



THE WHITE HOUSE
PRESIDENT
GEORGE W. BUSH

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President Addresses Joint Armed Forces Officers' Wives' Luncheon

Bolling Air Force Base
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 [en Español](#)

11:33 A.M. EDT

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you all. (Applause.) Thanks for having me. Please be seated. Thank you for the kind introduction, Jonnie, and thanks for the warm welcome. I appreciate being invited to come. It's such an honor to be here to stand up with so many strong and caring women -- and a few men -- (laughter) -- who are devoted to their husbands and their wives, and to our country.

I remember when Laura came over here to speak before -- she had a heck of a good time. I bet you're probably wishing she was back. (Laughter.) This is the 28th anniversary of this luncheon. (Applause.) Laura and I happen to have our 28th anniversary of our own coming up Saturday. (Applause.) You helped me remember. (Laughter.) It's the best decision I ever made, was marrying Laura in Midland, Texas. (Applause.) Some question whether or not it was the best decision she ever made. (Laughter.)

Speaking about decisions, I've got another decision to make, and maybe after the lunch you can help me, and that is what do I get her on the 28th anniversary? (Laughter.) Never mind. (Laughter.) Never mind. (Laughter.) Sorry I asked. (Laughter.)

Today America also honors the memory of one of the most inspiring women of the 20th century, Rosa Parks. (Applause.) Fifty years ago, in Montgomery, Alabama, this humble seamstress stood up to injustice by refusing a bus driver's order that she give up her seat for a white man. Her show of defiance was an act of personal courage that moved millions, including a young preacher named Martin Luther King. Rosa Parks' example helped touch off the civil rights movement and transformed America for the better. She will always have a special place in American history, and our nation thinks of Rosa Parks and her loved ones today.



VIDEO Multimedia

President's Remarks

 [view](#)



I appreciate Lynne Pace, honorary chairman of the luncheon; and Cindy G. (Laughter.) I tried it once -- (laughter) -- and I'm not trying it again. (Laughter.) I want to thank Linda Odierno. It's good to see Joyce Rumsfeld; Meryl Chertoff, who is the wife of Mike Chertoff -- (applause) -- Dotty England; Mary Harvey. And I appreciate all the other spouses that are here to give me a chance to come.

I've got an important talk to you -- I want to tell you some things. We meet at a critical time for our military and our nation. At this hour, Americans in uniform are deployed around the world to defend our freedom and our security in the first war of the 21st century. They're carrying out dangerous missions with skill and courage and compassion. I hope you know this, but the entire nation is proud of the men and women who wear our uniform. (Applause.) And so am I.

Every sailor, soldier, airman, Marine, and Coast Guardsman who wears the uniform volunteered for duty. And they have something else in common: They all rely on the love and support of their families -- their moms, their dads, their husbands and their wives. You are the ones who send the care packages, and send the e-mails. You're the ones who provide the daily encouragement for our folks overseas.

I know this is a trying time for our military spouses. Many of you have endured long separations from your husbands and wives. You miss them and worry about them -- and all the while, keep things running at home. By standing behind those who serve, you're serving, as well. The American people are grateful to the strength and sacrifice of our military spouses, and so am I. (Applause.)



Our service members and families are sacrificing for our country, and you deserve full support in return. You deserve the best possible pay. I've gladly signed legislation increasing basic military pay by 21 percent since 2001. (Applause.) You deserve extra compensation when your loved ones put themselves in harmed [sic] way, so we've increased imminent danger pay by 50 percent, and we have more than doubled family separation pay. (Applause.)

You deserve comfortable and affordable places to live -- (applause) -- so we've improved housing for families living on base, and we've eliminated out-of-pocket housing expenses for most families living off base. You deserve generous and flexible benefits, so we've made it easier for military families to get health care. We've extended tax filing deadlines; we've increased the payments for service members wounded in action; and we've improved education benefits for the National Guard and Reserve.

