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Office of the Vice President  
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## **Vice President Delivers Commencement Address at the United States Naval Academy**

Navy-Marine Corps Memorial Stadium  
Annapolis, Maryland

 [Photo Essay: U.S. Naval Academy Graduation](#)

10:16 A.M. EDT

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Thank you. (Applause.) Thank you very much. Secretary Winter, Admiral Mullen, Admiral Rempt, General Magnus, Dean Miller, Captain Grooms, Mayor Moyer, Academy staff and faculty -- distinguished guests, officers, midshipmen, alumni, and graduates:

Thank you for the warm welcome today, and for the privilege of standing before the newest officers of the United States Navy and Marine Corps. I'm looking at a group of men and women who have brought academic and athletic distinction to the Naval Academy; and who, in just a few moments, will accept commissions to God and country. I commend each one of you for this achievement, and for the years of hard effort that brought you to this day. And I am honored to extend the personal congratulations of your Commander-in-Chief, President George W. Bush. (Applause.)

It is always an honor to visit this Academy, which has prepared so many splendid officers down through the generations. Of the six current members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, four, including the Chairman, are graduates of this Academy. (Applause.) The nation is exceedingly well served by the Naval Academy alumni, and we are grateful for the superior standards that are upheld on this campus each and every day.

Those of you graduating today will carry your own special memories of the place, and of the formative events during your time as midshipmen. I should point out that in these four years you've worked very diligently. You've been good citizens. You've helped out in disaster areas; volunteered for charities; and served as mentors to young people. You've shown extraordinary generosity of spirit. And you beat Army four times in a row. (Applause.)

As I learned about this class, I was naturally interested, as a resident of Wyoming, in how many graduates happen to come from my home state.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: (Cheers.) (Laughter.)

THE VICE PRESIDENT: That's one of them. (Laughter.) Actually, I found out there are two in this class -- one from Gillette and one from Rock Springs.

AUDIENCE MEMBERS: (Cheers.)

THE VICE PRESIDENT: I would have expected more, considering Wyoming's maritime traditions and the breadth of our coastline. (Laughter.) But I will remind Midshipmen McFarrin and Rawson -- (applause) -- of the motto I used to have when I was the lone congressman from Wyoming: It may be a small delegation, but it's all quality. (Laughter and applause.)

As members of the brigade gather in tribute to the class of 2006, I want you to know about a small matter the President and I discussed before I came over to Annapolis today. We realize the academic year may be over, but there are still some midshipmen on restriction for minor conduct offenses. We talked about it. The President took the view that we should be lenient. Me, I could have gone either way. (Laughter.) But he's the boss. So at his direction, and in accordance with tradition, I hereby absolve the midshipmen on restriction for minor conduct offenses. (Applause.)

All of you today are feeling a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction -- and rightly so. Four years ago, you entered one of the most rigorous leadership programs in the world, and you have been found worthy. But your path to leadership began long before Induction Day. In your lifetime you have had the encouragement and support of the people who know you best, who care about you the most, and who keep you in their prayers. This is a great moment for them, as well. So let's give a round of applause to the parents and family of the class of 2006. (Applause.)

In a world that depends on American sea power to swiftly deliver humanitarian aid and disaster relief, to secure the sea lanes, and to carry out combat operations, we'll be counting on all of you. And you are well prepared for the tasks ahead. We know where the aviators are headed -- you'll be on fixed wing or helicopter assignments. We know where the Marines will be -- in the air, on the ground, or in support of combat operations. And we know where the surface officers will be -- on an Arleigh Burke-class destroyer, or perhaps serving as diplomats in places around the globe, such as Japan or Bahrain. Special forces: you'll be at the tip of the spear, worldwide. And submariners: we don't know where you'll be -- (laughter) --but we're glad you're there -- (laughter) -- as part of our strategic forces. (Applause.)

To any place that duty takes you -- whether on the bridge of a ship or at the controls of a jet or a submarine -- you will arrive with the knowledge and the tools to excel. At the Naval Academy you've been tested -- morally, mentally, and physically. You have shown yourselves to be men and women of agility, endurance, and, above all, honor. And each one of you is a superb addition to the quality force that America has continued to build over these past five years.

You are the first class to enter the Academy following the attacks of 9/11. And I'm guessing that more than a few of you were inspired to military service by that attack on our country. In these four years, the war on terror has influenced the course of study at our service academies, and it will define much of your career leading American sailors and Marines.

To prevail in this fight, we must understand the nature of the enemy that threatens America and the civilized world. It is as brutal and heartless as any we have ever faced. This enemy wears no uniform, has no regard for the rules of warfare, and is unconstrained by any standard of decency or morality. They plot and plan in secret, target the defenseless, and rejoice at the death of innocent, unsuspecting human beings.

