



THE WHITE HOUSE
PRESIDENT
GEORGE W. BUSH

 [CLICK HERE TO PRINT](#)

For Immediate Release
Office of the Vice President
January 6, 2006

Vice President's Remarks at a Rally for the Troops

Fort Leavenworth
Leavenworth, Kansas

12:10 P.M. CST

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Thank you all very much. I appreciate the warm welcome, honored to pay a visit to the best hometown in the United States Army, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. (Applause.) And it's good to be here, as well today -- we've got some distinguished congressional friends with us: Senator Pat Roberts; Congressmen Jerry Moran, Jim Ryun and Dennis Moore. (Applause.)

I'm using a cane today, and it's driving the press nuts. (Laughter.) They keep asking my staff what happened to the Vice President, is it serious? And so I said, no, Secretary Rumsfeld bit me in the ankle. (Laughter.) Not to worry. (Laughter.) But don't tell him I said that. (Laughter.)

But I appreciate the kind words from the Commanding General of the Combined Arms Center here at Fort Leavenworth, of course, General David Petraeus. And, General, I want to begin today with a special word of thanks to you. After leading the Screaming Eagles of the 101st Airborne during Operation Iraqi Freedom, you became the first commander of the Multi-National Security Transition Command, and also led the NATO Training Mission -- Iraq. The United States, our coalition, and the Iraqi people counted on you to begin the process of training security forces for that nation. You carried out that assignment brilliantly, with the kind of foresight, integrity, and wisdom this nation expects of our finest military officers. Every day we're seeing the good results of your efforts. And here in the presence of the men and women of Fort Leavenworth, I want to thank you for what you did for all of us. (Applause.)



This military post on the banks of the Missouri was an important place in the life of our country, and in the history of freedom. Here the nation has prepared generations of officers, who have provided the kind of leadership that keeps our military strong, and keeps our country free. At Fort Leavenworth the CAC supports an Army that is transforming itself for a new century, while at the same time fighting this century's very first war. This is also the home of a very important Battle Command Training Center for the Army National Guard, and the 35th ID, which mobilized and moved swiftly in the recovery effort after Hurricane Katrina.

These are eventful times for the U.S. military, and Fort Leavenworth is at the center of a great many critical assignments. You know what you're doing, and you do it very well. I am honored to be in your company. And I bring good wishes to each and every one of you from our Commander-in-Chief, President George W. Bush. (Applause.)

Our nation has counted on the Army for more than 230 years. And soldiers of the United States are repaying that confidence every day that we fight the war on terror. When we were attacked on that terrible September morning four years ago, President Bush said that the struggle would be lengthy and difficult, and would require our best effort and unfailing resolve. And in that fight some of the hardest duties have come to the men and women of the United States Army.

A number of people on this platform have been in the thick of battle against our enemies of freedom. We know your country asked you to carry out some very demanding missions. You've done so with focus and skill, regardless of the conditions. Your performance in combat -- 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. I want to thank you for a job well done and say welcome home. (Applause.)

As some of you know, just before Christmas I visited Afghanistan and Iraq, and met with some of the units we've deployed to those countries. I thanked them for their service, and for all they've done to bring freedom, stability, and peace to a troubled part of the world. Afghanistan four years ago was in the grip of a violent, merciless regime that harbored terrorists and plotted murder for export. There is still tough fighting going on in that country, some of it in very rough terrain, high in the mountains and up along the borders. But our people are getting the job done, together with coalition partners and an increasingly strong and professional Afghan military.

And Afghanistan is a rising nation - with a democratically-elected government, a market economy, equality for women, and millions of children going to school for the very first time. It is impossible to overstate all that our coalition has achieved in Afghanistan -- 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.

I brought that same message to 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 to 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 for our grandchildren.

The war on terror is a battle for the future of civilization; it's a battle worth fighting -- it's a battle we are going to win. (Applause.)

Our strategy in Iraq is clear, our tactics will remain flexible, and we'll work at the job until we finish it. Progress has not come easily, but it has been steady, and we can be confident going forward. By voting in free elections, by ratifying a constitution, by electing a government last month, 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 the Iraqi Security Forces, and we've come a great distance over the past year. We're helping to build an Iraqi force that is sharp and well equipped, and this was vital to the success of last month's elections. Gradually, Iraqi forces are taking control of more Iraqi territory -- and as they undertake further missions on their own, confidence is growing within the country and more and more intelligence tips are being provided by the Iraqi population.

As the ISF gains strength and experience, and as the political process advances, we'll be able to transfer more and more responsibility to the Iraqis, and eventually decrease troop levels without losing our capacity to defeat the terrorists. And I assure you: Any decisions about troop levels will be driven by conditions on the ground and by the judgment of our commanders -- not by artificial timelines set by politicians in Washington, D.C. (Applause.)

Recently there have been some prominent voices advocating a sudden withdrawal of our forces from Iraq. Some have suggested the war is not winnable, a few seem almost eager to conclude that the struggle was already lost. But they are wrong. The only way to lose this fight is to quit -- and that is not an option. (Applause.)

Every American serving in this war can be absolutely certain that the people of our country do not support a policy of passivity, resignation, or 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 hard work ahead, because we are dealing with enemies who have declared an intention to bring great harm to any nation that opposes their aims. Their prime targets are the United States and the American people. And so we have a continuing responsibility to lead in this fight.

