



THE WHITE HOUSE
PRESIDENT
GEORGE W. BUSH






 [CLICK HERE TO PRINT](#)

For Immediate Release
Office of the Press Secretary
December 17, 2008

President Bush Discusses National Security, Homeland Security and the Freedom Agenda at U.S. Army War College

U.S. Army War College
Carlisle, Pennsylvania

-  [In Focus: Freedom Agenda](#)
-  [In Focus: Homeland Security](#)
-  [In Focus: National Security](#)
-  [Fact Sheet: President Bush Has Kept America Safe](#)

-  [Video \(Windows\)](#)
-  [Presidential Remarks](#)
-  [Audio](#)
-  [Photos](#)
-  [En Español](#)

12:58 P.M. EST

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you very much. Please be seated. (Applause.) Thank you for the warm welcome. I'm sorry I'm late. (Laughter.) But I am honored to be back at the Army War College. A few weeks ago, you celebrated this college's 107th birthday. I was interested to learn that the school was originally located across the street from the White House. Apparently after a few years on Pennsylvania Avenue -- (laughter) -- it was time to pack up your bags. (Laughter.) Laura and I know the feeling. (Laughter and applause.)

General Williams, thank you for your leadership.
Sergeant Major Powell, thank you for greeting me.

I'm traveling today with the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, Jim Peake. (Applause.) I assume he got a seat. (Laughter.) Peake, how are you -- finally, yes! (Laughter.) He actually was a 1988 graduate of the U.S. Army War College. (Applause.) He claimed he was the president of the class. (Laughter.) But he also modestly informed me that the reason why is because he was the oldest member of the class. (Laughter.) Anyway, Mr. Secretary, thanks for your service.

Students, faculty, and staff, it's good to be with you.

Over the past century, this important institution has become one of our nation's most revered places. It really has been. After all, the graduates of this college are legendary -- and perhaps I'm looking at



legends -- Dwight Eisenhower, Omar Bradley, George Patton to Norm Schwarzkopf, Tommy Franks, and a man who I visited with recently, Ray Odierno. I want to thank you for continuing this college's noble tradition of military scholarship. I thank you for volunteering to serve our nation during a time of war. I appreciate the officers from our partner nations who are studying here and who are strengthening their countries' friendship with the United States.

I know many of you have served overseas in the war on terror. This weekend, I was honored to make one final trip to the front lines in Iraq and Afghanistan. During my trip, I had the opportunity to spend time with men and women in uniform, and I've got to tell you, there is nothing better, to be the Commander-in-Chief, and stand in front of brave souls who bring such dignity to the United States of America. (Applause.)

They say, what are you going to miss? I'm going to miss a lot of things -- like no traffic jams on the way from Harrisburg. (Laughter.) But I'm most going to miss being the Commander-in-Chief. It is amazing to serve with people who are willing to stand up and step forward to address the great challenge to freedom and democracy of our time. We have been called to action, and many have agreed to serve.

You know, the threat emerged long before September the 11th. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the followers of a hateful and twisted ideology grew in strength and number. In lands where repression and despair reigned, these extremists found willing recruits for their murderous vision. They unleashed an unprecedented campaign of terror against the United States -- attacking the World Trade Center in 1993, bombing two of our embassies in Africa in 1998, striking the USS Cole in 2000.

For many years, our nation viewed these attacks as isolated incidents, and we responded with limited measures. That changed on September the 11th, 2001. On that morning, Americans woke to news of a plane crashing into the North Tower of the World Trade Center. Within the span of 90 minutes, a second plane struck the South Tower, a third one pierced the rings of the Pentagon, and a fourth vanished from the skies above Pennsylvania. By nightfall, the sun had set on a very different world. With rumors of more attacks swirling, Americans went to bed wondering what the future would bring.



On that night, virtually no one would have predicted that more than seven years would pass without another terrorist attack on our soil. It's not a matter of luck. It is a tribute to the dedicated men and women who work day and night to defend our great land. (Applause.) It's the result of tough decisions that we began making immediately after September the 11th.

You see, in those uncertain first weeks, there was no obvious precedent to follow. We faced a choice among many different courses of action. On one end of the spectrum, we could have responded with a purely defensive strategy -- hunkering down behind our borders, and retreating from the world stage. On the other end of the spectrum, we could have sought revenge through instant retaliation -- attacking

nations that support terror, with no broader strategy to address the root cause of the problem.

