

For Immediate Release
Office of the Press Secretary
February 9, 2006

President Discusses Progress in War on Terror to National Guard

National Guard Building
Washington, D.C.

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10:03 A.M. EST

THE PRESIDENT: Thanks for that warm welcome. I'm delighted to be here with the men and women of the National Guard Association of the United States. For 128 years, the National Guard Association has been fighting for the citizen-soldiers who fight for America. I appreciate your service, and I appreciate you supporting those that America depends on in times of crisis. Our nation is safer because citizens are willing to put on the uniform and defend our freedom.



The first thing I want to tell you is America is grateful for the service of our Guardsmen and women, and I'm proud to be their Commander-in-Chief. (Applause.)

I thank Brigadier General Bob Taylor for his service and for his introduction. I appreciate Congressman Jim Gibbons, who is with us today, from the great state of Nevada. Thanks for coming, Congressman; I'm proud you're here, thanks for supporting the Guard.

I thank Brigadier General Steve Koper, retired president of the National Guard Association of the United States. General, thank you for greeting me. I'm proud to be here with Major General Roger Lempke. He's the president of the Adjutant General Association. I thank my friend, Lieutenant General Danny James. One of the interesting things about my life, I've been the Commander-in-Chief twice -- today and when I was the Governor of Texas. And Danny and I worked together for the good of our state. Thanks for coming, Danny; glad to see your brought your beautiful wife.

I want to thank Lewis King; he's the Chief Warrant Officer, retired. He helped raise the money for this box, and I appreciate it very much, Lewis, and all those who contributed to it. I want to thank Charles Parks, the sculptor. Charles caught me before my hair went gray. (Laughter.)

I also want to thank Lanny McNeely for joining us today. He's the head of the 147th Wing Guard at Ellington, where I used to serve. And I appreciate you coming, Colonel; thanks for being here; thanks for greeting me when I arrived there, on Air Force One there at Ellington -- checking on my mother and father on a regular basis. I also want to thank Chuck Rodriguez, who's the TAG of Texas. When you're a Texan you always got to make sure you pay attention to your fellow Texans.

And thank you all for having me. I want to share with you some thoughts about the war on terror. Before I do, I want to remind our country that the Guard has been fighting for America since before America was a nation. From your "First Muster" in 1636 to today's global war on terror, Americans have counted on the Guard to protect our land and defend our way of life. The role of the Guard in our military is unique. It's the only part of the Armed Forces that serves both the state and the nation. And in the past year, Americans have witnessed the courage of our Guardsmen and women at home and abroad.

When Hurricane Katrina struck the Gulf Coast last year, more than 40,000 Guardsmen and women rushed to the impact zone -- it was the largest stateside deployment in National Guard history. They conducted search and rescue operations, distributed food and water, provided emergency medical care, protected communities from criminality, and worked around the clock to repair homes and restore



power. Guard units from all 50 states, three U.S. territories, and the District of Columbia provided assistance -- and together, they saved lives and helped evacuate over 175,000 people stranded by the storm.

When the Pennsylvania National Guard came to repair the roof of a Louisiana woman, she said this to the soldiers: "That's a long way to come to help us. We're really grateful ... you boys are going to heaven, I tell you." (Laughter.) When tragedy strikes, Americans know they can count on the men and women of the National Guard.

As you protect your neighbors from natural disasters, you're also protecting the American people from terrorist dangers. Since September the 11th, 2001, more than 260,000 members of the National Guard have been mobilized for various missions in the war on terror. At this moment, Guardsmen and women are training the Afghan National Army, standing watch over the world's most dangerous terrorists in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, and taking the fight to the enemy in Iraq. Across the world, and on every front, the men and women of the Guard are serving with courage and determination -- and they're bringing us to victory in the global war on terror.



