

EYE ON IRAQ

November 28, 2005

The Iraqi people, with help from coalition nations, continue to succeed in reconstruction, economic development and fighting terrorism

LTG Vines Remarks to reporters during Nov. 22 Press Conference on the progress being made in Iraq

I must tell you that I believe that the heroic efforts of our men and women over here have helped contribute to the relative peace and security that we enjoy back in the United States, and I believe it's because of the efforts of the men and women here, as well as our security forces back in the United States, that can be directly attributable to that peace that we do enjoy at home.

I'd like to talk briefly about what's happened over the last couple of years as we look back in the over two years since the regime of Saddam Hussein fell, particularly since January of this year; a national election was held and a transitional government assumed responsibility; an assembly was seated; a constitution was drafted; a national referendum was held and the constitution was ratified. And here, in just less than a month, a national election will be held in which the people of Iraq will pick their own representatives, in which to proceed along the path toward a democratically elected government, a government that provides for the security and protection of each Iraqi citizen; a government that is able to not only secure Iraq, but to make sure that Iraq is not a threat to its neighbors or to others. So, enormous progress has been made in the governance line.



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In security, about a third of the Iraqi army battalions, about 36 of them right now, are responsible for their own areas of operation and the operations that are conducted in those. And they are doing, in some cases, extraordinary work. In all cases they are in the fight. We've got about 80 percent of the Iraqi security forces at any given time that are in the fight and participating in combat operations around the country. Increasingly, the police are participating, some in greater numbers in urban areas; other police are being developed. So the police are doing some extraordinary work.

In the referendum in October, Iraqis voted in numbers that exceeded the participation levels in Western democracies. And so they clearly wish to be able to determine for themselves their own form of government. The security enjoyed by our citizens is something sometimes we take for granted. Iraqis don't take it for granted because they recognize that people such as the jihadists and Islamic extremists wish to impose their worldview on Iraq, and they recognize what's at stake.

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Iraqi soldiers and policemen are in the fight; they're risking their lives and they're fighting, in some cases dying for Iraq, for that security of their fellow citizens. They've been conducting operations particularly in Anbar province recently, the Western Euphrates Valley, with the purpose of denying sanctuary to foreign terrorists that have been operating there, and to establish control of the borders so they can control what comes in and out of their own country. And so they have made extraordinary progress in that area and we expect that they will establish control over their borders prior to the election, and that is enormously heartening.

The bottom line is, there is a lot of progress being made. Sunnis are being brought into the political process. They're choosing the ballot box rather than violence to influence their government and what goes on in the country, and that is very heartening. And we see that in a variety of ways, not only in terms of the polls, but the leadership of the greater Sunni populace is committed to attempting to have a say in the outcome of their government.

So overall, there is an enormous amount that remains to be done, but the progress that's been made in the last couple of years, and particularly in the last year, is absolutely extraordinary.



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