This enemy has a set of beliefs -- and we saw the expression of those beliefs in the rule of the Taliban. They seek to impose a dictatorship of fear, under which every man, woman, and child lives in total obedience to a narrow and hateful ideology. This ideology rejects tolerance, denies freedom of conscience, and demands that women be pushed to the margins of society. Such beliefs can be imposed only through force and intimidation, so those who refuse to bow to the tyrants will be brutalized or killed -- and no person or group is exempt.

This enemy also has a clear set of objectives. The terrorists want to end all American and Western influence in the Middle East. Their goal in that region is to seize 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 one country, they will be able to target and overthrow other governments in the region, ultimately to establish a totalitarian 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 ambitions: to arm themselves with chemical, biological or even nuclear weapons; to destroy Israel; to intimidate all Western countries; and to cause mass death here in the United States. Some might look at these ambitions and wave them off as extreme and mad. Well, these ambitions are extreme and mad. They are also real, and we must not wave them off. We must take them seriously. We must oppose them. And we must defeat them. (Applause.)

Over the last several decades, Americans have seen how the terrorists pursue their objectives. To put it in very basic terms, they would hit us, and we would not hit back hard enough. For many years prior to 9/11, we treated terror attacks against Americans as isolated incidents, and answered -- if at all -- on an ad hoc basis, and never in a systematic way. Even after a strike inside our own country -- the 1993 attack on the World Trade Center in New York -- there was a tendency to treat terrorist attacks as individual criminal acts, to be handled primarily as a matter for law enforcement. The man who perpetrated that first attack in New York was tracked down, arrested, convicted, and sent off to spend the rest of his life in prison. Yet behind that one man was a growing network with operatives inside and outside the United States, waging war against our country. For us, that war started on 9/11. For them, it started years before. After the World Trade Center attack in 1993 came the murders at the Saudi Arabian National Guard facility in 1995; the attack on Khobar Towers in 1996; the simultaneous bombings of our embassies Tanzania and Kenya in 1998; and the attack on the USS Cole in 2000. With each attack, the terrorists grew more confident in believing they could strike America without paying a price and believing that if they killed enough Americans, they could change our policy. So they continued to wage those attacks -- making the world less safe and eventually striking us here in the homeland on September 11th and killing 3,000 of our fellow citizens.

Against this kind of determined, organized, ruthless enemy, America required a new strategy -- not merely to prosecute a series of crimes, but to fight and win a global campaign against the terror network.

First, we are absolutely determined to prevent attacks before they occur, and so we are on the offensive against the terror networks. At home and with coalition partners abroad, we have broken up terror cells, tracked down terrorist operatives, and put pressure on their ability to organize and plan attacks. The work is difficult and often perilous, and there is much yet to do. But we have made tremendous progress against this enemy that dwells in the shadows.

Second, we are determined to deny safe haven to the terrorists. Since the day our country was attacked, we have applied the Bush Doctrine: Any person or government that supports, protects, or harbors terrorists is complicit in the murder of the innocent and will be held to account.

Third, we are working to halt the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and to keep those weapons out of the hands of killers. In the post-9/11 world, we have had to confront such dangers before they materialize. The President put it very well: "Terrorists and terror states do not reveal these threats with fair notice, in formal declarations -- and responding to such enemies only after they have struck first is not self--defense, it's suicide."

Fourth, we are determined to deny the terrorists control of any nation, which they would use as a home base and a staging ground for terrorist attacks on others. That is why we continue to fight Taliban remnants and al Qaeda forces in Afghanistan. That is why we are working with President Musharraf to oppose and isolate the terrorist element in Pakistan. And that is why we are fighting the remnants of Saddam Hussein's regime and the terrorists in Iraq.

Because our coalition has stood by our commitment to the Afghan and Iraqi peoples, some 50 million men, women, and children who lived under dictators now live in freedom. Afghanistan is a rising democracy, with the first fully elected government in its 5,000-year history. Iraq has the most progressive constitution and the strongest democratic mandate in the Arab world. And 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. Now they live under an elected government committed to serving all Iraqis, determined to speed up the day when Iraqi forces can assume full responsibility for their nation's security. We will help them on this journey because we are a nation that keeps its word. And we know that when men and women are given the power to determine their own destiny, the ideologies of violence and resentment will lose their appeal, and nations will turn their energies to the pursuit of peace.

By standing with our friends, and making a better day possible in the broader Middle East; by supporting democracy, we serve both ideals and the security of our nation. And the brave Americans on duty in this war can be proud of their service for the rest of their lives. (Applause.)

In an enterprise as vast as the war on terror, victory requires that we use every element of our national power. The terrorists view the entire world as a battlefield. And those of us in positions of responsibility must do everything we can to figure out the intentions of an enemy that likely has combatants inside the United States today. We live in a free and open society, and the terrorists want to use those very advantages against us. And so we have an urgent duty to learn who they are, what they are doing, and to stop them before they act.

