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PRESIDENT
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Vice President's Remarks at United States Air Force Academy Commencement

Falcon Stadium

United States Air Force Academy, Colorado

10:18 A.M. MDT

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Thank you. (Applause.) Thank you very much. Thank you very much, Secretary Dominguez, General Rosa, General Jumper, Lieutenant Governors Leman and Norton, Academy staff and faculty, distinguished guests, officers, cadets, and members of the graduating class of 2005. It's a high privilege to be with you this morning, and I thank you for the warm welcome on a very special day.

It's a privilege as well to visit the Air Force Academy once again. This fine institution, in service to the United States for a half-century, has prepared an exceptional corps of Air Force officers. Members of the cadet wing are drawn from every region of the country and from two dozen foreign lands. Taken together, they represent the future of air and space power in freedom's cause. When you see these young men and women, and understand the rigor and the discipline of a service academy, you can't help but feel confidence in the rising generation of military leaders. The defense of this nation is in very good hands. (Applause.)



This is a day of dedication for the members of the George S. Patton Class of 2005. For these four years, all of you have marched into Falcon Stadium as members of the cadet wing. You will leave the stadium today as the newest officers in the United States military. Our whole country is proud of you, and I bring greetings and congratulations from your Commander-in-Chief, President George W. Bush. (Applause.)

In these four years, as you have studied and drilled and prepared to become leaders, you have seen changes in yourself. You have been tested in mind, body, and character. You have felt the pride that comes from striving, succeeding, and becoming the person the Air Force knew you could be. And you have proven yourselves worthy of the honor you receive today.

You have taken academic courses from biology to physics, from law to computer science, from philosophy to aeronautical engineering. Your military training has included endless hours of study on

military strategy, doctrine, and heritage. I've been told that additional lessons have been learned outside the core curriculum. For example, members of this class displayed a superb application of stealth, using nothing more than a bottle of Hershey's syrup in the dining hall. (Laughter.) And although most of you understand the complexities of jet aircraft and navigational systems, at least one of you also has demonstrated considerable skill in operating a Bobcat tractor. (Laughter.)

You conclude your time at the Air Force Academy rightfully proud of your achievements, and well prepared for the duties ahead of you. You are on a journey of success that does not end with graduation, and did not begin on the day you arrived for BCT in-processing. Even before you came to Colorado Springs, you stood apart as young men and women of exceptional gifts and potential. And you had the support and encouragement of the people who care the most about you -- the ones who shaped your character, and set you on a path to respect the rank you hold today. This ceremony is a wonderful moment for them, as well. So I believe it's fitting that we give a round of applause to the parents of the class of 2005. (Applause.)

This morning you take your place as commissioned officers in the most powerful air and space force in the history of mankind. That responsibility comes to you in a period of unprecedented challenge for our country, and extraordinary change for the armed forces. Four years ago, when you arrived at the Air Force Academy, some believed our nation had entered a long period of relative quiet, with few real threats to our security, little reason to expect serious danger from abroad, and no chance of direct attack. You were here on the day that comforting illusions gave way to immediate and critical national priorities.

All of you remember that Tuesday morning in 2001 when alarms were sounded, military bases were put on high alert, and the gates of this academy were locked. Here in Colorado Springs, and at our nation's other service academies, men and women understood immediately that a new mission had come to America, and that some of the most vital work would be carried out by your generation. The attacks on our country underscored the seriousness of the profession you had entered and the oath you had taken only a few months earlier. And many of you shared the same wish -- that you could graduate on September 12th, and take your place in the first war of the 21st century.



A great deal has happened since that day, but we have much yet to do as a nation -- and you will be among those who lead us to victory against freedom's enemies. (Applause.) Your class, which has been defined by change, will see and be a part of many more changes in the course of your careers. And the security of our country will always depend not just on strength and firepower, but on our adaptability to change, the flexibility of our forces, and our willingness to confront dangers before they fully materialize.

Every day for nearly four years, each one of you has prepared to become an Air Force officer in a time of war. And ladies and gentlemen, this is a war we are winning. (Applause.)

