



THE WHITE HOUSE
PRESIDENT
GEORGE W. BUSH

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President Bush Visits with Military Personnel and Families at Fort Benning, Georgia

Freedom Hall
Fort Benning, Georgia

 [In Focus: Defense](#)

1:10 P.M. EST

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you all. Please be seated. You call him General, I call him "Wojo." (Laughter.) Thank you for the introduction. I'm proud to be with you. I'm proud to be at Fort Benning, Georgia, home of the Infantry. I'm proud to be with those who have volunteered to serve our country, brave men and women who understand that the awesome responsibility of government is to provide security to the American people. I applaud you for your efforts. I'm proud to be your Commander-in-Chief. And I'm honored to have lunch with you.

I'm only sorry that my wife hasn't joined me. She's the better half of our deal. (Laughter.) But she sends her love and her respect.

Speaking about families, I have the greatest of respect for not only those of you who wear the uniform, but your families, as well. I fully understand in times of danger the military families make a significant sacrifice. And so on behalf of a grateful nation, I say thanks to the families of the soldiers here at Fort Benning, Georgia. (Applause.)

Wojo, I'm glad your wife, Candy, joined us. We both married well. I appreciate traveling here today with the United States Congressman who represents this area, Congressman Sanford Bishop. Thank you for coming, Congressman. (Applause.) And I'm pleased that Congressman Lynn Westmoreland -- he is from the district right north of here -- has joined us today. Lynn, thank you for being here. (Applause.)

I appreciate the Mayor of Columbus, Georgia, Mayor Wetherington. Mr. Mayor, thank you for being here. Thanks for coming. (Applause.) Mayor Hardin, of Phenix City, Alabama has joined us. Mr. Mayor, appreciate you coming. (Applause.) I know you didn't ask, neither of the Mayors asked, but sometimes I like to remind them, just go ahead and fill the potholes. (Laughter.) I'm not suggesting there are any, it's just my advice.



VIDEO Multimedia

President's Remarks



I appreciate all the officials, local officials who are here. I can't thank the commanders of the base who have arranged this visit -- I do want to thank Keith Lovejoy, Colonel Keith Lovejoy, Garrison Commander of Fort Benning, and his wife, Carol; Sergeant Major Doug Greenway, his wife JoAnn.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Hooah!

THE PRESIDENT: You've got a little bit of a following here. (Laughter.)

I appreciate all the civilian personnel that have joined us to help make this base run. You know, our bases cannot run without the important contributions of civilians, and I appreciate your effort in helping this fine base survive. This is a really important place. This is a place that has a long tradition of turning civilians into highly skilled soldiers. And I can't thank you enough for the contribution you're making to the security of this country.

There's a lot of history here at Fort Benning, Georgia. A lot of folks have left this base to defend freedom and pass the peace. And I appreciate the fact -- and I know you do, as well -- that you're part of a long tradition of people who have made incredibly important sacrifices so that hundreds of millions of people would enjoy the blessings of liberty and freedom and the world will be more peaceful.

And that's what we're here to celebrate today. On September the 11th, our nation saw firsthand the destructive vision of a new kind of enemy, and once again the men and women of Fort Benning answered the call to protect our country from that enemy. You know, I knew that right after the attacks, the American psyche being what it is, people would tend to forget the grave threat posed by these people. I knew that. As a matter of fact, I was hoping that would happen so that life would go on. But the fortunate thing for this country is that those who wear the uniform have never forgotten the threat. You understand the stakes.



You know, the Rangers from the Third Battalion of the 75th regiment led the way when it came to upholding doctrine that said, if you harbor a terrorist, you're equally as guilty as the terrorists, and helped liberate Afghanistan. The first fight of this new war was in that faraway place. Soldiers from Fort Benning led the way.

The Third Brigade Combat Team of the Third Infantry Division took up the sledgehammer to help liberate Baghdad. One soldier from Fort Benning, Sergeant First Class Paul R. Smith of the Third Infantry Division, went into Iraq. He was there when they surprised about a hundred of Saddam Hussein's Republican Guard. They were attacked, and Sergeant Smith manned a 50-caliber machine gun atop a damaged armored vehicle to protect his men. He continued to fire from an exposed position. He took a fatal round. He saved more than a hundred lives of American soldiers. He received the Medal of Honor. (Applause.)

