

Georgia, Hungary, Italy, Kazakhstan, Latvia, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, South Korea, Spain, Thailand, and Ukraine have given their lives in the fight against the extremists. (Applause.) The citizens of these countries have sacrificed for the cause of freedom in Iraq. America has been proud to serve alongside such courageous allies.

I congratulate our coalition partners on their historic accomplishments in Iraq, and for maintaining their resolve during the dark days. Thanks to their determined work and the growing capability of Iraqi forces, many of our partners in Iraq are now in a position to "return on success" as well. Australia has withdrawn its battle group, the Polish contingent is set to redeploy shortly, and many more coalition nations will be able to conclude their deployments to Iraq this year -- thanks to the skill of their troops and the success of their missions. (Applause.)

The important task in the period ahead will be to work toward the conclusion of a strategic framework agreement and a status of forces agreement between the United States and Iraq. These agreements will serve as the foundation for America's continued security support to Iraq once the United Nations resolution authorizing the multinational forces there expires on December 31st of this year. They will allow us to establish a bilateral relationship between the United States and Iraq like those we have with dozens of other countries around the world.

Early on in this struggle, I made clear that America's goal in Iraq was to help the Iraqi people build a democratic nation that can govern itself, sustain itself, and defend itself. And thanks to the success of the surge, Iraq is making steady progress toward that goal. (Applause.) The steps I've described here at NDU will help us build on this success. It will set America's engagement in Iraq on a strong and steady course, and it will allow our troops to come home in victory. (Applause.)

Al Qaeda's leaders have repeatedly declared that Iraq is the central front of their war with America -- but it is not the only front. As al Qaeda faces increased pressure in Iraq, the terrorists are stepping up their efforts on the front where this struggle first began -- the nation of Afghanistan.

After September the 11th, 2001, coalition forces destroyed the Taliban regime. We drove al Qaeda from the Afghan sanctuary where they had plotted and planned unprecedented attacks on our country. We helped Afghans begin to build a new democracy. Together with our military, American civilian experts helped the Afghan people build their economy, and provide basic services, and expand health care, as well as open up schools for Afghan girls and boys.

These were important successes. Yet the enemies of a free Afghanistan refused to give up the fight. They sought to undermine the democratic government so they could regain the place of dominance they enjoyed in Afghanistan before September the 11th. With the help of their sanctuary in Pakistan, they ruthlessly attacked innocent Afghans across the country.

As the security situation changed, America and our coalition partners responded with troop increases. At the NATO summit in Bucharest in April, I told our allies the United States was deploying 3,500 more Marines to Afghanistan, and that we would make additional forces available in 2009. I also called on allies to increase their force levels. And during the past year, the United Kingdom, France, Poland, Bulgaria, Romania, Australia, Germany, Denmark, the Czech Republic, and others have sent