THE WHITE HOUSE
PRESIDENT
GEORGE W. BUSH

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President Delivers Remarks at Elmendorf AFB on War on Terror

Hangar One
Elmendorf Air Force Base
Anchorage, Alaska

- In Focus: National Security
- en Español

2:35 P.M. AKST

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you all. Thanks for the warm welcome. (Applause.) Laura and I were in the neighborhood - (laughter) -- we thought we'd come by to say hello to the nation's "Arctic Warriors." (Applause.) We're proud to stand with the courageous airmen of Elmendorf Air Force Base, the soldiers of Fort Richardson, the Coast Guard -- (applause) -- the Coast Guard men and women here in Alaska -- (applause) -- the men and women of the Alaskan Command, and all those who wear the uniform of our country. (Applause.)

The General is right about one thing -- (laughter) -- I did live in Alaska. (Laughter.) In 1974, and I remember it just the way it looked coming in on Air Force One, this vast, majestic land, so beautiful, and full of decent, honorable, independent-minded people. (Applause.) People who love their country. (Applause.)

Here at Elmendorf Air Force Base, you're defending our nation's frontiers. You're securing freedom for future generations of Americans. Servicemen and women have departed this base to help liberate Iraq and Afghanistan, assist tsunami victims in Indonesia, and help those hit by the recent earthquake in Pakistan. Your courage and commitment are saving lives every day. First thing I want to tell you is the American people are grateful for your service -- and so is the Commander-in-Chief. (Applause.)

I also want to thank the military families who are with us today. (Applause.) Please be seated unless you don't have a seat. (Laughter.) I know that for many of you Alaska is a long way from home -- and it gets especially lonely when your loved ones are deployed on dangerous missions in distant lands. You have built a strong and close-knit community here. You support each other -- and you support your loved ones who stand in harm's way. I am proud of our men and women in the armed forces -- and I

am grateful to the military families who stand behind them. (Applause.)

I want to thank General Fraser and his wife, Rena. I appreciate Brigadier General Hawk Carlisle. (Applause.) Kind of sounds like a general -- Hawk Carlisle. (Laughter.) I appreciate Craig Christensen and Hazen Baron.

I want to thank Senator Lisa Murkowski for flying all the way from Washington today to make sure she was here to see her fellow Alaskans, as well as to be with the President. It means a lot to me. I don't know if you know this or not, but after this speech, she said, make sure you keep it short because she's got to fly back to Washington this evening to make important votes for the people of Alaska. Lisa, thank you for your service. (Applause.) She's doing a fine job. And I see she brought her parents with her.

Governor and First Lady Nancy, thank you all for being here. We're proud to share the stage with you. I want to thank the Lieutenant Governor and his wife, Carolyn, for joining us. I appreciate the mayor of the City of Anchorage, Mayor Begich, and his wife, Deborah, for joining us today. I want to welcome former Governor Walter Hickle here today. He's a man who served his country and his state with dignity and class. (Applause.) I know we got a lot of state and statehouse folks and local folks, thank you all for being here. But most of all, thank you. Thanks for taking time out of your day to let me come by and share some thoughts with you.

In the 20th century, the men and women of Elmendorf Air Force Base and Fort Richardson stood guard on the frontlines of freedom -- serving in the shadow of the Soviet Union. From here, you gave our nation "Top Cover" -- standing ready to defend America at a moment's notice. And because of the courage of men and women like those who served here, the cause of liberty prevailed in the Cold War -- and millions who once lived in chains now live in freedom. (Applause.)

On September the 11th, 2001, history called on our nation to defend freedom once again. On that morning more than four years ago, Americans witnessed the violence and the hatred of a new enemy. We saw the terrorists' destructive vision for us and for all who love freedom. And in the face of this threat, our nation has made a clear choice: We will confront this mortal danger. We will stay on the offensive, we will not wait to be attacked again, and we will press on until this war is won. (Applause.)

This is a vital mission for our armed forces, and you're helping to carry out that mission. Since September the 11th, 2001, thousands of men and women from Elmendorf, Fort Richardson, U.S. Army

Alaska, and Alaska National Guard have served in Afghanistan, Iraq, and other fronts in the war on terror. The 517th Airlift Squadron has served for over a year in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. (Applause.) Crews from the 68th Medical Company have saved the lives of our injured and wounded in Afghanistan. The 172nd Stryker Combat Team is taking the fight to the enemy with Task Force Freedom in Mosul. (Applause.) Soldiers of the 95th Chemical Company are in Kuwait dealing with port decontamination and hazardous material operations. And the Fourth Battalion of the 123rd Aviation Regiment has been flying support missions throughout Iraq and Kuwait. From the deserts of Iraq to the mountains of Afghanistan, America's Arctic Warriors are leaving their mark, and leaving a legacy of freedom. (Applause.)

