still reversible, but they report that there now appears to be a "degree of durability" to the gains we have made.

A significant reason for this sustained progress is the success of the surge. Another is the increasing capability of the Iraqi forces. Iraqi forces now have 192 combat battalions in the fight -- and more than 110 of these battalions are taking the lead in combat operations against terrorists and extremists.

We saw the capability of those forces earlier this year, when the Iraqi government launched successful military operations against Shia extremist groups in Basra, Amarah, and the Sadr City area of Baghdad. Because of these operations, extremists who once terrorized the citizens of these communities have been driven from their strongholds. As a result, our Ambassador to Iraq, Ryan Crocker, was able to walk the streets of Sadr City last Wednesday, as something that would not have been possible just a few months ago.



This week, the Iraqi government is launching a new offensive in parts of the Diyala province that contain some of al Qaeda's few remaining safe havens in the country. This operation is Iraqi-led; our forces are playing a supporting role. And in the moments -- in the months ahead, the Iraqis will continue taking the lead in more military operations across the country.

As security in Iraq has improved, the Iraqi government has made political progress as well. The Iraqi Council of Representatives has passed several major pieces of legislation this year, and Iraqi leaders