



THE WHITE HOUSE

PRESIDENT GEORGE W. BUSH

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President Bush Discusses NATO Alliance During Visit to Latvia

Grand Hall
Latvia University
Riga, Latvia

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4:30 P.M. (Local)

PRESIDENT BUSH: Thank you all. Labdien! (Applause.) Madam President, thank you for your kind words. Thank you for your leadership, and thank you for your friendship. Mr. Speaker; Mr. Prime Minister; Senator Sessions from the great state of Alabama, who is with us; Mark Leland, my friend from a long period of time. I want to thank the Rector of this important university. Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, thank you for your warm welcome. I'm delighted to be back in Riga.

I appreciate the Latvian Transatlantic Organization, the Commission of Strategic Analysis, and the German Marshall Fund of the United States for organizing this important conference. This is my third visit to the Baltics as the President of the United States, and it's my second visit to this beautiful city. I just can't stay away. I'm thrilled and honored to be back here, and I bring the greetings and good wishes of the American people.



Not far from where we meet today stands Riga's Freedom Monument. It was erected in 1935, during this country's brief period of independence between the two world wars. During the dark years of Soviet occupation, the simple act of laying flowers at the foot of this monument was considered a crime by Communist authorities. In 1989, the monument was the scene of one of the most remarkable protests in the history of freedom. Hundreds of thousands of people stood together and formed a human chain that stretched nearly 400 miles across the Baltics -- from Tallinn in the north, through downtown Riga, and into the heart of Vilnius. By joining hands, the people of this region showed their unity and their determination to live in freedom -- and it made clear to the Soviet authorities that the Baltic peoples would accept nothing less than complete independence.

It took more years of struggle, but today the Baltic nations have taken their rightful place in the community of free nations, and Latvia is a host for an important NATO Summit -- the first time our Alliance has met in one of the "captive nations" annexed by the Soviet Union. This is a proud day for the people of Latvia, and all the Baltic states -- and on behalf of the American people, I thank you for your hospitality, your friendship, and the courage you are showing in the NATO Alliance.

As members of NATO, you are a vital part of the most effective multilateral organization in the world, and the most important military alliance in history. As NATO allies, you will never again stand alone in defense of your freedom and you'll never be occupied by a foreign power.

Each of the Baltic countries is meeting its obligations to strengthen NATO by bringing new energy and vitality and clarity of purpose to the Alliance. Your love of liberty has made NATO stronger -- and with your help, our Alliance is rising to meet the great challenges and responsibilities of this young century, by making NATO the world's most effective united force for freedom.

One of the great responsibilities of this Alliance is to strengthen and expand the circle of freedom here in Europe. In the nearly six decades since NATO's founding, Europe has experienced an unprecedented expansion of liberty. A continent that was once divided by an ugly wall is now united in freedom. Yet the work of uniting Europe is not fully complete. Many nations that threw off the shackles of tyranny are still working to build the free institutions that are the foundation of successful democracies. NATO is encouraging these nations on the path to reform -- and as governments make hard decisions for their people, they will be welcomed into the institutions of the Euro-Atlantic community.

After I took office in 2001, I declared that the United States believes in NATO membership for all of Europe's democracies that seek it -- and are ready to share the responsibilities that NATO brings. The following year in Prague, we invited seven nations to join our Alliance -- Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Bulgaria, Slovakia, and Slovenia. Here in Riga, allies will make clear that the door to NATO membership remains open, and at our next summit in 2008, we hope to issue additional invitations to nations that are ready for membership.

Today, Croatia, Macedonia, and Albania are all participating in NATO's Membership Action Plan, and the United States supports their aspirations to join the Atlantic Alliance. Georgia is seeking NATO membership, as well, and as it continues on the path of reform, we will continue to support Georgia's desire to become a NATO ally. We are also supporting the leaders of Ukraine, as they work to curb corruption, promote the rule of law, and serve the cause of peace. Our position is clear: As democracy takes hold in Ukraine and its leaders pursue vital reforms, NATO membership will be open to the Ukrainian people if they choose it.

We're also working with Russia through the NATO-Russia Council. We recognize that Russia is a vital and important country, and that it's in our interests to increase our cooperation with Russia in areas such as countering terrorism, and preventing the spread of weapons of mass destruction. By building ties between Russia and this Alliance, we will strengthen our common security and we will advance the cause of peace.