Every man and woman who volunteers to defend our nation in battle also deserves something else -- an unwavering commitment to the mission, and a clear strategy for victory. (Applause.) On the morning of September the 11th, 2001, we saw the destruction that terrorists intend for our nation. We know that they want to strike again. And our nation has made a clear choice: We will confront this mortal danger to all humanity. We will not rest or tire until the war on terror is won. (Applause.)

In four years since September the 11th, the evil that reached our shores has reappeared on other days, in other places -- in Mombasa and Casablanca and Riyadh and Jakarta and Istanbul and Madrid and Beslan and Taba, Netanya, Baghdad, and elsewhere. In the past few months, we've seen a new terror offensive with attacks in London, Sharm el-Sheikh, and a deadly bombing in Bali once again. All these separate images of destruction and suffering that we see on the news can seem like random and isolated acts of madness. Innocent men and women and children have died simply because they were in the wrong train, or worked in the wrong building, or checked into the wrong hotel. Yet, while the killers choose their victims indiscriminately, their attacks serve a clear and focused ideology -- a set of beliefs and goals that are evil, but not insane.

Some call this evil Islamic radicalism; others, militant Jihadism; still others, Islamo-fascism. Whatever it is called, this ideology is very different from the religion of Islam. This form of radicalism exploits Islam to serve a violent, political vision: the establishment, by terrorism, subversion and insurgency, of a totalitarian empire that denies all political and religious freedom. These extremists distort the idea of jihad into a call for terrorist murder against Christians and Hindus and Jews -- and also against Muslims who do not share their radical vision, whom they regard as heretics.



Many militants are part of a -- global, borderless terrorist organizations like al Qaeda, which spreads propaganda and provides financing and technical assistance to local extremists, and conducts dramatic and brutal operations like the attacks of September the 11th. Other militants are found in regional groups, often associated with al Qaeda -- paramilitary insurgencies and separatist movements in places like Somalia and the Philippines and Pakistan and Chechnya and Kashmir and Algeria. Still others spring up in local cells, inspired by Islamic radicalism, but not centrally directed. Islamic radicalism is more like a loose network with many branches than an army under a single command. Yet these operatives, fighting on scattered battlefields, share a similar ideology and vision for our world. And we know the vision of the radicals because they've stated it openly -- in videos and audiotapes and letters and declarations and on websites.

First, these extremists want to end American and Western influence in the broader Middle East, because we stand for democracy and peace, and we stand in the way of their ambitions. Al Qaeda's leader, Osama bin Laden, has called on Muslims to dedicate -- and I quote -- their "resources, sons and money to driving the infidels out of our lands." The tactics of al Qaeda and other Islamic extremists have been consistent for a quarter-century: They hit us, and expect us to run.

Earlier this month, the world learned of a letter written by al Qaeda's number two leader, a man named Zawahiri, a letter he wrote to his chief deputy in Iraq, the terrorist Zarqawi. In it, Zawahiri points to Vietnam as a model for al Qaeda. He writes: "The aftermath of the collapse of American power in Vietnam, and how they ran and left their agents, is noteworthy." The terrorists witnessed a similar response after the attacks of American troops in Beirut in 1983, Mogadishu in 1993. They believe that America can be made to run again -- only this time, on a larger scale, with greater consequences.

Secondly, the militant network wants to use the vacuum created by an American retreat to gain control of a country, a base from which to launch attacks and conduct their war against non-radical Muslim governments. Over the past few decades, radicals have specifically targeted Egypt and Saudi Arabia and Pakistan and Jordan for potential takeover. They've achieved their goal, for a time, in Afghanistan. And now they've set their sights on Iraq. In his recent letter, Zawahiri writes that al Qaeda views Iraq as, "the place for the greatest battle." The terrorists regard Iraq as the central front in their war against humanity. And we must recognize Iraq as the central front in our war on terror.

