

## Remarks by the Vice President at the Air National Guard Senior Leadership Conference

Adams Mark Hotel  
Denver, Colorado

10:29 A.M. CST

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Thank you. (Applause.) Thank you very much, General. I appreciate that warm welcome. I've been looking forward to having the opportunity to visit Denver today and to address the senior leaders of America's Air National Guard. I am honored to bring you greetings from the former Commander-in-Chief of the Texas National Guard, and the first Air National Guard veteran ever to live in the White House -- President George W. Bush. (Applause.)

I talked to the President just this morning, and he asked me to please give you his personal thanks for the fantastic job you've done for all us over the course of the last year and a half. In a speech last year to a group of National Guard personnel in Charleston, the President said that you not only have a former Guardsman in the White House, you also have a friend in the White House. And let me say to all of you that you also have a friend in the Vice President's office, as well. (Applause.)

In every generation, America has been served by people of honor, who place duty and country above themselves. And I know that I'm addressing many of those right now this morning.

The National Guard plays a unique role in our nation's defense. You serve America within our borders, and beyond our borders. You assist your neighbors in flood and storm and fire, and you answer your country's call to provide for the common defense. You are truly dual-missioned. But you have a single, overriding purpose -- you live your lives for the sake of your nation and your fellow Americans.

The Air National Guard's role in the aftermath of September 11th has been truly remarkable. You have assumed an astonishing portion of the military missions in Operation Noble Eagle and Operation Enduring Freedom. Today, there are nearly 11,000 mobilized and volunteer members of the Air National Guard serving at home or overseas. Air National Guard pilots fly three quarters of the combat air patrols defending the United States mainland, you provide 40 percent of our airlift capacity in Afghanistan, and 42 percent of the fighters in our air expeditionary force. Between September 11th of 2001 and September 11th of this year, Air National Guard pilots flew 46,000 sorties. As members of the National Guard, you may not be full-time soldiers, but you are all full-time patriots. (Applause.)

In my trip to the Middle East last March, I met Air National Guard officers throughout the region who represent the very best of America. At Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar, for example, I was escorted by Lieutenant Colonel Dean Pennington, a squadron commander in the South Carolina Air National Guard. Like everyone else in the Guard, Colonel Pennington led two lives -- at home he was a commercial airline pilot; in the Gulf, he flew an F-16 and helped to keep some of the America's most important commitments in one of the world's most dangerous and challenging neighborhoods.

And I have very special reason to recognize the skill and professionalism of the men and women of America's Air National Guard. On the morning of September 11th we were not sure how many planes had been hijacked, or how many sites had been targeted. The President, therefore, decided to order that the Air National Guard fly combat air patrols over Washington, D.C., and New York. Today, I want to express our nation's gratitude to the Air Guard's 119th Fighter Wing, whose F-16s defended the skies over Washington that morning and to the Air National Guard 102nd Fighter Wing, whose F-15s rose to the defense of New York City. In a time of great peril and uncertainty you were America's first line of defense and we will never forget it. (Applause.)

Since the hour of the attacks on September 11th, our country has been fighting an unprecedented kind of war. As the President said in Prague recently, "a great evil is stirring in the world -- perils we have not seen or faced before."

In the face of these new threats, Americans will do what we've always done, we'll stand firm against the enemies of freedom. We will organize ourselves to meet history's latest challenge. We will out-think the terrorists, out-plan the terrorists, outfight the terrorists. No matter how long it takes, once again, we will prevail. (Applause.)

President Bush understands, as future Presidents must also understand, that this new century requires us to guarantee our security in new ways. During the Cold War the only grave threat to America came from a rival superpower. We handled the threat with summit meetings, arms control treaties, and a policy of deterrence. In the terrorists, however, we have enemies who have nothing to defend. A group like the al Qaeda cannot be deterred or placated or reasoned with at a conference table. For this reason the war against terror will not end in a treaty. There will be no summit meeting or negotiations with terrorists. The conflict can only end with their complete and utter destruction and a victory for the United States and the cause of freedom. (Applause.)

In the last 14 months every level of our government has taken important steps to be better prepared for the fight against terrorism. For the first time ever, Customs agents are at overseas ports identifying suspicious containers before they can get anywhere near the United States. We've also put more marshals on our airplanes and stepped up security at power plants, and ports, and border crossings. We've deployed detection equipment to look for weapons of mass destruction. We're stockpiling enough smallpox vaccine for every American. The U.S.A. Patriot Act has helped us detect and disrupt terrorist activity in our country. And last week the President signed a historic bill to create a new Department of Homeland Security that will protect the American people against emerging threats in the 21st century. This Cabinet-level department will focus the full resources of the American government on the safety of the American people.

