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Office of the Press Secretary
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President's Radio Address

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THE PRESIDENT: Good morning. On Monday, I visited New York, Pennsylvania, and the Pentagon to attend memorials marking the fifth anniversary of the 9/11 attacks. It was an emotional day for me and for our country. On that day, we remembered those who lost their lives, and we paid tribute to those who gave their lives so that others might live. We rededicated ourselves to protecting the American people from another attack.

Next week, I will return to New York, where I will address the United Nations General Assembly. I look forward to talking to the world leaders gathered there about our obligation to defend civilization, and how we must work together to support the forces of freedom and moderation throughout the Middle East.

As we work with the international community to defeat the terrorists and extremists, we must also provide our military and intelligence professionals the tools they need to keep our country safe. Congress is considering two vital pieces of legislation to help us do just that. My Administration is working closely with members of both parties to pass these bills.

The first bill would allow us to use military commissions to try suspected terrorists for war crimes. We need this legislation because the Supreme Court has ruled that military commissions must be explicitly authorized by Congress.

I recently announced that 14 suspected terrorists, including Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, the man believed to be the mastermind of the 9/11 attacks, had been transferred to Guantanamo Bay. As soon as Congress acts to authorize the military commissions I have proposed, the men our intelligence agencies believe helped orchestrate the deaths of nearly 3,000 Americans on September the 11th, 2001, can face justice.

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This bill will also provide clear rules for our personnel involved in detaining and questioning captured terrorists. The information the Central Intelligence Agency has obtained by questioning men like Khalid Sheikh Mohammed has helped disrupt terrorist plots, including planned strikes inside the United States and on a U.S. Marine base in East Africa, an American consulate in Pakistan, and Britain's Heathrow Airport. This CIA program has saved American lives, and the lives of people in other countries.

Unfortunately, the recent Supreme Court decision put the future of this program in question, and we need this legislation to save it. There is debate about the specific proposals in this bill, and my Administration will work with Congress to find common ground. I have one test for this legislation: The intelligence community must be able to tell me that the bill Congress sends to my desk will allow this vital program to continue.

The second bill before Congress would modernize our electronic surveillance laws and provide additional authority for the terrorist surveillance program. I authorized the National Security Agency to operate this vital program in response to the 9/11 attacks. It allows us to quickly monitor terrorist communications between someone overseas and someone in America. It has helped detect and prevent terrorist attacks on our own country. The principle behind this program is clear: When al Qaeda operatives are calling into or out of our country, we need to know who they are calling, why they are calling, and what they are planning.

Both these bills are essential to winning the war on terror. So we will work with legislators from both sides of the aisle to get them passed. By passing these critical bills, we will bring terrorists to justice, continue collecting vital intelligence from captured terrorists in a lawful way, and monitor terrorist communications, so we can stop new attacks on our nation.

Thank you for listening.

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