



THE WHITE HOUSE

PRESIDENT GEORGE W. BUSH

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President Bush Reaffirms Resolve to War on Terror, Iraq and Afghanistan

Remarks by the President on Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom
The East Room

11:02 A.M. EST

THE PRESIDENT: Good morning and thanks for coming. Laura and I are pleased to welcome you all to the White House. Mr. Secretary, thank you for being here. Members of my National Security Council are here, members of the administration, members of our armed forces, members of the United States Congress. Thank you for being here. Ladies and gentlemen. I particularly want to thank the members of the Diplomatic Corps who are here; thank the ambassadors for coming today.

We are representing 84 countries united against a common danger, and joined in a common purpose. We are the nations that have recognized the threat of terrorism, and we are the nations that will defeat that threat. Each of us has pledged before the world: We will never bow to the violence of a few. We will face this mortal danger, and we will overcome it together.

As we meet, violence and death at the hands of terrorists are still fresh in our memory. The people of Spain are burying their innocent dead. These men and women and children began their day in a great and peaceful city, yet lost their lives on a battlefield, murdered at random and without remorse. Americans saw the chaos and the grief, and the vigils and the funerals, and we have shared in the sorrow of the Spanish people. Ambassador Ruperez, please accept our deepest sympathy for the great loss that your country has suffered.



The murders in Madrid are a reminder that the civilized world is at war. And in this new kind of war, civilians find themselves suddenly on the front lines. In recent years, terrorists have struck from Spain, to Russia, to Israel, to East Africa, to Morocco, to the Philippines, and to America. They've targeted Arab states such as Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Yemen. They have attacked Muslims in Indonesia, Turkey, Pakistan, Iraq, and Afghanistan. No nation or region is exempt from the terrorists' campaign of violence.

Each of these attacks on the innocent is a shock, and a tragedy, and a test of our will. Each attack is designed to demoralize our people and divide us from one another. And each attack must be answered, not only with sorrow, but with greater determination, deeper resolve, and bolder action against the killers. It is the interest of every country, and the duty of every government, to fight and destroy this threat to our people.

There is no dividing line -- there is a dividing line in our world, not between nations, and not between religions or cultures, but a dividing line separating two visions of justice and the value of life. On a tape claiming responsibility for the atrocities in Madrid, a man is heard to say, "We choose death, while you choose life." We don't know if this is the voice of the actual killers, but we do know it expresses the creed of the enemy. It is a mind set that rejoices in suicide, incites murder, and celebrates every death we mourn. And we who stand on the other side of the line must be equally clear and certain of our convictions. We do love life, the life given to us and to all. We believe in the values that uphold the dignity of life, tolerance, and freedom, and the right of conscience. And we know that this way of life is worth defending. There is no neutral ground -- no neutral ground -- in the fight between civilization and terror, because there is no neutral ground between good and evil, freedom and slavery, and life and death.

The war on terror is not a figure of speech. It is an inescapable calling of our generation. The terrorists are offended not merely by our policies -- they are offended by our existence as free nations. No concession will appease their hatred. No accommodation will satisfy their endless demands. Their ultimate ambitions are to control the peoples of the Middle East, and to blackmail the rest of the world with weapons of mass terror. There can be no separate peace with the terrorist enemy. Any sign of weakness or retreat simply validates terrorist violence, and invites more violence for all nations. The only certain way to protect our people is by early, united, and decisive action.



In this contest of will and purpose, not every nation joins every mission, or participates in the same way. Yet, every nation makes a vital contribution, and America is proud to stand with all of you as we pursue a broad strategy in the war against terror.

We are using every tool of finance, intelligence, law enforcement and military power to break terror networks, to deny them refuge, and to find their leaders. Over the past 30 months, we have frozen or seized nearly \$200 million in assets of terror networks. We have captured or killed some two-thirds of al Qaeda's known leaders, as well as many of al Qaeda's associates countries like the United States, or Germany, or Pakistan, or Saudi Arabia, or Thailand. We are taking the fight to al Qaeda allies, such as Ansar-al-Islam in Iraq, Jemaah Islamiya in Indonesia, and Southeast Asia. Our coalition is sending an unmistakable message to the terrorists, including those who struck in Madrid: These killers will be tracked down and found, they will face their day of justice.

Our coalition is taking urgent action to stop the transfer of deadly weapon and materials. America and the nations of Australia, and France, and Germany, and Italy, and Japan, and the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Spain, the United Kingdom, Canada, Singapore, and Norway have joined in the Proliferation Security Initiative all aimed to bind together, to interdict lethal materials transported by air or sea or land. Many governments have cooperated to expose and dismantle the network of A.Q. Khan, which sold nuclear secrets to Libya, Iran and North Korea. By all these efforts, we are determined to prevent catastrophic technologies from falling into the hands of an embittered few.

Our coalition is also confronting the dangerous combination of outlaw states, terrorist groups, and weapons of mass destruction. For years, the Taliban made Afghanistan the home base of al Qaeda. And so we gave the Taliban a choice: to abandon forever their support for terror, or face the destruction of their regime. Because the Taliban chose defiance, our coalition acted to remove this threat. And now the terror camps are closed, and the government of a free Afghanistan is represented here today as an active partner in the war on terror.

The people of Afghanistan are a world away from the nightmare of the Taliban. Citizens of Afghanistan have adopted a new constitution, guaranteeing free elections and full participation by women. The new Afghan army is becoming a vital force of stability in that country. Businesses are opening, health care centers are being established, and the children of Afghanistan are back in school, boys and girls.

