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## President Bush Addresses CENTCOM Coalition Conference

MacDill Air Force Base  
Tampa, Florida

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12:45 P.M. EDT

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you all. Thank you all for letting me come by to say hello. I am proud to address the CENTCOM Coalition Conference. CENTCOM's Coalition Village is a welcome reminder that in the fight against radicals and extremists and murderers of the innocent, we stand as one. We appreciate your country's contributions to this enormous challenge in the 21st century.

I appreciate the fact that your work has helped to liberate millions of people. I appreciate the fact that your work has helped keep millions of people safe. And so I thank you for defending the security of the civilized world.

I appreciate the fact that Fox Fallon has taken on this very important command. I can remember visiting him on the Hawaiian Islands. He had a house that overlooked the Pacific. It was quite a luxurious place. I told him, though, Tampa Bay is a good place to live, and the mission is vital. And so I thank you for taking it on, Admiral.



I appreciate General Doug Brown, Commander of the U.S. Special Operations Command. I'm proud to be here with General David Petraeus, Commander, Multi-National Force, Iraq. I thank the coalition members here; I welcome the ambassadors who have joined us. I thank Dr. Rubaie, National Security Advisor to the Prime Minister of a free Iraq. It's good to see you, sir. Please give my very best to the Prime Minister. I thank the other Iraqis who are here with us. Thank you for your courage, thank you for your determination, thank you for making history.

CENTCOM has built an impressive record of achievement in a short amount of time. This command

was established by President Ronald Reagan to deter a Soviet invasion of the Middle East in the latter days of the Cold War. That era is receding into memory, but it was a long struggle -- one of constant dangers and one of fierce debates. Victory often seemed elusive. Yet victory did come, because America and her allies stood firm against an empire and an ideology that vowed to destroy us.

Once again, history has called on great nations to assume great responsibilities. And once again, it is vital that allies, despite occasional disagreements, hold firm against vicious and determined enemies. We saw the action of this vicious and determined enemy here in America on September the 11th, 2001. Terrorists murdered citizens from more than 80 countries. Since that September morning, acts of terror have appeared in places like Mombasa and Casablanca and Riyadh and Jakarta and Istanbul and London and Amman and Madrid and Beslan and Bali and Algiers, and elsewhere. September the 11th was not an isolated incident. These terrorists bring death to innocents all across the globe. They bring death to commuters on subway trains, and guests who have checked into the wrong hotel, and children attending their first week of school.

Our main enemy is al Qaeda and its affiliates. Their allies choose their victims indiscriminately. They murder the innocent to advance a focused and clear ideology. They seek to establish a radical Islamic caliphate, so they can impose a brutal new order on unwilling people, much as Nazis and communists sought to do in the last century. This enemy will accept no compromise with the civilized world. Here is what the al Qaeda charter says about those who oppose their plans: "We will not meet them halfway, and there will be no room for dialogue with them." These enemies have embraced a cult of death. They are determined to bring days of even greater destruction on our people. They seek the world's most dangerous weapons. Against this kind of enemy, there is only one effective response: We must go on the offense, stay on the offense, and take the fight to them.



America is joined in this fight by more than 90 nations, including every country represented in this room. An era of new threats requires new forms of engagement, new strategies, and new tactics. So we have reinvigorated historic alliances, such as NATO, and formed new and dynamic coalitions to address the dangers of our time. Our broad coalition has protected millions of people. We have worked to stop the spread of dangerous weapons. We have taken the fight to the enemy where they live, so we don't have to face them where we live. This is a record that all our countries can be proud of, and the United States of America is proud to stand with you.

Working together, America and our allies have shared intelligence that has helped thwart many attacks. We uncovered and stopped terrorist conspiracies targeting embassies in Yemen and Singapore and ships in the Straits of Hormuz and the Straits of Gibraltar. We stopped a Southeast Asian terror cell grooming operatives for terrorist attacks. We stopped an al Qaeda cell seeking to develop anthrax. British authorities disrupted a plot to blow up aircraft flying over the Atlantic toward the United States.

