

For Immediate Release  
Office of the Vice President  
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## Vice President's Remarks at a Rally for Expeditionary Strike Group One

The USS Bonhomme Richard  
San Diego, California

10:42 A.M. PDT

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Well, thank you very much.

Admiral LeFever, Admiral Ames, Captain Greene, sailors and Marines. (Applause.) Thank you for the honor of being here today.

We're joined as well by two of our outstanding congressmen from southern California, both veterans and strong supporters of our military -- Darrell Issa and Duncan Hunter, the chairman of the armed services committee. (Applause.)

I came by today because I wanted to say thank you for what you've done for all of us. Being in the neighborhood, I wanted to personally thank the men and women on the ships of ESG-1. You're a spectacular group that has carried out humanitarian missions, disaster relief, and combat operations. I saw your work with my own eyes on a trip to the earthquake region in Pakistan late last year.



In addition, some of the Marines here today were also present when I visited al Asad, Iraq. In February -- that's all right, don't hold back. (Laughter and applause.) In February, ESG-1 returned home from a truly historic deployment. It's good to see all of you, and I'm delighted to say welcome home. (Applause.)

I know you're glad to be back in port, and together again with your families. They are incredibly proud of you, of course -- and so is your country. Each of you serves the United States of America in a period of national challenge, military transformation, and unprecedented threats. We have asked you and your comrades to carry out urgent, difficult assignments -- one after the other. You have done so, day in and day out, with exemplary skill and honor. I am honored to be in your presence today, and I bring greetings to each and every one of you from our Commander-in-Chief, George W. Bush. (Applause.)

The ships of the ESG-1 logged tens of thousands of miles on the recent deployment, provided key support to Operation Iraqi Freedom and to the global war on terror. With us today is the crew of the USS Tarawa -- (applause) -- don't over do it -- (laughter) -- which steamed across two oceans, visiting nine countries in Southwest Asia, Africa, and the Far East. Tarawa provided humanitarian relief in the Philippines, and participated in Exercise Bright Star in Egypt, along with the USS Cleveland. (Applause.)

The Cleveland also conducted maritime security operations in the Persian Gulf, trained with the Iraqi Navy, and transported tons of heavy equipment, food, and supplies to Pakistan after the earthquake.

The USS Pearl Harbor was also there in Pakistan -- (applause) -- offloading heavy equipment needed to clear roads, set up hospitals, and save lives.

I also want to recognize the other ships of ESG-1 that are now docked in Hawaii and Washington State -- the USS Chosin, USS Santa Fe, and the USS Ingraham, as well as the USS Gonzalez, still on sea-swap deployment with the 5th Fleet. (Applause.)

Their assignments included joint exercises with coalition partners and security patrols. Another great ship, our host platform today, is the USS Bonhomme Richard -- (applause) -- which spearheaded the Tsunami relief effort off Indonesia last year.



All around us today are the signs of American sea power -- a fleet like none that ever sailed before, a Navy and Marine Corps that uphold noble traditions, and a flag that stands for freedom, human rights, and stability in a turbulent world. Aboard these ships, on this base, and across the globe, Americans in uniform are writing a new chapter of excellence and achievement for the United States Armed Forces. You bring relief to the helpless, hope to the oppressed. And you are protecting the people of this nation in a time of war.

When this conflict began nearly five years ago, President Bush told Congress and the country that we "should not expect one battle, but a lengthy campaign, unlike any other we've ever seen." "It may," he said, "include dramatic strikes, visible on television and covert operations, secret even in success."

All this has come to pass. And there is more work to be done, because we face ruthless and determined enemies. We are dealing with small groups of highly motivated extremists, operating in the shadows, determined to carry out missions of murder of increasing size and audacity. They came into our country to murder thousands of our fellow citizens. They continued attempting to evade our strengths, to search for our weaknesses, in order to find ways to strike again.

And the greatest danger to civilization is the prospect of a terror network, on its own or with the help of an outlaw regime, acquiring weapons of mass destruction -- and thereby gaining the power to kill hundreds of thousands, and to blackmail entire nations.

In the face of such enemies, we have to consider a few basic questions: First, whether to confront them on our terms, or on their terms; second, whether to face them on their territory, or our territory; and third, whether to wage this war on offense or defense. America and the civilized world have made our decision: Wherever terrorists operate, we will find them where they dwell, stop them in their planning, and bring them to justice. We will stay on offense and stay in the fight until the fight is won. (Applause.)

It's a large effort, because the terror network has cells in countries all over the world. Yet bit by bit, by diplomacy, through intelligence cooperation, police work, and the spread of democratic institutions, we are acting to shrink the area in which the terrorists can operate freely. We have also enforced a doctrine that is understood by all: Governments that support or harbor terrorists are complicit in the murder of the innocent, and equally guilty of terrorist crimes.



We gave ultimatums to the brutal regimes led by the Taliban and Saddam Hussein. And when those regimes defied the demands of the civilized world, we acted to remove them from power and to liberate their people.

The nature of the terrorist enemy -- hidden, diffuse, secret in their movements, asymmetrical in their tactics -- creates a different kind of security environment. And a military that was designed for the mid-to-late 20th century must now become a force that is more adaptable, more agile, and more lethal in action. As we transform the military we're going to build upon traditional advantages such as our technological superiority, our ability to project force across great distances, and our precision strike capabilities. We're going to stress rapid reaction and reward new thinking, breaking down old information stovepipes, and placing greater emphasis on jointness of operations.