This conflict began on the timing and the terms of 19 men aboard civilian aircraft. We learned that day just how much violence and suffering can be inflicted on our country in the space of a few hours. September 11th also gave us a glimpse of the terrorists' broader ambitions. They hate our country and oppose everything we stand for in this world. They hold an ideology that demands complete conformity, the crushing of dissent, and the subjugation of women -- and in service to that ideology they are willing to inflict merciless harm upon innocent men, women, and children. The terrorists seek to impose their will across the broader Middle East and beyond.



They have declared their intention to strike America again, and to kill ever greater numbers of our citizens. And they seek weapons of mass destruction, in order to blackmail free nations and commit murder on a massive scale. This continuing threat demands a unified, effective response -- to make this nation better able to respond to any future attacks, to reduce our vulnerability, and, above all, to hunt down the terrorists before they can hit us again. (Applause.)

To protect the American people, we have made an urgent and substantial reform in the organization of our government. We created the Department of Homeland Security, strengthened defenses of our borders and coastlines, and improved our preparedness against the possible use of biological weapons. Almost three years ago, we stood up the U.S. Northern Command, here in Colorado Springs, to protect our airspace and provide support to civil authorities in the event of emergency. The men and women of NORTHCOM are helping to make absolutely certain that the United States of America never lets down our guard in the fight against terror.

To protect the American people, we've strengthened our intelligence capabilities -- because reliable intelligence is our first line of defense against terror. We will continue improving our capacity to collect and analyze information from every kind of source. The Air Force will remain at the center of that enterprise, through networked air and space platforms. The capabilities we have now are the result of decades of innovative thinking and wise investment. And in the future, as the margin for error in national security matters gets smaller, the quality of our intelligence services will become even better.

To protect the American people, we are confronting new dangers with a new national security strategy. During the '80s and '90s, as terror networks began to wage attacks against Americans, there was a tendency to treat those attacks as isolated incidents. And those acts were answered, if at all, on an ad hoc basis with subpoenas, criminal indictments, and the occasional cruise missile. As time passed, the terrorists concluded that they could hit America with very little consequence to themselves



and might even change American policy through acts of murder, so their attacks became more ambitious and more deadly. After 9/11 this nation made a decision: We will not sit back and wait for future attacks. We will prevent those attacks by taking the fight to the enemy. (Applause.)



With good allies at our side, America has also enforced a doctrine that is understood by all: Governments that support or harbor terrorists are complicit in the murder of the innocent, and equally guilty of terrorist crimes. There may be some in the world who doubt the seriousness of our commitment -- but those doubters do not include members of the former regime in Afghanistan, or the former dictator of Iraq. (Applause.)

At this Academy you have studied the methods and the technologies that are transforming the U.S. military. As leaders in the Air Force you will be participants in that transformation to make America far better able to meet the challenges of the 21st century. A military that was designed for the mid to late 20th century is becoming a force that is lighter, more flexible, more agile, more lethal in action. Our task is to continue building on America's advantages -- our technological superiority, our ability to project force across great distances, our precision strike capabilities, a space program second to none. And we must continue investing in the greatest advantage of all: Men and women like you, whose competence, creativity, and flexibility will always keep our nation steps ahead of potential adversaries. (Applause.)

Military transformation will be a constant theme of your career, and every branch of the service will share in the responsibility of getting the job done right. Yet the project is well begun, as we saw in operations in Afghanistan and Iraq during major combat, and as we see to this very day. For its part, the United States Air Force has shown the kind of skill, precision, readiness, and flexibility that will help protect this nation from harm -- and, when necessary, to engage the enemy and dominate the battle space.

The basic reasons for your successes are already clear. The first is the adaptive mindset of the Air Force. You are steadily building a culture of transformation that emphasizes problem-solving, innovation, and planning.

Another factor is your ability to integrate operations with our joint and coalition forces. The other branches of our military depend on the Air Force for air superiority, theater lift, close air support, intelligence support, combat search and rescue, and GPS positioning. In the last several years our national security needs have required the Air Force to work with sister services in closer joint operations than ever before. You have risen to that challenge. And because you have transformed into an expeditionary air and space force, you are even more flexible and our reliance on your abilities has only grown.

