

REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT TO THE NATIONAL DEFENSE
UNIVERSITY'S DISTINGUISHED LECTURE PROGRAM

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It is a pleasure to be back at the National Defense University. This is my fifth visit to your school as President. Every time, I come away encouraged and inspired by the brave men and women who work and study here. Across the world, NDU students and faculty have served with valor in the war on terror. Here on this campus, you are helping train the next generation of military and civilian leaders who will defend our Nation against the threats of a new century. And you have developed new ways for our military and civilian personnel to work together to meet the new challenges we face. I thank you for your patriotism, your hard work, and your devotion to protecting the American people.

Last week, a remarkable event took place in Iraq. At a ceremony in the city of Ramadi, responsibility for security in Anbar Province was transferred to Iraqi civilian authorities. Iraqi forces are now leading security operations across Anbar, with American troops in an "overwatch" role. With this transfer of responsibility, the people of Anbar took charge of their own security and their own destiny. It was a moment of pride for all Iraqis - and a moment of success in the war on terror.

Two years ago, such a moment was virtually unimaginable. Anbar was one of the most dangerous provinces in Iraq. Al Qaida was in control of almost every major population center. They had largely succeeded in turning the region into a safe haven, bringing them closer to one of their key goals - launching new attacks on America, our allies, and our interests in the region. In 2006, a military intelligence report concluded that the province was lost - and Anbar was held up as proof of America's failure in Iraq.

Yet something remarkable was happening. The tribes in Anbar were growing tired of al Qaida's brutality, and this presented us with an opportunity to defeat al Qaida. So last year we sent 4,000 additional Marines to Anbar as part of the surge. The surge showed America's commitment to security and helped renew the confidence of local tribal

sheiks, who led the uprising to take Anbar back from the terrorists. And together, local tribes, Iraqi troops, and American forces systematically dismantled al Qaida control across the province.

Today, Anbar is a province transformed. Attacks in the province have dropped by more than 90 percent, and casualties are down dramatically. Virtually every city and town in Anbar now has a mayor and a functioning municipal council. Provincial Reconstruction Teams are helping local leaders create jobs and economic opportunity. And as security has improved, reconciliation is taking place across the province. Today, Anbar is no longer lost to al Qaida - it has been reclaimed by the Iraqi people.

We are seeing similar gains in other parts of Iraq. Earlier this year, the Iraqi government launched successful military operations against Shia extremist groups in Basra, Baghdad, and al-Amarah. And Iraqi forces are staying on the offensive. They are now conducting operations in and around the northern city of Mosul, where al Qaida terrorists are seeking refuge. And the Iraqi Army recently launched a new offensive against al Qaida in Diyala province. All of these operations are Iraqi-led, with American forces playing a supporting role.

As a result of these and other operations in Iraq, violence is down to its lowest point since the spring of 2004. Civilian deaths are down, sectarian killings are down, suicide bombings are down and normal life is returning to communities across the country. Political reconciliation is moving forward, and the Iraqi government has passed several major pieces of legislation. Our diplomats report that markets once shuttered by terrorist violence are now open for business. And the Iraqi Health Ministry reports that hundreds of doctors who had fled the fighting have now returned to serve the people of their country.

The reduced levels of violence in Iraq have now been sustained for several months. While the progress in Iraq is still fragile and reversible, General Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker report that there now appears to be a "degree of durability" to the gains we have made.

Here is the bottom line: While the enemy in Iraq is still dangerous, we have seized the offensive, and Iraqi

forces are becoming increasingly capable of leading and winning the fight. As a result, we have been able to carry out a policy of "return on success" - reducing American combat forces in Iraq as conditions on the ground continue to improve.

We have now brought home all five of the Army combat brigades, the Marine Expeditionary Unit, and the two Marine battalions, that were sent to Iraq as part of the surge. I was proud to visit with some of our returning troops at Fort Bragg earlier this year. They are among our Nation's finest citizens. The American people are grateful for their courage and proud of their accomplishments.

Another aspect of our "return on success" policy is reduced combat tours in Iraq. Last month, troops began deploying for 12-month tours instead of 15-month tours. This change will ease the burden on our forces, and make life easier for the military families that support them.

Today, I am pleased to announce the next step forward in our policy of "return on success." General Petraeus has just completed a review of the situation in Iraq - and he and the Joint Chiefs of Staff have recommended that we move forward with additional force reductions. Over the next several months, we will bring home about 3,400 combat support forces - including aviation personnel, explosive ordnance teams, combat and construction engineers, military police, and logistical support forces. By November, we will bring home a Marine battalion that is now serving in Anbar province. And in February of 2009, another Army combat brigade will come home. This amounts to about 8,000 additional American troops returning home without replacement. And if the progress in Iraq continues to hold, General Petraeus and our military leaders believe additional reductions will be possible in the first half of 2009.

