



THE WHITE HOUSE

PRESIDENT GEORGE W. BUSH

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President Bush Discusses Progress in Afghanistan, Global War on Terror

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[Fact Sheet: Increasing Support to Help the People of Afghanistan Succeed](#)

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10:05 A.M. EST

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you, Mr. President. (Laughter.) That's got kind of a nice ring to it. (Laughter.) Chris, thanks for inviting me. I appreciate the chance to come and share some thoughts with the men and women of AEI. I admire AEI a lot -- I'm sure you know that. After all, I have been consistently borrowing some of your best people. More than 20 AEI scholars have worked in my administration. A few have returned to the fold -- you'll have to wait two more years to get another one to return to the fold. Dick Cheney is occupied. (Laughter.) He sends his best.

I appreciate what the AEI stands for. This Institute has been a tireless voice for the principles of individual liberty, free enterprise, limited government, and a strong national defense. And no one embodied these principles better than the late Ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick. (Applause.) She was a professor, author, diplomat, presidential advisor, and a key architect in our victory in the Cold War.

In 2003, I had the honor of asking her to lead the U.S. delegation to the U.N. Human Rights Commission in Geneva. I would like to share with you what she told that commission. She said, "[America's] national policy is to assert that all human beings are born free. All human beings are equal in inherent rights and human dignity." That's the policy of the Bush administration, as well. I believe in the universality of freedom, and I believe that this country, this grand country of ours, has an obligation to help people realize the blessings of freedom. I appreciate so very much that Jeane Kirkpatrick was such a well-spoken advocate for that basic truth. I am proud to join you in paying tribute to her life and the legacy of a great American stateswoman.



I appreciate the board of directors of the AEI for giving me this forum. Thanks for trying to stay on the leading edge of thought, as well. It's really important that ideas be conceived, circulated and embraced. I want to thank members of the Congress who have joined us today -- there they are. Good, yes. (Laughter.) All friends -- Pete King from New York, Trent Franks from Arizona, Mario Diaz-Balart from Florida, and fellow Texan Mike McCaul. Thanks for coming. Appreciate you being here.

(Applause.) I thank the members of the diplomatic corps who have joined us; proud you're here. Thanks for taking time out of a busy schedule to come and hear this address. I appreciate members of the United States Armed Forces who have joined us. I thank the dignitaries and friends of the AEI and members of my administration who have joined. Don't linger. (Laughter.) Get back to work, but thank you for being here. (Laughter.) I fully expect you to stay awake for the entire address.

As scholars and thinkers, you are contributing to a nationwide debate about the direction of the war on terror. A vigorous debate is healthy for our country, it really is, and I welcome the debate. It's one of the true hallmarks of a free society, where people can get up and express their beliefs in open forum. Yet five years into this war, there is one principle of which every member of every party should be able to agree on -- in other words, after all the debate, there is one thing we all ought to be able to agree on, and that is: We've got to fight the terrorists overseas, so we don't have to face them here at home again.



We're acting on that principle. Since the attacks of September the 11th, we have been on the offense. I believe the best way to do our duty in securing the homeland is to stay on the offense. And we're not alone. That's what our fellow citizens have got to understand. We're not in this fight against extremists and murders alone.

Recently in the Philippines, that country's special forces conducted raids in which they killed two top leaders of an al Qaeda-affiliated terrorist organization -- a group that we believe was responsible for kidnapping four American citizens and killing two of them. In Tunisia, authorities recently broke up a terrorist cell that was planning to attack the American and British Embassies. In Spain, police captured several fugitives wanted for aiding the escape of terrorists responsible for the Madrid train bombings. And in the past year, nations including Denmark, Italy, France, Indonesia, Jordan, Malaysia, Turkey, Canada, and Britain have broken up terrorist cells. The enemy is active, and so are those of us who love freedom. It's in the interests of the United States to encourage other nations not to relent and not to give in, but to keep the pressure on those who try to have their way by murdering the innocent. And that's exactly what we'll continue to do.

