



Remarks to Troops at the Kabul Compound

Secretary Condoleezza Rice

Kabul, Afghanistan
March 17, 2005

SECRETARY RICE: Thank you very, very much. I first want to thank General Barno for that wonderful introduction and I want to thank him, too, for the wonderful leadership that he has provided here in Afghanistan. We admire you, General, for the job you've done. You've served the country well and we continue to look forward to working with you. Thank you.

I also want to recognize our fine Ambassador, Zal Khalilzad, who was born here in Afghanistan. And maybe only in America could somebody be born in Afghanistan, go to the United States to study, grow up then as a member of the foreign policy establishment, and then come back to Afghanistan to lead America's effort here. Thank you, Zal.



And I just stopped by to say hi to you because -- (applause and cheers) -- thank you, thank you, for what you've done here. And I want to thank you and have you thank people who may have served here over the years. I know it's been a sacrifice and sometimes it's been tough because this is not an easy place. I know that there are lost comrades who served here in Afghanistan who you remember every day.

But I want to go back to September 11th, on that horrible day when the Twin Towers and the Pentagon were attacked and when America was so vulnerable in a way that America had not felt vulnerable, really, in its entire history. And a few days after that, September 16th, I went with President Bush and Vice President Cheney, Secretary Powell and Secretary Rumsfeld, and we went up to Camp David to try and plan the response of the United States of America to what had happened to us.

And I think it's fair to say that everybody was still a little bit in a state of shock about what had happened to us and we rolled out a map because we knew that the people who had done that to us had come right out of here, right out of Afghanistan, which had become a terrorist haven for al-Qaida and for the ideology of hatred that caused people to fly those airplanes into our buildings.

We rolled out that map, and I'm going to tell you, the color drained from everybody's face because we looked and we saw Afghanistan and we thought, "Afghanistan, sitting there next to Iran and Pakistan, not the easiest places in and of themselves," and I think we wondered how was all of this was going to turn out.

And in fact, what happened was that because of the skill and bravery of the American Armed Forces we were able, with our Afghan allies, the Afghan resistance, to overthrow the Taliban, and in doing so to create the possibility of a different kind of Afghanistan that would be a place that would no longer be a haven for terrorists but would indeed be an ally in the war on terrorists. And that was the first phase of this great effort, the overthrow of that horrible regime and the opportunity to give the people of Afghanistan a chance.

And then the next phase was: What kind of Afghanistan was it going to be? And in the finest American tradition that we saw in Europe and that we saw in Asia, America supported the emergence of a democratic Afghanistan because we fundamentally understand that our values and our interests are linked, that it is really only freedom and liberty that is an antidote to those ideologies of hatred. And when Afghans went out in record numbers and voted, people who clearly came from the far reaches of this country, people who came despite the fact that many of them couldn't even read and write -- I read the story of a 93-year-old man who said that his son had brought him to vote because he was going to get a chance to exercise his right to vote. Just imagine what a tremendous gift this has been, not just to the people of Afghanistan but to the people of the world.

And I can tell you it's an inspiration. When I talk to ordinary Americans, they know what it means that people of Afghanistan have a chance for freedom. And they know that that chance for freedom and that desire for freedom is spreading. It spread to Iraq. It spread to Lebanon. It's spreading throughout the Middle East. And we're going to build, as a result of the bravery and skill of America's men and women in uniform and the chance that we've given the people here, which is where it started, we're going to build a different kind of Middle East, a different kind of broader Middle East that's going to be stable and democratic and where our children will one day not have to worry about the kind of ideologies of hatred that led those people to fly those airplanes into those buildings on September 11th.

That's what you have helped to achieve. It's in the finest tradition of America that power comes with compassion. It's in the finest tradition of America that strength comes with a belief in values. It's in the finest tradition of America that the defeat of the enemy comes with a hand to help those up who need our help.

Thank you for what you've done here. America is so proud of you. America is so grateful. I bring you greetings from your Commander-in-Chief, who watches this place every day. All of us do. Thank you, thank you, thank you.

(Applause.)

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[BACK TO TOP](#)

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