



April 28, 2004

Reflecting on the President's Speech Aboard the USS Abraham Lincoln

The Mission Was Accomplished

“Major combat operations in Iraq have ended. In the battle of Iraq, the United States and our allies have prevailed. And now our coalition is engaged in securing and reconstructing that country.”

- President George W. Bush, May 1, 2003

May 1 marks the one-year anniversary of President Bush's announcement aboard the aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln that “major combat operations in Iraq have ended.” Democrats and war critics, however, have twisted the President's words and the image of the “Mission Accomplished” banner pictured behind him that day to infer that the Bush Administration was naïve about the post-war Iraq situation. In making their charge, Democrats are deliberately confusing the issue: they refuse to distinguish between the end of wartime combat operations and the current post-conflict stabilization and pacification efforts.

President Bush made abundantly clear that he recognized the challenges that would be facing America, directly stating the need for U.S. troops to remain in Iraq: “And now our coalition is engaged in securing and reconstructing that country,” he stated — one sentence after saying that major combat operations were over.¹

The President further noted: “We have difficult work to do in Iraq. We're bringing order to parts of that country that remain dangerous And we will stand with the new leaders of Iraq as they establish a government of, by, and for the Iraqi people. *The transition from dictatorship to democracy will take time, but it is worth every effort. Our coalition will stay until our work is done. Then we will leave, and we will leave behind a free Iraq.*”

The President's resolve toward finishing the job in Iraq has not flagged nor fluctuated during the past year. He was willing to wage war and risk American lives for the right reasons:

¹ Address by President George W. Bush aboard USS Abraham Lincoln, May 1, 2003. Emphasis added.

to take the fight to the enemies of freedom and to defend the will of the international community. Democrats and war critics have repeatedly refused to recognize these facts, and *in the process have failed to understand that the mission was, in fact, accomplished.*

The clear meaning of the President's words on May 1, 2003 was that Saddam Hussein had been conquered, Iraq's military defeated, and the work of pacification and reconstruction had begun — and that such work would be difficult and costly.

In conducting Operation Iraqi Freedom, the United States and its allies liberated 25 million people from the dictatorship of Saddam Hussein — whose legacy includes the murder of his own people, attacks and threats on his neighbors, the abuse of international goodwill afforded by the Oil for Food program, and the defiance of the international community by refusing to comply with both the terms of the 1991 Gulf War ceasefire agreement and the subsequent resolutions demanding weapons inspections. By liberating Iraq, the United States and the coalition removed the threat that Hussein represented and helped change the dynamics on the ground in the Middle East, assisting in the efforts in the war on terror.

The United States has a vested interest in Iraq becoming a functioning, stable democracy that benefits both the Iraqi people and serves as a source of democratic influence on the peoples and leaders throughout the region. Repeatedly during the past year, President Bush has made it clear that the liberation of Iraq and removal of the Hussein regime did not mean that peace and stability would be the immediate byproducts. In fact, President Bush clearly stated his expectation that violence in the liberated Iraq would remain a challenge, and that a continued commitment would be needed from America's soldiers and the public in the days ahead.

So, as the critics of the Bush Administration continue their attempts to undermine both the American and international resolve for U.S. and coalition efforts in Iraq — or to simply try to score political points in an election year — they should pause to think about just what alternatives they have to offer. More importantly, they should carefully consider the message they are sending to both the enemies and defenders of freedom throughout the world.