Third, the militants believe that controlling one country will rally the Muslim masses, enabling them to overthrow all moderate governments in the region, and establish a radical Islamic empire that spans from Spain to Indonesia. Zawahiri writes that the terrorists, "must not have their mission end with the expulsion of Americans from Iraq." He goes on to say, "The jihad requires several incremental goals -- expel the Americans from Iraq; establish the Islamic authority over as much territory as you can to spread its power in Iraq; extend the jihad wave to the secular countries neighboring Iraq."

With the greater economic and military and political power they seek, the terrorists would be able to advance their stated agenda: to develop weapons of mass destruction; to destroy Israel; to intimidate Europe; to assault the American people; and to blackmail our government into isolation.

Some might be tempted to dismiss these goals as fanatical or extreme. Well, they are fanatical and extreme -- and they should not be dismissed. Our enemy is utterly committed. As Zarqawi has vowed, "We will either achieve victory over the human race, or we will pass to the eternal life." And the civilized world knows very well that other fanatics in history -- from Hitler to Stalin to Pol Pot -- consumed whole nations in war and genocide before leaving the stage of history. Evil men, obsessed with ambition and unburdened by conscience, must be taken very seriously -- and we must stop them before their crimes can multiply. (Applause.)

Defeating the militant network is difficult because it thrives, like a parasite, on the suffering and frustrations of others. The radicals exploit local conflicts to build a culture of victimization, in which someone else is always to blame and violence is always the solution. They exploit resentful and disillusioned young men and women, recruiting them through radical mosques, as the pawns of terror. And they exploit modern technology to multiply their destructive power. Instead of attending faraway training camps, recruits can now access online training libraries to learn how to build a roadside bomb, or fire a rocket-propelled grenade -- and this further spreads the threat of violence, even within peaceful democratic societies.

The influence of Islamic radicalism is also magnified by helpers and enablers. They've been sheltered by authoritarian regimes -- allies of convenience like Syria and Iran -- that share the goal of hurting America and modern Muslim governments, and use terrorist propaganda to blame their own failures on the West, on America, and on the Jews.

The radicals depend on front operations, such as corrupted charities, which direct money to terrorist activity. They're strengthened by those who aggressively fund the spread of radical, intolerant versions of Islam in unstable parts of the world. The militants are aided, as well, by elements of the Arab news

media that incite hatred and anti-Semitism, that feed conspiracy theories, and speak of a so-called American "war on Islam" -- with seldom a word about American action to protect Muslims in Afghanistan, in Bosnia, in Somalia, and Kosovo and Kuwait and Iraq; with seldom a word about -- word about the generous assistance to Muslims recovering from natural disasters in places like Indonesia and Pakistan.

Some have argued that extremism has been strengthened by the actions of our coalition in Iraq, claiming that our presence in that country has somehow caused or triggered the rage of radicals. I would remind them that we were not in Iraq on September 11th, 2001, and al Qaeda attacked us anyway. The hatred of the radicals existed before Iraq was an issue, and it will exist after Iraq is no longer an excuse. (Applause.)

The government of Russia did not support Operation Iraqi Freedom, and yet the militants killed more than 150 Russian schoolchildren in Beslan. Over the years these extremists have used a litany of excuses for violence -- the Israeli presence on the West Bank, or the U.S. military presence in Saudi Arabia, or the defeat of the Taliban, or the Crusades of a thousand years ago. In fact, we're not facing a set of grievances that can be soothed and addressed. We're facing a radical ideology with inalterable objectives: to enslave whole nations and intimidate the world.

No acts of ours involves the rage of killers. And no concessions, bribe, or act of appeasement would change or limit their plans of murder. On the contrary; they target nations whose behavior they believe they can change through violence. Against such an enemy, there is only one effective response: We will never back down, never give in, and never accept anything less than complete victory. (Applause.)