In the war on terror we face a loose network of committed fanatics, found in many countries and operating under different commanders. Yet the branches of this network share the same basic ideology and the same dark vision for the world. The terrorists want to end American and Western influence in the Middle East. Their goal in that region is to gain control of a country, so they have a base from which to launch attacks and to wage war against governments that do not meet their demands. The terrorists believe that by controlling an entire country, they will be able to target and overthrow other governments, and to establish a radical Islamic 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 weapons of mass destruction, to destroy Israel, to intimidate all Western countries, and to cause mass death here in the United States. In the face of such a threat, those of us in positions of responsibility have a duty to wage a broad-scale effort for the sake of this nation's freedom and security.

That effort includes a home front, which is every bit as important as the battlefields abroad. In his

speech to Congress after 9/11, President Bush said that the United States would, "direct every resource at our command -- every means of diplomacy, every tool of intelligence, every instrument of law enforcement, every financial influence, and every necessary weapon of war -- to the disruption and to the defeat of the global terror network." (Applause.)

The Congress backed him up in full, authorizing the President to defeat an enemy that had already slipped into our country and waged a horrific attack upon 3,000 innocent, unsuspecting men, women, and children.

The President also signed the Patriot Act, which removed the artificial barrier that used to exist between law enforcement and intelligence, and gave federal officials the ability to pursue terrorists with the tools that they already use for drug traffickers and other kinds of criminals. That law has helped us to disrupt terrorist activity, to break up terror cells within the United States, and to protect the lives of many Americans. We look forward to a renewal of the Patriot Act in 2006, because that law has done exactly what it was intended to do -- and this country cannot afford to be without its protection.

Another vital step the President took in the days following 9/11 was to authorize the National Security Agency to intercept a certain category of terrorist-linked international communications. Now, you've seen a lot of press commentary recently about "domestic surveillance". Let me remind everybody, what we're talking about are international communications, one of end of the communication is outside the United States and one end of the communication we have reason to believe is al Qaeda or terrorist-related. There are no more important communications to the safety of the United States than those related to al Qaeda that have one end in the United States. If we'd been able to do this before 9/11, we might have been able to pick up on two hijackers who subsequently flew a jet into the Pentagon. They were in the United States, communicating with al Qaeda associates overseas. But we did not know they were here plotting until it was too late.

If you'll recall, the report of the 9/11 Commission it focused on criticism of our inability to uncover links between terrorists at home and terrorists abroad. The authorization the President made after September 11th helped address that problem in a manner that is fully consistent with the constitutional responsibilities and legal authority of the President and with the civil liberties of the American people. The activities conducted under this authorization have helped to detect and prevent possible terrorist attacks against the American people. And as such, this program is critical to the national security of the United States.

A spirited debate is now underway, and one -- and our message to the American people is clear and straightforward: These actions are within the President's authority under the Constitution and laws, and these actions are vital to the security of our nation. This is a wartime measure, limited in scope to surveillance associated with terrorists, and conducted in a way that safeguards the civil liberties of the American people.

It is important to note that leaders of Congress have been briefed more than a dozen times on the President's authorization, and on activities conducted under it. I have personally presided over most of those briefings. In addition, the entire program undergoes a thorough review approximately every 45 days. After each review, the President personally determines whether or not to reauthorize the

program. He has done so more than 30 times since September 11th -- and he has indicated his intent to do so as long as our nation faces a continuing threat from al Qaeda and related organizations.

It seems more than obvious to say that our nation is still at risk of attack. Yet as we get farther away from September 11th, some in Washington are yielding to the temptation to downplay the threat, and to back away from the business at hand. That mindset may be comforting but it is dangerous. We're all grateful this nation has gone four years and four months without another 9/11.

Obviously, no one can guarantee that we won't be hit again. But getting through four years of wartime without an attack on the homeland was more than just a matter of luck. 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, in law enforcement, in intelligence, and homeland security.

The enemy that struck on 9/11 is weakened and fractured, yet still lethal and still determined to hit us again. We have faced, and are facing today, enemies who hate us, who hate our country, and hate the liberties for which we stand. They dwell in the shadows, wear no uniform, have no regard for the laws of warfare, and feel unconstrained by any standard of morality. It's a serious fight -- and we have a lot more to do before it's finished. Either we are serious about fighting this war or we are not. And the enemies of America need to know: We are serious, and we will not let down our guard. (Applause.)

Ladies and gentlemen, as members of the United States Armed Forces, 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 realize the extent of your sacrifice and your achievements. I want you to know that Americans do realize it -- and that we do not take our military for granted. We appreciate fellow citizens who go out on long deployments and endure the hardship of separation from home and family. We care about those who have returned with injuries, and who face a hard road ahead. And our nation grieves for the brave men and women whose lives have ended in freedom's cause. No one can take away the sorrow that has come to the families of the fallen. 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.)

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 a good country, a decent country, and we are 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 and to lay the foundations for a better world.

Each time I visit a military installation 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 nation and its ideals, and you are meeting that commitment during a time of great need for this country. The Army defends America. You represent the very best of America. You make us proud every single day. (Applause.)

END 12:35 P.M. CST

Return to this article at:

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2006/01/20060106-9.html>



CLICK HERE TO PRINT