

Al-Sadr's methods of violence and intimidation are widely repudiated by other Shia cleric. Although these instigations of violence come from different factions, they share common goals. They want to run us out of Iraq and destroy the democratic hopes of the Iraqi people.

The violence we have seen is a power grab by these extreme and ruthless elements. It's not a civil war. It's not a popular uprising. Most of Iraq is relatively stable. Most Iraqis, by far, reject violence and oppose dictatorship. In forums where Iraqis have met to discuss their political future and in all the proceedings of the Iraqi Governing Council, Iraqis have expressed clear commitments. They want strong protections for individual rights, they want their independence, and they want their freedom.

America's commitment to freedom in Iraq is consistent with our ideals and required by our interests. Iraq will either be a peaceful democratic country or it will again be a source of violence, a haven for terror, and a threat to America and to the world.

By helping to secure a free Iraq, Americans serving in that country are protecting their fellow citizens. Our nation is grateful to them all and to their families that face hardship and long separation. This weekend at a Fort Hood hospital, I presented a Purple Heart to some of our wounded, had the honor of thanking them on behalf of all Americans. Other men and women have paid an even greater cost. Our nation honors the memory of those who have been killed, and we pray that their families will find God's comfort in the midst of their grief. As I've said to those who have lost loved ones: We will finish the work of the fallen.

America's armed forces are performing brilliantly, with all the skill and honor we expect of them. We're constantly reviewing their needs. Troop strength now and in the future is determined by the situation on the ground. If additional forces are needed, I will send them. If additional resources are needed, we will provide them. The people of our country are united behind our men and women in uniform. And this government will do all that is necessary to assure [sic] the success of their historic mission. One central commitment of that mission is the transfer of sovereignty back to the Iraqi people. We have set a deadline of June 30. It is important that we meet that deadline. As a proud and independent people, Iraqis do not support an indefinite occupation, and neither does America. We're not an imperial power, as nations such as Japan and Germany can attest. We're a liberating power, as nations in Europe and Asia can attest as well.

America's objective in Iraq is limited, and it is firm. We seek an independent, free, and secure Iraq. Were the coalition to step back from the June 30 pledge, many Iraqis would question our intentions and feel their hopes betrayed. And those in Iraq who trade in hatred and conspiracy theories would find a larger audience and gain a stronger hand. We will not step back from our pledge. On June 30, Iraqi sovereignty will be placed in Iraqi hands. Sovereignty involves more than a date and a ceremony. It requires Iraqis to assume responsibility for their own future.

Iraqi authorities are now confronting the security challenge of the last several weeks. In Falluja, coalition forces have suspended offensive operations, allowing members of the Iraqi Governing Council and local leaders to work on the restoration of central authority in that city. These leaders are communicating with the insurgents to ensure an orderly turnover of that city to Iraqi forces so that the resumption of military action does not become necessary. They are also