As we help the new democracies of Europe join the institutions of Europe, we must not forget those who still languish in tyranny. Just across the border from here lies the nation of Belarus -- a place where peaceful protesters are beaten and opposition leaders are "disappeared" by the agents of a cruel regime. The existence of such oppression in our midst offends the conscience of Europe, and it offends the conscience of America. We have a message for the people of Belarus: The vision of a Europe whole, free, and at peace includes you -- and we stand with you in your struggle for freedom.

Another great responsibility of this Alliance is to transform for new challenges. When NATO was formed in 1949, its principal mission was to protect Europe from a Soviet tank invasion. Today, the Soviet threat is gone. And under the able leadership of the Secretary General, NATO is transforming from a static alliance focused on the defense of Europe, into an expeditary* [sic] alliance ready to deploy outside of Europe in the defense of freedom. This is a vital mission.

Over the past six years, we've taken decisive action to transform our capabilities in the Alliance. We created a new NATO transformation command, to ensure that our Alliance is always preparing for the threats of the future. We created a new NATO battalion to counter the threats of enemies armed with weapons of mass destruction. We created a new NATO Response Force, to ensure that our Alliance can deploy rapidly and effectively.

Here in Riga, we're taking new steps to build on this progress. At this summit, we will launch a NATO Special Operations Forces Initiative that will strengthen the ability of special operations personnel from NATO nations to work together on the battlefield. We will announce a new Strategic Airlift Initiative that will ensure that participating NATO members have a dedicated fleet of C-17 aircraft at their disposal. We will launch the Riga Global Partnership Initiative that will allow NATO to conduct joint training and joint exercises and common defense planning with nations like Japan and Australia -- countries that share NATO's values and want to work with our Alliance in the cause of peace. We will launch a new NATO Training Cooperation Initiative that will allow military forces in the Middle East to receive NATO training in counter-terrorism and counter-proliferation and peace support operations. And as we take these steps, every NATO nation must take the defensive -- must make the defensive investments necessary to give NATO the capabilities it needs, so that our Alliance is ready for any challenge that may emerge in the decades to come.

The most basic responsibility of this Alliance is to defend our people against the threats of a new century. We're in a long struggle against terrorists and extremists who follow a hateful ideology and seek to establish a totalitarian empire from Spain to Indonesia. We fight against the extremists who desire safe havens and are willing to kill innocents anywhere to achieve their objectives.

NATO has recognized this threat. And three years ago, NATO took an unprecedented step when it sent allied forces to defend a young democracy more than 3,000 miles from Europe. Since taking command of the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan, NATO has expanded it from a small force that was operating only in Kabul into a robust force that conducts security operations in all of Afghanistan. NATO is helping to train the Afghan National Army. The Alliance is operating 25 Provincial Reconstruction Teams that are helping the central government extend its reach into distant regions of that country. At this moment, all 26 NATO allies, and 11 partner nations are contributing forces to NATO's mission in Afghanistan. They're serving with courage and they are doing the vital work necessary to help this young democracy secure the peace.

We saw the effectiveness of NATO forces this summer, when NATO took charge of security operations in Southern Afghanistan from the United States. The Taliban radicals who are trying to pull down Afghanistan's democracy and regain power saw the transfer from American to NATO control as a window of opportunity to test the will of the Alliance. So the Taliban massed a large fighting force near Kandahar to face the NATO troops head on. It was a mistake. Together with the Afghan National Army, NATO forces from Canada and Denmark and the Netherlands and Britain and Australia and the United States engaged the enemy -- with operational support from Romanian, Portuguese, and Estonian forces. According to NATO commanders, allied forces fought bravely and inflicted great damage on the Taliban.

General David Richards, the British commander of NATO troops in Afghanistan, puts it this way: "There were doubts about NATO and our ability to conduct demanding security operations. There are no questions about our ability now. We've killed many hundreds of Taliban, and it has removed any doubt in anybody's mind that NATO can do what we were sent here to do."

Taliban and al Qaeda fighters, and drug traffickers and criminal elements and local warlords remain active and committed to destroying democracy in Afghanistan. Defeating them will require the full

commitment of our Alliance. For NATO to succeed, its commanders on the ground must have the resources and flexibility they need to do their jobs. The Alliance was founded on a clear principle: an attack on one is an attack on all. That principle holds true whether the attack is on our home soil, or on our forces deployed on a NATO mission abroad. Today Afghanistan is NATO's most important military operation, and by standing together in Afghanistan, we'll protect our people, defend our freedom, and send a clear message to the extremists the forces of freedom and decency will prevail.