This war against the terrorists, this war to protect ourselves, takes place on many fronts. One such front is Iraq. We're on the offense in Iraq, as we should be, against extremists and killers. I recently announced a new strategy for Iraq -- it's a plan that demands more from the Iraqi government. Not only do we demand more from the Iraqi government, but so do the Iraqi people demand more from the Iraqi government. They want to live in peace. It's important for our fellow citizens to understand a mother in downtown Baghdad wants her child to be able to walk the streets peacefully, just like mothers here in America want their children to be able to go to a playground and play peacefully.

I made Baghdad the top security priority. In other words, it's important, in order to achieve our objective, that the capital city of this grand country be secure. And I sent reinforcements to our troops so they can accomplish that mission. I spent a lot of time with members of my administration thinking about the way forward in Iraq. And we listened to a lot of opinions and a lot of different ideas. In the end, I chose this course of action because it provides the best chance for success.



And the reason why I mention success is, it's important for us to

succeed. It's important for us to help this young democracy fight off the extremists so moderation can prevail. It's important for us to stand with this young democracy as they live -- as they try to build a society under the most modern constitution written in the Middle East, a constitution approved by millions of their citizens.

One of the interesting things that I have found here in Washington is there is strong disagreement about what to do to succeed, but there is strong agreement that we should not fail. People understand the consequences of failure. If we were to leave this young democracy before the job is done, there would be chaos, and out of chaos would become vacuums, and into those power vacuums would flow extremists who would be emboldened; extremists who want to find safe haven.

As we think about this important front in the war against extremists and terrorists, it's important for our fellow citizens to recognize this truth: If we were to leave Iraq before the job is done, the enemy would follow us home.

Our new commander in Iraq, General David Petraeus, is now on the ground in Baghdad. I visited him by secure video yesterday. He reports that coalition troops are arriving on schedule. He says the Iraqi government is following through on its commitment to deploy three additional army brigades in the capital. Prime Minister Maliki has said part of our strategy is to put more Iraqis in the fight in the capital city to achieve our objective, and he's doing that. So far, coordination between Iraqi and coalition forces has been good -- they are beginning joint operations to secure the city by chasing down the terrorists, and insurgents, and the criminals, and the roaming death squads. They're doing what the Iraqi people want in Baghdad -- they want a peaceful life.

The initial signs of progress are encouraging. Yet it's important for us to recognize that this is the beginning of what will be a difficult operation in the Iraqi capital. Our troops are risking their lives. As they carry out the new strategy, they need our patience, and they need our support. (Applause.) When General Petraeus' nomination was considered three weeks ago in the United States Senate, the senators voted unanimously to confirm him to his new position, and I appreciate that affirmation, that strong statement for this good General.

Now, the House is debating a resolution that disapproves of our new strategy. This may become the first time in the history of the United States Congress that it has voted to send a new commander into battle and then voted to oppose his plan that is necessary to succeed in that battle.

Members of Congress have every right to express their opinion - - and I fully expect them to do so. The resolution they are debating is non-binding. Soon the Congress is going to vote on a piece of legislation that is binding -- a bill to provide emergency funding for our troops. Our men and women in uniform are counting on their elected leaders to provide them with the support they need to accomplish their mission. We have a responsibility, Republicans and Democrats have a responsibility to give our troops the resources they need to do their job and the flexibility they need to prevail. (Applause.)

As we implement a new strategy in Iraq, we are also taking new steps to defeat the terrorists and



extremists in Afghanistan. My administration has just completed a top-to-bottom review of our strategy in that country, and today I want to talk to you about the progress we have made in Afghanistan, the challenges we face in Afghanistan, and the strategy we're pursuing to defeat the enemies of freedom in Afghanistan.

It wasn't all that long ago that we learned the lessons of how terrorists operate. It may seem like a long time ago -- five years is a long time in this day and age of instant news cycles -- but it really isn't all that long ago, when you think about the march of history. In Afghanistan, we saw how terrorists and extremists can use those safe havens, safe havens in a failed state, to bring death and destruction to our people here at home.