I rejected both these extremes in favor of a deliberate and comprehensive approach -- one where we used all elements of our national power to keep America safe at home, the understanding that we needed to take the fight to the enemy abroad, and the idea of promoting liberty as the alternative to terror.

Last week, I spoke at West Point about transforming our military to wage this war. And today I'm going to talk you about the strategy we pursued to keep our country safe, the results we've achieved, and the institutions we leave behind for future Presidents to carry on this struggle.

After September the 11th, we fundamentally reshaped our strategy for protecting the American people around three core principles. First, we recognized that our homeland security and intelligence capabilities were inadequate. So we launched the largest reorganization of the federal government since the beginning of the Cold War with one overriding purpose -- and that was to prevent new attacks.

Secondly, we recognized that even with the best defenses, we could not afford to wait for the terrorists to attack again. So we launched a global campaign to take the fight to the terrorists abroad, to dismantle their networks, to dry up their financing, and find their leaders and bring them to justice. We sent a clear message that America will make no distinction between the terrorists and those who harbor them.

Immediately after September the 11th, we gave the Taliban in Afghanistan two options: Surrender the leaders of al Qaeda -- or you can share in their fate. When the regime leaders made their choice, we made ours. We removed the Taliban from power, we shut down the terrorist training camps, and we liberated more than 25 million Afghans.

After 9/11, we also reexamined the danger posed by Iraq -- a country that combined support for terror, the development and use of weapons of mass destruction, aggression against its neighbors, routine attacks on American forces, systemic violations of U.N. resolutions. We concluded that the world could not tolerate such a destabilizing and dangerous force in the heart of the Middle East. I offered Saddam Hussein a final chance to resolve the issue peacefully. It was his choice to make. And when he refused, we acted with a coalition of nations to protect our people -- and liberate 25 million Iraqis.

Thirdly, we recognized that the war on terror is more than a battle of arms. It is an ideological struggle for hearts and minds. And to prevail, we must counter the terrorists' hateful ideology with a more hopeful alternative based on liberty and justice. So after removing the threatening regimes in Afghanistan and Iraq, we refused to take the easy course of trading one strongman for another. Instead, we stayed to help young democracies emerge as beacons for hope for people across the Middle East. We increased our support for democratic reformers and dissidents around the world. We expanded our efforts to combat the conditions of despair and hopelessness that give rise to rage and radicalism.

While there's room for honest and healthy debate about the decisions I've made -- and there's plenty of

debate -- there can be no debate about the results in keeping America safe. (Applause.)

Here at home we prevented numerous terrorist attacks -- including an attempt to bomb fuel tanks at JFK Airport, a plot to blow up airliners bound for the East Coast, a scheme to attack a shopping mall in the Chicago area, and a plan to destroy the tallest skyscraper in Los Angeles. We'll never know how many lives have been saved. But this is for certain: Since 9/11, there's not been another terrorist attack on American soil. (Applause.)

And this is certain as well: Around the world, we're driving the terrorists from their safe havens. We are choking off their financing. We are severely disrupting their operations. Together with our allies, we killed or captured hundreds of al Qaeda leaders and operatives, including the architect of the September the 11th attacks -- Khalid Sheikh Mohammed. And thanks to the success of the surge, the courage of our troops, and the determination of the Iraqi people, we have delivered a devastating blow to al Qaeda in the land Osama bin Laden once called the central battleground in the war on terror.

In the broader struggle between freedom and terror, people around the world have made their choice clear. In Afghanistan, eight million men and women went to the polls to elect a president for the first time in their history. In Iraq, 12 million people defied the terrorists and elected a representative government. You know, one of the things I'll never forget are the ink-stained fingers of people who had a chance to vote their conscience. In countries from Liberia and Lebanon to Georgia and Ukraine, citizens have taken to the streets to cast off the chains of tyranny, and demand their God-given right for freedom. And around the world, more people live in liberty than at any other time in human history.

This is a hopeful beginning. Yet it is only a beginning. Like the struggle against communism during the Cold War, the struggle against terror will be a generational conflict -- one that will continue long beyond my presidency. As my administration leaves office next month, we will leave behind the institutions and tools our country needs to prevail in the long struggle ahead.

