



For Immediate Release
Office of the Vice President
December 6, 2005

Vice President's Remarks at a Rally for the Troops

U.S. Army Garrison
Fort Drum, New York

11:55 A.M. EST

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Thank you. Thank you very much. And, General Freakley, thank you for the kind introduction, and thank you all for that warm welcome this morning.

I'm delighted to be here today, and to stand with the men and women of Fort Drum, New York. When I visited here as Secretary of Defense, I said this was one of the outstanding military facilities we have any place in the world. (Applause.) Now that I'm here as Vice President, I'll say it again: This is one of our finest military facilities, and a tremendous credit to the United States. (Applause.)



Hard soldiers are trained here in the North Country, and Fort Drum is one reason the U.S. Army in the year 2005 is about the finest Army we've ever fielded.

I want to thank General Taluto, General Genereux, General Sullivan, General Terry, Colonel Clark, Colonel Landry, Sergeant Major Borja, Sergeant Major Fearnside, and the outstanding Tenth Mountain Division Band. But above all, ladies and gentlemen, I want to thank the soldiers of two great American military units: The Tenth Mountain Division and the 42nd Infantry Division. (Applause.)

Both of these divisions have an important place in the life of our country, in the history of our freedom. In the four years since our nation was attacked, you've deployed on many fronts in the war on terror. Whether the job is dragging mortar tubes through waist-deep snow 9,000 feet up in the foothills of the Himalayas of Afghanistan, or conducting raids up staircases in urban Iraq, you know how to take the fight to the enemy and to get the job done right. I'm honored to be in your presence today. I bring good wishes to each and every one of you from our Commander-in-Chief, President George W. Bush. (Applause.)

Let me also thank the good people of Watertown and the nearby communities. These patriotic citizens are a tremendous source of support to Fort Drum, and I know you appreciate your North Country

neighbors.

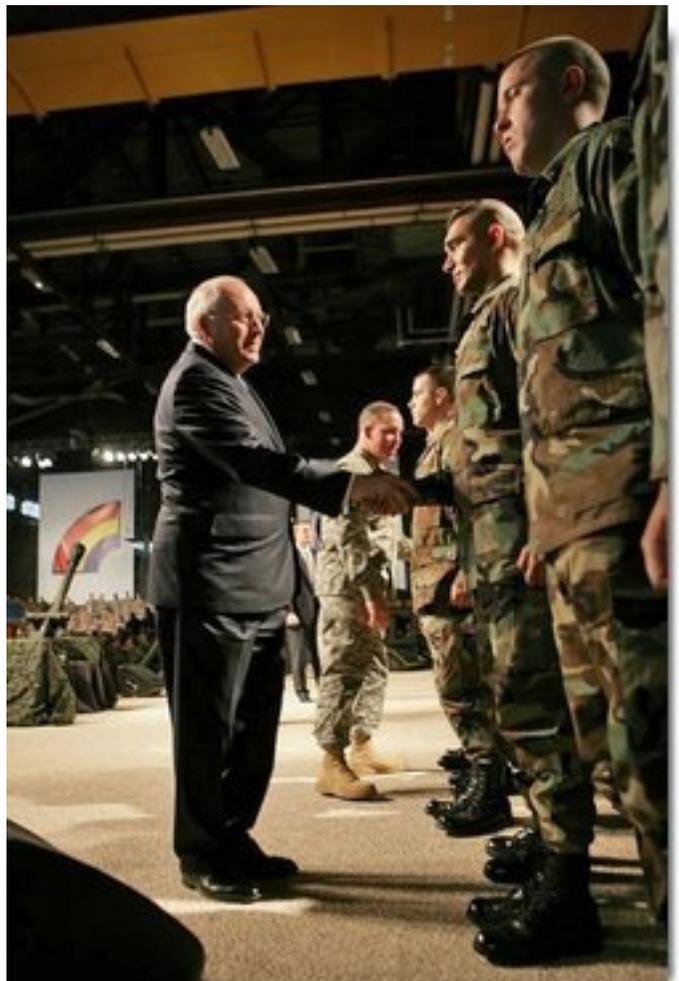
Military service often requires a great deal of commitment and sacrifices by families. On behalf of the President, and all Americans, I thank the family members who are with us here today, and I want you to know that all Americans appreciate the sacrifices of our military families.

