

in building a free and secure Iraq. We're working closely with the United Nations envoy Lakhdar Brahimi and with Iraqis to determine the exact form of the government that will receive sovereignty on June 30. The United Nations elections assistance team headed by Carina Pirelli is in Iraq developing plans for next January's election. NATO is providing support for the Polish-led multinational division in Iraq. And 17 of NATO's 26 members are contributing forces to maintain security. Secretary of State Powell and Secretary of [Defense] Rumsfeld and a number of NATO defense and foreign ministers are exploring a more formal role for NATO, such as turning the Polish-led division into a NATO operation and giving NATO specific responsibilities for border control.

Iraqis' neighbors also have responsibilities to make their region more stable. So I'm sending Deputy Secretary of State Armitage to the Middle East to discuss with these nations our common interest in a free and independent Iraq and how they can help achieve this goal.

As we made clear all along, our commitment to the success and security of Iraq will not end on June 30. On July 1 and beyond, our reconstruction assistance will continue and our military commitment will continue. Having helped Iraqis establish a new government, coalition military forces will help Iraqis to protect their government from external aggression and internal subversion.

The success of free government in Iraq is vital for many reasons. A free Iraq is vital because 25 million Iraqis have as much right to live in freedom as we do. A free Iraq will stand as an example to reformers across the Middle East. A free Iraq will show that America is on the side of Muslims who wish to live in peace, as we've already shown in Kuwait and Kosovo, Bosnia and Afghanistan. A free Iraq will confirm to a watching world that America's word, once given, can be relied upon even in the toughest times.

Above all, the defeat of violence and terror in Iraq is vital to the defeat of violence and terror elsewhere, and vital, therefore, to the safety of the American people. Now is the time and Iraq is the place in which the enemies of the civilized world are testing the will of the civilized world. We must not waver. The violence we are seeing in Iraq is familiar. The terrorist who takes hostages or plants a roadside bomb near Baghdad is serving the same ideology of murder that kills innocent people on trains in Madrid and murders children on buses in Jerusalem and blows up a nightclub in Bali and cuts the throat of a young reporter for being a Jew.

We've seen the same ideology of murder in the killing of 241 marines in Beirut, the first attack on the World Trade Center, in the destruction of two embassies in Africa, in the attack on the U.S.S. Cole, and in the merciless horror inflicted upon thousands of innocent men and women and children on September 11, 2001. None of these acts is the work of a religion. All are the work of a fanatical political ideology. The servants of this ideology seek tyranny in the Middle East and beyond. They seek to oppress and persecute women. They seek the death of Jews and Christians and every Muslim who desires peace over theocratic terror. They seek to intimidate America into panic and retreat and to set free nations against each other. And they seek weapons of mass destruction to blackmail and murder on a massive scale.

Over the last several decades, we've seen that any concession or retreat on our part will only embolden this enemy and invite more bloodshed. And the enemy has seen over the last 31 months that we will no longer live in denial or seek to appease them: For the first time, the civilized world has provided a concerted response to