Each of you is a volunteer. You stepped forward and took an oath to defend America. And every day you put on your uniforms, you reflect our nation's highest values and our greatest hopes. Through your hard work and dedication to duty, you are sacrificing to build a better and safer world for all Americans. And as you defend our freedom, the American people stand with you. (Applause.)

Every man and woman who volunteers to defend our nation deserves an unwavering commitment to the mission, and a clear strategy for victory. And a clear strategy begins with a clear understanding of the enemy we face. For more than four years, we've seen the brutal nature of the terrorists. They've targeted the innocent in many countries, people from all walks of life. In Casablanca, they killed diners enjoying their evening meal. In Bali, they killed tourists who were on a holiday. In Beslan, they killed Russian school children. They've murdered workers in Riyadh, commuters in Madrid, and hotel guests in Jakarta, and guests at a wedding celebration in Amman, Jordan. They kill Iraqi children in Baghdad.

The tragic images of innocent victims can make it seem like these terrorist attacks are random and isolated acts of madness. While these killers choose their victims indiscriminately, their attacks flow from an ideology and a terrifying vision for the world. Their acts are evil, but they're not insane. Some call this evil Islamic radicalism; others, militant jihadism; still others, Islamo-fascism. Whatever we choose to call this enemy, we must recognize that this ideology is very different from the tenets of the great 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.

We know this vision of the radicals because they openly state it. They put it in videos and audiotapes and letters and declarations and on websites. These extremists want to end American and Western influence in the broader Middle East, because we stand for democracy and peace and stand in the way of their ambitions.

The tactics of al Qaeda and other Islamic extremists have been consistent for a quarter century: They hit us, and they expect us to run. The terrorists witnessed our response after the attacks on American troops in Beirut in 1983, and in Mogadishu in 1993, and they concluded that America can be made to run again -- only this time on a larger scale, with greater consequences. The terrorists are mistaken.

America will never run. We will stand, we will fight, and we will win the war on terror. (Applause.)

The terrorists want to use the vacuum that would be created by an American retreat to gain control of a country, to build a base from which to launch attacks and conduct their war against America and non-radical Muslim governments. That's what they tell us. That's their stated goal. Over the past few decades, radicals have specifically targeted Egypt and Saudi Arabia and Pakistan and Jordan for potential takeover. And for a time, they achieved their goal in Afghanistan -- until they came face to face with the men and women of the United States Armed Forces. (Applause.)

In Afghanistan, we put the terrorists on the run, we routed them, and now they've set their sights on another country. They're trying to turn Iraq into what Afghanistan was under the Taliban -- a terrorist sanctuary from which they can plan and launch attacks against our people. The terrorists regard Iraq as the central front in their war against humanity. And we must recognize Iraq as the central front in the war on terror.

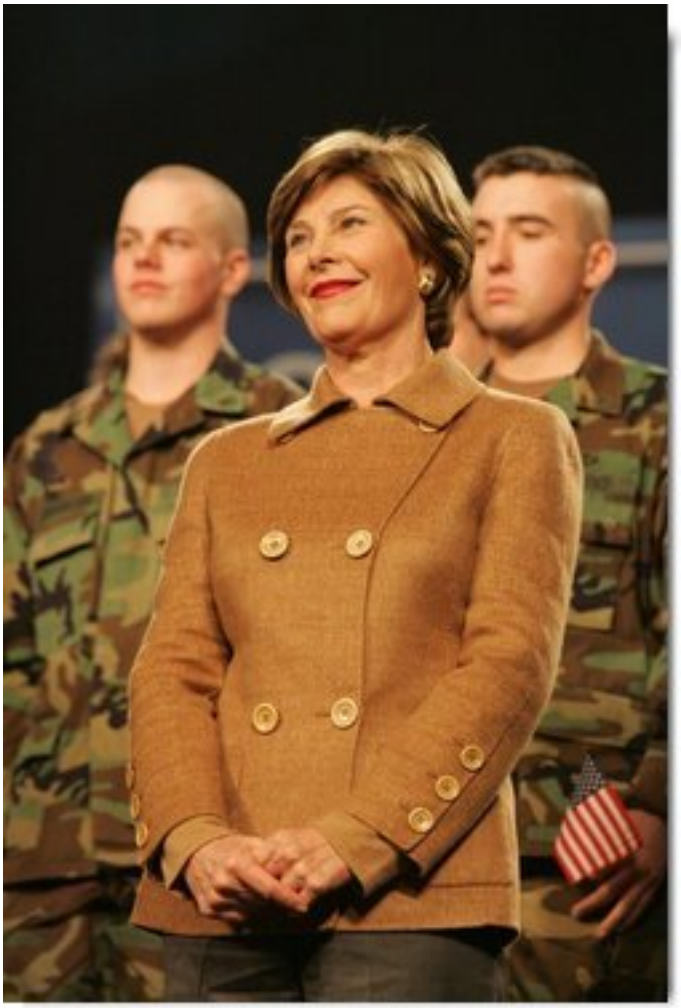
These militants believe that controlling one country will rally the Muslim masses, enabling them to overthrow moderate governments in the region, and establish a radical Islamic empire that reaches from Indonesia to Spain. If they are not stopped, the terrorists will be able to advance their agenda to develop weapons of mass destruction, to destroy Israel, to intimidate Europe, to break our will and blackmail our government into isolation. I make you this solemn commitment: That's not going to happen so long as I'm the President of the United States. (Applause.)