This morning we take special pride in recognizing those who have recently returned from duty in Iraq. We know your country asked you to carry out some difficult and some dangerous missions. You went about that work with tremendous focus, skill, and regardless of the conditions. Your performance in combat -- not just the progress you've made, but also the character you've shown -- has left a lasting impression on people up and down the chain of command. You've been taking on tough assignments, adapting to enemy tactics, pressing on and hanging tough. I want to thank you for a job well done and to say on behalf of all Americans, welcome home. (Applause.)

For many decades now, the Tenth Mountain Division has been known for producing some of our nation's finest soldiers. One of the greatest living Americans, Senator Bob Dole, served with the Tenth Mountain in World War II and is a wounded combat veteran himself.

Members of his generation did their part to protect the American people, and I know they recognize the same courage and fighting spirit in the soldiers of today. Recently I was told of two soldiers in the Tenth Mountain, both of whom had leg amputations after being injured in Afghanistan, and both of whom remain on active duty to this very day. Their courage is an inspiration to every person who wears the nation's uniform and to every American.

Our country is deeply grateful to the Second Brigade Combat Team, which has completed a deployment at Camp Liberty. This unit was one of the first to train the national army of Afghanistan. In Iraq, the Second Brigade Commandos have provided support for elections, and before returning to the United States, helped round up and detain some 600 terrorists around Baghdad.



We're also grateful to the historic group of soldiers that Douglas MacArthur called the "Rainbow Division." The 42nd I.D. headed to Iraq and became the first Army National Guard division headquarters to deploy into combat since the Korean War. They've conducted thousands of raids and search missions, killed and detained terrorists, helped train Iraqi forces, and provided security for the constitutional referendum in October. As General Taluto has pointed out, the 42nd I.D. has maintained, supplied, and supported one of the largest operational areas ever belonging to an Army division. One unit of the 40 (sic) I.D., the "Fighting 69th" from New York City, showed its toughness in confronting

insurgents around Baghdad. Fighting the war on terror requires skilled, well trained units of the National Guard, and the Rainbow Division is one of the best. (Applause.)

Each time I visit a military installation I come away with renewed confidence in the men and women who wear the uniform of the United States. Each one of you has dedicated yourself to serving our country and its ideals, and you are meeting that commitment during a very challenging time in American history.

Our nation has counted on the Army for more than 230 years. And in this young century, soldiers of the United States are repaying that confidence every day as we fight the global war on terror.



When we were attacked on a terrible September morning four years ago, President Bush said that the struggle would be long and difficult, and would require our best effort and unfailing resolve. It is tough and it is dangerous to fight enemies who dwell in the shadows, who target the innocent, who plot destruction on a massive scale. And in the fight some of the hardest duties have come to the men and women of the United States Army.

After the attacks of 9/11, the Tenth Mountain Division was among the first Army units in Afghanistan -- meeting enemies in their own element, taking down the Taliban, and preparing the way for the first democratic government in the 5,000-year history of that country. Soon a large portion of the division will be returning to Afghanistan. Your presence there will help ensure peace and security in that country, and serve as a reminder to friends and adversaries alike that when the United States of America makes a commitment, we keep our word. (Applause.)

Each and every one of you is part of a team that continues to make history -- removing threats to America and other free nations, bringing new hope to a troubled region of the world. As a member of the armed forces, each of you defends this country, and represents the best that is in it. And by your achievement you've made one thing very clear: The day you decided to join the armed forces of our country was a great day for the United States of America.

There's still difficult work ahead, because the terrorists regard Iraq as the central front in a war against the civilized world. We are dealing with enemies that recognize no rule of warfare and accept no standard of morality. They have declared their intention to bring great harm to any nation that opposes their aims. Their prime targets are the United States and the American people. And so we have a responsibility to lead in this fight.