But the President knows that wars are never won on the defensive. In the fight against global terror, we must take the battle to the enemy. And where necessary, preempt serious threats before they materialize against our country. The only path to safety is the path of action. And the United States of America will act. We will confront every threat from every source that could possibly bring harm to our country.

The world recognizes that we do not fight a religion. Ours is not a campaign against the Muslim faith. As the President has said, this is a fight to save the civilized world. This is a struggle against evil, against an enemy that rejoices in the murder of innocent, unsuspecting human beings. That is why people in every part of the world and of all faiths must stand together against this foe.



Today, America leads a coalition of more than 90 nations sharing intelligence, hunting down terrorists, and freezing the assets of terror groups and front organizations. Against such enemies, America and the civilized world have only one option: wherever terrorists operate, we must find them; wherever they dwell, we must hunt them down. We will stop them in their plotting and training, and we will bring them to justice. And let there be no doubt, through the relentless and inexorable application of pressure, using every element of national power, we are striking hard at terrorist networks.

In the current phase of the war on terrorism, we are focused on disrupting terrorist operations, dismantling terrorist groups and cells, denying sanctuaries, and deterring future action. Our people in law enforcement and intelligence have been putting in long hours in the most urgent and sometimes dangerous circumstances to thwart plots both here at home and abroad. Many of their successes must go unheralded. But some of their achievements are part of the public record.

For example, since the September 11th attacks, we've captured or killed many key leaders within the al Qaeda organization. These include Abu Zubaydah, bin Laden's chief of operations, who was seized last March in Pakistan and has been providing valuable information to U.S. interrogators; Ramzi bin al-Shibh, believed to be a top planner of the September 11th attacks, who was apprehended in Pakistan, and is also providing us with valuable leads; and Salem Suniam al-Harethi, a top bin Laden operative in Yemen, reportedly killed recently along with five terrorist colleagues.

Most recently, the United States captured al Qaeda's operations chief in the Gulf, Abdal Rashim al Nashiri, a Saudi national, who is believed to have been a key planner in the October 2000 attack on the U.S.S. Cole that killed 17 of our sailors -- the man who has also trained al Qaeda terrorists who took part in the bombings of our embassies in east Africa in 1998.

We and our partners have also dismantled terrorist cells in Italy, Spain, Germany; frozen over \$110 million in terrorist assets in some 500 accounts -- \$34 million in the U.S., \$78 million overseas; and arrested about 2,400 suspected terrorists in 99 countries.

Today, more than 60,000 American troops are deployed around the world in the war on terrorism -- 7,000 American troops in Afghanistan alone. Others are working with Yemenis, Georgians, and Filipinos to increase their capacity to fight terrorism. We are also expanding our maritime interdiction operations to prevent the illegal movement of personnel, arms, and equipment into our country. And we are rapidly identifying scientist and technical experts in foreign countries who have ties with al Qaeda and other terrorist organizations -- thereby reducing the possibility of the proliferation of illicit technology and weapons of mass destruction.

Here at home, the FBI has arrested and charged individuals with conspiracy to provide material support for terrorist groups; has disrupted a cell in Buffalo, New York, and arrested six individuals on charges of supporting foreign terrorist organizations; has arrested four individuals in Portland in connection with an ongoing terrorism investigation; and identified over 200 known or suspected terrorists who've entered the United States undetected.

Of course, America's most dramatic victory in the war against terrorism took place in Afghanistan, where the Taliban regime and the al Qaeda terrorists have met the fate that they chose for themselves. I saw up close and personal the new methods and capabilities of America's armed services last spring. And may I say, as a former Secretary of Defense, that I've never been more proud of the American military. (Applause.)

I met men like Major John D. Caine, an Air National Guard pilot, who was the first to use the Predator UAV to help guide his munitions in combat. The combination of advantages already seen in this conflict -- precision power from the air; real-time intelligence; special forces; and the long reach of naval task forces; close coordination with local forces represents a dramatic advance in our ability to engage and defeat any enemy. These advantages will only become more vital in future campaigns. President Bush has often spoken of how America can keep the peace by redefining war on our terms. That means that our military -- active duty, National Guard, and Reserves -- must have every tool to answer any threat that may emerge against us. It means that any enemy conspiring to harm America or our friends must face a swift, certain, and devastating response.

But for all the progress we've made in the war on terror, one thing is abundantly clear: our nation is still in danger. The threats to America are grave. As the President has said, "our war on terror is well begun, but it is only begun. This campaign may not be finished on our watch, yet it must be and it will be waged on our watch."