Some might be tempted to dismiss the terrorist goals as fanatical or extreme. They are fanatical and extreme -- but we cannot afford to dismiss them. Evil men, obsessed with ambition and unburdened by conscience, must be taken very seriously. Against such an enemy, there is only one effective response: We will never back down, we will never give in, and we will never accept anything less than complete victory. (Applause.)

We didn't ask for this global struggle, but we're answering history's call with confidence, and with a comprehensive strategy to win this war.

First, we are determined to prevent attacks by terrorist networks -- by protecting the homeland, and working with our allies to destroy the terrorist networks and incapacitate their leadership. Together with our coalition partners, we've disrupted a number of serious al Qaeda terrorist plots since September the 11th -- including several plots here on the homeland. Our coalition against terror has stayed on the offensive. We have killed or captured nearly all those directly responsible for the September the 11th attacks. (Applause.) We have killed or captured several of bin Laden's most senior deputies, including that -- the man who planned the U.S. -- the bombing of the USS Cole. We've killed and captured al Qaeda and -- and managers -- al Qaeda managers and operatives in countries all around the world. We will stay on the hunt. We will keep the pressure on these people. We will not relent until the terror

networks that threaten us are exposed and broken, and their leaders are held to account for their murder. (Applause.)



Second, we are determined to deny weapons of mass destruction to outlaw regimes, and to their terrorist allies who would use them without hesitation. Working with Great Britain and Pakistan and other nations, we 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. And in the last year, America and our partners in the Proliferation Security Initiative have stopped more than a dozen shipments of suspect weapons technology -- including equipment for Iran's ballistic missile program. We're going to continue to deny the world's most dangerous men the world's most dangerous weapons.

Third, we're determined to deny radical groups the support and sanctuary of outlaw regimes. So I've laid out a clear doctrine: The United States makes no distinction between those who commit acts of terror and those who support and harbor the terrorists because they're equally guilty of murder. (Applause.) Any government that chooses to be an ally of terror has also chosen to be an enemy of civilization -- and the civilized world will hold those regimes to account.

Fourth, we're determined to deny the militants control of any nation, which they would use as a home base and a launching pad for terror. This mission has brought new and urgent responsibilities to all who wear the uniform. American troops are fighting beside our Afghan partners against the remnants of the Taliban and their al Qaeda allies. And you're fighting alongside courageous Iraqis against the remnants of a regime and a network of terrorists who want to stop the advance of a free Iraq. Our goal is to defeat the terrorists and their allies in the heart of their power, so we will defeat the enemy in Iraq.

As we pursue the terrorists, we have a strategy to go forward. Our military is helping to train Iraqi security forces so they can defend their people and take the fight to the enemy. And we're making steady progress. With every passing month, more and more Iraqi forces are standing up, and the Iraqi military is gaining new capabilities and new confidence. At the time of our Fallujah operations just 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. American and Iraqi troops are conducting

major assaults to clear out enemy fighters in Baghdad and other parts of Iraq. Iraqi police and security forces are helping clear the terrorists from their strongholds, hold on to the areas we've cleared, and prevent the enemy from returning.

Our strategy can be summed up this way: As the Iraqis stand up, we will stand down. And when our commanders on the ground tell me that the Iraqi forces can defend their freedom, our troops will come home with the honor they have earned. (Applause.)

And the second part of our strategy is a political strategy. Iraqis are making inspiring progress toward building a democracy. A month ago, millions of Iraqis turned out to vote for a constitution that guarantees fundamental freedoms and lays the foundation for a lasting democracy. In a few weeks, Iraqis will vote again, to choose a fully constitutional government to lead them for the next four years. This country is making amazing progress from the days of being under the thumb of a brutal tyrant. In two-and-a-half years, they've gone from tyranny, to an election for a transitional government, to the ratification of a constitution, to the election of a free government. It's amazing progress when you think about it. (Applause.)

The Iraqi people are proving their determination to build a future founded on democracy and peace. And the United States of America will help them succeed. (Applause.)

