



THE WHITE HOUSE  
PRESIDENT  
GEORGE W. BUSH

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## **President Discusses Economy, Iraq in Cabinet Meeting**

Remarks by the President After Meeting with His Cabinet

The Cabinet Room

10:57 A.M. EDT

THE PRESIDENT: I've just met with my Cabinet. We discussed primarily the economy. And I was pleased with the report I got. The U.S. economy is strong and it's getting stronger. People are going back to work. There's a sense of optimism around this table, because these people have been out in the field and talking to people, talking to small business owners and entrepreneurs. I'm pleased with the progress we're making.

President George W. Bush meets with members of his Cabinet during a Cabinet Meeting at the White House Thursday, June 17, 2004. White House photo by Eric Draper There's more to do to make sure this growth is sustained throughout the decade. Primarily it requires a proper understanding of the role of government to the economy. The role of government is not to try to manage the economy, the role of government is to create an environment in which the capital flows and entrepreneurs feel emboldened to take risk, and to make sure workers are trained for the jobs of the 21st century. I will continue to talk to the American people about our pro-growth strategy that I'm confident will work.

The other thing we talked about was our firm resolve to spread freedom, and therefore peace, around the world. We fully understand terrorists will try to shake our will, to try to shake our confidence, to try to get us to withdraw from commitments we have made in places like Afghanistan and Iraq. And they won't succeed. Iraq will be free, and a free Iraq is in our nation's interest. A free Iraq will make the world more peaceful. A free Iraq will be an ally of those nations who

honor human rights and human dignity and the aspirations of men and women everywhere. A free Iraq will make America more secure.

And we're making progress toward that goal. We've been there -- it's been 14 months since the fall of Baghdad, and the work has been hard and difficult. Yet our military on the ground has done an excellent job of making sure the conditions are such that an Iraqi government can emerge and lead their nation to the better days.

I'll be glad to answer a couple of questions. Deb, why don't you lead it off?

Q Mr. President, why does the administration continue to insist that Saddam had a relationship with al Qaeda, when even you have denied any connection between Saddam and September 11th. And now the September 11th Commission says that there was no collaborative relationship at all.

THE PRESIDENT: The reason I keep insisting that there was a relationship between Iraq and Saddam and al Qaeda, because there was a relationship between Iraq and al Qaeda. This administration never said that the 9/11 attacks were orchestrated between Saddam and al Qaeda. We did say there were numerous contacts between Saddam Hussein and al Qaeda. For example, Iraqi intelligence officers met with bin Laden, the head of al Qaeda, in the Sudan. There's numerous contacts between the two.

I always said that Saddam Hussein was a threat. He was a threat because he had used weapons of mass destruction against his own people. He was a threat because he was a sworn enemy to the United States of America, just like al Qaeda. He was a threat because he had terrorist connections -- not only al Qaeda connections, but other connections to terrorist organizations; Abu Nidal was one. He was a threat because he provided safe-haven for a terrorist like Zarqawi, who is still killing innocent inside of Iraq.

President George W. Bush answers questions from the press before a Cabinet Meeting at the White House Thursday, June 17, 2004. White House photo by Eric Draper No, he was a threat, and the world is better off and America is more secure without Saddam Hussein in power.

Let's see -- Morgan.

Q Mr. President, given your administration's assertions that it works closely with the International Red Cross, are you disappointed that Secretary Rumsfeld instructed military officials in Iraq to hold a member of Ansar al-Islam without telling Red Cross officials?

THE PRESIDENT: The Secretary and I discussed that for the first time this morning. And he's going to hold a press conference today to discuss that with you. I'm never disappointed in my Secretary of Defense. He's doing a fabulous

job, and America is lucky to have him in the position he's in. But the Secretary will hold a press conference today, and you might want to ask him that question at his press conference.

Thank you.

END 11:03 A.M. EDT