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LEHRER: New question, Mr. President. Two minutes. What criteria would you use to determine when to start bringing U.S. troops home from Iraq?

BUSH: Let me first tell you that the best way for Iraq to be safe and secure is for Iraqi citizens to be trained to do the job. And that's what we're doing. We've got 100,000 trained now, 125,000 by the end of this year, 200,000 by the end of next year. That is the best way. We'll never succeed in Iraq if the Iraqi citizens do not want to take matters into their own hands to protect themselves. I believe they want to. Prime Minister Allawi believes they want to. And so the best indication about when we can bring our troops home – which I really want to do, but I don't want to do so for the sake of bringing them home; I want to do so because we've achieved an objective – is to see the Iraqis perform and to see the Iraqis step up and take responsibility. And so, the answer to your question is: When our generals on the ground and Ambassador Negroponte tells me that Iraq is ready to defend herself from these terrorists, that elections will have been held by then, that their stability and that the And I hope it's as soon as possible. But I know putting artificial deadlines won't work. You can't do that and expect to win the war on terror. Thank you for what you're doing. We're standing with you strong. We'll give you all the equipment you need. And we'll get you home as soon as the mission's done, A free Iraq will be an ally in the war on terror, and that's essential. A free Iraq will set a powerful example in the part of the world that is desperate for freedom. A free Iraq will help secure Israel. A free Iraq will enforce the hopes and aspirations of the reformers in places like Iran. A free Iraq is essential for the security of this country.

LEHRER: Ninety seconds, Senator Kerry.

KERRY: Thank you, Jim. My message to the troops is also: Thank you for what they're doing, but it's also help is on the way. I believe those troops deserve better than what they are getting today. You know, it's interesting. When I was in a rope line just the other day, coming out here from Wisconsin, a couple of young returnees were in the line, one active duty, one from the Guard. And they both looked at me and said: We need you. You've got to help us over there. Now I believe there's a better way to do this. You know, the president's father did not go into Iraq, into Baghdad, beyond Basra. And the reason he didn't is, he said – he wrote in his book – because there was no viable exit strategy. And he said our troops would be occupiers in a bitterly hostile land. That's exactly where we find ourselves today. There's a sense of American occupation. The only building that was guarded when the troops went into Baghdad was the oil ministry. We didn't guard the nuclear facilities. We didn't guard the foreign office, where you might have found information about weapons of mass destruction. We didn't guard the borders. Almost every step of the way, our troops have been left on these extraordinarily difficult missions. I know what it's like to go out on one of those missions when you don't know what's around the corner. And I believe our troops need other allies helping. I'm going to hold that summit. I will bring fresh credibility, a new start, and we will get the job done right.

LEHRER: All right, go ahead. Yes, sir?

BUSH: I think it's worthy for a follow-up.

LEHRER: Sure, right. LEHRER: We can do 30 seconds each here. All right.

BUSH: My opponent says help is on the way, ? Not a message a commander in chief gives, As well, help is on the way, but it's certainly hard to tell it when he voted against the \$87-billion supplemental to provide equipment for our troops, and then said he actually did vote for it before he voted against it. Not what a commander in chief does when you're trying to lead troops.

LEHRER: Senator Kerry, 30 seconds.

KERRY: Well, you know, when I talked about the \$87 billion, I made a mistake in how I talk about the war. But the president made a mistake in invading Iraq. Which is worse? I believe that when you know something's going wrong, you make it right. That's what I learned in Vietnam. When I came back from that war I saw that it was wrong. Some people don't like the fact that I stood up to say no, but I did. And that's what I did with that vote. And I'm going to lead those troops to victory.

LEHRER: All right, new question. Two minutes, Senator Kerry. Are Americans now dying in Iraq for a mistake?

