

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Vice President

For Immediate Release

July 4, 2010

REMARKS BY THE VICE PRESIDENT
AT A FOURTH OF JULY RECEPTION

New Embassy Compound
Baghdad, Iraq

7:33 P.M. (Local)

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Thank you very much, Mr. Ambassador. Let me begin by saying, Mr. President, it's great to see you again, and all of my friends; Mr. Minister. So many of you I've known for so long.

I came once again with a distinguished American delegation, because they don't trust me alone. (Laughter.) Because they know I like you too much.

Let me say to all of you before I reference our Fourth of July celebration, the first time I was here was very shortly after -- a matter of weeks after the statue of Saddam was famously pulled from its moorings.

Everything since then has changed but the heat. (Laughter.) As I flew into the embassy on a helicopter after landing at the airport last time I was here, it was in the evening. And I think General Odierno was with me, and I think you were in the helicopter as well, Mr. Ambassador. And I looked down -- and I mean this seriously -- I observed something remarkable. There was a traffic jam. Every road around Baghdad and coming into Baghdad was backed up bumper to bumper with automobiles. Welcome to peace and democracy. (Laughter.)

But it is the most significant sign that life and commerce and celebration has returned. And speaking of celebration, my -- our comrade in arms, our United States military, of whom I'm incredibly proud, and all the government officials and Americans that are here in Baghdad and throughout Iraq celebrate today in our country's history because we're so proud of what the day stands for.

As I've traveled around the world on our Fourth of July, many leaders of other countries assume we celebrate the Fourth of July because of our victory over the British in the Revolutionary War. But that date occurred much later. We celebrate the Fourth of July because of our Declaration of Independence. It was the day that our Founders laid out and signed, literally risking their own lives, what we believed our country should stand for and what all humanity was entitled to.

They made a universal statement, applying to all mankind. They said, "We hold these truths self-evident, that all men are created equal, endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, among them, life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness," free of any king or potentate, free of any foreign government.

The creation of the United States was a conscious, a deliberately conscious act to bring liberty and prosperity to all people in the world.

I'm not saying that we have been a perfect nation; we certainly have not. But as my grandfather would say, in the main, over the past 234 years, we've abided by those principles.

That's why I sent my son here in uniform for a year. That's why tens of thousands of Americans have sent their sons and daughters here for extended periods of time, because we know what you fight for. You hold all these truths self-evident.

But as you know better than we do -- and I see my good friend Mr. Hashimi has just walked in the door -- all of you know it requires great sacrifice and the willingness to subordinate your individual interest to the communal good.

As I said, I've met with all of you for many years, and hopefully you view me as I view you, as a personal friend. I just wanted to make it clear I'm not lecturing, I'm not imparting any great wisdom that you don't already know. But the concept of subordinating your individual interest is fundamental to the success of any nation. And it's enshrined in the immortal words of a famous American revolutionary leader who said, "United we stand; divided we fall."

The American people stand with you, stand united with you, at a time when a new Iraq has been born. Over the past several years, you've made extraordinary progress, and you've had extraordinary sacrifices you've made. These sacrifices have been both public and personal.

Some of you have lost your brothers. Some of you have lost your sisters. Some of you have lost family. It's the responsibility, it seems to be now of all of us, but primarily all of you assembled here, to honor those sacrifices and honor the public trust that was awarded to all of you in the elections you just held.

You should not -- and I'm sure you will not -- let any state, from the United States to any state in the region, dictate what will become of you all.

So my plea to you is, finish what you started -- a truly legitimate and representative government that meets the needs and aspirations of all Iraqi people.

To the extent you continue that quest, we will stand with you -- not telling you what to do, but stand with you in doing what you need help doing if you ask us.

I hope you know we've kept our commitment so far, and on August 31st, we will change our military mission by drawing closer to all of you, not further apart.

We will still have 50,000 of our sons and daughters who can shoot straight, who can work with you, but they will be in reserve. You, your military, has acquired the capacity to lead your country.

As we enter this new relationship, I want to reiterate -- and I can speak and I do speak for the President of the United States -- our commitment to you will not disappear on August 31st; it will grow stronger. As you continue to stand up and build your democracy, we'll be there with you economically, politically, socially, science, education. I've been put in charge of our government's effort to unite all the elements of our government, from the Department of Education to the Department of Commerce to the Department of Science and Technology -- to work with you if you want us to.

America has no hidden agenda. We have nothing more than to want you to grow as an independent, prosperous democracy. That will benefit our interest more than anything that else could happen in the region.

What I'm about to say is the only thing that may border on sounding like I am lecturing. In my humble opinion, in order for you to achieve your goals, you must have all communities' voices represented in this new government -- proportionately.

Iraqiyya, State of Law, Iraqi National Alliance, the Kurdistan Alliance -- all are going to have to play a meaningful role in this new government for it to work, in my humble opinion.

As a piece of American history, when our Founders did it, when they signed that Declaration, many of them did not even like one another. (Laughter.) You think I'm joking; I'm not.

So I'll end by repeating what I said to the press when I arrived: I'm absolutely confident you will do it, because I've met so many of you. There's so much talent here. And what I've watched grow is an Iraqi interest before a sectarian interest; an Iraqi interest before a regional interest; a national interest that I believe is real.

So Godspeed in your effort, and may God bless you all.

END

7:50 P.M. (Local)