At the same time, we're keeping our eye on the fundamentals, and one of those is sea power. Naval operations are every bit as important, if not more so, than they were in the last century. Nothing takes the place of a naval task force, able to enter any ocean, project great force from over the horizon, and keep terrorists from disrupting the sea lanes or using the ocean to transport operatives or weapons. Sea power allows the Commander-in-Chief to commit forces while retaining flexibility. With ships in place, we can fire precision strikes, launch sea-based rockets and missiles, deploy SEALs and Marine Air-Ground Task Forces by night or day, from close by or from a distance. Expeditionary Strike Groups are essential in this new security environment, because they are so highly mobile and so adaptable. With ESGs, we have great offensive capability, expanded operational reach, a maritime interdiction force without equal, and an even better intelligence-gathering network.

After we got hit on 9/11, sea power had a central role in taking down the Taliban. I can remember when the campaign in Afghanistan was just beginning. People warned us that the obstacles would be extreme -- and they were. Here, after all, was a landlocked country with a forbidding, mountainous terrain, and winter setting in. The enemy force was widely scattered, but well armed, protected by deep caves, and skilled in guerilla tactics. Added to that was the sheer mileage between our forces and their

objective. And yet amphibious forces opened the conventional war by establishing a forward-operating base 450 miles inland at Camp Rhino -- more than twice the distance that previous military doctrine considered supportable. And in short order, the Taliban regime was removed from power.

Afghanistan five years ago was in the grip of a violent, merciless regime that harbored terrorists and 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. 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. (Applause.)

The same is true for our people serving in Iraq. Americans understand what is at stake in that country -- and so do the terrorists. That is why they commit 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 power and their appeal. The war on terror is a battle for the future of civilization. It's a battle worth fighting. It's a battle we're going to win. (Applause.)

In Iraq, having removed a dictator, our coalition is working with Iraqi leaders toward the same goal: a democratic country that can defend itself, that will never again be a safe haven for terror, that will be a model of freedom in a troubled part of the world. Our strategy in Iraq is clear, our tactics will remain flexible, and we'll keep at the work until we finish the job. Progress has not come easily, but it has been steady, and we can be confident going forward.

Iraq has the most progressive constitution and the strongest democratic mandate in the entire Arab world. Despite threats from assassins and car-bombers, Iraqis came forward by the millions to cast their votes and to proclaim their rights as citizens of a free country. Iraq now has a unity government that is committed to a future of freedom and progress for all Iraqis.

Our coalition has also put great effort into standing up the Iraqi Security Forces. And that work, also, is going very well. At present more than a quarter of a million trained and equipped Iraqi forces are in the fight on behalf of the Iraqi people. As those forces gain strength and experience, and 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 judgments of our military commanders -- not by artificial timelines set by politicians in Washington, D.C. (Applause.)

We are going to keep at this mission until it is completed -- because we have given our word, and because freedom's victory in Iraq is vital to our own security. 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 area for ever greater attacks against America and other civilized nations. But the advance of democracy in Iraq is giving inspiration to 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 our grandchildren.

Our cause is necessary; our cause is just; and we are on the right side of history. As President Bush has said, the only way to lose this fight is to quit -- and quitting is not an option. (Applause.)

Americans know about the heroism displayed every day in this war, and we are not the kind of people to take our military for granted. All the people of this country appreciate the sacrifices of those who serve. We care deeply for those who have given their lives or suffered terrible injuries. And we appreciate our military families as well. I was struck by a recent comment made by General Peter Pace, a good Marine, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. He said that your families, "serve this country equally well as anyone who ever wore the uniform. They sit silently at home and pray for their loved one, waiting for news of their return, then silently stand back and pretend that they had nothing to do with our success. Whereas, in fact, it is the love and support of our families that makes all the difference in the world."

I know that General Pace's words speak for all of you. And I want you to know that our entire nation is filled with gratitude for all of our military families. (Applause.)

Ladies and gentlemen, none of us can ever know all the turns that lie 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 the American military stands in their way. (Applause.)

Each time I visit a military facility 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 every single day -- at a period -- a time of -- challenges in American history. The more you know about this country, and the more you travel and see what we've been able to achieve in this troubled world, you cannot help but grow in optimism and, yes, swell in pride as well.

I'll never forget my trip last December to Pakistan, going by helicopter to the earthquake-stricken area, out in the foothills of the Himalayas. After the quake had hit, President Bush ordered units of our military to go in and help, and within 48 hours Americans were on the scene. Up in the mountains was a MASH unit with military physicians, nurses, and physicians assistants, and even some volunteer doctors from the United States.

Lynne and I went to that tent village. And I can tell you, it's quite a feeling to stand in the remotest hinterlands and see the American flag, and citizens of our country giving aid to the desperate, including medical care to some people who had never before seen a doctor in their entire lives. This operation would not have been possible without the supporting efforts of ESG-1. (Applause.)

These are extraordinary accomplishments -- and yet they are so typical of Americans -- and so very much in the spirit of our country. The United States is a good and a generous land. We are a nation that believes in ideals, upholds them in our own country, and acts on them in the world beyond. From providing global food aid and disaster relief, to standing with freedom-loving peoples in the struggle

against tyranny and terror, we are doing great good in this world.

Once again, I want to thank each and every one of you for serving the land we love. You've done exemplary work in a time of great national need. You've reflected great credit on this country. You have made your fellow citizens very, very proud. And it's been my great honor to be in your company today.

Thank you. (Applause.)

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