For this reason, in the aftermath of 9/11 President Bush authorized the National Security Agency to intercept a certain category of terrorist-linked international communications. The purpose is very simple to state: If people inside the United States are communicating with al Qaeda, they are talking to the enemy -- and we need to know about it. (Applause.)

The Terrorist Surveillance Program is highly classified and carefully limited. The program was improperly revealed to the news media, some of which now describe it as domestic surveillance. That is not the case. We are talking about international communications, one end of which we have reason to believe is related to al Qaeda or to terrorist networks. It's hard to think of any category of information that could be more important to the safety of the United States.

The Terrorist Surveillance Program is fully consistent with the constitutional responsibilities and the legal authorities of the President. And the program is conducted in a manner that fully protects the civil liberties of the American people. The President has made clear -- (applause) -- the President has made clear from the outset, both publicly and privately, that our duty to uphold the law of the land admits no exceptions in wartime. As he has said, "We are in a fight for our principles, and our first responsibility is to live by them."

In addition, the entire program is reconsidered and reauthorized by the President himself every 45 days. He has reauthorized it more than 30 times since September 11th because our nation faces a continuing threat from al Qaeda and related organizations. Key members of Congress, from both political parties, have received more than a dozen briefings on the Terrorist Surveillance Program. The reason I know this is that I'm the one who presided over most of those briefings.

Above all, I can tell you that the Terrorist Surveillance Program is absolutely essential to the security of the United States. If you'll recall, the 9/11 Commission focused criticism on the nation's inability to uncover links between terrorists at home and terrorists overseas. The term that's used is "connecting the dots" -- and the fact is that one small piece of data might very well make it possible to save thousands of lives. And the very important question today is whether or not we've learned all the lessons of September 11th.

In the decade prior to 9/11, this country spent more than \$2 trillion dollars on national security. Yet we lost nearly 3,000 Americans at the hands of 19 men with box cutters and plane tickets. In the case of al Qaeda we are not dealing with large armies we can track, or uniforms we can see, or men with territory of their own to defend. Their preferred tactic, which they boldly proclaim, is to slip into this country, blend in among the innocent, kill without mercy and without restraint. They have intelligence and counterintelligence operations of their own. They take their orders from overseas. They are using the most sophisticated communications technology they can get their hands on. Since 9/11 they have successfully carried out attacks in Casablanca, Jakarta, Mombassa, Bali, Riyadh, Baghdad, Istanbul, Madrid, London, Sharm al-Sheikh and elsewhere. Here in the U.S., we have not had another 9/11. But while the enemies that struck us may be weakened and fractured, they are still lethal and still desperately trying to hit us again. They hate us, they hate our country, and they hate the liberties for which we stand. They have contempt for our values. They doubt our strength. And they believe that America will lose our nerve and let down our guard.

We're all grateful that this nation has not had another day like September 11th. Obviously, no one can guarantee that we won't be hit again. But the relative safety of these years did not come about by accident. We've been protected by sensible policy decisions, by decisive action at home and abroad, and by round-the-clock efforts on the part of people in the armed services, law enforcement, intelligence, and homeland security.

Every day the President of the United States makes decisions based on the intelligence briefing he received that morning. The information in that briefing is critical to assessing risks, and to allocating security assets inside the homeland and far beyond. Throughout our military, intelligence has a daily, indeed hourly, influence on the movement of ships and subs, fighter and bomber missions, and orders given to those commands at the tip of the spear. Gathering the best information, and getting it into the hands of the war fighter, means that your work is more effective, your maneuvers are more safe, and the nation you serve is more secure.

As you ready yourselves for new responsibilities, I want each one of you to know that the President will not relent in the effort to track the enemies of the United States with every legitimate tool in his command. (Applause.) This is not a war we can win on the defensive. Our only option against these enemies is to monitor them, to find them, to fight them, and to destroy them. (Applause.)

The class of 2006 has adopted the motto, Custodus Liberatus -- Custodians of Liberty. Ladies and gentlemen, I lack the words to fully express how much you mean to this nation -- not just on commissioning day, but every day that you give to America. We look at you and we see the best that is in our country. In your careers you will serve in a fleet like none other that has ever sailed before. You are part of a Navy and Marine Corps that uphold the noblest of traditions. You serve under a flag that stands for freedom, and human rights, and stability in a turbulent world.

As of today, you, the Custodians of Liberty, will begin writing your own chapter of excellence and achievement for the United States Armed Forces. (Applause.) As military officers you will bring relief to the helpless, hope to the oppressed. You will protect the United States of America in a time of war, and you'll help to build the peace that freedom brings.

Four years ago you arrived at Annapolis with a sense of all that you could become. You have grown in knowledge and in character. You have earned the rank and the respect that are yours today. You were selected with care, and you are sent forth with high expectations, the hopes, and the prayers of the greatest nation on Earth.

Good luck and Godspeed to the U.S. Naval Academy Class of 2006. (Applause.)

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