

additional forces to support the NATO mission in Afghanistan.

These troop increases represent a "quiet surge" in Afghanistan. In all, the number of American troops in the country increased from less than 21,000 two years ago to nearly 31,000 today. The number of coalition troops -- including NATO troops -- increased from about 20,000 to about 31,000. And the number of trained Afghan army and police forces increased from less than 67,000 to nearly 144,000.

These troop increases have made a difference, yet huge challenges in Afghanistan remain. This is a vast country. And unlike Iraq, it has few natural resources and has an under-developed infrastructure. Its democratic institutions are fragile. Its enemies are some of the most hardened terrorists and extremists in the world. With their brutal attacks, the Taliban and terrorists have made some progress in shaking the confidence of the Afghan people. And in the face of all these challenges, the Afghan people are naturally questioning what their future looks like.

Afghanistan's success is critical to the security of America and our partners in the free world. And for all the good work we've done in that country, it is clear we must do even more. As we learned in Iraq, the best way to restore the confidence of the people is to restore basic security -- and that requires more troops. I'm announcing today additional American troop deployments to Afghanistan. In November, a Marine battalion that was scheduled to deploy to Iraq will instead deploy to Afghanistan. It will be followed in January by an Army combat brigade.

The mission of these forces will be to work with the Afghan forces to provide security for the Afghan people, protect Afghanistan's infrastructure and democratic institutions, and help ensure access to services like education and health care. They will show the citizens of Afghan that the government and its partners will stand with them in the battle against the Taliban and the extremists. They will help clarify a stark contrast in Afghanistan: While the terrorists and extremists deliberately target and murder the innocent, coalition and Afghan forces risk their lives to protect the innocent.

Regrettably, there will be times when our pursuit of the enemy will result in accidental civilian deaths. This has been the case throughout the history of warfare. Our nation mourns the loss of every innocent life. Every grieving family has the sympathy of the American people. And I've given President Karzai my word that America will work closely with the Afghan government to ensure the security of the Afghan people while protecting innocent life.

As we deploy these reinforcements, America will take new steps to help the Afghan government mobilize more forces of its own. Afghan fighters are good fighters. If you talk to people who have been in Afghanistan, they'll tell you the Afghan troops are courageous, they just need some help. Along with the Afghan government, the United States and our allies are now launching a new initiative to double the size of the Afghan National Army over the next five years. We'll also work to increase the involvement of Afghan tribes. Local Afghan forces were key to our successes in 2001 and 2002, when we combined the 21st century capabilities of the American military with the courage of Afghan fighters on horseback. In the period ahead, we will once again encourage Afghan security forces and Afghan tribes to take a leading role in the building of a democratic Afghanistan. The Taliban and al Qaeda will not be allowed to return to power. The terrorists will suffer the same fate in Afghanistan that they are now suffering in Iraq -- and they will be defeated. (Applause.)