It was an amazing turning point in the history of our country, really, when you think about it. It was a defining moment for the 21st century. Think about what I just said, that in the remote reaches of the world, because there was a failed state, murderers were able to plot and plan and then execute a deadly attack that killed nearly 3,000 of our citizens. It's a lesson that we've got to remember. And one of the lessons of that September the 11th day is that we cannot allow terrorists to gain sanctuary anywhere, and we must not allow them to reestablish the safe haven they lost in Afghanistan.

Our goal in Afghanistan is to help the people of that country to defeat the terrorists and establish a stable, moderate, and democratic state that respects the rights of its citizens, governs its territory effectively, and is a reliable ally in this war against extremists and terrorists.

Oh, for some that may seem like an impossible task. But it's not impossible if you believe what Jeane Kirkpatrick said, and that freedom is universal; that we believe all human beings to live in freedom and peace.

Over the past five years, we've made real progress toward this goal I just described. In 2001, Afghanistan was a totalitarian nightmare -- a land where girls could not go to school, where religious police roamed the streets, where women were publicly whipped, where there were summary executions in Kabul's soccer stadium, and terrorists operated freely -- they ran camps where they planned and trained for horrific attacks that affected us and other nations.

Today, five short years later, the Taliban have been driven from power, al Qaeda has been driven from its camps, and Afghanistan is free. That's why I say we have made remarkable progress. Afghanistan has a democratically-elected President, named Hamid Karzai. I respect him. I appreciate his courage. Afghanistan has a National Assembly chosen by the Afghan people in free elections.

Under the Taliban, women were barred from public office. Today, Afghanistan's parliament includes 91 women -- and President Karzai has appointed the first woman to serve as a provincial governor.

Under the Taliban, free enterprise was stifled. Today, the Afghan economy has doubled in size since liberation. Afghanistan has attracted \$800 million in foreign investment during that time.

Under the Taliban, there were about 900,000 children in school. Today, more than 5 million children are in school -- about 1.8 million of them are girls.

Under the Taliban, an estimated 8 percent of Afghans had access to basic health care. Today, the United States has built or renovated 681 health clinics across the country -- now more than 80 percent of Afghans have access to basic health coverage -- health care.

Under the Taliban, Afghans fled the country in large numbers, seeking safety abroad. Today, more than 4.6 million Afghan refugees have come home -- one of the largest return movements in history.

In today's Afghanistan, people are free to speak their minds, they're free to begin to realize dreams. In today's Afghanistan there's a NATO Alliance is taking the lead to help provide security for the people of Afghanistan. In today's Afghanistan, the terrorists who once oppressed the Afghan people and threatened our country are being captured and killed by NATO forces and soldiers and police of a free Afghanistan. Times have changed. Our work is bringing freedom. A free Afghanistan helps make this country more secure.

We face a thinking enemy. And we face a tough enemy -- they watch our actions, they adjust their tactics. And in 2006, this enemy struck back with vengeance. As freedom began to spread, an enemy that cannot stand the thought of a free society tried to do something about it, tried to stop the advance of this young democracy. It's not the only place in the world where the enemy struck back in 2006. They struck back in Iraq. They struck in Lebanon. This should be a lesson for our fellow citizens to understand, where these group of people find freedom they're willing to resort to brutal tactics.

It's an interesting enemy, isn't it? An enemy that can't stand the thought of somebody being able to live a peaceful life, a life of hope, an optimistic life. And it's an enemy we've got to take seriously.

Across Afghanistan last year, the number of roadside bomb attacks almost doubled, direct fire attacks on international forces almost tripled, and suicide bombings grew nearly five-fold. These escalating attacks were part of a Taliban offensive that made 2006 the most violent year in Afghanistan since the liberation of the country.

And so the fundamental question is, how do you react? Do you say, maybe it's too tough? Let's just kind of let this young democracy wither and fade away. Do we forget the lessons of September the 11th? And the answer is absolutely not.