The fifth element of our strategy in the war on terror is to deny the militants future recruits by replacing hatred and resentment with democracy and hope across the broader Middle East. If the 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. 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 free women, then the extremists will be marginalized, and the flow of violent radicalism to the rest of the world will slow and eventually end. History has proven that free nations are peaceful nations, and that democracies do not fight their neighbors. By advancing the hope of freedom and democracy for others, we make our own freedom more secure. (Applause.)

The work ahead involves great risk. A time of war is a time of sacrifice, and the greatest burden falls on our 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 loved ones back home. Each loss is heartbreaking. And the best way to honor the sacrifices of our fallen troops is to complete the mission and lay the foundation of peace for generations to come. (Applause.)

The outcome of this war will affect every single American. And that makes it a subject of vital debate. And it's important to be clear about the facts. When our nation was attacked on September the 11th, leaders of both political parties recognized a new reality: If we wait for threats to fully materialize, we will have waited too long. We had to take a hard look at every threat to America after September the 11th, and when we did, one stood apart: Saddam Hussein.

Under Saddam's dictatorship, Iraq was the only country in the world where American military pilots faced regular attack. Iraq was the only country that had used chemical weapons on its own people, invaded its neighbors, and fought a war against the United States and a great coalition. Iraq was only

one of seven countries listed as a state sponsor of terror, and it was judged by intelligence agencies around the globe to possess weapons of mass destruction. After more than a decade of diplomacy, we gave Saddam Hussein a final chance to comply with the United Nations Security Council resolutions, ordering him to disclose, disarm, or face serious consequences. When he refused, we had a choice: Do we take the word of a madman and forget the lessons of September the 11th, or do we take action to defend our country? Given that choice, I will defend America every time. (Applause.)

Combat forces of the United States, Great Britain, Australia, Poland, and other countries enforced the demands of the United Nations, and put an end to Saddam's regime. Because we acted, the Iraqi people now live in freedom, and the people of the United States are safer.

Reasonable people can disagree about the conduct of the war, but it is irresponsible for Democrats to now claim that we misled them and the American people. Leaders in my administration and members of the United States Congress from both political parties looked at the same intelligence on Iraq, and reached the same conclusion: Saddam Hussein was a threat.

Let me give you some quotes from three senior Democrat leaders: First, and I quote, "There is unmistakable evidence that Saddam Hussein is working aggressively to develop nuclear weapons." Another senior Democrat leader said, "The war against terrorism will not be finished as long as Saddam Hussein is in power." Here's another quote from a senior Democrat leader: "Saddam Hussein, in effect, has thumbed his nose at the world community. And I think the President is approaching this in the right fashion."

They spoke the truth then, and they're speaking politics now. (Applause.)

The truth is that investigations of intelligence on Iraq have concluded that only one person manipulated evidence and misled the world -- and that person was Saddam Hussein. In early 2004, when weapons inspector David Kay testified that he had not found weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, he also testified that, "Iraq was in clear material violation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1441. They maintained programs and activities, and they certainly had the intentions at a point to resume their programs. So there was a lot they wanted to hide because it showed what they were doing that was illegal."

Eight months later, weapons inspector Charles Duelfer issued a report that found, "Saddam Hussein so dominated the Iraqi regime that its strategic intent was his alone. He wanted to end sanctions while preserving the capability to reconstitute his weapons of mass destruction when the sanctions were lifted."

Some of our elected leaders have opposed this war all along. I disagreed with them, but I respect their willingness to take a consistent stand. Yet some Democrats who voted to authorize the use of force are now rewriting the past. They are playing politics with this issue and they are sending mixed signals to our troops and the enemy. And that's irresponsible.

As our troops fight a ruthless enemy determined to destroy our way of life, they deserve to know that their elected leaders who voted to send them into war continue to stand behind them. (Applause.) Our

troops deserve to know that this support will remain firm when the going gets tough. (Applause.) And our troops deserve to know that whatever our differences in Washington, our will is strong, our nation is united, and we will settle for nothing less than victory. (Applause.)

Thanks to our men and women in uniform, the Iraqi and Afghan people are building democracies, and as they do so, they inspire people across the broader Middle East. And freedom's advance has only just begun. In our lifetime, we've seen the power of freedom to conquer evil, and take root in previously unfamiliar soil. Freedom is the mightiest force of history -- because the desire for liberty is embedded in the soul of every man, woman, and child on the face of this earth. (Applause.) If we are steadfast, if we do our duty, this young century will be freedom's century -- and we will have done our duty by laying the foundation of peace for generations to come. (Applause.)

We'll -- be honored -- are honored to be here with those who wear our nation's uniform. We're honored to be here with those who support those who wear our nation's uniform. And we're really happy to be back in Alaska. May God bless our troops, may God bless their families, and God continue to bless the United States of America. Thank you all. (Applause.)

END 3:09 P.M. AKST

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