KERRY: No, and they don't have to, providing we have the leadership that we put – that I'm offering. I believe that we have to win this. The president and I have always agreed on that. And from the beginning, I did vote to give the authority, because I thought Saddam Hussein was a threat, and I did accept that intelligence. But I also laid out a very strict series of things we needed to do in order to proceed from a position of strength. Then the president, in fact, promised them. We will plan carefully. We will proceed cautiously. We will not make war inevitable. He didn't do any of those things. They didn't do the planning. They left the planning of the State Department in the State Department desks. They avoided even the advice of their own general. General Shinseki, the Army chief of staff, said you're going to need several hundred thousand troops. Instead of listening to him, they retired him. That's what we have here. And what we need now is a president who understands how to bring these other countries together to recognize their stakes in this. They do have stakes in it. They've always had stakes in it. The Arab countries have a stake in not having a civil war. The European countries have a stake in not having total disorder on their doorstep. But this president hasn't even held the kind of statesman-like summits that pull people together and get them to invest in those states. In fact, he's done the opposite. He pushed them away. That's not a way to invite people.

LEHRER: Ninety seconds.

BUSH: That's totally absurd. Of course, the U.N. was invited in. And we support the U.N. efforts there. They pulled out after Sergio de Mello got killed. But they're now back in helping with elections. My opponent says we didn't have any allies in this war. What's he say to Tony Blair? What's he say to Alexander Kwasniewski of Poland? You can't expect to build an alliance when you denigrate the contributions of those who are serving side by side with American troops in Iraq. Plus, he says the cornerstone of his plan to succeed in Iraq is to call upon nations to serve. Please join us in Iraq. We're a grand diversion. I know how these people think. I deal with them all the time. I sit down with the world leaders frequently and talk to them on the phone frequently. I know how these people think. I deal with them all the time. I sit down with the world leaders frequently and talk to them on the phone frequently. They're not going to follow somebody who says this is the wrong war at the wrong place at the wrong time. They're not going to follow somebody whose

core convictions keep changing because of politics in America. And finally, he says we ought to have a summit. Well, there are summits being held. Japan is going to have a summit for the donors; \$14 billion pledged. And Prime Minister Koizumi is going to call countries to account, to get them to contribute. And there's going to be an Arab summit, of the neighborhood countries. And Colin Powell helped set up that summit.

LEHRER: Forty seconds, Senator.

KERRY: The United Nations, Kofi Annan offered help after Baghdad fell. And we never picked him up on that and did what was necessary to transfer authority and to transfer reconstruction. It was always American-run. Secondly, when we went in, there were three countries: Great Britain, Australia and the United States. That's not a grand coalition. We can do better.

LEHRER: Thirty seconds, Mr. President.

BUSH: Well, actually, he forgot Poland. And now there's 30 nations involved, standing side by side with our American troops. And I honor their sacrifices. And I don't appreciate it when candidate for president denigrates the contributions of these brave soldiers. You cannot lead the world if you do not honor the contributions of those who are with us. He called them coerced and the bribed. That's not how you bring people together. Our coalition is strong. It will remain strong, so long as I'm the president.

LEHRER: New question, Mr. President, two minutes. of what the conditions would be in post-war Iraq. What was the miscalculation, and how did it happen?

BUSH: No, what I said was that, because we achieved such a rapid victory, more of the Saddam loyalists were around. I mean, we thought we'd whip more of them going in. But because Tommy Franks did such a great job in planning the operation, we moved rapidly, and a lot of the Baathists and Saddam loyalists laid down their arms and disappeared. I thought they would stay and fight, but they didn't. And now we're fighting them now. And it's hard work. I understand how hard it is. I get the casualty reports every day. I see on the TV screens how hard it is. But it's necessary work. And I'm optimistic. See, I think you can be realistic and optimistic at the same time. I'm optimistic we'll achieve – I know we won't achieve if we send mixed signals. I know we're not going to achieve our objective if we send mixed signals to our troops, our friends, the Iraqi citizens. We've got a plan in place. The plan says there will be elections in January, and there will be. The plan says we'll train Iraqi soldiers so they can do the hard work, and we are. And it's not only just America, but NATO is now helping, Jordan's helping train police, UAE is helping train police. We've allocated \$7 billion over the next months for reconstruction efforts. And we're making progress there. And our alliance is strong. And as I just told you, there's going to be a summit of the Arab nations. Japan will be hosting a summit. We're making progress. It is hard work. It is hard work to go from a tyranny to a democracy. It's hard work to go from a place where people get their hands cut off, or executed, to a place where people are free. But it's necessary work. And a free Iraq is going to make this world a more peaceful place.

LEHRER: Ninety seconds, Senator Kerry.