And so the Taliban offensive that was launched was turned back by incredible courage of the Afghan soldiers, and by NATO forces that stood strong. You see, I believe the Taliban felt that they could exploit weakness. I believe that they said to themselves, if we can -- we'll test NATO and cause NATO leaders to turn their back on this young democracy.

After the fierce battles throughout the year 2006, the Taliban had failed in their objective of taking and holding new territory.

In recent months, the intensity of the fighting has died down -- that's only natural. It does every year when the snow and ice set in there in Afghanistan. But even in these winter months, we stayed on the offensive against the Taliban and al Qaeda. This January, NATO reconnaissance units observed a major Taliban incursion from Pakistan -- with about 150 Taliban fighters crossing the border into the Paktika province. So NATO and Afghan forces launched a coordinated air assault and ground assault, and we destroyed the Taliban force. A large number of enemy fighters were killed; they were forced to retreat, where they were engaged by Pakistani troops.

Just two weeks ago, NATO launched an air strike against Taliban fighters who had seized the town of Musa Qala in Helmand province -- a key Taliban commander was brought to justice.

The snow is going to melt in the Hindu Kush Mountains, and when it does we can expect fierce fighting to continue. The Taliban and al Qaeda are preparing to launch new attacks. Our strategy is not to be on

the defense, but to go on the offense. This spring there is going to be a new offensive in Afghanistan, and it's going to be a NATO offensive. And that's part of our strategy -- relentless in our pressure. We will not give in to murderers and extremists.

And we're focused on five key goals that I want to share with you. First, the United States and our allies will help President Karzai increase the size and capabilities of the Afghan security forces. After all, for this young democracy to survive in the long term, they'll have their own security forces that are capable and trained. We don't have to teach them courage. These folks understand courage. They're willing to fight for their country. They're willing to defend this young democracy. And so it's in our interest and the interest of NATO countries to provide training so they have more, more strong fighters -- so we're going to increase the size of the national police from 61,000 to 82,000 by the end of 2008. And we'll help them develop new specialties: new civil order brigades, counter-narcotics, and border surveillance.

We're going to increase the Afghanistan army. Today, it's 32,000 -- that's not enough to do the job in this vast country -- to 70,000 by the end of 2008. It's one thing to get them trained and one thing to get them uniforms, but they're also going to have to have ways to move around their country. So we're going to add commando battalions, a helicopter unit, combat support units. In other words, we're going to help this young democracy have a fully integrated security force that will respond to the commands of the elected officials.

Capable troops need intelligence. This is a war that requires good intelligence on all fronts. So the United States and our allies will also work with Afghanistan's leaders to improve human intelligence networks, particularly in areas that are threatened by the Taliban. Together with the Afghan government and NATO, we created a new Joint Intelligence Operations Center in Kabul -- so all the forces fighting the terrorists in Afghanistan have a common picture of the enemy. That may sound simple to those of us who have gotten used to sophisticated systems to protect ourselves. This is important innovation in Afghanistan.

America and our allies are going to stand with these folks. That's the message I want to deliver to the Afghanistan people today. Free debates are important. But our commitment is strong: we will train you, we will help you, and we will stand with you as you defend your new democracy. (Applause.)

The second part of our strategy is to work with our allies to strengthen the NATO force in Afghanistan. Today, Afghanistan is NATO's most important military operation. Isn't it interesting that NATO is now in Afghanistan? I suspect 20 years ago if a President stood in front of AEI and said, I'll make a prediction to you that NATO would be a force for freedom and peace outside of Europe -- you probably never would have invited the person back. (Laughter.) Today, NATO is in Afghanistan. And I thank the leaders of the NATO countries for recognizing the importance of Afghanistan in our own security and enhancing the security of our own countries.