Every ally can take pride in the transformation that NATO is making possible for the people of Afghanistan. Because of our efforts, Afghanistan has gone from a totalitarian nightmare to a free nation, with an elected president, a democratic constitution, and brave soldiers and police fighting for their country.

Over 4.6 million Afghan refugees have come home. It's one of the largest return movements in history. The Afghan economy has tripled in size over the past five years. About two million girls are now in school, compared to zero under the Taliban -- and 85 women were elected or appointed to the Afghan National Assembly. A nation that was once a terrorist sanctuary has been transformed into an ally in the war on terror, led by a brave President, Hamid Karzai. Our work in Afghanistan is bringing freedom to the Afghan people, it is bringing security to the Euro-Atlantic community, and it's bringing pride to the NATO Alliance.

NATO allies are also making vital contributions to the struggle for freedom in Iraq. At this moment, a dozen NATO allies, including every one of the Baltic nations, are contributing forces to the coalition in Iraq. And 18 NATO countries plus Ukraine are contributing forces to the NATO Training Mission that is helping develop the next generation of leaders for the Iraqi Security Forces. To date, NATO has trained nearly 3,000 Iraqi personnel, including nearly 2,000 officers and civilian defense officials trained inside Iraq, plus an additional 800 Iraqis trained outside the country. NATO has also helped Iraqis stand up a new military academy near Baghdad, so Iraqis can develop their own military leaders in the years to come. And NATO has contributed \$128 million in military equipment to the Iraqi military, including 77 Hungarian T-72 battle tanks. By helping to equip the Iraqi Security Forces and train the next group of Iraqi military leaders, NATO is helping the Iraqi people in the difficult work of securing their country and their freedom.

Tomorrow, I'm going to travel to Jordan where I will meet with the Prime Minister of Iraq. We will discuss the situation on the ground in his country, our ongoing efforts to transfer more responsibility to the Iraqi Security Forces, and the responsibility of other nations in the region to support the security and stability of Iraq. We'll continue to be flexible, and we'll make the changes necessary to succeed. But there's one thing I'm not going to do: I'm not going to pull our troops off the battlefield before the mission is complete.

The battles in Iraq and Afghanistan are part of a struggle between moderation and extremism that is unfolding across the broader Middle East. Our enemy follows a hateful ideology that rejects fundamental freedoms like the freedom to speak, to assemble, or to worship God in the way you see fit. It opposes the rights for women. Their goal is to overthrow governments and to impose their totalitarian rule on millions. They have a strategy to achieve these aims. They seek to convince America and our allies that we cannot defeat them, and that our only hope is to withdraw and abandon an entire region to their domination. The war on terror we fight today is more than a military conflict; it is the decisive ideological struggle of the 21st century. And in this struggle, we can accept nothing less than victory for our children and our grandchildren.

We see this struggle in Lebanon, where last week gunmen assassinated that country's Industry Minister, Pierre Gemayel, a prominent leader of the movement that secured Lebanon's independence last year. His

murder showed once again the viciousness of those who are trying to destabilize Lebanon's young democracy. We see this struggle in Syria, where the regime allows Iranian weapons to pass through its territory into Lebanon, and provides weapons and political support to Hezbollah. We see this struggle in Iran, where a reactionary regime subjugates its proud people, arrests free trade union leaders, and uses Iran's resources to fund the spread of terror and pursue nuclear weapons. We see this struggle in the Palestinian Territories, where extremists are working to stop moderate leaders from making progress toward the vision of two democratic states, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security.

In each of these places, extremists are using terror to stop the spread of freedom. Some are Shia extremists, others are Sunni extremists -- but they represent different faces of the same threat. And if they succeed in undermining fragile democracies, and drive the forces of freedom out of the region, they will have an open field to pursue their goals. Each strain of violent Islamic radicalism would be emboldened in its efforts to gain control of states and establish new safe havens. The extremists would use oil resources to fuel their radical agenda, and to punish industrialized nations, and pursue weapons of mass destruction. Armed with nuclear weapons, they could blackmail the free world, spread their ideologies of hate, and raise a mortal threat to Europe, America, and the entire civilized world.

If we allow the extremists to do this, then 50 years from now history will look back on our time with unforgiving clarity, and demand to know why we did not act. Our Alliance has a responsibility to act. We must lift up and support the moderates and reformers who are working for change across the broader Middle East. We must bring hope to millions by strengthening young democracies from Kabul to Baghdad, to Beirut. And we must advance freedom as the great alternative to tyranny and terror.