The progress in Iraq is a credit to the valor of American troops and civilians, the valor of Iraqi forces and the valor of our Coalition partners. Since Operation Iraqi Freedom began, more than 140,000 troops from 41 countries have served as part of our Coalition in Iraq. And sons and daughters of Australia, Azerbaijan, the United Kingdom, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Denmark, El Salvador, Estonia, Georgia, Hungary, Italy, Kazakhstan, Latvia, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, South

Korea, Spain, Thailand, and Ukraine have given their lives in the fight against the terrorists and extremists there. The citizens of these countries have sacrificed for the cause of freedom in Iraq - and America has been proud to serve alongside such courageous allies.

I congratulate our Coalition partners on their historic accomplishments in Iraq, and for maintaining their resolve through dark days. Thanks to their determined work and the growing capability of Iraqi forces, many of our partners in Iraq are now in a position to "return on success" as well. Australia has withdrawn its Battle Group, and the Polish contingent is set to redeploy shortly. And many more Coalition nations will be able to conclude their deployments to Iraq this year - thanks to the skill of their troops and the success of their missions.

In the period ahead, we will also continue working toward the conclusion of a Strategic Framework Agreement and a Status of Forces Agreement between the United States and Iraq. These agreements will serve as the foundation for America's continued security support to Iraq once the United Nations resolution authorizing the multinational forces there expires on December 31st. And they will allow us to establish a bi-lateral relationship between the United States and Iraq like those we have with dozens of other countries around the world.

Early on in this struggle, I made clear that America's goal in Iraq was to help the Iraqi people build a democratic nation that can govern itself, sustain itself, and defend itself. Thanks to the success of the surge, Iraq is making steady progress toward that goal. The steps I have described today will help us build on this success, set America's engagement in Iraq on a strong and steady course and allow our troops to come home in victory.

Al Qaida leaders have repeatedly declared that Iraq is the central front of their war with America - but it is not the only front. As al Qaida faces increased pressure in Iraq, the terrorists are stepping up their efforts on the front where this struggle first began - the nation of Afghanistan.

After September the 11th, 2001, Coalition forces destroyed the Taliban regime, we drove al Qaida from the

Afghan sanctuary where they plotted and planned unprecedented attacks on our country and we helped Afghans begin to build a new democracy. Together with our military, American civilian experts helped the Afghan people build their economy, provide basic services, expand health care and open schools for Afghan boys and girls.

These were important successes, yet the enemies of a free Afghanistan refused to give up the fight. They sought to undermine the democratic government so they could regain the place of dominance they enjoyed in Afghanistan before Nine Eleven. And with the help of their sanctuary in Pakistan, they ruthlessly attacked innocent Afghans across the country.

As the security situation changed, America and our Coalition partners responded with troop increases. At the NATO Summit in Bucharest in April, I told our allies that the United States was deploying 3,500 more Marines to Afghanistan, and that we would make additional forces available in 2009. I also called on allies to increase their force levels. And during the past year, the United Kingdom, France, Poland, Bulgaria, Romania, Australia, Germany, Denmark, the Czech Republic, and others have sent additional forces to support the NATO mission in Afghanistan. These troop increases represent a "quiet surge" in Afghanistan. In all, the number of American troops in the country increased from less than 21,000 two years ago to nearly 31,000 today. The number of Coalition troops - including NATO troops - increased from about 20,000 to about 31,000. And the number of trained Afghan army and police forces increased from less than 67,000 to nearly 144,000.

These troop increases have made a difference, yet huge challenges in Afghanistan remain. The country is vast. Unlike Iraq, it has few natural resources and has an under-developed infrastructure. Its democratic institutions are fragile. And its enemies are some of the most hardened terrorists and extremists in the world. With their brutal attacks, the Taliban and the terrorists have made some progress in shaking the confidence of the Afghan people. And in the face of all these challenges, the Afghan people are naturally questioning what their future will look like.