This is the kind of remarkable courage found throughout the -- throughout the men and women on this base. Troops from Fort Benning are now serving in Iraq right now, helping to protect the troops and the Iraqi citizens, training Iraqi security forces.

You're doing something else remarkable here, rebuilding schools and helping improve lives. Everywhere that warriors from this base serve, you leave your mark, and I believe it will be a legacy of hope and freedom and peace.

Last night I talked about a new strategy for Iraq, and I want to share some thoughts with you about that. You know, in 2005, I was able to report to the country that nearly 12 million Iraqis had cast their ballots in a remarkable election. I hope you still remember the moments when people were proudly able to wave their fingers saying, we have shed ourselves from a tyrant, and we're able to express our individual wills about the future of our country. I believe that 2005 would have been a -- we would have completed a lot of the mission and that would have been training the Iraqis so they would be in the lead, that they would be in a position to uphold the wishes of the 12 million people that voted.

In spite of the remarkable progress, 2006 turned out differently than I had anticipated. And it did because there's an enemy there that recognizes that the advance of freedom is in contrast to their hopes and their dreams. They can't stand the thought of a free society. Al Qaeda and foreigners and radicals took action trying to spur sectarian violence. They bombed holy -- important holy site, they killed innocent people, and they were effective at spawning sectarian violence.



The situation in Iraq is difficult, no question about it. It's a difficult time in Iraq because the sectarian violence needs to be challenged and stopped in order for this young society to advance. Yet, it's important for our fellow citizens to understand that failure in Iraq would be a disaster for our future. And here's why. One of the wisest comments I've heard about this battle in Iraq was made by General John Abizaid -- smart guy, a great soldier. He told me -- he said, Mr. President, if we were to fail in Iraq, the enemy would follow us here to America.

It's a different kind of war in which failure in one part of the world could lead to disaster here at home. It's important for our citizens to understand that as tempting as it might be, to understand the consequences of leaving before the job is done, radical Islamic extremists would grow in strength. They would be emboldened. It would make it easier to recruit for their cause. They would be in a position to do that which they have said they want to do, which is to topple moderate governments, to spread their radical vision across an important region of the world.

Imagine what would happen if these extremists who hate America and our way of life gained control of energy reserves. You can bet they would use those reserves to blackmail economies in order to achieve their objective. If we were to leave before the job is done, if we were to fail in Iraq, Iran would be emboldened in its pursuit of nuclear weapons. Our enemies would have safe havens from which to

launch attacks. People would look back at this moment in history and say, what happened to them in America? How come they couldn't see the threats to a future generation? That is why we must, and we will, succeed in Iraq. (Applause.)

The most urgent priority for success in Iraq is security, especially in Baghdad. Only the Iraqis can end sectarian violence. That's their job. The Iraqis must secure their people. The government recognizes they've got to do so, and they've put forth a plan. I received their plan, their version of the plan when I was in Jordan. The Prime Minister came and said, look, I understand we've got to do something about this violence, and here is what I suggest we do. Our commanders looked at it, helped fine-tune it so it would work.

The plan basically calls for the government to appoint a military commander for Baghdad, which they have done. And they've got the city divided into nine divisions in which there will be 18 Iraqi Army and National Police brigades operating out of local police stations to set up checkpoints, to knock on doors and take a census, to let them know that there is an army presence in the neighborhood to protect them.

The commanders on the ground in Iraq, people who I listen to -- by the way, that's what you want your Commander-in-Chief to do. You don't want decisions being made based upon politics, or focus groups, or political polls. You want your military decisions being made by military experts. And they analyzed the plan and they said to me, and to the Iraqi government, this won't work unless we help them. There needs to be a bigger presence.

And there needs to be a bigger presence because, in the past, we would go in with Iraqis and clear a neighborhood of extremists and terrorists, and then there wouldn't be enough troops to hold the neighborhood. So our kids would do a lot of hard work, and insurgents and terrorists and killers would generally not want to engage our troops -- probably a pretty smart decision on their part. But when they did, they would find justice, and then we'd go on to another assignment, and they'd come back in the neighborhood. And it's frustrating to our troops; it's equally frustrating to the Iraqi citizens who want to live in peace. That's what they want. They want to be able to have a peaceful life.