For NATO to succeed, member nations must provide commanders on the ground with the troops and the equipment they need to do their jobs. Many allies have made commitments of additional forces and support -- and I appreciate those commitments, but nearly as much as the people in Afghanistan appreciate them. Norway, Lithuania and the Czech Republic have all agreed to send special operation forces to Afghanistan. Britain, Poland, Turkey and Bulgaria have agreed to additional troops. Italy has agreed to send aircraft. Romania will contribute to the EU police mission. Denmark, Greece, Norway and Slovakia will provide funding for Afghan security forces. Iceland will provide airlift. The people of Afghanistan need to know that they've got a lot of friends in this world who want them to succeed.

For NATO to succeed, allies must make sure that we fill the security gaps. In other words, when there is

a need, when our commanders on the ground say to our respective countries, we need additional help, our NATO countries must provide it in order to be successful in this mission.

As well, allies must lift restrictions on the forces they do provide so NATO commanders have the flexibility they need to defeat the enemy wherever the enemy may make a stand. The alliance was founded on this principle: An attack on one is an attack on all. That principle holds true whether the attack is on the home soil of a NATO nation, or on allied forces deployed on a NATO mission abroad. By standing together in Afghanistan, NATO forces protect our own people, and they must have the flexibility and rules of engagement to be able to do their job.

Third, the United States and our allies will help President Karzai improve provincial governance and develop Afghanistan's -- and to help develop Afghanistan's rural economy. Many Afghans in remote regions fight with the Taliban simply because there are no other jobs available. The best way to dry up Taliban recruits is to help Afghanistan's government create jobs and opportunity. So NATO is operating 25 provincial reconstruction teams across the country. These teams are made up of civilian and military experts. They are helping the Afghan government extend its reach into distant regions, they're improving security, and they're helping to deliver reconstruction assistance. In other words, I just described military operations that are necessary, but in order for these young democracies to survive, there's got to be more than just military. There has to be political development, and tangible evidence that a government can provide opportunity and hope. And these provincial reconstruction teams do just that.

These teams will help build irrigation systems, improve power production, provide access to micro-credit. The idea is to encourage entrepreneurship, job formation, enterprise. These teams will undertake new efforts to train provincial and local leaders. We take democracy for granted. Democracy hasn't exactly been rooted deeply in Afghan history. It takes a while for people to understand how to function as an elected official. It takes help for people to understand the obligations to respond to the people, and these teams will change provincial and local leaders.

Another key element to bringing stability to Afghanistan is building roads. Lieutenant General Eikenberry, who served with distinction in Afghanistan, just finished his tour, he was the senior commander there, said really something very interesting that caught my attention. He said, "Where the roads end in Afghanistan, the Taliban begin." So in order to help the security of this country, the international community has stepped up its road-building campaign across Afghanistan. So far, the United States and other nations have completed construction of more than 4,000 miles of roads -- that sounds like a lot, and it is a lot. We're also talking about a big country.

Much of the ring road -- we call it the ring road -- that links key provincial capitals to Kabul, is pretty well complete. And that's important, because, first of all, road building brings jobs to young men who might be recruited to the Taliban. But roads enable people to get commerce to centers of trade. In other words, roads promote enterprise. Enterprise provides hope. Hope is what defeats this ideology of darkness. And so we're going to build another 1,000 roads [sic] in 2007. It's an important effort, and our allies need to follow through on their commitments to help this young democracy have a road system that will enable it to flourish and survive.

Fourth, the United States and our allies will help President Karzai reverse the increase in poppy cultivation that is aiding the Taliban. After a decline in 2005, Afghanistan saw a marked increase in poppy cultivation last year. This is a direct threat to a free future for Afghanistan. I have made my concerns to President Karzai pretty clear -- not pretty clear, very clear -- and that in order for him to gain the confidence of his people, and the confidence of the world, he's got to do something about it, with our help.

The Taliban uses drug money to buy weapons -- they benefit from this cultivation -- and they pay Afghans to take up arms against the government. And so we're helping the President in a variety of ways to deal with the problem. First, he has established what's called a Central Narcotics Tribunal in Kabul. One way to deal with the drug problem is for there to be a push back to the drug dealers, and a good way to push back on the drug dealers is convict them and send them to prison. He has improved the Afghan Eradication Force this is mobile units that can deploy across the country to help governors in their eradication efforts.