The application of technology has also been crucial. Our military today operates at a higher level of accuracy over greater distances than earlier generations could have imagined possible. We all remember the images from Afghanistan of Air Force airmen on horseback. They were there with laser designators and laptop computers, taking readings on enemy coordinates, transmitting them to a

cockpit more than 32,000 feet overhead, and calling in precision air strikes within minutes.

In Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom, most of our B-2 missions were flown not from bases abroad, but from right here in the United States. The jets would take off from a base in Missouri, fly across seven or more time zones, refuel several times en route, deliver 15 or more tons of bombs on enemy targets, and return home. And when the bombs were dropped, they struck within ten meters of the target -- having been programmed for latitude, longitude, elevation, and even wind speed. We've also seen the kind of innovative thinking that combines new technology with older assets. The B-52 -- the mainstay of the Cold War bomber force, which used to hit a small number of targets with accuracy to within half a mile -- can now hit 20 separate targets on a single mission.

Today, as our coalition fights Taliban remnants in Afghanistan and insurgents in Iraq, Air Force jets are flying 24 hours a day, on combat air patrol and intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance missions. Also overhead, a constellation of Air Force-operated satellites provides navigation and positioning information to every command vehicle on the ground. We continue to depend on Air Force radar, photo, and infrared imaging, and on unmanned aircraft such as the Predator, which gathers data, sends it back to commanders in real time, then, if needed, fires on a target with pinpoint accuracy.

All the advantages of joint operations and leading-edge technology add up to a military force that is constantly improving, adapting to circumstances, and finding new ways to defeat shadowy, entrenched enemies. Yet the greatest advantage we have as a nation is the cause we stand for -- and the character of the individuals who serve that cause. As President Ronald Reagan said, "No weapon in the arsenals of the world is so formidable as the will and moral courage of free men and women." (Applause.)

In these years of challenge, our people in uniform have done their duty with all the skill and the honor we expect of them. We have also had to say farewell to some of the bravest Americans, including graduates of this Academy. We cannot replace the loss, or take away the sadness of the families left behind. But we will always remember their service and be grateful, and we will honor their memory by completing our mission. (Applause.)

For all the effort that lies ahead, we can be proud of everything that's been achieved. America chose to lead, and had the courage to act -- and so the murderous regimes of the Taliban and Saddam Hussein are history, more than 50 million people have been liberated from tyranny, and democracy is coming to the broader Middle East. We are committed to the advance of freedom in that region not just because it serves our ideals, but also because it serves our interests. Free societies are hopeful societies; free societies do not feed resentments and lash out at peaceful neighbors, or produce violence for export. Our country is safer today because Afghanistan and Iraq have governments that fight terrorists instead of harboring them. Future generations of Americans will be spared from violence and fear as democracy and hope and governments that oppose terror multiply across the Middle East.

Because we have acted in freedom's defense, and because we are pursuing a forward strategy of freedom, we can see a vision of a world beyond the war on terror. And as you rise through the ranks of the Air Force, we will be counting on you to show America's strength, our commitment to peace, and

the great idealism and justice of this country. Many challenges are already upon us, and others will emerge during your careers. In the years to come we will protect this nation, our deployed forces, and our friends and allies with ballistic missile defenses. We will work day by day -- and side by side with other governments -- to oppose the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. We will uphold and strengthen our traditional alliances, and seek good relations with all countries that share our commitment to freedom, prosperity and security. We will maintain our military strength, repositioning our forces so that we can always move swiftly to keep the peace.

I want each one of you to know that this nation will never take you, or your service, for granted. (Applause.) We will provide everything you need to carry out the missions that are given to you. And we will always have faith in you, just as you have faith in this great country of ours. Four years ago, you were selected to come to this Academy, and now you have earned the right to be called Air Force officers. For the rest of your life, the commission you receive today will set you apart. Because of that commission, others will assume that you are a person of integrity, that you value service before self, and that you strive for excellence in all that you do. These are the core values of the United States Air Force, and I am certain you will live up to them at every stage of your career.

As Vice President of the United States -- and more importantly, as a citizen of this land -- I respect each one of you for giving the best years of your lives to the service of the country. (Applause.) America has prepared you for the work ahead. America is very proud of you. And you will play an historic role in the great victories to come. To every man and woman in the class of 2005, I wish you good luck, and Godspeed. (Applause.)

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