



THE WHITE HOUSE
PRESIDENT
GEORGE W. BUSH

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Office of the Vice President
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Vice President's Remarks at a Rally for the Troops of the 24th Infantry Division

Cavalry Parade Field
Fort Riley, Kansas

2:35 P.M. CDT

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Thank you. Thank you very much. And I appreciate the warm welcome to America's War Fighting Center, Fort Riley, Kansas. (Applause.) Don't hold back. (Laughter.) I'm also glad your Congressman, Jim Ryun, is able to join us today.

I want to thank General Hardy, Colonel Smith, Colonel Perkins, Command Sergeant Major Dean, and the outstanding musicians of the 77th Army Band from Fort Sill, Oklahoma. Above all, ladies and gentlemen, I want to thank the soldiers of the 24th I.D. -- the "Victory Division" of the United States Army. (Applause.)



This great Army post has an important place in the life of our country, and in the history of freedom. Fort Riley is on the leading edge of military transformation -- making certain the Army is ready to face any challenge that comes to us in this new century. And in these four-and-a-half years, soldiers of Fort Riley have deployed to many fronts in the war on terror. You've given exemplary service in a time of great need for our country. You know how to take the fight to the enemy and to get the job done right. (Applause.)

I'm honored to be in your presence today, and 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 patriotic citizens of Kansas for standing by our military, and for giving such tremendous community support to the soldiers of Fort Riley.

And on behalf of the President, I want to give special thanks to the wives, the husbands, and the children of our soldiers. America is proud of each and every one of our military families. (Applause.)

For many decades, the 24th I.D. has been known for producing some of our nation's finest soldiers. And today we take special pride in recognizing the soldiers of the Third Brigade Combat Team who have recently returned from duty in Iraq. (Applause.) I had the great privilege of visiting the "Bulldog

Brigade" at Camp Taji just before Christmas. Your country asked you to carry out some difficult and dangerous missions -- and you conducted more than 22,000 patrols; 200 raids; 1,300 cordon and search missions; 6,500 traffic control points; 1,500 convoy security operations; and 4,100 supply route security missions. Every day you went about that work with tremendous focus and skill, regardless of the conditions. Your performance in the field -- not just the progress you've made, but also the character you have shown -- has left a lasting impression on people up and down the chain of command. Thank you for a job superbly done, and welcome home. (Applause.)

We're also grateful to the First Brigade, First Infantry Division -- the oldest brigade in the U.S. Army. (Applause.) Today I'll have the honor of presenting the First Brigade with the Valorous Unit Award for extraordinary heroism and gallantry in Iraq. You have been building good will among the Iraqi people, sponsoring civil projects to help them reclaim their lives. And you have protected them, and your fellow Americans, by directing lethal power against the enemy. You've written a proud new chapter in the history of the Devil Brigade.



The nation is grateful, as well, to the Fourth Brigade, First Infantry Division. A great Army needs tough, skilled light infantry fighters. And we have them in the Dragon Brigade. (Applause.)

We're grateful to the 541st Combat Sustainment Support Battalion. (Applause.) You have set the pace for readiness here at Fort Riley, and at other bases. You have deployed in places from Bosnia to Cuba to Iraq. And you've done a terrific job every step of the way.

We're grateful as well to the 97th Military Police Battalion. (Applause.) We count on you to prepare MP units for rapid deployment in combat. And your work is vital to victory in Iraq.

America has counted on the Army for more than 230 years. And in our own time, 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-and-a-half years ago, President Bush said that the struggle would be lengthy 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 this fight some of the hardest duties have come to the men and women of the United States Army.

It's impossible to overstate just how much our military has done over the last several years to make this nation safer, and to bring freedom, stability, and peace to a troubled part of the world. Afghanistan five years ago was in the grip of a violent, merciless regime that harbored terrorists who plotted murder for export. Today Afghanistan is a rising nation -- with an elected government, a market economy, and millions of children going to school for the first time in their lives. And when our forces return home from that part of the world, they can be proud of their service for the rest of their lives.

The same is true for the men and women serving in Iraq. Americans understand what is at stake in that country -- as do the terrorists. That's why the terrorists commit random acts of random horror, calculated to shock and intimidate the civilized world. The terrorists



know that as freedom takes hold, the ideologies of hatred and resentment will lose their appeal, and the advance of democracy will inspire reformers across the broader Middle East. And as that region experiences new hope and progress, we will see the power of freedom to lift up whole nations, and the spread of liberty will produce a much safer world for our children and grandchildren. The war on terror is a battle for the future of civilization. It is a battle worth fighting. It is a battle we are going to win. (Applause.)

Our strategy in Iraq is clear, our tactics will remain flexible, and we'll keep at the work until we finish the job. The work is still difficult. We can expect further acts of violence and destruction by the enemies of freedom. But progress has been steady, and we can be confident going forward. By voting in free elections, ratifying a constitution, and going to the polls with a turnout of more than 70 percent, Iraqis have shown they value their own liberty and are determined to choose their own destiny.