The President and I begin each day, as we did today, with a briefing on the threat situation around the world. We know that the terrorists who struck America are still at work, still attempting to strike us wherever they can. Where al Qaeda and its allies are concerned, we are dealing with a network that operates in some 50 or more countries; that has murdered Americans in Bali, Kuwait, and in Jordan; that is determined to acquire weapons of mass destruction -- chemical, biological and nuclear weapons. And they would use those weapons against us if they could.

There is also a grave danger that al Qaeda or other terrorists will join with outlaw regimes that have these weapons to attack their common enemy, the United States of America. That is why confronting the threat posed by Iraq is not a distraction from the war on terror. It is absolutely crucial to winning the war on terror. Saddam Hussein is harboring terrorists and the instruments of terror. He is pressing forward with weapons of mass destruction -- weapons he's already used in his war against Iran and against his own people. His regime has had high-level contacts with al Qaeda going back a decade and has provided training to al Qaeda terrorists. And as the President has said, "Iraq could decide on any given day to provide biological or chemical weapons to a terrorist group or to individual terrorists" -- which is why the war on terror will not be won till Iraq is completely and verifiably deprived of weapons of mass destruction. (Applause.)

The government of the United States understands that just as World War II was waged in both Europe and the Pacific, the war on terror must be waged on many fronts at once. As we destroy the terrorist networks and hunt down the killers, we must simultaneously confront the regime that is developing weapons for the sole purpose of inflicting death on a massive scale.

Thanks to the strong leadership of the President, the United States Congress and U.N. Security Council have both determined that the outlaw regime in Iraq will not be allowed to possess chemical, biological, or nuclear weapons. The President will see to it that these judgments are enforced. We will not permit Saddam Hussein to blackmail and terrorize freedom-loving nations.

Last month, Saddam's regime said it would deal with U.N. inspections. Saddam has made such pledges before and he has violated them all -- time and time again. We have now called an end to Saddam's game. Under the terms of the U.N. Security Council Resolution 1441, Saddam must disclose the extent of his chemical, nuclear, and biological weapons by December 8th. And this time deception will not be tolerated. This time, as the President has said, delay and defiance will invite the severest consequences. The demands of the world will be met, or action will be unavoidable. Either Saddam Hussein will fully comply with the United Nations resolution, or the United States and a coalition of other nations will disarm Saddam Hussein. (Applause.)

As the United States acts to hunt down terrorists and confront Saddam's murderous regime, we also affirm our solidarity with the peoples of the Middle East. There are long-term obstacles to peace and development in the Middle East. And as the nations of that region address them, they can count on American support. As the President said last summer, "prosperity and freedom and dignity are not just Americans hopes or Western hopes, they are universal human hopes. Even in the violence and turmoil of the Middle East, America believes those hopes have the power to transform lives and nations."

To successfully meet whatever challenges await you, the men and women of our armed forces deserve the best tools, the best training, and the best support we can possibly give you. That is why President Bush has signed into law the most significant increase in defense spending since Ronald Reagan lived in the White House. And today, the President will sign into law a pay raise for every member of the military. We believe you deserve it. (Applause.)

As a former Secretary of Defense, I know the conduct of our military does more than bring credit to the country, it reflects the basic fundamental character

of the American people. This is a good, a decent, and a generous land. We fight not for revenge against our enemies, but for the freedom and security of our own people and for the peace of the world.

This past year has brought many critical missions to the men and women of the Air National Guard. Throughout this holiday season, these missions continue. The responsibilities of a citizen-soldier involve real sacrifice, long periods away from your families, your jobs, sometimes from your country. The sacrifices are shared by spouses, by children, and employers, as well. But whether it's in the skies over Washington, or Afghanistan, New York, or the Persian Gulf, Americans count on the Air National Guard to help protect our homeland and to help keep the peace. On our nation's behalf, for myself and President Bush, I thank the citizen-airmen of the Air National Guard for your unending service to your fellow citizens, for your magnificent contributions to the war on terror, for the great honor you bring to your uniform, to our flag, and to our country. You joined the Air National Guard because you believe in America and America believes in you.

In this time of testing for our nation, I have the honor to stand beside a great President who has united Americans behind great goals and has brought honor and dignity to the White House. For all the challenges we face, the United States of America has never been stronger than we are today. We are using our great strength not to dominate others, but to lift the dark threat of terrorism from our country and from our world. We confront a determined enemy. But we will go forward -- clear in our purposes, confident in the rightness of our cause, and certain of the victories to come. Thank you very much. (Applause.)

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