Working together, coalition forces have captured or killed key leaders of terrorist networks. Philippine forces killed top leaders of an al Qaeda affiliate. Spanish police captured fugitives wanted in connection with the Madrid train bombings. Terrorist cells have been broken up by countries including Britain and Canada and Denmark and Italy and France and Indonesia, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, and Turkey. We must stay on the offense. We must defeat the enemy overseas, so we don't have to face them in our countries.

Working together, America and our allies have shut down funding channels and frozen terrorist assets, making it harder for our enemies to finance attacks. It makes it hard for the enemies to purchase weapons, to train and move around their recruits. The international community through the United Nations has imposed measures to identify terrorist financiers and prevent them from using international financial system to fund their acts of murder and terror.



Working together, America and our allies are training local forces to conduct counterterrorism activities in their own regions. We are helping key nations stop terrorists from establishing safe havens inside their borders -- including Indonesia and the Philippines and Yemen. The Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership provides counterterrorism and military assistance to Chad and Mali, Niger, Mauritania, Algeria, Morocco, Nigeria, Senegal, and Tunisia. The East African Counterterrorism Initiative provides border security and police training to Comoros, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Madagascar, Tanzania, and Uganda.

We're active. We're working together to make this world a safer place. Working together, our coalition is taking steps to stop terrorists from obtaining the world's most dangerous weapons. More than 80 nations have joined the Proliferation Security Initiative. We're working to stop shipments of materials related to weapons of mass destruction on land, at sea, and in the air.

Working together, America and other nations have acted boldly to confront adversaries who threaten international security. In Afghanistan, coalition forces drove the Taliban from power, removed al Qaeda training camps, and helped bring freedom to 25 million people. Since their liberation, the Afghan people have made enormous strides. Afghans chose the first democratically-elected President in their history. They've held free elections for a National Assembly. The Afghan economy has doubled in size. And more than 4.6 million Afghan refugees have come home. It's one of the largest return movements in the history of the world.

The Taliban and their al Qaeda allies are actively working to undermine this progress. They want power to impose their vision. Our coalition, led by NATO, is going on the offense against them. Coalition and Afghan forces have conducted dozens of operations over the past few months to go after enemy strongholds, including an operation launched this week targeting the Taliban in Helmand province in the south of Afghanistan. We've seized dozens of caches of weapons and ammunition and improvised explosive devices. We're making progress in training the growing Afghan National Army. At least 20 other nations are supporting efforts to rebuild Afghanistan. We appreciate these contributions.

And we will stand with our partners and the Afghan people until this important work is done.

Just as America and our allies are standing together in Afghanistan, a determined coalition is committed to winning the fight in Iraq. Four years ago, we confronted a brutal tyrant who had used weapons of mass destruction, supported terrorists, invaded his neighbors, oppressed his people, and tested the resolve and the credibility of the United Nations. Saddam Hussein ignored every opportunity to comply with more than a dozen resolutions passed by the U.N. Security Council. So coalition forces went into Iraq, removed his vicious regime, and helped bring freedom to the Iraqi people.



In 2005, nearly 12 million Iraqis demonstrated their desire, their deep desire, to live in freedom and peace. Iraqis voted in three national elections -- choosing a transitional government, adopting the most progressive, democratic constitution in the Arab world, and then electing a government under that constitution. In 2006, a thinking enemy, a brutal enemy responded to this progress and struck back -- staging sensational attacks that led to a tragic escalation of sectarian rage and reprisal in Baghdad.

As sectarian violence threatened to destroy this young democracy, our coalition faced a choice. One option was to help the Iraqi government tamp down the sectarian violence and provide them with the breathing space they need to achieve reconciliation -- provide them the breathing space they need to take the political and economic measures necessary to make sure our military efforts were effective. The other option was to pull back from the capital, before the Iraqis could defend themselves against these radicals and extremists and death squads and killers. That risked turning Iraq into a cauldron of chaos. Our enemy, the enemies of freedom, love chaos. Out of that chaos they could find new safe havens. Withdrawal would have emboldened these radicals and extremists. It would have confirmed their belief that our nations were weak. It would help them gain new recruits, new resources. It would cause them to believe they could strike free nations at their choice.