This progress is a tribute to the brave Afghan people, and to the efforts of many nations. NATO -- including forces from Canada, France, Germany, and other nations -- is leading the effort to provide security. Japan and Saudi Arabia have helped to complete the highway from Kabul to Kandahar, which is furthering commerce and unifying the country. Italy is working with Afghans to reform their legal system, and strengthening an independent judiciary. Three years ago, the people of Afghanistan were oppressed and isolated from the world by a terrorist regime. Today, that nation has a democratic government and many allies -- and all of us are proud to be friends of the Afghan people.

Many countries represented here today also acted to liberate the people of Iraq. One year ago, military forces of a strong coalition entered Iraq to enforce United Nations demands, to defend our security, and to liberate that country from the rule of a tyrant. For Iraq, it was a day of deliverance. For the nations of our coalition, it was the moment when years of demands and pledges turned to decisive action. Today, as Iraqis join the free peoples of the world, we mark a turning point for the Middle East, and a crucial advance for human liberty.

There have been disagreements in this matter, among old and valued friends. Those differences belong to the past. All of us can now agree that the fall of the Iraqi dictator has removed a source of violence, aggression, and instability in the Middle East. It's a good thing that the demands of the United Nations were enforced, not ignored with impunity. It is a good thing that years of illicit weapons development by the dictator have come to the end. It is a good thing that the Iraqi people are now receiving aid, instead of suffering under sanctions. And it is a good thing that the men and women across the Middle East, looking to Iraq, are getting a glimpse of what life in a free country can be like.

There are still violent thugs and murderers in Iraq, and we're dealing with them. But no one can argue that the Iraqi people would be better off with the thugs and murderers back in the palaces. Who would prefer that Saddam's torture chambers still be open? Who would wish that more mass graves were still being filled? Who would begrudge the Iraqi people their long-awaited liberation? On year after the armies of liberation arrived, every soldier who has fought, every aid worker who has served, every Iraqi who has joined in their country's defense can look with pride on a brave and historic achievement. They've served freedom's cause, and that is a privilege.

Today in Iraq, a British-led division is securing the southern city of Basra. Poland continues to lead a multinational division in south-central Iraq. Japan and the Republic of Korea -- of South Korea have made historic commitments of troops to help bring peace to Iraq. Special forces from El Salvador, Macedonia, and other nations are helping to find and defeat Baathist and terrorist killers. Military engineers from Kazakhstan have cleared more than a half a million explosive devices from Iraq. Turkey is helping to resupply coalition forces. All of these nations, and many others, are meeting their responsibilities to the people of Iraq.

Whatever their past views, every nation now has an interest in a free, successful, stable Iraq. And the terrorists understand their own interest in the fate of that country. For them, the connection between Iraq's future and the course of the war on terror is very clear. They understand that a free Iraq will be a devastating setback to their ambitions of tyranny over the Middle East. And they have made the failure of democracy in Iraq one of their primary objectives.

By attacking coalition forces -- by targeting innocent Iraqis and foreign civilians for murder -- the terrorists are trying to weaken our will. Instead of weakness, they're finding resolve. Not long ago, we intercepted a planning document being sent to leaders of al Qaeda by one of their associates, a man named Zarqawi. Along with the usual threats, he had a complaint: "Our enemy," said Zarqawi, "is growing stronger and his intelligence data are increasing day by day -- this is suffocation." Zarqawi is getting the idea. We will never turn over Iraq to terrorists who intend our own destruction. We will not fail the Iraqi people, who have placed their trust in us. Whatever it takes, we will fight and work to assure the success of freedom in Iraq.

Many coalition countries have sacrificed in both Iraq and Afghanistan. Among the fallen soldiers and civilians are sons and daughters of Australia, Bulgaria, Canada, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, India, Italy, Japan, the Republic of Korea, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Spain, Switzerland, Thailand, Turkey, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, the United Kingdom, and the United States. We honor their courage, we pray for the comfort of their families. We will uphold the cause they served.

The rise of democratic institutions in Afghanistan and Iraq is a great step toward a goal of lasting importance to the world. We have set out to encourage reform and democracy in the greater Middle East as the alternatives to fanaticism, resentment, and terror. We've set out to break the cycle of bitterness and radicalism that has brought stagnation to a vital region, and destruction to cities in America and Europe and around the world. This task is historic, and difficult; this task is necessary and worthy of our efforts.

In the 1970s, the advance of democracy in Lisbon and Madrid inspired democratic change in Latin America. In the 1980s, the example of Poland ignited a fire of freedom in all of Eastern Europe. With Afghanistan and Iraq showing the way, we are confident that freedom will lift the sights and hopes of millions in the greater Middle East.

One man who believed in our cause was a Japanese diplomat named Katsuhiko Oku. He worked for the Coalition Provision Authority in Iraq. Mr. Oku was killed when his car was ambushed. In his diary he described his pride in the cause he had joined. "The free people of Iraq," he wrote, "are now making steady progress in reconstructing their country -- while also fighting against the threat of terrorism. We must join hands with the Iraqi people in their effort to prevent Iraq from falling into the hands of terrorists." This good, decent man concluded, "This is also our fight to defend freedom."

Ladies and gentlemen, this good man from Japan was right. The establishment of a free Iraq is our fight. The success of a free Afghanistan is our fight. The war on terror is our fight. All of us are called to share the blessings of liberty, and to be strong and steady in freedom's defense. It will surely be said of our times that we lived with great challenges. Let it also be said of our times that we understood our great duties, and met them in full.

May God bless our efforts. (Applause.)

END 11:26 A.M. EST