The murderous ideology of the Islamic radicals is the great challenge of our new century. Yet, in many ways, this fight resembles the struggle against communism in the last century. Like the ideology of communism, Islamic radicalism is elitist, led by a self-appointed vanguard that presumes to speak for the Muslim masses. Bin Laden says his own role is to tell Muslims -- and I quote -- "what is good for them and what is not." And what this man who grew up in wealth and privilege considers good for poor Muslims is that they become killers and suicide bombers. He assures them that this is the road to paradise -- though he never offers to go along for the ride. (Laughter.)

Like the ideology of communism, our new enemy teaches that innocent individuals can be sacrificed to serve a political vision. And this explains their cold-blooded contempt for human life. We've seen it in the murders of Daniel Pearl, Nicholas Berg, and Margaret Hassan, and many, many others. In a courtroom in the Netherlands, the killer of Theo Van Gogh turned to the victim's grieving mother and said, "I do not feel your pain because I believe you're an infidel." And in spite of this veneer of religious rhetoric, most of the victims claimed by the militants are fellow Muslims.

When 25 Iraqi children are killed in a bombing, or Iraqi teachers are executed at their school, or hospital workers are killed caring for the wounded, this is murder, pure and simple -- the total rejection of justice and honor and morality and religion. These militants are not just enemies of America or enemies of Iraq, they are the enemies of Islam and enemies of humanity. (Applause.)

We have seen this kind of shameless cruelty before -- in the heartless zealotry that led to the gulags,

the Cultural Revolution, and the killing fields. Like the ideology of communism, our new enemy pursues totalitarian aims. Its leaders pretend to be an aggrieved party, representing the powerless against imperial enemies. In truth, they have endless ambitions of imperial domination; they wish to make everyone powerless, except themselves. Under their rule, they have banned books and desecrated historical monuments and brutalized women. They seek to end dissent in every form, to control every aspect of life, and to rule the soul, itself. While promising a future of justice and holiness, the terrorists are preparing a future of oppression and misery.

Like the ideology of communism, our new enemy is dismissive of free peoples, claiming that men and women who live in liberty are weak and decadent. Zarqawi has said that Americans are, "the most cowardly of God's creatures." But let us be clear: It is cowardice that seeks to kill children and the elderly with car bombs. It's cowardice that cuts the throat of a bound captive. It is cowardice that targets worshipers leaving a mosque. It is courage that liberated more than 50 million people; it is courage that keeps an untiring vigil against the enemies of a rising democracy. It is courage in the cause of freedom that will once again destroy the enemies of freedom. (Applause.)

And Islamic radicalism, like the ideology of communism, contains inherent contradictions that doom it to failure. By fearing freedom -- by distrusting human creativity and punishing change, and limiting the contributions of half the population -- this ideology undermines the very qualities that make human progress possible, and human societies successful. The only thing modern about the militants' vision is the weapons they want to use against us. The rest of their grim vision is defined by a warped image of the past -- a declaration of war on the idea of progress, itself. And whatever lies ahead in the war against this ideology, the outcome is not in doubt: Those who despise freedom and progress have condemned themselves to isolation, decline and collapse. Because free peoples believe in the future, free peoples will own the future. (Applause.)

We didn't ask for this global struggle, but we're answering history's call with confidence -- and with a comprehensive strategy. Defeating a broad and adaptive network requires patience and constant pressure and strong partners in Europe, in the Middle East, in North Africa and Asia and beyond. Working with these partners, we're disrupting militant conspiracies, destroying their ability to make war, and working to give millions in a troubled region of the world a hopeful alternative to resentment and violence.

First, we're determined to prevent the attacks of terrorist networks before they occur. We're reorganizing the government to give this nation a broad and coordinated homeland defense. We're reforming our intelligence agencies for the incredibly difficult task of tracking enemy activity, based on information that often comes in small fragments from widely scattered sources, here and abroad. And as we're acting, along with governments from many countries, we're doing so to destroy the terrorist networks and incapacitate their leaders.