And so our commanders looked at the plan and said, Mr. President, it's not going to work until -- unless we support -- provide more troops. And so last night I told the country that I've committed an additional -- a little over 20,000 more troops, five brigades of which will be in Baghdad. They're going to work alongside the Iraqi units. They will be embedded in Iraqi units. They will help the Iraqis take the lead in securing the neighborhoods.



They're going to have a well-defined mission. You hear people say, there must be a clear military mission.



That's what

the military people have said to me. The mission is to help Iraqis clear and secure neighborhoods, to help Iraqis protect the local population, and to ensure that the Iraqi forces that are left behind will be capable of providing the security necessary in the capital city of Iraq. That's the mission.

I asked General Casey, can we accomplish that mission? He said, you bet, we can accomplish that mission. It's got enough troops to accomplish the mission. But one other thing must happen -- that our troops and Iraqi troops must have proper rules of engagement. In other words, there can't be politics interfering with the action of our troops. The American people say, well, you tried it before -- and we did. They said, what went wrong, what's different?

Well, what's new about this plan is there will be enough troops to clear, build and hold, and that our troops will be able to move alongside the Iraqis without political interference, and that's very important. It's important for our troops to hear, and it's important for the American people to know, this is new. This is something different that enables the military folks to predict that we will succeed in helping quell sectarian violence in Baghdad.

The other thing that's going to have to happen is that the government of Iraq must exhibit the will necessary to succeed. It's one thing to develop a plan, it's another thing to see it through. The Prime Minister and I have had some plain talking. I have made it clear that the patience of the American people is not unlimited. And now is the time to act. It's time to act not only for our sake, it's time to act for the sake of people in Iraq. Shia and Sunni mothers want their children to grow up in peace.

The Prime Minister has pledged that political or sectarian interference will not be tolerated. He has said this publicly. The new strategy is not going to yield immediate results. It's going to take awhile. The American people have got to understand that suicide bombings won't stop immediately. The IED attacks won't stop immediately.

Yet over time, we can expect to see positive results, and that would be the Iraqis chasing down the murderers; that there will be fewer brazen acts of terror inside of Baghdad; that there will be growing trust between the different neighborhoods. In other words, you'll begin to see a society that is somewhat more peaceful. Daily life will improve, the Iraqis will gain confidence in their leaders, and the government will have the breathing space necessary to be able to do other things, to do the politics necessary, to reconcile, to pass an oil law, to allow there to be provincial elections, to make sure that deBaathification rules are altered, to say to people, this society is a unified society. In other words, to

listen to the will of the 12 million people that voted.

We -- it's interesting -- you know, I mentioned that the Prime Minister and the government have got to step up and lead. I was heartened by the resolve that I've seen in the last couple of days, the resolve of the government, and the resolve of the Iraqi troops. They fought bravely beside U.S. forces in Baghdad to rout out insurgents and terrorists along Haifa Street. I don't know if you followed that battle, but it was a tough battle, with the Iraqis in the lead, and our folks helping them.



Yesterday, the resolve was seen when Prime Minister Maliki made it clear that illegal militias, including the Mahdi Army, have a choice to make: either lay down your arms or face justice. That's the kind of leadership that the Iraqi people expect. And that's the kind of leadership I expect, and the American people expect. Our support is not open-ended. If the Iraqis demonstrate a willingness to fight for a better future, we'll help them. It's in our interests that we do so. Not only do we expect to see action militarily, as I mentioned, we expect to see them fulfill the benchmarks that they laid out for their people.

We're going to help them. I was telling the General we'll double the number of provincial reconstruction teams; our commanders and civilians will have greater flexibility to spend money on the ground. For those of you who have been there, it's called CERP money. You know it's an effective tool to help part of the "build" part of "clear" -- build and hold. But their government has got to come in behind us.

I was pleased to see that the Iraqi government pledged \$10 billion of their own money to help this government show the people that beyond just security there needs to be an improvement in life, that people have got to have -- see a better life in order for this government to work.

Last night I also talked about Anbar Province. It's important for the American people to understand al Qaeda still is in Iraq. As a matter of fact, they made it clear their ambitions in Iraq. These are the same folks that came and killed about 3,000 of our citizens. Their goal in Iraq is to topple the government, topple democracy.

