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## President Discusses War on Terror at National Endowment for Democracy

Ronald Reagan Building and International Trade Center  
Washington, D.C.

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10:07 A.M. EDT

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you all. (Applause.) Thank you all. Please be seated. (Applause.) Thank you for the warm welcome. I'm honored once again to be with the supporters of the National Endowment for Democracy. Since the day President Ronald Reagan set out the vision for this Endowment, the world has seen the swiftest advance of democratic institutions in history. And Americans are proud to have played our role in this great story.



Our nation stood guard on tense borders; we spoke for the rights of dissidents and the hopes of exile; we aided the rise of new democracies on the ruins of tyranny. And all the cost and sacrifice of that struggle has been worth it, because, from Latin America to Europe to Asia, we've gained the peace that freedom brings.

In this new century, freedom is once again assaulted by enemies determined to roll back generations of democratic progress. Once again, we're responding to a global campaign of fear with a global campaign of freedom. And once again, we will see freedom's victory. (Applause.)

Vin, I want to thank you for inviting me back. And thank you for the short introduction. (Laughter.) I appreciate Carl Gershman. I want to welcome former Congressman Dick Gephardt, who is a board member of the National Endowment for Democracy. It's good to see you, Dick. And I appreciate Chris Cox, who is the Chairman of the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission, and a board member for the National Endowment of Democracy, for being here, as well. I want to thank all the other board members.

I appreciate the Secretary of State, Condi Rice, who has joined us -- alongside her, Secretary of Defense Don Rumsfeld. Thank you all for being here. I'm proud, as well, that the newly sworn-in Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, the first Marine ever to hold that position, is with us today -- General Peter Pace. (Applause.) I thank the members of the Diplomatic Corps who are here, as well.

Recently our country observed the fourth anniversary of a great evil, and looked back on a great turning point in our history. We still remember a proud city covered in smoke and ashes, a fire across the Potomac, and passengers who spent their final moments on Earth fighting the enemy. We still remember the men who rejoiced in every death, and Americans in uniform rising to duty. And we remember the calling that came to us on that day, and continues to this hour: We will confront this mortal danger to all humanity. We will not tire, or rest, until the war on terror is won. (Applause.)

The images and experience of September the 11th are unique for Americans. Yet the evil of that morning has reappeared on other days, in other places -- in Mombasa, and Casablanca, and Riyadh, and Jakarta, and Istanbul, and Madrid, and Beslan, and Taba, and Netanya, and Baghdad, and elsewhere. In the past few months, we've seen a new terror offensive with attacks on London, and Sharm el-Sheikh, and a deadly bombing in Bali once again. All these separate images of destruction and suffering that we see on the news can seem like random and isolated acts of madness; innocent men and women and children have died simply because they boarded the wrong train, or worked in the wrong building, or checked into the wrong hotel. Yet while the killers choose their victims indiscriminately, their attacks serve a clear and focused ideology, a set of beliefs and goals that are evil, but not insane.





Some call this evil Islamic radicalism; others, militant Jihadism; still others, Islamo-fascism. Whatever it's called, this ideology is very different from the religion of Islam. This form of radicalism exploits Islam to serve a violent, political vision: the establishment, by terrorism and subversion and insurgency, of a totalitarian empire that denies all political and religious freedom. These extremists distort the idea of jihad into a call for terrorist murder against Christians and Jews and Hindus -- and also against Muslims from other traditions, who they regard as heretics.

Many militants are part of global, borderless terrorist organizations like al Qaeda, which spreads propaganda, and provides financing and technical assistance to local extremists, and conducts dramatic and brutal operations like September the 11th. Other militants are found in regional groups, often associated with al Qaeda -- paramilitary insurgencies and separatist movements in places like Somalia, and the Philippines, and Pakistan, and Chechnya, and Kashmir, and Algeria. Still others spring up in local cells, inspired by Islamic radicalism, but not centrally directed. Islamic radicalism is more like a loose network with many branches than an army under a single command. Yet these operatives, fighting on scattered battlefields, share a similar ideology and vision for our world.

We know the vision of the radicals because they've openly stated it -- in videos, and audiotapes, and letters, and declarations, and websites. First, these extremists want to end American and Western influence in the broader Middle East, because we stand for democracy and peace, and stand in the way of their ambitions. Al Qaeda's leader, Osama bin Laden, has called on Muslims to dedicate, quote, their "resources, sons and money to driving the infidels out of their lands." Their tactic to meet this goal has been consistent for a quarter-century: They hit us, and expect us to run. They want us to repeat the sad history of Beirut in 1983, and Mogadishu in 1993 -- only this time on a larger scale, with greater consequences.