Our coalition has also put great effort into standing up Iraqi Security Forces. As those forces gain strength and experience, as the political process advances, we'll be able to decrease troop levels without losing our capacity to defeat the terrorists. And as always, decisions about troop levels will be driven by the conditions on the ground and the judgment of our commanders -- not by artificial time lines set by politicians in Washington, D.C. (Applause.)

Every American serving in this war can be certain that the people of our country do not support a policy of passivity, resignation, and defeatism in the face of terror. The United States will never go back to the false comforts of the world before September 11th, 2001. Terrorist attacks are not caused by the use of strength. They are invited by the perception of weakness. And this nation made a decision: We will engage these enemies -- facing them far from home, so we do not have to face them on the streets of our own cities. (Applause.)

There is 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 target is the United States. So we have a responsibility to lead in this fight.



Although we've been in the struggle against terrorism for more than four years now, the terrorists were actually at war with this country even before 9/11. But for a long time, they were the ones on the offensive. And they grew bolder in their belief that if they killed enough Americans, they could change American policy. In Beirut in 1983, terrorists killed 241 Americans. Shortly after, the United States withdrew its forces from Beirut.

Time and time again, for the remainder of the 20th century, the terrorists hit America and America did not hit back hard enough. In 1993 we saw the killing of American soldiers in Mogadishu, and the first bombing at the World Trade Center in New York. We had the murders at the Saudi National Guard Training facility in Riyadh in 1995; the killings at Khobar Towers in 1996; the destruction of two of our embassies in East Africa in 1998; and the attack on the USS Cole in 2000. The terrorists came to believe that not only could they change American policy -- if they killed enough Americans -- but also that they could strike America without paying a price -- because they did, repeatedly.

And so they continued to wage those attacks eventually striking us here at home on 9/11, killing 3,000 of our fellow citizens. Now they're making a stand in Iraq -- testing our resolve, trying to shake our commitment to democracy in that country. If the terrorists were to succeed, they would return Iraq to the rule of tyrants, make it a source of instability in the Middle East, and use it as a staging base for ever greater attacks against America and other civilized nations. The only way to lose this fight is to quit -- and quitting is not an option. That's not going to happen on our watch. (Applause.)

By serving in this cause, 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 recognize the extent of your achievements -- how hard you've worked, how urgent and serious your business can be, and how it feels to say farewell to a fellow soldier whose life is taken in combat. I want you to know that Americans do recognize it -- and our whole country is filled with respect and with gratitude.

Americans know about the heroism displayed every day in this war. We stand in total admiration when

we learn of soldiers who run through heavy fire to assist wounded comrades, or dive into canals to pull men out of an overturned vehicle, or face heavy engagement against insurgent positions, or conduct dangerous patrols.

We know how tough your work really is, and we know how tough a person it takes to do it -- tough enough to wear heavy armor when the thermometer hits 125 degrees, to work seven days a week, often 14, 16, or 18 hours a day. Americans are not the kind of people to take our military for granted. We are a democracy, defended by volunteers who deserve all the tools and support that we can possibly provide. (Applause.)

We 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've returned with injuries, and we have a responsibility to help them on the hard road ahead. And our nation grieves for the brave men and women whose lives have ended in freedom's cause. For many of you, these losses have been deeply personal. We can only say, with complete certainty, that these Americans served in a noble and necessary cause, and their sacrifice has made our nation and the world more secure. We will honor their memory forever. (Applause.)

We are a nation that keeps its word, and so we will carry out a strategy for victory in Iraq. America is a good and a generous country, and your own conduct is showing the Iraqi people the true character of the United States. Members of our military have worked in the neighborhoods to make sure that more Iraqi families have electricity, water, and sanitation; seen to it that children have classrooms and school supplies. By your openness, your decency, and your kindness to others in thousands of interactions every day, you have built permanent bonds of friendship between our two countries. And it's a sign that much is right with the world as elected representatives work to build a new Iraqi government while the tyrant who filled mass graves and terrorized Iraq for decades went from a palace to a bunker to a spider hole to jail. (Applause.)

Ladies and gentlemen, 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 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. As our President has made clear, our terrorist enemies will fail -- because the movement of history is toward justice and human freedom. The terrorists will fail -- because the resolve of America and our allies will not be shaken. And, the terrorists will fail -- because soldiers like you are standing in their way. (Applause.)

Once again, I want to thank each and every one of you for your great service to the nation. It's an honor to be in your presence today. You've been taking on perilous assignments, adapting to enemy tactics, pressing on, hanging tough. You've shown yourselves worthy of the title you hold, the uniform you wear, and the code you live by. You believe in America -- America believes in you.

Thank you. (Applause.)

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