Afghanistan's success is critical to the security of America and our partners in the free world. And for all the good work we have done in that country, it is clear we must do even more. As we learned in Iraq, the best way to restore the confidence of the people is to restore basic security - and that requires more troops. So today, I am announcing additional American troop deployments to Afghanistan. In November, a Marine battalion that was scheduled to deploy to Iraq will instead deploy to Afghanistan. It will be followed in January by an Army combat brigade. The mission of these forces will be to work with Afghan forces to provide security for the Afghan people, protect Afghanistan's infrastructure and democratic institutions and help ensure access to services like education and health care. They will show citizens that the Afghan government and its partners stand with them in the battle against the terrorists and the Taliban. And they will help clarify a stark contrast in Afghanistan: While the terrorists and extremists deliberately target and murder the innocent, Coalition and Afghan forces risk their lives to protect the innocent.

Regrettably, there will be times when our pursuit of the enemy will result in accidental civilian deaths. This has been the case throughout the history of warfare, yet our Nation mourns every innocent life lost. Every grieving family has the sympathy of the American people. And I have given President Karzai my word that America will work closely with the Afghan government to ensure the security of the Afghan people while protecting innocent life.

As we deploy these reinforcements, America will take new steps to help the Afghan government mobilize more forces of its own. Along with the Afghan government, the United States and our allies are now launching a new initiative to double the size of the Afghan National Army over the next five years. We will also work to increase the involvement of Afghan tribes. Local Afghan forces were key to our successes in 2001 and 2002, when we combined the 21st century capabilities of the American military with the courage of Afghan fighters on horseback. In the period ahead, we will once again encourage Afghan security forces and Afghan tribes to take a leading role in building a democratic Afghanistan. The Taliban and al Qaida will not be allowed to return to power. The terrorists will suffer the same fate in Afghanistan that they are now suffering in Iraq - they will be defeated.

In addition to these new military measures, we are also stepping up efforts on the civilian side. We are increasing our civilian presence with new personnel from the US Agency for International Development, the Drug Enforcement Agency, and the Foreign Service. We are using Provincial Reconstruction Teams of military and civilian experts to help local communities fight corruption, improve governance, and jumpstart their economies. We are using Agricultural Development Teams to help Afghan farmers feed their people and become more self-sufficient. We are supporting Afghanistan's National Development Strategy, which helps the democratic government in Kabul offer greater support to the provinces in areas like health and infrastructure. We are working with Afghan authorities to prepare for elections in 2009 and 2010. And at the international conference in Paris this June, America pledged 10 billion dollars over the next two years to support Afghan development. In all these ways, we are working to ensure that military progress is accompanied by the political and economic gains that are critical to the success of a free Afghanistan.

As we take these new steps in Afghanistan, we must also help the government of Pakistan defeat Taliban and al Qaida fighters hiding in remote border regions of that country. These extremists are increasingly using Pakistan as a base from which to destabilize Afghanistan's young democracy. And in the past year, the Taliban, al Qaida, and other extremist groups operating in these remote regions have stepped up their attacks against the Pakistani government itself - hoping to stop that country's democratic progress as well.

Defeating these terrorist and extremists is in Pakistan's interest - because they pose a mortal threat to Pakistan's future as a free and democratic nation. Defeating these terrorist and extremists is also Pakistan's responsibility - because every nation has an obligation to govern its own territory and make certain that it does not become a safe haven for terror. America and our NATO allies will continue helping Pakistan in its efforts to defeat the extremists - because the same terrorists who murder innocent civilians in Karachi and Islamabad are also plotting new attacks against the United States and the nations of Europe.

Each of the three places I have discussed today - Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan - pose unique challenges for our country. Yet they are all theaters in the same overall struggle. In all three places, extremists are using violence and terror in an attempt to impose their ideology on whole populations. And in all three places, America is standing with brave elected leaders, determined reformers, and millions of ordinary citizens who seek a future of liberty, justice, and tolerance.

Defeating our enemies requires success on the military front. Together with our allies, we have made substantial progress toward breaking up terrorist networks - and we will not rest until they are destroyed. Defeating our enemies also requires success in an ideological battle. We must show the people of the broader Middle East a better alternative to a life of violence and despair, and that alternative is freedom. History shows that people who are given the choice between freedom and tyranny will ultimately choose freedom. And history shows that freedom will yield the peace we all want.

There will be difficult moments in the work ahead, yet we can have confidence in the outcome. With faith in the power of freedom, we will transform nations that once harbored our enemies into strong and capable allies in the war on terror. With faith in the power of freedom, we will prove that the future of the Middle East belongs not to terror, but to liberty. And with faith in the power of freedom, we will leave behind a safer and more peaceful world for our children and grandchildren.

Men and women of the Armed Forces and America's civilian agencies: Thank you for your service in freedom's cause. Thank you for all you do to keep America safe. May God bless you all. And may God continue to bless and protect the United States of America.