Second, the militant network wants to use the vacuum created by an American retreat to gain control of a country, a base from which to launch attacks and conduct their war against non-radical Muslim governments. Over the past few decades, radicals have specifically targeted Egypt, and Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan, and Jordan for potential takeover. They achieved their goal, for a time, in Afghanistan. Now they've set their sights on Iraq. Bin Laden has stated: "The whole world is watching this war and the two adversaries. It's either victory and glory, or misery and humiliation." The terrorists regard Iraq as the central front in their war against humanity. And we must recognize Iraq as the central front in our war on terror.

Third, the militants believe that controlling one country will rally the Muslim masses, enabling them to overthrow all moderate governments in the region, and establish a radical Islamic empire that spans from Spain to Indonesia. With greater economic and military and political power, the terrorists would be able to advance their stated agenda: to develop weapons of mass destruction, to destroy Israel, to intimidate Europe, to assault the American people, and to blackmail our government into isolation.

Some might be tempted to dismiss these goals as fanatical or extreme. Well, they are fanatical and extreme -- and they should not be dismissed. Our enemy is utterly committed. As Zarqawi has vowed, "We will either achieve victory over the human race or we will pass to the eternal life." And the civilized world knows very well that other fanatics in history, from Hitler to Stalin to Pol Pot, consumed whole nations in war and genocide before leaving the stage of history. Evil men, obsessed with ambition and unburdened by conscience, must be taken very seriously -- and we must stop them before their crimes can multiply.

Defeating the militant network is difficult, because it thrives, like a parasite, on the suffering and frustration of others. The radicals exploit local conflicts to build a culture of victimization, in which someone else is always to blame and violence is always the solution. They exploit resentful and disillusioned young men and women, recruiting them through radical mosques as the pawns of terror. And they exploit modern technology to multiply their destructive power. Instead of attending faraway training camps, recruits can now access online training libraries to learn how to build a roadside bomb, or fire a rocket-propelled grenade -- and this further spreads the threat of violence, even within peaceful democratic societies.



The influence of Islamic radicalism is also magnified by helpers and enablers. They have been sheltered by authoritarian regimes, allies of convenience like Syria and Iran, that share the goal of hurting America and moderate Muslim governments, and use terrorist propaganda to blame their own failures on the West and America, and on the Jews. These radicals depend on front operations, such as corrupted charities, which direct money to terrorist activity. They're strengthened by those who aggressively fund the spread of radical, intolerant versions of Islam in unstable parts of the world. The militants are aided, as well, by elements of the Arab news media that incite hatred and anti-Semitism, that feed conspiracy theories and speak of a so-called American "war on Islam" -- with seldom a word about American action to protect Muslims in Afghanistan, and Bosnia, Somalia, Kosovo, Kuwait, and Iraq.

Some have also argued that extremism has been strengthened by the actions of our coalition in Iraq, claiming that our presence in that country has somehow caused or triggered the rage of radicals. I would remind them that we were not in Iraq on September the 11th, 2001 -- and al Qaeda attacked us anyway. The hatred of the radicals existed before Iraq was an issue, and it will exist after Iraq is no longer an excuse. The government of Russia did not support Operation Iraqi Freedom, and yet the militants killed more than 180 Russian schoolchildren in Beslan.

Over the years these extremists have used a litany of excuses for violence -- the Israeli presence on the West Bank, or the U.S. military presence in Saudi Arabia, or the defeat of the Taliban, or the Crusades of a thousand years ago. In fact, we're not facing a set of grievances that can be soothed and addressed. We're facing a radical ideology with inalterable objectives: to enslave whole nations and intimidate the world. No act of ours invited the rage of the killers -- and no concession, bribe, or act of appeasement would change or limit their plans for murder.

On the contrary: They target nations whose behavior they believe they can change through violence. Against such an enemy, there is only one effective response: We will never back down, never give in, and never accept anything less than complete victory. (Applause.)