Withdrawal would have increased the probability that coalition troops would be forced to return to Iraq one day, and confront an enemy that is even more dangerous. Failure in Iraq should be unacceptable to the civilized world. The risks are enormous.

So after an extensive review, I ordered a new strategy that is dramatically different from the one we were pursuing before. I listened to our military commanders; I listened to politicians from both sides of the aisle. I made a decision. I appointed a new commander, General David Petraeus, to carry out this strategy. This new strategy recognizes that our top priority must be to help the Iraqi government secure its capital so they can make economic and political progress.

The Iraqis cannot yet do this on their own. So I ordered reinforcements to help Iraqis secure their population, to go after those inciting sectarian violence, and to help the Iraqis get their capital under control.

This strategy is still in its early stages. Some of the reinforcements General Petraeus requested have not yet arrived in Baghdad. He believes it will take months before we can accurately gauge the strategy's potential for success. Yet at this early hour, we are seeing some signs that give us hope. Coalition forces have captured a number of key terrorist leaders who are providing information about how al Qaeda operates in Iraq. They stopped a car bomb network that had killed many citizens of Baghdad, and destroyed major car bomb factories. There has been a decline in sectarian violence. And in some areas of the capital, Iraqis are returning to their neighborhoods with an increased feeling of security.

Terrorists and the extremists continue to unleash horrific acts of violence. Al Qaeda is playing a major role. Last week, General Petraeus called al Qaeda "probably public enemy number one" in Iraq. He said that al Qaeda has made Iraq "the central front in their global campaign." And that's why success in Iraq is critical to the security of free people everywhere.

There are those who say America is engaged in this fight alone. Each of you here knows better. The Iraqis are suffering a lot, but they're in this fight. I'm impressed by the courage of the Iraqi people. Today there are more than 30 nations supporting the operations in Iraq. I appreciate the 17 NATO nations that have contributed forces or been part of the NATO Training Mission to help train Iraqis. I appreciate Georgia's recent decision to contribute 2,000 troops.

America joins in honoring the coalition troops who have been killed in Iraq, and the others who have been wounded in combat. I want your countries to know that the sacrifices made by these brave soldiers are for a noble cause, a necessary cause, and we grieve for them as we grieve for our own. Your countries have risked too much and fought too hard for anyone to dismiss or disregard your contributions. Our nations are standing together in this fight, and I want your citizens to know that America is deeply grateful.

America is also grateful for the increasing contributions international organizations are making for Iraq's stability. On Thursday, the United Nations will host a conference in Egypt to sign an International Compact for Iraq -- an agreement that will bring new economic assistance in exchange for greater economic reform. Then, on Friday, Iraq's neighbors will meet to discuss ways to promote political reconciliation in Iraq, to promote stability in Iraq. These meetings will be attended by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and senior officials from other G8 nations. Iran and Syria have been invited to attend, and this will be an important test of whether these regimes are truly interested in playing a constructive role in Iraq.

Everyone in this room knows the consequences of failure in Iraq, and that we should also appreciate the consequences of success, because we have seen them before. Following World War II, many nations helped lift the defeated populations of Japan and Germany, and stood with them as they built representative governments from societies that had been ravaged and decimated. We committed years and resources to this cause. And that effort has been repaid many times over in three generations of prosperity and peace. During the Cold War, the NATO Alliance worked to liberate nations from communist tyranny, even as allies bickered, and millions marched in the streets against us, and the pundits lost hope. We emerged from that struggle with a Europe that is now whole and free and at peace.

We look back at that history and marvel at what millions of ordinary people accomplished. Yet success was not preordained, and the outcome was not certain. Only now we can see those eras with the proper perspective. I believe that one day future generations will look back at this time in the same way, and they will be awed by what our coalition has helped to build. They will see that we strengthened alliances, offered new relevance to international institutions, encouraged new forms of multilateral engagement, and laid the foundation of peace for generations to come.

These are difficult times. These are tough times. These are times of test and resolve of free people. These are times that require hard work and courage and faith in the ability of liberty to yield the pace we want. And so I thank you for your contributions. Thank you for standing for what's right. Thank you for helping the liberated. And thank you for working for peace.

God bless.

END 1:07 P.M. EDT

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