Together with our coalition partners, we've disrupted a number of serious al Qaeda terrorist plots since September the 11th, including several al Qaeda plots to attack inside the United States. Our coalition against terror has killed or captured nearly all of those directly responsible for the September the 11th attacks; several of bin Laden's most senior deputies; al Qaeda managers and operatives in more than 24 countries; the mastermind of the USS Cole bombing, who was chief of al Qaeda operations in the Persian Gulf. We brought to justice the mastermind of the bombings in Jakarta and Bali, a senior

Zarqawi terrorist planner, and many of al Qaeda's senior leaders in Saudi Arabia.

Because of this steady progress, the enemy is wounded -- but the enemy is still capable of global operations. Our commitment is clear: We will not relent until the organized international terror networks are exposed and broken, and their leaders are held to account for their murder. (Applause.)

Second, we're determined to deny weapons of mass destruction to outlaw regimes, and to the terrorist allies who would use them without hesitation. The United States, working with Great Britain, Pakistan, and other nations, has exposed and disrupted a major black-market operation in nuclear technology led by A.Q. Khan. Libya has abandoned its chemical and nuclear weapons programs, as well as its long-range ballistic missiles. In the last year, America and our partners in the Proliferation Security Initiative have stopped more than a dozen shipments of suspected weapons technology, including equipment for Iran's ballistic missile program. This progress has reduced the danger to free nations, but it has not removed it. Evil men who want to use horrendous weapons against us are working in deadly earnest to gain them. And we're working urgently to keep weapons of mass murder out of the hands of those fanatics.

Third, we're determined to deny radical groups the support and sanctuary of outlaw regimes. State sponsors like Syria and Iran have a long history of collaboration with terrorists, and they deserve no patience from the victims of terror. The United States makes no distinction between those who commit acts of terror and those who support and harbor them -- because they are equally guilty of murder. (Applause.) Any government that chooses to be an ally of terror has chosen to be an enemy of civilization, and the civilized world must hold those regimes to account.

This week, the United Nations Security Council will hear a new report from an independent commission that points to Syrian involvement in the terrorist bombing that killed former Lebanese Prime Minister Hariri, and 22 others last February. Syria is destabilizing Lebanon, permitting terrorists to use its territory to reach Iraq, and giving safe harbor to Palestinian terrorist groups. The United Nations has passed strong resolutions against terror. Now the United Nations must act -- and Syria and its leaders must be held accountable for their continuing support for terrorism, including any involvement in the murder of Prime Minister Hariri. (Applause.)

Fourth, we're determined to deny the militants control of any nation, which they would use as a home base and launching pad for terror. This mission has brought new and urgent responsibilities to our Armed Forces -- and because of that, it's brought urgent responsibilities to you all. American troops are fighting beside Afghan partners against remnants of the Taliban and their al Qaeda allies. We're working with President Musharraf to oppose and isolate the militants in Pakistan. We're fighting the regime remnants and terrorists in Iraq. The terrorists' goal is to overthrow a rising democracy, claim a strategic country as a haven for terror, destabilize the Middle East, and strike America and other free nations with ever-increasing violence. Our goal is to defeat the terrorists and their allies at the heart of their power -- and so we will defeat the enemy in Iraq. (Applause.)

Our coalition, along with our Iraqi allies, is moving forward with a comprehensive plan. As Secretary Rice explained last week, our strategy is to clear, hold, and build. We're working to clear areas from terrorist control, to hold those areas securely, and to build lasting, democratic Iraqi institutions. In

recent weeks, American and Iraqi troops have conducted several major assaults to clear out enemy fighters in Western Iraq, and to help shut down terrorist entry routes from Syria. During one raid, our forces killed a top Zarqawi henchman named Abu Abdullah, who was responsible for attacks on American troops and on innocent Iraqis. Thousands of Iraqi forces have been participating in these operations, and many have remained in cities along with coalition forces to hold onto our gains and prevent the enemy from returning. Iraqi forces are using their local expertise to maintain security, and to make tangible improvements in the lives of their fellow Iraqis.