The murderous ideology of the Islamic radicals is the great challenge of our new century. Yet, in many ways, this fight resembles the struggle against communism in the last century. Like the ideology of communism, Islamic radicalism is elitist, led by a self-appointed vanguard that presumes to speak for the Muslim masses. Bin Laden says his own role is to tell Muslims, quote, "what is good for them and what is not." And what this man who grew up in wealth and privilege considers good for poor Muslims is that they become killers and suicide bombers. He assures them that his -- that this is the road to paradise -- though he never offers to go along for the ride.

Like the ideology of communism, our new enemy teaches that innocent individuals can be sacrificed to serve a political vision. And this explains their cold-blooded contempt for human life. We've seen it in the murders of Daniel Pearl, Nicholas Berg, and Margaret Hassan, and many others. In a courtroom in the Netherlands, the killer of Theo Van Gogh turned to the victim's grieving mother and said, "I do not feel your pain -- because I believe you are an infidel." And in spite of this veneer of religious rhetoric, most of the victims claimed by the militants are fellow Muslims.

When 25 Iraqi children are killed in a bombing, or Iraqi teachers are executed at their school, or hospital workers are killed caring for the wounded, this is murder, pure and simple -- the total rejection of justice and honor and morality and religion. These militants are not just the enemies of America, or the enemies of Iraq, they are the enemies of Islam and the enemies of humanity. (Applause.) We have seen this kind of shameless cruelty before, in the heartless zealotry that led to the gulags, and the Cultural Revolution, and the killing fields.

Like the ideology of communism, our new enemy pursues totalitarian aims. Its leaders pretend to be an aggrieved party, representing the powerless against imperial enemies. In truth they have endless ambitions of imperial domination, and they wish to make everyone powerless except themselves. Under their rule, they have banned books, and desecrated historical monuments, and brutalized women. They seek to end dissent in every form, and to control every aspect of life, and to rule the soul, itself. While promising a future of justice and holiness, the terrorists are preparing for a future of oppression and misery.

Like the ideology of communism, our new enemy is dismissive of free peoples, claiming that men and women who live in liberty are weak and decadent. Zarqawi has said that Americans are, quote, "the most cowardly of God's creatures." But let's be clear: It is cowardice that seeks to kill children and the elderly with car bombs, and cuts the throat of a bound captive, and targets worshipers leaving a mosque. It is courage that liberated more than 50 million people. It is courage that keeps an untiring vigil against the enemies of a rising democracy. And it is courage in the cause of freedom that once again will destroy the enemies of freedom. (Applause.)

And Islamic radicalism, like the ideology of communism, contains inherent contradictions that doom it to failure. By fearing freedom -- by distrusting human creativity, and punishing change, and limiting the contributions of half the population -- this ideology undermines the very qualities that make human progress possible, and human societies successful. The only thing modern about the militants' vision is the weapons they want to use against us. The rest of their grim vision is defined by a warped image of the past -- a declaration of war on the idea of progress, itself. And whatever lies ahead in the war against this ideology, the outcome is not in doubt: Those who despise freedom and progress have condemned themselves to isolation, decline, and collapse. Because free peoples believe in the future, free peoples will own the future. (Applause.)

We didn't ask for this global struggle, but we're answering history's call with confidence, and a comprehensive strategy. Defeating a broad and adaptive network requires patience, constant pressure, and strong partners in Europe, the Middle East, North Africa, Asia and beyond. Working with these partners, we're disrupting militant conspiracies, destroying their ability to make war, and working to give millions in a troubled region of the world a hopeful alternative to resentment and violence.

First, we're determined to prevent the attacks of terrorist networks before they occur. We're reorganizing our government to give this nation a broad and coordinated homeland defense. We're reforming our intelligence agencies for the incredibly difficult task of tracking enemy activity, based on information that often comes in small fragments from widely scattered sources, here and abroad. We're acting, along with the governments from many countries, to destroy the terrorist networks and incapacitate their leaders. Together, we've killed or captured nearly all of those directly responsible for the September the 11th attacks; as well as some of bin Laden's most senior deputies; al Qaeda managers and operatives in more than 24 countries; the mastermind of the USS Cole bombing, who was chief of al Qaeda operations in the Persian Gulf; the mastermind of the Jakarta and the first Bali bombings; a senior Zarqawi terrorist planner, who was planning attacks in Turkey; and many of al Qaeda's senior leaders in Saudi Arabia.

