



## U.S. Department of Defense

Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Public Affairs)

# Speech

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### Troop Talk at The National Training Center

*Remarks as Delivered by Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld, Fort Irwin, California, Monday, August 29, 2005.*

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...We appreciate you being here. We appreciate having the chance to tell you in person, how much the service of your spouses and your fathers and mothers and -- whatever they may be -- mean to our country.

Now troops! I am so pleased to have a chance to come back to this great installation, that's doing such important work, work that can save lives -- let there be no doubt -- and have a change to thank those of you who have already served in Iraq for the most part -- but also in Afghanistan in some cases. And to wish those of you who are -- I guess a number of you will be going over in December, and to wish you well, and to let you know how much we appreciate what you're doing for our country.

I guess behind me, I'm told, we have some 32 Purple Heart recipients and a number of people who have recently returned from Iraq and Afghanistan, so a special greetings to you as well.

You know it's worth noting that there seems to be some confusion and misunderstanding, at least in certain circles in the United States, about America's place in the world, about the nature of this Global War on Terror that our country is fighting today.

When you consider some of the things that we've been hearing, it suggests that we may have arrived at a rather unusual place:

- A place where, in some cases, U.S. military action in response to a terrorist attack seems as likely to be called "inhumane" as the terrorist attacks against innocent men, women and children;
- Where some devote -- I've seen some papers that have devoted five to ten times as many editorials to illegal mistreatment of prisoners by a few, actual and alleged, than to the terrorists' beheading of innocent citizens;
- Where tens of thousands of Iraqi corpses are found in Saddam Hussein's mass graves in Iraq, yet a prominent political figure in Washington says that Saddam's torture chambers have been reopened under new management;
- Where polls showing concern with the war's progress are given frequent press mention, but polls showing growing Muslim support for democracy and growing rejection of extremism and terrorism are given at best only passing reference;

- Where some folks, with an indignation, inaccurately allege that American troops are killing innocent civilians, and flushing a Koran down a toilet -- which didn't happen -- but shy away from using the word "terrorist" because of its pejorative connotations.

And then there are the anxious assertions that we have recently heard in Washington:

- We're losing the Iraq War, they say;
- That we should withdraw precipitously; and
- That the situation is worse than Vietnam.

This same kind of talk was prevalent throughout the Cold War. We were told we couldn't confront the Soviet Empire successfully, we were told we couldn't win, we were told that maybe America, not the Soviet Union, was the real problem.

It seems to me that, that kind of thinking needs to be challenged, it needs to be raised, and talked about and discussed. So let's be clear:

- The United States is not losing the war -- the global war against terrorists -- nor are we losing the war in Afghanistan or Iraq;
- We must not -- and we will not -- retreat.

The challenge we face is clear, but admittedly difficult: If our enemies obtain the even more lethal weapons that they seek, this war could well escalate to considerably larger numbers than the casualties we saw on September 11th.

It's time that we remind the world what we're doing and why we're doing it. They need to remember who we are -- the United States of America -- and who we are not:

- That our Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Marines have defended generations of Americans from the deadly designs of dictators, terrorists, fascists, Nazis, and Communists, and that they're doing so today, and that they will be doing so as long as there is an America.

There are some who are asking why America is fighting this war half a world away, in Afghanistan and in Iraq.

Tell them it's because you are standing on the front lines to protect and safeguard their freedoms.

Tell them that America is not what's wrong with the world. It is the terrorists, the beheaders, the hostage takers, the assassins -- the people being pursued and fought every day in Iraq, in Afghanistan, and elsewhere -- they are what's wrong with the world.

Some may ask what are goal is, what our mission is.

Tell them the mission is not to think it is possible to only defend, to cower behind illusory defenses. Or to wait for danger to return to our shores. Your mission is to go on offense. To go on the attack.

And that is exactly what the U.S. and Coalition forces are doing in Afghanistan and in Iraq: they are engaging the terrorists where they live for the simple reason that we do not have to deal with them where Americans live.

Some may ask specifically what our goal is in this war.

Well, you can tell them it is victory. Unapologetic and unyielding victory.

And we can tell them one more thing. That Americans know and appreciate the cost of war, its pain, that every loss of life, every wounded soldier, weighs on our souls and in our hearts. That we value human life, that we're proud that we value human life, and we do not consider that a weakness. Indeed we consider it a strength.

You might remind them of what one sailor wrote to his son upon hearing of the Japanese surrender which ended World War II, some 60 years ago this month. He wrote:

“When you grow a little older, you may think war to be a great adventure.  
Take it from me -- it's the most horrible thing ever done by man.”

And it is. And that's why it will always and must be always, the last choice.

But today, as in World War II, America confronts a lethal enemy as the only means to secure our freedom and peace. Americans fight today so that their children and their children's children might have those same freedoms that we have all been privileged to enjoy.

I was in the Republic of Korea, last year -- a year and a half ago, I guess -- and I was putting a wreath where the Americans who had been killed in Korea have a monument. And it has a plaque for each state in the United States of America showing the people who were killed from that state, half a world away, in Korea on the Korean peninsula, back in the 1950s.

One of the names there was a high school classmate of mine who was killed, and later that evening I was in a meeting with a group of Koreans, and a woman journalists came up to me and, had her tape-recorder and she said -- it was exactly the time that the Korean parliament was debating whether or not they should put any Korean forces in Iraq. And the big debate was going on in the press, and she stuck her -- what do you call it -- her tape recorder in my face and said: “Why should we send young Koreans over half a world away to Iraq to have them killed or wounded.”

And I thought of a satellite photograph I have on my desk in Washington, taken of the Korean peninsula at night. And it shows the demilitarized zone, and south of it, its all electricity, and energy and freedom. And north of it is pitch black at night except for one pinprick of light in the capital city of Pyongyang.

The people in North Korea and South Korea, the same number of people, the same resources north and

south, one country many years ago, and today there is an eight inch differential in the height -- the people in the north are eight inches shorter because of a lack of nutrition. They are taking people in the North Korean military that are under 5 feet tall and less than 100 pounds -- men! Because of a lack of nutrition. You can just see the difference between a free political system and a free economic system versus a command economy and a vicious dictatorship repressing the people of North Korea.

And I told this woman to look out the window. I said, that's why. That's why Koreans ought to go over to Iraq. That's why young Koreans ought to be willing to risk their lives to help the people in Iraq have a free system, so that they will not live like the people in the north. She obviously was too young to have remembered the Korean War, but the truth is, so many countries in the world today are right there making that choice between a regime like the north -- a dictatorship, an economy that can't provide for the people, and a free system -- a free political system and a free economic system.

I think it's good to remind ourselves of that.

Each of you here have volunteered, each of you have volunteered to help make history. You are making history, and you're making a proud history. Your children -- five, then, fifteen, twenty years from now -- you'll be able to look back, and it won't be a satellite photo, although it might be, but you'll be able to see the effects of your contributions to freedom on this globe. And as I say, it will be a proud history. And our country will remember and honor the noble service that you are performing for free people so far away, and at the same time for helping to secure the -- provide the freedom and security for people here at home.

So may God bless each of you. I express my deepest appreciation to all of you for what you do for our country. I know the American people share that appreciation. And may God continue to bless our wonderful country. Thank you so much.

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