We'll leave behind a vastly upgraded network of homeland defenses. Federal, state, and local law enforcement officers are working together more closely than ever before. The number of border patrol agents has doubled since 2001. Our airports and seaports have bolstered screening procedures. Major cities have installed early-warning systems for detecting biological and radiological attacks. And to better coordinate a comprehensive strategy for keeping our people safe, we have a new Cabinet-level Department of Homeland Security.

We'll leave behind a revamped intelligence community that has new tools for staying one step ahead of our enemies. Under the new Director of National Intelligence, federal agencies are collecting and sharing information more effectively than ever before. At the new National Counterterrorism Center, representatives from 16 different federal agencies are working side by side to track any new threat. The FBI -- agents and analysts have shifted their focus from investigating terrorist attacks after they happen to gathering intelligence to prevent them from happening in the first place. The Treasury Department -- there are new programs to shut down financing for terrorism. The CIA -- human intelligence capabilities have improved. More operations officers have deployed overseas to penetrate the terrorist organizations. There's a program to interrogate key terrorist leaders. At the NSA, there are expanded efforts to monitor terrorist communications around the world. We need to quickly figure out

who the terrorists are talking to, and what they're saying, in order to protect the homeland.

We will leave behind new technologies and resources for our military to keep the pressure on the enemy. Our forces are more mobile and more agile, and better positioned now to deploy to trouble spots around the world. On the battlefield, they have access to real-time intelligence that would have been unimaginable just a couple of years ago. With weapons like the Predator drone in our arsenal, our troops can conduct precision strikes on terrorists in hard to reach areas while sparing innocent life. At institutions like the Army War College, our men and women in uniform are studying new counterinsurgency and counterterrorism strategies -- because we're going to depend on you. Long after I'm gone, Presidents will count on you.

We will leave behind a strong coalition of more than 90 nations -- composing almost half the world -- who have committed to combating terror, and sharing intelligence, and keeping our citizens safe. This coalition includes Saudi Arabia, the nation that produced 15 of the 9/11 hijackers and now serves as a staunch ally in the war on terror. This coalition includes Pakistan, a country that was a supporter of the Taliban before September the 11th and today is a strong partner of the United States. This coalition includes two of America's newest and most courageous friends, the free nations of Afghanistan and Iraq. This coalition includes members of the new Proliferation Security Initiative and the new Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism, who are working to prevent the spread of weapons of mass destruction.

We will leave behind new programs to help change the conditions of suffering and hopelessness that give rise to extremism and terror. In Afghanistan and Iraq, new provincial reconstruction teams are helping rebuild war-torn communities, and revive local economies, and restore basic government services. On the continent of Africa, millions are receiving lifesaving treatment, thanks to America's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief. And around the world, countries that govern wisely, and open up their economy, and invest in the health and education of their people are receiving strong support from Millennium Challenge grants.

And finally, we leave behind an unprecedented commitment to extending the reach of liberty and democracy. Key organizations devoted to supporting freedom enjoy stronger government support than ever before. Official U.S. policy now requires our diplomats to seek out and support dissidents and democratic reformers in unfree nations. And it is now the stated policy of the United States to seek the end of tyranny in all nations, for all time.

Until that day comes, the United States will not rest in our fight against oppression and terror. As President, I've had no higher responsibility than waging this struggle for the security and liberty of our people. After 9/11, I vowed that I would never forget the wounds from that day -- and I'm not. That day defined my presidency, and that day changed the course of history. And while we cannot know the path ahead, we can be confident in the destination -- a world where the American people are safe, and children around the world grow up with hope and peace. (Applause.)

We can be confident because freedom is universal. I strongly believe there's an Almighty, and a gift of that Almighty to every man, woman and child on the face of the Earth is freedom. We can be confident because we're blessed with men and women who willingly put the welfare of their nation before

themselves. As long as we have defenders of such character and courage, our nation will always be in good hands and the future will always be bright.

So I thank you for inviting me today. I thank you for having given me the honor of a lifetime to serve as your Commander-in-Chief. God bless. (Applause.)

END 1:19 P.M. EST

Return to this article at:

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2008/12/20081217-6.html>



CLICK HERE TO PRINT