

Press Conference by the President Bush

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The fight in Iraq is part of a broader struggle that's unfolding across the region. The same region in Iran -- the same regime in Iran that is pursuing nuclear weapons and threatening to wipe Israel off the map is also providing sophisticated IEDs to extremists in Iraq who are using them to kill American soldiers. The same Hezbollah terrorists who are waging war against the forces of democracy in Lebanon are training extremists to do the same against coalition forces in Iraq. The same Syrian regime that provides support and sanctuary for Islamic jihad and Hamas has refused to close its airport in Damascus to suicide bombers headed to Iraq. All these extremist groups would be emboldened by a precipitous American withdrawal, which would confuse and frighten friends and allies in the region.

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Q Didn't we go into Iraq --

THE PRESIDENT: It was his decision to make. Obviously, it was a difficult decision for me to make, to send our brave troops, along with coalition troops, into Iraq. I firmly believe the world is better off without Saddam Hussein in power. Now the fundamental question facing America is will we stand with this young democracy, will we help them achieve stability, will we help them become an ally in this war against extremists and radicals that is not only evident in Iraq, but it's evident in Lebanon, the Palestinian Territories and Afghanistan.

We're at the beginning stages of a great ideological conflict between those who yearn for peace and those who want their children to grow up in a normal, decent society, and radicals and extremists who want to impose their dark vision on people throughout the world. Iraq is obviously -- Helen, it's got the attention of the American people, as it should; this is a difficult war and it's a tough war. But as I have consistently stated throughout this presidency, it is a necessary war to secure our peace.

I find it interesting that as this young democracy has taken hold, radicals and extremists kill innocent people to stop its advance. And that ought to be a clear signal to the American people that these are dangerous people and their ambition is not just contained to Iraq. Their ambition is to continue to hurt the American people. My attitude is we ought to defeat them there so we don't have to face them here, and that we ought to defeat their ideology with a more hopeful form of government.