Your service is vital to the security of the country and the peace of the world -- and that service would not be possible without the support of the Guard families. Guard loved ones miss their husband and wife or son and daughter; they worry when our Guards people are deployed overseas. By standing behind our Guardsmen and women, the families of the Guard serve our country as well, and America appreciates their service. Our nation also depends on the commitment of the employers of the Guardsmen and women. In offices and schools and factories across America, organizations do without the talents of some really fine people that have been called upon to protect our nation. Businesses that are putting patriotism ahead of profit deserve the gratitude of all Americans.

Each of the Guardsmen and women have stepped forward to defend our country, and our country owes them something in return. We've taken a number of steps to improve the call up process, so it's more respectful to the Guardsmen and women and their families. In most cases, we're now giving you at least 30 days notification before mobilization, so that you and your families have time to make arrangements. We're working to give you as much certainty as possible about the length of mobilizations, so you can know when you will be able to resume civilian life. We're working to minimize the number of extensions and repeat mobilizations. We're working to ensure that you and your families are treated with the dignity they deserve.

We're also taking steps to improve the quality of life. We've expanded health care benefits for Guard and Reserve forces and their families, giving you access to the military's TRICARE system. We're also expanding access to education for America's citizen-soldiers. I was proud to sign legislation providing our Guard and Reserve forces between 40 and 80 percent of the education benefits available to active duty forces -- depending on the length of their mobilization in the war on terror. We've also tripled the amount that can be paid for re-enlisting in the National Guard or Reserve. The last month, I signed into

law a new retention bonus for Guardsmen and Reservists with critical skills needed in this war on terror. Our Guardsmen and Reservists are standing up for America, and you need to know that this administration supports you in your efforts.

We're working to give you the tools and resources you need to prevail in the war on terror -- and meet state and homeland security missions, as well. Our 2007 budget that I just submitted to the Congress increases funding for our men and women of Armed Forces by \$28.5 billion. That includes vital funds to help the National Guard meet its responsibilities during this war.

The Army National Guard currently has about 330,000 soldiers -- and my 2007 budget funds the Guard at that level. As the Guard recruits above that level, we'll make certain that there is funding in place for every citizen who steps forward to wear the uniform. (Applause.) And to ensure that the Army and our Air National Guard are ready for any challenge, my budget more than doubles funding for equipment and modernization over the next five years. (Applause.) Any time we've got folks in harm's way, they deserve the best -- the best pay possible, the best training possible, and the best equipment possible. It's a commitment this administration has made since I've been the Commander-in-Chief, and it's a commitment we will keep. (Applause.)

We remain a nation at war. I wish I could report, you know, a different sentence to you. But my job as the President of the United States is to keep the American people fully informed of the world in which we live. In recent months, I've spoken extensively about our strategy for victory in Iraq. Today, I'm going to give you an update on the progress that we're making in the broader war on terror: The actions of our global coalition to break up terrorist networks across the world, plots we've disrupted that have saved American lives, and how the rise of freedom is leading millions to reject the dark ideology of the terrorists -- and laying the foundation of peace for generations to come.

On September the 11th, 2001, our nation saw that vast oceans and great distances could no longer keep us safe. I made a decision that day -- that America will not wait to be attacked again. (Applause.) And since that day, we've taken decisive action to protect our citizens against new dangers. We're hunting down the terrorists using every element of our national power -- military, intelligence, law enforcement, diplomatic, and financial. We're clarifying the choice facing every nation: In this struggle between freedom and terror, every nation has responsibilities -- and no one can remain neutral.

Since September the 11th, we've led a broad coalition to confront the terrorist threat. Four weeks after the attacks, America and our allies launched military operations to eliminate the terrorists' principal sanctuary in the nation of Afghanistan. I told the world that if you harbor a terrorist, you're equally as guilty as the terrorists. And when an American President says something, he better mean what he said. I meant what I said. (Applause.)

We removed a cruel regime that oppressed its people, brutalized women and girls, and gave safe haven to the terrorists who attacked America. Because we acted, the terror camps in Afghanistan have been shut down -- and 25 million people have tasted freedom, many for the first time in their lives. Afghanistan now has a democratically elected President, a new national assembly, and the beginnings of a market economy. Women are working and starting their own businesses, boys and girls are back in school. The Afghan people are building the institutions of a lasting democracy and the foundations of

a hopeful future for their children and their grandchildren.