At the same time, Iraqis are making inspiring progress toward building a democracy. Ten days ago, millions of Iraqis turned out to vote on a constitution that guarantees fundamental freedoms and lays the foundation for lasting democracy. And today the Iraqi elections commission certified the passage of the constitution. Many more Sunnis participated in this vote than in January's historic elections, and the level of violence was dramatically lower. With their courageous vote, the Iraqi people have once again proved their determination to build a democracy united against extremism and violence.

An 85-year-old Iraqi woman cast a ballot in favor of the constitution after her son carried her on his back to the polls. Here's what she said. She said, "I went out to vote for it because I want the future to be safe and peaceful for my sons and my grandchildren." (Applause.)

We got more work to do, and it involves great risk for Iraqis and for American and coalition forces. A time of war is a time for sacrifice, and the greatest burden falls on military families. We've lost some of our nation's finest men and women in the war on terror. Each of these men and women left grieving families and left loved ones back home. Each of these patriots left a legacy that will allow generations of their fellow Americans to enjoy the blessings of liberty. Each loss of life is heartbreaking. And the best way to honor the sacrifice of our fallen troops is to complete the mission and lay the foundation of peace by spreading freedom. (Applause.)

The sacrifices made by you and your loved ones in uniform are always on our minds and in our prayers. All of you also understand that sacrifice is essential to winning war -- and this war will require more sacrifice, more time, and more resolve. The terrorists are as brutal an enemy as we have ever faced, unconstrained by any notion of common humanity and by the rules of warfare. No one should underestimate the difficulties ahead; nor should they overlook the advantages we bring to this fight.

Some observers look at the job ahead and adopt a self-defeating pessimism. It's not justified. With every random bombing and every funeral of a child, it becomes more clear that the extremists are not patriots or resistance fighters -- they are murderers at war with the Iraqi people, themselves. In contrast, the elected leaders of Iraq are proving to be strong and steadfast. By any standard or precedent of history, Iraq has made incredible political progress -- from tyranny to liberation, to national elections, to the ratification of a constitution -- in the space of two and a half years. (Applause.)

With our help, the Iraqi military is gaining new capabilities and new confidence with every passing month. At the time of our Fallujah operations nearly a year ago, there were only a few Iraqi army battalions in combat. Today there are nearly 90 Iraqi army battalions fighting the terrorists alongside our forces. General David Petraeus said, "Iraqis are in the fight. They're fighting and dying for their country, and they're fighting increasingly well." The progress isn't easy, but it is steady. And no fair-

minded person should ignore, deny, or dismiss the achievements of the Iraqi people.

Some observers question the durability of democracy in Iraq. They underestimate the power and appeal of freedom. We've heard it suggested Iraq's democracy must be on shaky ground because Iraqis are arguing with each other. (Laughter.) That's the essence of democracy. (Laughter.) You make your case; you debate those who disagree with you; you build consensus by persuasion; and you answer to the will of the people.

We've heard it said that the Shia and Sunnis and Kurds of Iraq are too divided to form a lasting democracy. In fact, democratic federalism is the best hope for unifying a diverse population, because a federal constitutional system respects the rights and religious traditions of all citizens, while giving all minorities, including the Sunnis, a stake and a voice in the future of their country.

It's true that the seeds of freedom have only recently been planted in Iraq, but democracy, when it grows, is not a fragile flower, it's a healthy, sturdy tree. As Americans, we believe that people everywhere prefer freedom to slavery, and that liberty, once chosen, improves the lives of all. And so we're confident; as our coalition and the Iraqi people each do their part, Iraqi democracy will succeed. (Applause.)

Some observers also claim that America would be better off by cutting our losses and leaving Iraq now. This is a dangerous illusion, refuted by a simple question: Would the United States and other free nations be more safe, or less safe, with Zarqawi and bin Laden in control of Iraq, its people, and its resources? Having removed a dictator who hated free peoples, we will not stand by as a new set of killers, dedicated to the destruction of our country, seizes control of Iraq by violence.