I know some in my country, and some here in Europe, are pessimistic about the prospects of democracy and peace in the Middle East. Some doubt whether the people of that region are ready for freedom, or want it badly enough, or have the courage to overcome the forces of totalitarian extremism. I understand these doubts, but I do not share them. I believe in the universality of freedom. I believe that the people of the Middle East want their liberty. I'm impressed by the courage I see in the people across the region who are fighting for their liberty.

We see this courage in the eight million Afghans who defied terrorist threats and went to the polls to choose their leaders. We see this courage in the nearly 12 million Iraqis who refused to let the car bombers and assassins stop them from voting for the free future of their country. We see this courage in the more than one million Lebanese who voted for a free and sovereign government to rule their land. And we see this courage in citizens from Damascus to Tehran, who, like the citizens of Riga before them, keep the flame of liberty burning deep within their hearts, knowing that one day its light will shine throughout their nations.

There was a time, not so long ago, when many doubted that liberty could succeed in Europe. Here in the Baltics, many can still recall the early years of the Cold War, when freedom's victory was not so obvious or assured. In 1944, the Soviet Red Army reoccupied Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia, plunging this region into nearly five decades of communist rule. In 1947, communist forces were threatening Greece and Turkey, the reconstruction of Germany was faltering, and mass starvation was setting in across Europe. In 1948, Czechoslovakia fell to communism, France and Italy were threatened by the same fate, and Berlin was blockaded on the orders of Josef Stalin. In 1949, the Soviet Union exploded a nuclear weapon -- and weeks later, communist forces took control in China. And in the summer of 1950, seven North Korean divisions poured across the border into South Korea, marking the start of the first direct military clash of the Cold War. All of this took place in the six years following World War II.

Yet today, six decades later, the Cold War is over, the Soviet Union is no more, and the NATO Alliance is meeting in the capital of a free Latvia. Europe no longer produces armed ideologies that threaten other

nations with aggression and conquest and occupation. And a continent that was for generations a source of instability and global war has become a source of stability and peace. Freedom in Europe has brought peace to Europe, and freedom has brought the power to bring peace to the broader Middle East.

Soon after I took office, I spoke to students at Warsaw University. I told them America had learned the lessons of history. I said, "No more Munichs, and no more Yaltas." I was speaking at the time about Europe, but the lessons of Yalta apply equally across the world. The question facing our nations today is this: Will we turn the fate of millions over to totalitarian extremists, and allow the enemy to impose their hateful ideology across the Middle East? Or will we stand with the forces of freedom in that part of the world, and defend the moderate majority who want a future of peace?

My country has made its choice, and so has the NATO Alliance. We refuse to give in to a pessimism that consigns millions across the Middle East to endless oppression. We understand that, ultimately, the only path to lasting peace is through the rise of lasting free societies.

Here in the Baltic region, many understand that freedom is universal and worth the struggle. During the second world war, a young girl here in Riga escaped with her family from the advancing Red Army. She fled westward, moving first to a refugee camp in Germany, and then later to Morocco, where she and her family settled for five-and-a-half years. Spending her teenage years in a Muslim nation, this Latvian girl came to understand a fundamental truth about humanity: Moms and dads in the Muslim world want the same things for their children as moms and dads here in Riga -- a future of peace, a chance to live in freedom, and the opportunity to build a better life.

Today, that Latvian girl is the leader of a free country -- the Iron Lady of the Baltics, the President of Latvia. (Applause.) And the lessons she learned growing up in Casablanca guide her as she leads her nation in this world. Here is how she put it earlier this year, in an address to a joint meeting of the United States Congress: "We know the value of freedom and feel compassion for those who are still deprived of it. Every nation on Earth is entitled to freedom," your President said. She said, "We must share the dream that some day there won't be a tyranny left anywhere in the world. We must work for this future, all of us, large and small, together."

Like your President, I believe this dream is within reach, and through the NATO Alliance, nations large and small are working together to achieve it.

We thank the people of Latvia for your contributions to NATO, and for the powerful example you set for liberty. I appreciate your hospitality at this summit. America is proud to call you friends and allies in the cause of peace and freedom. May God bless you, and may God continue to bless America. Thank you very much. (Applause.)

END 4:57 P.M. (Local)

* expeditionary