See, their vision of life, their ideology can't stand the thought of free societies in their midst. They're totalitarians. You do it this way, or else, is their attitude about government. They don't believe in freedoms, like freedom to worship. I, frankly -- well, speaking about religion, these are murderers. They use murder as a tool to achieve their objective. Religious people don't murder. They may claim they're religious, but when you kill an innocent woman, or a child to create a political end, that's not my view of religion. And yet, there are a lot of



peaceful, religious people in the Middle East.

These people need to be stopped. They can't stand the thought of the Iraqis being able to worship freely. They want safe haven, and they've chosen Anbar as their place to achieve safe haven.

We've got a lot of really fine troops fighting al Qaeda and we're making progress. There's a lot of pressure on them in Anbar. Interestingly enough, a lot of sheikhs have decided to join in the fight against al Qaeda. They're tired of foreigners and killers in their midst. That's what the commanders have told me. And they believe we have a good opportunity to really crush this group of folks. And that's why I've committed 4,000 additional troops into Anbar, as well as the troops into Baghdad.

The purpose really is to crush these insurrections now, so that the -- democracy in Iraq can develop, has a chance to make it. That's why I made the decision I made. I understand the consequences of failure; they're not acceptable. And so I thought long and hard how best to succeed. That's what I'm interested in, is success. The American people are interested in success. And I laid out a plan that is our best chance for success.

It's also important for our citizens to understand that Iraq must be viewed in the larger context of the Middle East. It's important for Iran and Syria to understand that we will disrupt their attacks on our forces, that we will interrupt the flow of support from Iran and Syria. We'll seek out and destroy the networks providing advanced weaponry and training to our enemies in Iraq.

Iran's desire to have a nuclear weapon has caught the attention of the world. It is a very dangerous -- that would be a dangerous situation if the Iranians were able to achieve a nuclear weapon. We will continue to pressure Iran, and call upon the world to do so, to end its nuclear weapons ambitions.

I made a statement last night that I had ordered the deployment of an additional carrier strike group to the region. I also talked about Patriot missile systems in the region, to help others deal with the external threats. We will use our full diplomatic resources throughout the Middle East.

It's very important for people to understand -- put this situation in Iraq in a larger context, and that is the ideological war that we're seeing. I talked to you about the consequences of failure. The best way to defeat the totalitarian of hate is with an ideology of hope -- an ideology of hate -- excuse me -- with an ideology of hope. It matters whether or not people are resentful in the Middle East. It matters if people are hateful and look to strike out at a convenient target in the Middle East. Our security depends on there to be a alternative to the ideology of hate. Because if there's resentment and hate, it's easier to recruit 19 kids to get on an airplane and kill 3,000 people.

And therefore, in the long run, your children and grandchildren are more likely to live in peace with the advent of liberty. And I'm confident that there are millions of people who are desirous to live in a free society, regardless of their religion, because I believe in the universality of freedom. I believe there's an Almighty, and I believe a gift of the Almighty to every soul is the desire to be free. That's what I believe. And so it did not surprise me when people defied car bombers and killers to vote, to send a signal, I want to be free.

And the task, immediate task of America, and the long-range goal of this country must be to help those who desire to live in free societies to do so, for the sake of peace for our own children. And that's the call. And it's going to require sacrifice, and I appreciate the sacrifices our troops are willing to make. Some units are going to have to deploy earlier than scheduled as a result of the decision I made. Some will remain deployed longer than originally anticipated. I will work with you and the Congress to provide all the resources you need in this war on terror, and that means good equipment and training, good housing. I understand full well, if you're family is happy, you're happy. The same thing in my house, by the way. (Laughter.)

I believe it's important to increase the end strength of the United States Army so it can remain engaged -- (applause.) If this is a long struggle, now is the time to prepare this country and our military for this long struggle. It's important for our citizens to understand that the terrorists and extremists are as brutal an enemy as this country has ever faced. There are no rules of warfare. They don't -- they will kill you in a minute in order to achieve an objective. And I know we're going to face difficulties as we take on this important duty and task, and so do you.

You know first hand that -- what it means to lose a comrade. My view is that it is important for us to succeed so that comrade would not have died in vain. It's important to leave behind a better world as the sacrifices that all have made.

There is no doubt in my mind we will prevail. It will require patience and determination. It will require our military to do what you have done every time this government has asked of you. It will require the full resolve of not only this government, but future governments that will be following this one. Every time this country has been tested, we've responded. As I said last night, we have defied the pessimists, and we will do so again in this first battle of the 21st century.

God bless. (Applause.)

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