Overall, the United States and our partners have disrupted at least ten serious al Qaeda terrorist plots since September the 11th, including three al Qaeda plots to attack inside the United States. We've stopped at least five more al Qaeda efforts to case targets in the United States, or infiltrate operatives into our country. Because of this steady progress, the enemy is wounded -- but the enemy is still capable of global operations. Our commitment is clear: We will not relent until the organized international terror networks are exposed and broken, and their leaders held to account for their acts of murder.

Second, we're determined to deny weapons of mass destruction to outlaw regimes, and to their terrorist allies who would use them without hesitation. The United States, working with Great Britain, Pakistan, and other nations, has exposed and disrupted a major black-market operation in nuclear technology led by A.Q. Khan. Libya has abandoned its chemical and nuclear weapons programs, as well as long-range ballistic missiles. And in the last year, America and our partners in the Proliferation Security Initiative have stopped more than a dozen shipments of suspected weapons technology, including equipment for Iran's ballistic missile program.

This progress has reduced the danger to free nations, but has not removed it. Evil men who want to use horrendous weapons against us are working in deadly earnest to gain them. And we're working urgently to keep weapons of mass destruction out of their hands.

Third, we're determined to deny radical groups the support and sanctuary of outlaw regimes. State sponsors like Syria and Iran have a long history of collaboration with terrorists, and they deserve no patience from the victims of terror. The United States makes no distinction between those who commit acts of terror and those who support and harbor them, because they're equally as guilty of murder. (Applause.) Any government that chooses to be an ally of terror has also chosen to be an enemy of civilization. And the civilized world must hold those regimes to account.

Fourth, we're determined to deny the militants control of any nation, which they would use as a home base and a launching pad for terror. For this reason, we're fighting beside our Afghan partners against remnants of the Taliban and their al Qaeda allies. For this reason, we're working with President Musharraf to oppose and isolate the militants in Pakistan. And for this reason, we're fighting the regime remnants and terrorists in Iraq. The terrorist goal is to overthrow a rising democracy, claim a strategic country as a haven for terror, destabilize the Middle East, and strike America and other free nations with ever-increasing violence. Our goal is to defeat the terrorists and their allies at the heart of their power -- and so we will defeat the enemy in Iraq.

Our coalition, along with our Iraqi allies, is moving forward with a comprehensive, specific military plan. Area by area, city by city, we're conducting offensive operations to clear out enemy forces, and leaving behind Iraqi units to prevent the enemy from returning. Within these areas, we're working for tangible improvements in the lives of Iraqi citizens. And we're aiding the rise of an elected government that unites the Iraqi people against extremism and violence. This work involves great risk for Iraqis, and for Americans and coalition forces. Wars are not won without sacrifice -- and this war will require more sacrifice, more time, and more resolve.

The terrorists are as brutal an enemy as we've ever faced. They're unconstrained by any notion of our common humanity, or by the rules of warfare. No one should underestimate the difficulties ahead, nor should they overlook the advantages we bring to this fight.

Some observers look at the job ahead and adopt a self-defeating pessimism. It is not justified. With every random bombing and with every funeral of a child, it becomes more clear that the extremists are not patriots, or resistance fighters -- they are murderers at war with the Iraqi people, themselves.

In contrast, the elected leaders of Iraq are proving to be strong and steadfast. By any standard or precedent of history, Iraq has made incredible political progress -- from tyranny, to liberation, to national elections, to the writing of a constitution, in the space of two-and-a-half years. With our help, the Iraqi military is gaining new capabilities and new confidence with every passing month. At the time of our Fallujah operations 11 months ago, there were only a few Iraqi army battalions in combat. Today there are more than 80 Iraqi army battalions fighting the insurgency alongside our forces. Progress isn't easy, but it is steady. And no fair-minded person should ignore, deny, or dismiss the achievements of the Iraqi people.

Some observers question the durability of democracy in Iraq. They underestimate the power and appeal of freedom. We've heard it suggested that Iraq's democracy must be on shaky ground because Iraqis are arguing with each other. But that's the essence of democracy: making your case, debating with those who you disagree -- who disagree, building consensus by persuasion, and answering to the will of the people. We've heard it said that the Shia, Sunnis and Kurds of Iraq are too divided to form a lasting democracy. In fact, democratic federalism is the best hope for unifying a diverse population, because a federal constitutional system respects the rights and religious traditions of all citizens, while giving all minorities, including the Sunnis, a stake and a voice in the future of their country. It is true that the seeds of freedom have only recently been planted in Iraq -- but democracy, when it grows, is not a fragile flower; it is a healthy, sturdy tree. (Applause.)