Afghanistan still faces serious challenges, from illicit drug trafficking to continued violence from al Qaeda and the remnants of the Taliban regime. So the international community is working together to help Afghanistan's young democracy succeed. Earlier this month, Prime Minister Tony Blair hosted over 40 nations and nine international organizations for a conference in London, where they pledged \$10.5 billion in aid to Afghanistan. (Applause.) With the help of 35 nations, NATO is leading the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan.

The United States, Britain, Norway, Germany, Italy, Spain, Lithuania, Canada, the Netherlands and New Zealand are all leading provincial reconstruction teams. These teams are helping the Afghan government extend its authority and provide security in provinces across the country. Our coalition has trained nearly 27,000 Afghan soldiers and more than 56,000 Afghan police -- so they can take the fight to the terrorists and eventually provide for the security of their own citizens. Afghan forces are risking their lives to fight our common enemy -- and coalition forces are proud to serve along with such courageous and bold and determined allies.

Our coalition is also working to root out and destroy terrorist networks all around the world. More than 90 nations --nearly half the world -- are now cooperating in a global campaign to dry up terrorist financing, hunt down terrorist operatives, and bring terrorist leaders to justice.

Some said that an aggressive strategy of bringing the war to the terrorists would cost us international support, would drive nations from our coalition. The opposite has happened. Today more governments are cooperating in the fight against terror than ever before. And in one of the most significant developments of this war, many nations that once turned a blind eye to terror are now helping lead the fight against it.

A little over four years ago, Pakistan was only one of three countries in the world that recognized the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. Today, Pakistani forces are risking their lives in the hunt for al Qaeda; President Musharraf has faced several attempts on his life since his courageous decision to join the war on terror. Before September the 11th, terrorist supporters were operating with relative ease in Saudi Arabia, where fundraisers and facilitators were providing money and logistical support to al Qaeda. Since the Riyadh bombings in May of 2003, the Saudi government has recognized that it is a prime target of the terrorists. And in the past two and a half years, Saudi forces have killed or captured nearly all of the terrorists on their most wanted list, they've reduced the flow of money to terror groups, and arrested hundreds of radical fighters bound for Iraq.

These governments are taking important steps to confront terror -- and as they do, we will continue to encourage them to take the path of political reform. By respecting the rights and choices of their own people these nations can marginalize the extremists, strengthen their societies, and eliminate the conditions that feed radicalism.

These and other governments around the world are stepping forward to fight the terrorists because they know the lives of their citizens are at stake. President Musharraf said something interesting: "Terrorism threatens to destabilize all modern societies. It cannot be condoned for any reason or

cause. The people of Pakistan have suffered from terrorism . [and] we are making our contribution to the fight against terrorism." President Musharraf is right. In the war against terror, there is no separate peace -- and no nation can stand on the sidelines.

By standing together, the United States and our partners are striking real blows against the enemy. Since September the 11th, 2001, our coalition has captured or killed al Qaeda managers and operatives in over two dozen countries. That includes many of al Qaeda's operational commanders -- the senior leaders responsible for day-to-day planning of terrorist activities across the globe. In November 2001, our coalition forces killed Mohammed Atif with an air strike in Afghanistan. In March 2003, his replacement -- Khalid Shaykh Mohammad -- was captured in Pakistan. In May, 2005, the man who took over for him -- a terrorist named al-Libi -- was captured in South Asia.

The terrorists are living under constant pressure -- and this adds to our security. When terrorists spend their days working to avoid death or capture, it's harder for them to plan and execute new attacks on our country. By striking the terrorists where they live, we are protecting the American homeland. (Applause.)