In the war on terror we face a loose network of committed fanatics, found in many countries, operating under different commanders. Yet the branches of the network share the same basic ideology and the same dark vision for the world. The terrorists want to end American and Western influence in the Middle East. Their goal in that region is to gain control of a country, so they have a base from which to launch attacks and wage war against governments that do not meet their demands. The terrorists

believe that by controlling an entire country, they will be able to target and overthrow other governments in the region and establish a radical Islamic empire that encompasses a region from Spain, across North Africa, through the Middle East and South Asia, all the way to Indonesia.

They have made clear, as well, their ultimate ambition: to arm themselves with weapons of mass destruction, to destroy Israel, to intimidate all Western countries, and to cause mass death here in the United States.

Some have suggested that by liberating Iraq from Saddam Hussein, we simply stirred up a hornet's nest. They overlook a fundamental fact: We were not in Iraq on September 11th, 2001, and the terrorists hit us anyway. The reality is that terrorists were at war with our country long before the liberation of Iraq, and long before the attacks of 9/11. And for many years, they were the ones on the offensive. They grew bolder in their belief that if they killed enough Americans, they could change American policy. In Beirut in 1983, terrorists killed 241 of our servicemen. Thereafter, U.S. forces withdrew from Beirut. In Mogadishu in 1993, terrorists killed 19 American soldiers. Thereafter, United States forces withdrew from Somalia. Over time, the terrorists concluded that they could strike America without paying a price, because they did, repeatedly: They bombed the World Trade Center in 1993; the murders at the Saudi National Guard training facility in Riyadh in 1995; the Khobar Towers in Saudi Arabia in 1996; the simultaneous bombing of two of our embassies in East Africa in 1998; and the USS Cole in 2000.

Believing they could strike us with impunity and that they change U.S. policy, they attacked us on 9/11 here in the Homeland and killed 3,000 Americans. Now they're making a stand in Iraq -- testing our resolve, trying to intimidate the United States into abandoning our friends and permitting the overthrow of a new Middle Eastern democracy. Recently we obtained a message from the number-two man in al Qaeda, a man named Zawahiri, that was sent to his chief deputy in Iraq, the terrorist Zarqawi. The letter makes clear that Iraq is part of a larger plan of imposing Islamic radicalism across the broader Middle East -- making Iraq a terrorist haven and a staging ground for attacks against other nations. Zawahiri also expresses the view that America can be made to run once again.

I realize that some have advocated a sudden withdrawal of our forces from Iraq. This would be unwise in the extreme: a victory for terrorists, bad for the Iraqi people, and bad for the United States. To leave that country before the job is done would be to hand Iraq over to car bombers and assassins. That nation would return to the rule of tyrants, become a massive source of instability in the Middle East, and be a staging area for ever greater attacks against America and other civilized nations.

As some of you know, when I first ran for Vice President five years ago, my Democratic opponent was a fine U.S. senator named Joe Lieberman. We disagreed on some issues, but we stand together on this war. After visiting our troops in Iraq last month, Senator Lieberman said, quote, "almost all of the progress in Iraq and throughout the Middle East will be lost if those forces are withdrawn faster than the Iraqi military is capable of securing the country." He is entirely correct.

On this, both Republicans and Democrats should be able to agree. The only way the terrorists can win is if we lose our nerve and abandon our mission. But the world can have confidence in the resolve of the United States. We will stand by our friends. We will help Iraqis build a nation that is free and secure

and able to defend itself. We will confront our enemies on this and every other front in the war on terror. And with good allies at our side, we will prevail. (Applause.)

In Iraq, we are going forward with a comprehensive strategy for victory. On the political side, we are helping the Iraqis to build the institutions of a free and representative government. Every benchmark has been met successfully -- starting with the turnover of sovereignty a year and a half ago, national elections last January, the drafting of the constitution last summer and its ratification by the Iraqi people in October, and less than ten days from now, the election of a new government under that constitution will occur.