There's always a temptation, in the middle of a long struggle, to seek the quiet life, to escape the duties and problems of the world, to hope the enemy grows weary of fanaticism and tired of murder. That would be a pleasant world -- but it isn't the world in which we live. The enemy is never tired, never sated, never content with yesterday's brutality. This enemy considers every retreat of the civilized world as an invitation to greater violence. In Iraq, there is no peace without victory -- and we will keep our nerve and we will win that victory. (Applause.)

The fifth element of our strategy in the war on terror is to deny the militants of future recruits by replacing hatred and resentment with democracy and hope across the broader Middle East. This is difficult, and it's a long-term project; yet there's no alternative to it. Our future and the future of that region are linked. If the broader Middle East is left to grow in bitterness, if countries remain in misery, while radicals stir the resentments of millions, then that part of the world will be a source of endless conflict and mounting danger -- in our own generation and in the next. If the peoples of that region are permitted to choose their own destiny, and advance by their own energy and participation as free men and women, then the extremists will be marginalized, and the flow of violent radicalism to the rest of the world will slow, and eventually end. By standing for the hope and freedom of others, we make our own freedom more secure.

America is making this stand in practical ways. We are encouraging our friends in the Middle East, including Egypt and Saudi Arabia, to take the path of reform, to strengthen their own societies in the

fight against terror by respecting the rights and choices of their own people. We're standing with dissidents and exiles against oppressive regimes, because we know that the dissidents of today will be the democratic leaders of tomorrow. We're making our case through public diplomacy, stating clearly and confidently our belief in self-determination, and the rule of law, and religious freedom, and equal rights for women -- beliefs that are right and true in every land, and in every culture. (Applause.)

And as we do our part to confront radicalism, we know that the most vital work will be done within the Islamic world, itself. And this work has begun. Many Muslim scholars have publicly condemned terrorism, often citing Chapter 5, Verse 32 of the Koran, which states that killing an innocent human being is the killing of all humanity -- is like killing all humanity, and saving the life of one person is like saving all of humanity.

After the attacks in London on July the 7th, an imam in the UAE declared, "Whoever does such a thing is not a Muslim, nor a religious person." The time has come for all responsible Islamic leaders to join in denouncing an ideology that exploits Islam for political ends, and defiles a noble faith.

Many people of the Muslim faith are proving their commitment at great personal risk. Everywhere we have engaged the fight against extremism, Muslim allies have stood up and joined the fight, becoming partners in a vital cause. Afghan troops are in combat against Taliban remnants. Iraqi soldiers are sacrificing to defeat the al Qaeda in their own country. These brave citizens know the stakes: the survival of their own liberty, the future of their own region, the justice and humanity of their own tradition -- and we are proud to stand beside them. (Applause.)

With the rise of a deadly enemy and the unfolding of a global ideological struggle, our time in history will be remembered for new challenges and unprecedented dangers. And yet the fight we've joined is also the current expression of an ancient struggle -- between those who put their faith in dictators, and those who put their faith in the people. Throughout history, tyrants and would-be tyrants have always claimed that murder is justified to serve their grand vision -- and they end up alienating decent people across the globe. Tyrants and would-be tyrants have always claimed that regimented societies are strong and pure -- until those societies collapse in corruption and decay. Tyrants and would-be tyrants have always claimed that free men and women are weak and decadent -- until the day that free men and women defeat them.

We don't know the course of -- our own struggle will take, or the sacrifices that might lie ahead. We do know, however, that the defense of freedom is worth our sacrifice. We do know that the love of freedom is the mightiest force of history. We do know the strength and character that our troops and military families bring to the fight. And we do know that the cause of freedom will once again prevail. (Applause.)

These are historic times. It's a vital time for our nation and the world. And I want to thank you for your courage and thank you for your sacrifice. May God bless your loved ones. May God bless you, and may God continue to bless our country. (Applause.)

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