Since September the 11th, the United States and our coalition partners have disrupted a number of serious al Qaeda terrorist plots -- including plots to attack targets inside the United States. Let me give you an example. In the weeks after September the 11th, while Americans were still recovering from an unprecedented strike on our homeland, al Qaeda was already busy planning its next attack. We now know that in October 2001, Khalid Shaykh Muhammad -- the mastermind of the September the 11th attacks -- had already set in motion a plan to have terrorist operatives hijack an airplane using shoe bombs to breach the cockpit door, and fly the plane into the tallest building on the West Coast. We believe the intended target was Liberty [sic] Tower in Los Angeles, California.*

Rather than use Arab hijackers as he had on September the 11th, Khalid Shaykh Muhammad sought out young men from Southeast Asia -- whom he believed would not arouse as much suspicion. To help carry out this plan, he tapped a terrorist named Hambali, one of the leaders of an al Qaeda affiliated group in Southeast Asia called "J-I." JI terrorists were responsible for a series of deadly attacks in Southeast Asia, and members of the group had trained with al Qaeda. Hambali recruited several key operatives who had been training in Afghanistan. Once the operatives were recruited, they met with Osama bin Laden, and then began preparations for the West Coast attack.

Their plot was derailed in early 2002 when a Southeast Asian nation arrested a key al Qaeda operative. Subsequent debriefings and other intelligence operations made clear the intended target, and how al Qaeda hoped to execute it. This critical intelligence helped other allies capture the ringleaders and other known operatives who had been recruited for this plot. The West Coast plot had been thwarted. Our efforts did not end there. In the summer of 2003, our partners in Southeast Asia conducted another successful manhunt that led to the capture of the terrorist Hambali.

As the West Coast plot shows, in the war on terror we face a relentless and determined enemy that operates in many nations -- so protecting our citizens requires unprecedented cooperation from many nations as well. It took the combined efforts of several countries to break up this plot. By working together, we took dangerous terrorists off the streets; by working together we stopped a catastrophic

attack on our homeland.

Across the world, our coalition is pursuing the enemy with relentless determination. And because of these efforts, the terrorists are weakened and fractured -- yet they're still lethal. We cannot let the fact that America hasn't been attacked in four and a half years since September 11, 2001 lull us into the illusion that the threats to our nation have disappeared. They have not. Just last month, we heard Osama bin Laden declare his intention to attack America again. Our military, law enforcement, homeland security, and intelligence professionals take those threats very seriously -- and they're working around the clock day and night to protect us. We are safer for their efforts -- but we're not yet safe. America remains at risk -- so we must remain vigilant. We will stay on the offense, we will hunt down the terrorists, and we will never rest until this threat to the American people is removed. (Applause.)

We will continue to take the fight to the enemy. Yet we must also recognize in the long run, victory will require more than military means alone. Ultimately, the only way to defeat the terrorists is to defeat their dark vision of hatred and fear by spreading the hope of freedom to troubled regions of the world. The terrorists have an ideology; they share a hateful vision that rejects tolerance and crushes all dissent; a world where women are oppressed and children are indoctrinated; and those who reject their ideology of violence and extremists are threatened and often murdered.

The terrorists have aims -- they seek to impose their heartless ideology of totalitarian control throughout the Middle East, and arm themselves with weapons of mass murder. Their stated goal is to overthrow moderate governments, take control of countries, and use them as safe havens to launch attacks against America. When an enemy states a goal and a strategy and tactics, we must take their word seriously.

To achieve their aims, the terrorists need popular support. We know this from the terrorists' own words. In a letter to his chief of operations in Iraq, the terrorist Zawahiri wrote that popular support is, "a decisive factor between victory and defeat. In the absence of this popular support the ... movement would be crushed in the shadows." He went on to say, "... Therefore our planning must strive to involve the Muslim masses in the battle."

So a key part of the terrorists' strategy is to feed public resentment by convincing people across the Muslim world that the future holds just two choices: One of Islam, holiness, and virtue -- and one of Western decadence, immorality and imperialism. They use every opportunity to promote this false choice. Sometimes they spread blatant lies about America. Other times, it is American mistakes -- like the abuses of Abu Ghraib -- that give them ammunition in their campaign to foment anti-Western sentiment, and rally Muslims to support their dark ideology.