On the economic side, we are helping the Iraqis in the work of rebuilding and reforming their economy. And on the security side, coalition and Iraqi goals are clear -- are to clear, to hold and to build: clearing areas of terrorist control, by taking the offensive, holding areas out of enemy control, and building, with targeted reconstruction to help Iraqis prepare for a better future. In fact, at this very hour, the First Brigade of the Tenth Mountain Division is in Iraq carrying out the vital work of confronting terrorists and training Iraqi Security Forces to defend their country. (Applause.)

Thanks to the quality of our forces -- and the will of the Iraqi people to keep and defend their freedom -- we have been making steady progress. At this time last year, there were only a handful of Iraqi battalions ready for combat. Now there are more than 120 Iraqi Army and police combat battalions in the fight against the terrorists. About 80 of them are fighting side by side with coalition forces, and about 40 others are taking the lead in the fight -- controlling their own area, conducting their own operations against the terrorists.

Gradually, Iraqi forces are taking control of more and more Iraqi territory -- and as they undertake more and more missions on their own, confidence is growing within the country and more and more intelligence is coming directly from the Iraqi people.

The mission of the United States and our coalition will continue to change as necessary, as it has from the beginning. Going forward, we'll have fewer nationwide operations and more specialized operations against the terrorists. We'll move out of Iraqi cities, reduce the number of bases, and conduct fewer patrols and convoys. As the Iraqi Security Forces gain strength and experience, and as the political process advances, we'll be able to decrease American troop levels without losing our capacity to defeat the terrorists. All Americans can be certain: Any decisions about troop levels will be driven by the conditions on the ground and the judgments of our commanders -- not by artificial timelines set by politicians in Washington, D.C. (Applause.)

Our strategy is clear, our tactics will remain flexible, and we'll keep at this work until we finish the job. The progress we've seen in Iraq has not come easily, but it has been steady, and we can be confident going forward. By voting in free elections, by ratifying a constitution, by stepping forward in larger and larger numbers to fight and die to secure their country and defeat the terrorists, by preparing for elections later this month, Iraqis are showing that they value their own liberty and are determined to choose their own destiny.

And by staying in this fight, we honor both the ideals and the security interests of the United States of

America. The victory of freedom in Iraq will inspire democratic reformers in other lands. In the broader Middle East and beyond, America will continue to encourage free markets, democracy, and tolerance -- because these are the ideas and the aspirations that overcome violence, and turn societies to the pursuits of peace. And as the people of that region experience new hope, progress, and control over their own destiny, we will see the power of freedom to change the world, and a terrible threat will be removed from the lives of our children and our grandchildren. (Applause.)

Each one of you is helping to write a proud chapter in the history of freedom. At times you may wonder if your fellow citizens truly realize the extent of your achievements -- how hard you've worked, how urgent and dangerous your business can be, how it feels to go out on long shifts in unfamiliar places far from home. I want you to know that Americans do realize it -- and we are very grateful.

This is not a country that takes its military for granted. We are a democracy, defended by volunteers who deserve all the tools and the support we can provide. Americans appreciate our fellow citizens who go out on long deployments and endure the hardship of separation from home and family. We care about those who have returned with injuries, and who face a hard road ahead. And our nation grieves for the brave men and women whose lives have ended in freedom's cause. No one can take away the sorrow that has come to the families of the fallen. We can only say, with complete certainty that these Americans served in a noble and a necessary cause, and their sacrifice has made our nation more secure. We will honor their memory forever. (Applause.)

None of us can know every turn that lies ahead for America in the fight against terror. Yet the direction of events is plain to see, and this period of struggle and testing is also a time of promise. The United States of America is a good country, a decent country, and we're making the world a better place by defending the innocent, confronting the violent, and bringing freedom to the oppressed. We understand the continuing dangers to civilization, and we have the resources, the strength, and the moral courage to overcome those dangers and to lay the foundations for a better world.

You've met every challenge with focus and courage, and with great effectiveness, and, above all, with honor. Standing here today, in the presence of U.S. Army combat veterans, I am reminded once again of what a privilege it is to be a citizen of the United States of America. (Applause.) You've brought credit to yourselves and to this nation. Your Commander-in-Chief and your fellow Americans are very proud of you, and it's my great honor to bring you that message today.

Never Forget, Climb to Glory. Thank you very much. (Applause.)

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