As Americans, we believe that people everywhere -- everywhere -- prefer freedom to slavery, and that liberty, once chosen, improves the lives of all. And so we're confident, as our coalition and the Iraqi people each do their part, Iraqi democracy will succeed.

Some observers also claim that America would be better off by cutting our losses and leaving Iraq now. This is a dangerous illusion, refuted with a simple question: Would the United States and other free nations be more safe, or less safe, with Zarqawi and bin Laden in control of Iraq, its people, and its resources? Having removed a dictator who hated free peoples, we will not stand by as a new set of killers, dedicated to the destruction of our own country, seizes control of Iraq by violence.

There's always a temptation, in the middle of a long struggle, to seek the quiet life, to escape the duties and problems of the world, and to hope the enemy grows weary of fanaticism and tired of murder. This would be a pleasant world, but it's not the world we live in. The enemy is never tired, never sated, never content with yesterday's brutality. This enemy considers every retreat of the civilized world as an invitation to greater violence. In Iraq, there is no peace without victory. We will keep our nerve and we will win that victory. (Applause.)

The fifth element of our strategy in the war on terror is to deny the militants future recruits by replacing hatred and resentment with democracy and hope across the broader Middle East. This is a difficult and long-term project, yet there's no alternative to it. Our future and the future of that region are linked. If the broader Middle East is left to grow in bitterness, if countries remain in misery, while radicals stir the resentments of millions, then that part of the world will be a source of endless conflict and mounting danger, and for our generation and the next. If the peoples of that region are permitted to choose their own destiny, and advance by their own energy and by their participation as free men and women, then the extremists will be marginalized, and the flow of violent radicalism to the rest of the world will slow, and eventually end. By standing for the hope and freedom of others, we make our own freedom more secure.

America is making this stand in practical ways. We're encouraging our friends in the Middle East, including Egypt and Saudi Arabia, to take the path of reform, to strengthen their own societies in the fight against terror by respecting the rights and choices of their own people. We're standing with dissidents and exiles against oppressive regimes, because we know that the dissidents of today will be the democratic leaders of tomorrow. We're making our case through public diplomacy, stating clearly and confidently our belief in self-determination, and the rule of law, and religious freedom, and equal rights for women, beliefs that are right and true in every land, and in every culture. (Applause.)

As we do our part to confront radicalism, we know that the most vital work will be done within the Islamic world, itself. And this work has begun. Many Muslim scholars have already publicly condemned terrorism, often citing Chapter 5, Verse 32 of the Koran, which states that killing an innocent human being is like killing all humanity, and saving the life of one person is like saving all of humanity. After the attacks in London on July the 7th, an imam in the United Arab Emirates declared, "Whoever does such a thing is not a Muslim, nor a religious person." The time has come for all responsible Islamic leaders to join in denouncing an ideology that exploits Islam for political ends, and defiles a noble faith.

Many people of the Muslim faith are proving their commitment at great personal risk. Everywhere we have engaged the fight against extremism, Muslim allies have stood up and joined the fight, becoming partners in a vital cause. Afghan troops are in combat against Taliban remnants. Iraqi soldiers are sacrificing to defeat al Qaeda in their own country. These brave citizens know the stakes -- the survival of their own liberty, the future of their own region, the justice and humanity of their own tradition -- and that United States of America is proud to stand beside them. (Applause.)

With the rise of a deadly enemy and the unfolding of a global ideological struggle, our time in history will be remembered for new challenges and unprecedented dangers. And yet the fight we have joined is also the current expression of an ancient struggle, between those who put their faith in dictators, and those who put their faith in the people. Throughout history, tyrants and would-be tyrants have always claimed that murder is justified to serve their grand vision -- and they end up alienating decent people across the globe. Tyrants and would-be tyrants have always claimed that regimented societies are strong and pure -- until those societies collapse in corruption and decay. Tyrants and would-be tyrants have always

claimed that free men and women are weak and decadent -- until the day that free men and women defeat them.

We don't know the course of our own struggle -- the course our own struggle will take -- or the sacrifices that might lie ahead. We do know, however, that the defense of freedom is worth our sacrifice. We do know the love of freedom is the mightiest force of history. And we do know the cause of freedom will once again prevail.

May God bless you. (Applause.)

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