We're supporting him. We're supporting him through direct aid on these mobile units, and we're supporting him to expand alternative livelihood programs. These poppy growers are trying to make a living. And the idea is to provide these farmers with credit, and seeds, and fertilizer, and assistance to bring their products to market. So the strategy to eliminate poppies is to encourage the government to eradicate, and to provide alternative means for a livelihood, and to help have the roads so that when somebody grows something somebody wants to buy in Kabul, there's a road to be able to take the product along to the markets.

It's important, and we're going to stay focused on the poppy issue. And when the President and his government is able to make progress on it, it will really inspire countries who want to help to do more.

Finally, we're going to help President Karzai fight corruption. And one place where he needs help is in the judicial system. There's nothing more discouraging when justice is not fair. And Afghans too often see their courts run by crooked judges. It's important to have the confidence of the people in a free society. Crooked judges makes it hard to earn that confidence.

President Karzai, to his credit, has established a Criminal Justice Task Force that is now after public corruption. This task force has 400 prosecutors [sic] and there are ongoing investigations. The United States, Britain and Norway are providing full time prosecutors, judges, police, and defense attorneys to mentor their Afghan counterparts -- and I appreciate our own citizens going over there. It is must be neat, really -- I guess "neat" isn't a sophisticated word, but it must be heartening to be somebody who's helping this young democracy develop a judicial system that is worthy. And I cannot thank our citizens for taking time out of their lives to go.

The United States has built or renovated 40 judicial facilities; we've distributed more than 11,000 copies of the Afghan constitution; we've trained more than 750 Afghan judges and lawyers and prosecutors. The international community is helping this new government build a justice system so they can replace the rule of the Taliban with the rule of law.

Now, there's another part of our strategy I want to share with you, and that is to help President Musharraf defeat the terrorists and extremists who operate inside of Pakistan. We're going to work Pakistan and Afghanistan to enhance cooperation to defeat what I would call a common enemy. Taliban and al Qaeda fighters do hide in remote regions of Pakistan -- this is wild country; this is wilder than the Wild West. And these folks hide and recruit and launch attacks.

The President understands our desire to work with him to eliminate this kind of action. People say, well, do you think President Musharraf really understands the threat of extremists in his midst? I said, yes, I do. You know how I know? They've tried to kill him. Al Qaeda has launched attacks against the President of this country. He understands. He also understands that extremists can destabilize countries on the border, or destabilize countries from which they launch their attacks. And so he's launched what they call a frontier strategy, and that is to find and eliminate the extremists and deliver a better governance and economic opportunity.

We're helping him in these efforts. It's in our interest to help him. We provided him -- we're helping him equip his security forces that are patrolling the border regions with Afghanistan. We're funding construction of more than 100 border outposts, which will provide their forces with better access to remote regions of this part of the country. We've given him high-tech equipment to help the Pakistani forces locate the terrorists attempting to cross the border. We're funding an air wing, with helicopters and fixed-wing aircraft, to give Pakistan better security, better swift response and better surveillance.

President Musharraf is going to better be able to now deal with this problem. Bob Gates went out and visited with him recently, had a good response. He's an ally in this war on terror and it's in our interest to support him in fighting the extremists.

I also had an interesting meeting at the White House last September -- and that is, I hosted a private dinner with President Musharraf and President Karzai, right there in what's called the Family Dining Room. It was a fascinating discussion. Clearly there are different histories, different anxieties about the way forward. We did reach some agreements, however, that it's in all our interests for people to work together, for example, to improve intelligence sharing. It's in our interest to expand trade between these two countries. In other words, on the one hand it's in our interest to work closely on security for security operations, but it's also in our mutual interest -- all three of our interests -- to provide different alternatives for people to choose from.