The problem for the terrorists is they cannot hide the inhumanity of their ideology. Because they lack the military strength to challenge us directly, they have turned to the weapon of fear. They seek to break our will with stunning acts of violence. They don't understand America. They cannot shake our will. We will stay on the hunt, we will never give in, and we will win this war on terror. (Applause.)

In the terrorists' campaign of violence and destruction, the majority of their victims since 9/11 have

been innocent Muslims. When the people in the Arab world see al Qaeda murdering Iraqi children or blowing up mourners in an Iraqi mosque, their outrage grows. And as the terrorists spread violence in places like Riyadh and Istanbul and Sharm el-Sheikh and Jakarta and Bali -- the people of those countries are starting to turn against the terrorists.

After terrorists bombed a Palestinian wedding at a hotel in Amman last November, thousands of Jordanians took to the street and rallied against al Qaeda. One protester carried a sign that read "Jordan's Nine-Eleven." Others chanted "This is not Islamic, this is terrorism!" The outrage even reached the Jordanian town of Zarqa -- birthplace of the terrorist Zarqawi, who heads al Qaeda in Iraq and who was the mastermind of the Jordan bombing. A cousin standing outside the al Qaeda leader family home said this: "We hate him even more than other people do now." Zarqawi was even expelled by his own tribesmen, hundreds of whom declared in a letter to a Jordanian newspaper: we "renounce his actions, pronouncements or whatever he approves of. We disown him until judgment day."

Before the bombings, most Jordanians reportedly sympathized with al Qaeda. Today only a minority sympathize with al Qaeda, and most Jordanians say its activities are not in conformity with the teachings of Islam. Similar shifts in public opinion are beginning to appear in other parts of the Muslim world. From Pakistan, to Indonesia, to al Qaeda's former home base of Afghanistan, more people now say they oppose the terrorists and their tactics.

These are positive signs -- but we still have a long way to go. So we'll continue to oppose the terrorists' ideology by offering the hopeful alternative of political freedom and peaceful change. We're working to spread the hope of liberty across the broader Middle East because we've learned the lessons of history: Free nations don't wage wars of aggression; they don't give safe haven to terrorists to attack other democracies. Free nations are peaceful nations. And when democracy takes hold, nations replace resentment with hope, respect the rights of their citizens and their neighbors, and join the fight against terror. Every step toward freedom in the world makes this country safer -- so across the world the United States of America is acting boldly in freedom's cause.

We're standing with the brave people of Iraq as they risk their lives to build a strong democracy in the heart of the Middle East. And their courage is changing their country, and it's changing the region, and it's changing the world. Before the January 2005 elections, the terrorists threatened anybody who voted with death. The Iraqi people defied these threats, and went to the polls in that election and two other elections last year, each with larger and broader participation than the one that came before. Iraqis are rejecting terror, they're rejecting the violence; and they want to replace terror and violence with openness and democracy. They have made their decision, and the world saw their decision. They're showing the world that the terrorists' ideology cannot compete on a level playing field with the ideology of freedom.

Iraqis still face challenges, and they're serious. The terrorists and Saddamists continue to sow violence and terror, and they will continue fighting freedom's progress with all the hateful determination they can muster. The Iraqis still have to overcome long-standing ethnic and religious tensions, and they must build the institutions of a free society that will serve all the people, not narrow political or religious interests. These challenges ahead are complex and difficult, yet the Iraqis are determined to overcome them -- and our coalition is determined to help the Iraqi people succeed.

We're carrying out a clear strategy for victory in Iraq. First, we're helping Iraqis build an inclusive government, so that old resentments will be eased, and the insurgency marginalized. Second, we're continuing reconstruction efforts and helping Iraqis build a modern economy, so all Iraq's citizens can experience the benefits of freedom. And, third, we're striking terrorist targets, we're after the terrorists; and at the same time we're training Iraqi forces which are becoming increasingly capable of defeating the enemy. The Iraqi forces show courage every day. We are proud to be the allies in the cause of freedom. As Iraqis stand up, America and our coalition will stand down.

