

I wanted to share a statement I released yesterday in advance of President Obama's address to the American people during which he announced the formal completion of combat operations in Iraq. You can read my comments below:

"I am very encouraged that our nation's mission in Iraq is transitioning to an advisory and training role. This development reflects the tremendous progress Iraq has made in maintaining its security and becoming a stable and functioning democracy. In turn, our national security has been enhanced because today's Iraq bolsters the hope of the millions in the region who seek freedom and peace while dealing a heavy blow to the radical jihadists and dangerous regimes who long for destruction and regional dominance.

"Our troops who have fought in Iraq deserve our deepest gratitude and respect for the sacrifices they have made to keep us secure and free here at home. They have built a foundation for success in Iraq that's rooted in democracy's fundamental principles: freedom, the rule of law, and fair elections. It is my hope and prayer that the families of those that gave what Lincoln called 'the last full measure of devotion' find peace in knowing that their sacrifices were not in vain but instead continued the long tradition of Americans who took up the banner of freedom to strengthen the security of our nation.

"The transition in our mission in Iraq also validates President Bush's bold decision to pursue the surge strategy in the midst of difficult times and deafening opposition – rather than ensure defeat through surrender. I applaud President Obama for continuing the core element of his predecessor's policy and allowing the progress in Iraq to grow and mature. His announcement tonight does not mean, however, that our mission there is over or that Iraq no longer has challenges. Indeed, it would be a grave mistake were we to prematurely stop providing Iraq with the necessary assistance moving forward.

"The progress in Iraq demonstrates that circumstances in Afghanistan can also improve. General Petraeus has earned our utmost confidence in his command, and I urge President Obama to closely follow his advice rather than arbitrary deadlines or pressure from opponents of the mission. Like Iraq, our mission in Afghanistan is critical to U.S. security. As we approach the ninth anniversary of our nation's most tragic Tuesday morning, we must not forget that the al Qaeda jihadists who planned those attacks were provided a sanctuary in Afghanistan by the same Taliban government that seeks to reclaim power there today. We must never allow that to happen."