Remember I said earlier that oftentimes people support the Taliban, or sometimes they support the Taliban in Afghanistan because it's the only job they can find. If that's the case -- and I believe it's true -- we need to help these folks provide an economy that gives hope. And so one way we can do this is what we call reconstruction opportunity zones that exist on both sides of the Pak and Afghan border. These zones will give residents the chance to export locally made products to the United States, duty free. That's our contribution. Got a vast market, wealthy country with a lot of consumers, and it's not going to take much to provide hope if we can get little manufacturing enterprises set up, local entrepreneurs to be able to manufacture goods and sell them here in our countries. It's a tiny contribution for us and a major contribution for providing the conditions necessary for stability.

I'm going to continue to work with both the leaders. It's a useful role for the President of the United States to be in constant contact with both Presidents, to remind them of the great obligations we have to fight the extremists and to help people realize dreams.

So our strategy in this country is robust and important. A lot of attention here in the United States is on Iraq. One reason I've come to address you is I want to make sure people's attention is also on Afghanistan. I'm asking Congress for \$11.8 billion over the next two years to help this young democracy survive. I've ordered an increase in U.S. forces in Afghanistan. We've extended the stay of 3,200 troops now in the country, for four months, and we'll deploy a replacement force that will sustain this increase for the foreseeable future.

These forces and funds are going to help President Karzai defeat common enemies. Success in Afghanistan is important for our security. We are engaged in a long ideological struggle between the forces of moderation and liberty versus the forces of destruction and extremism. And a victory for the forces of liberty in Afghanistan will be a resounding defeat in this ideological struggle. It's in our national interest that we succeed, that we help President Karzai and the people of Afghanistan succeed. And I'm confident -- I'm confident that with persistence and patience and determination, we will succeed.

And the biggest source for success is the Afghan people, themselves. They want their freedom. Freedom

is universal. Jeane Kirkpatrick was right -- people around the world, regardless of their faith, their background, or their gender, want to be free. (Applause.) There is tangible evidence in Afghanistan: 8 million people went to the polls to choose their President in a free election. We take it for granted. Eight million said we want to be free. Imagine how far that society has come from the days of the Taliban. There's courage in that country. People are showing faith and freedom and courage to defend that freedom.

I want to tell you an interesting story about an Afghan security office at Camp Phoenix near Kabul. This fellow has worked at this base for four years -- nearly four years. His job was to guard the front gate and screen cars before they are allowed to approach a U.S. military checkpoint. He is very popular with our troops -- people who have gotten to know him like him a lot. They appreciate his courage and his personality and they call him "Rambo." (Laughter.) Must have been a lot for the Afghan citizen to be called "Rambo," but that's what they call him.

One day Rambo was on duty, a car loaded with explosives tried to crash through the front gate -- they were attempting to get to our troops. This fellow did not hesitate, he jumped in the car and he prevented the terrorist from exploding the device. He saw somebody who was about to harm our citizens, our troops -- he then jumps into the car and stops the attack. A U.S. Army sergeant then responded, helped him pull the guy out of the car.

One of our U.S. soldiers who was there said this, he said, "He saved our lives. I promised him I'd name my firstborn son after him." The guy is hoping for a boy. (Laughter.)

It's a human story. It's a story that speaks of courage and alliance, respect for life. To me it's a story that says these people in Afghanistan want to do what is necessary to survive and succeed, and it's in our interest to help them.

I am really proud that our nation helped liberate the 25 million people of that country. (Applause.) We should be proud to stand alongside the people of Afghanistan, the newly liberated Afghanistan. And I know we're all proud of the men and women who have helped liberate that country -- the men and women who wear our uniform who helped liberate that country and continue to make the sacrifices necessary. (Applause.)

I thank you for giving me a chance to come and talk about a strategy for success, a strategy that is part of our efforts to make sure that a generation of Americans, beyond our generation, will look back and say they did their duty to protect the homeland and, as a result, we can live in peace.

God bless. (Applause.)

END 10:53 A.M. EST