Many of you are concerned about troop levels in Iraq. Those decisions will be made based upon conditions on the ground, based upon the recommendations of our military commanders -- not based upon politics in Washington, D.C. (Applause.)

The courage of Iraqis is inspiring others across the broader Middle East to claim their freedom, as well. And the message is going forth from Damascus to Tehran that the future of the Middle East belongs to freedom. As liberty spreads in this vital region and freedom produces opportunity and hope for those who have not known it, the terrorist temptation will start to fall away. And as more nations claim their freedom, we will gain new allies in the war on terror, and new partners in the battle for peace and moderation in the Muslim world.

Before that day comes, there will be more days of testing. The terrorists remain brutal and determined -- and they still have some resources at their disposal. The attacks in London and Madrid and other cities are grim reminders of how lethal al Qaeda remains. Money is still flowing to radical mosques and madrassas, which are still turning out new terrorist recruits. Some countries, like Syria and Iran, still provide terrorists with support and sanctuary. And the terrorists are sophisticated at spreading propaganda, and using spectacular attacks to dominate our evening news.

Yet from the vantage point of a terrorist sitting in a cave, the future seems increasingly bleak. Consider how the world looks four-and-a-half years into the war on terror: The terrorists have lost their home base in Afghanistan, and no longer have control of a country where they can train recruits and plot new attacks; many of their leaders are dead or in custody, and the rest of them are on the run; they've been reduced to using messengers to communicate; they're running low on funds, and have been forced to beg the terrorists in Iraq to send money; countries that once allowed them free reign are now on the hunt.

Their efforts to divide the West have largely failed, and the vast majority of the world's governments are standing firm and working together in the fight against those terrorists. Iraqis are forming a unity government, instead of giving into disunity, instead of fighting the civil war the terrorists hoped to foment. Iraqi Sunnis are joining the political process. The success of democracy in Iraq and Afghanistan is inspiring calls for change across the region. And the terrorists' strategy of attacking innocent Muslims is beginning to backfire and expose them for what they are: murderers with no respect for human life and human dignity.

Despite the violence and the suffering the terrorists are wreaking, we're winning the war on terror. Yet victory will require more courage and sacrifice. In this war, we have said farewell to some very good men and women -- including more than 360 heroes of the National Guard. We hold their loved ones in

our hearts and we lift them up in our prayers. These brave Americans gave their lives for a cause that is just, and necessary for the security of our country. And their sacrifice is sparing millions from lives of tyranny and sorrow.

And now we will honor their sacrifice by completing the mission. And in this long run, we can be confident in the outcome of this struggle -- because we've seen the power of freedom to defeat tyranny and terror before. And because we have on our side the greatest force for freedom in the history of the world: the men and women of the United States Armed Forces. (Applause.)

One of the great strengths of our military is that it's an all-volunteer army, and all-volunteer force. And since the attacks of September the 11th, 2001, nearly 1.5 million Americans has stepped forward to put on our nation's uniform -- including nearly 290,000 who have joined the National Guard. Nearly 1.3 million more American troops have made the courageous decision to re-enlist and stay in the fight -- including more than 350,000 members of the National Guard.

These brave Americans saw the future the terrorists intend for us, and they said, "Not on my watch." (Applause.) Four-and-a-half years into the fight, America's Armed Forces are determined, experienced and ready for any challenge -- and our nation is blessed to have such brave defenders. All of you are bringing honor to the uniform, and pride to our country, and security to the American people. America will always be grateful for your service in the cause of freedom.

Thank you for letting me come today. God bless you and your families, and may God continue to bless our country. (Applause.)

END 10:41 A.M. EST

*The believed target was *Library* Tower in Los Angeles, California.

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