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Office of the Vice President  
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## Vice President's Remarks at the United States Military Academy Commencement

West Point, New York

9:17 A.M. EDT

**THE VICE PRESIDENT:** Thank you very much. General Hagenbeck; members of Congress; Military Academy faculty and staff; distinguished guests; officers, cadets, members of the Class of 2007:

Thank you all for the welcome to West Point. I'm delighted to be here again, and to join in today's ceremony, and to stand before the newest graduates of the greatest military academy in the world. (Applause.)

Today the Class of 2007 leaves behind its leadership duties to the Corps of Cadets, and takes up leadership duty to the United States of America. As a class they've brought honor to Cadet Gray. As commissioned officers they'll bring the same honor to Army Blue. Graduates, this is a proud moment in your life, and in the life of our country. I count it a privilege to be in your company, and I bring warmest congratulations from our Commander-in-Chief, President George W. Bush. (Applause.)

There is one item of business to take care of today. Apparently some members of the Corps of Cadets are still on restriction for minor offenses. And I guess you're looking for a little compassion. Such matters are to be decided by the President himself, and so he and I had a discussion about it. He took the strong view that we ought to be lenient. Me, I could have gone either way. (Laughter.) But the President is in charge, so at his direction, I hereby grant amnesty for all cadets on restriction for minor conduct offenses. (Applause.) Now here's the fine print: For the definition of "minor offenses," you've got to check with General Hagenbeck. (Laughter.)



Like every Academy graduate who came before, each of you will leave here with a rucksack full of

memories. After you've gone out Thayer Gate for the last time, I have a feeling you'll cherish above all the friendships you've made here. You'll remember the training and testing that you've faced together, as well as the challenges you faced alone. Wherever you go in life, you'll hear the voice of the BTO telling you to keep your elbows off the table. (Laughter.) You'll think of Lake Frederick whenever you get soaked in the rain. And of course, you'll think of your dean, General Finnegan, every time you see a pair of "really cool running shoes." (Laughter.)

A friend of mine, General Norman Schwarzkopf, once said that if you "ask any West Pointer what day they remember best ... almost all of them will say it's that first day" -- R-Day -- maybe the longest in your cadet life. You didn't know any of your classmates, you weren't sure of all that lay ahead of you in Beast Barracks. If you had doubts, you overcame them. If you had fears, you mastered them. Inside of you was a basic confidence -- a sense of who you were, and of the officer you hoped to become.

But your making as an officer didn't really begin on R-Day. The process started out much further back, over many years of guidance from the ones who know you best and care about you the most. For them, too, this is an incredibly proud day. So may I suggest a grateful round of applause for the moms and dads of the Class of 2007. (Applause.)

I wish that all Americans could visit and see with their own eyes our service academies. Year in and year out, the academies prepare the finest of young Americans to protect our people, to defend the land we call home, and to serve the ideals that define this nation. In an often cynical age, the armed forces and their academies are all the more exceptional. The values of a military education -- the sense of rectitude, the devotion to duty, and the daily acceptance of personal responsibility -- are a credit to the students and to the instructors, and an example for our entire country.

Of course, as West Pointers, you belong to the very first of all of our academies, a place in steady service to the United States for more than two centuries. There's a saying here -- that "much of the history we teach was made by the people we taught." By training the senior leadership of the Army, this institution has been absolutely critical to fighting and winning America's wars. If there had never been a Long Gray Line, I doubt that America would still be a free nation today. Dwight Eisenhower, class of 1915, stated the case perfectly. "West Point," he said, "is a national asset beyond all price."



It is rare in West Point history for a class to join during wartime, and to graduate in the midst of that same war. But this, too, is part of the story of the Class of 2007. You came here knowing these four years would pass; the courses would be finished; this day of commissioning would arrive -- and you

would then become responsible for the well being of men and women under your command. You are trained and prepared for battlefield leadership. And you follow in the path of many alumni already in the fight. More than 25 graduates of this Academy now on active duty have earned the Silver Star. And in Iraq, the Multinational Force is led by a superb officer, General Dave Petraeus, class of 1974. (Applause.)

In the group that graduates today, and among the cadets watching from the stands, we have dozens of future officers that are already combat veterans. You've been to Iraq and Afghanistan. You've seen the enemy and his tactics. You've been part of an Army that has faced unprecedented challenges; an Army at war that is, without question, the finest ever fielded by the United States of America. (Applause.)

We're fighting a war on terror because the enemy attacked us first, and hit us hard. Scarcely 50 miles from this place, we saw thousands of our fellow citizens murdered, and 16 acres of a great city turned to ashes. Others were killed within view of the White House, at the headquarters of our military at the Pentagon. Many heroes emerged that day, both on board an aircraft over Pennsylvania and among the rescue teams, and they, too, died in the hundreds.

These are events we can never forget. And they are scenes the enemy would like to see played out in this country over and over again, on a larger and larger scale.

Al Qaeda's leadership has said they have the right to "kill four million Americans, two million of them children, and to exile twice as many and to wound and cripple thousands." We know they are looking for ways of doing just that -- by plotting in secret, by slipping into the country, and exploiting any vulnerability they can find.

We know, also, that they're working feverishly to obtain ever more destructive weapons, and using every form of technology they can get their hands on. And this makes the business of fighting this war as urgent and time-sensitive as any task this nation has ever taken on. As the Director of National Intelligence, Admiral Mike McConnell, said recently, "The time needed to develop a terrorist plot, communicate it around the globe, and put it into motion has been drastically reduced. The time line is no longer a calendar, it is a watch."

For nearly six years now, the United States has been able to defeat their attempts to attack us here at home. Nobody can guarantee that we won't be hit again. But we've been safe because a lot of very dedicated professionals have been working relentlessly to protect the homeland. Our government has used every legitimate tool to counter the activities of an enemy that likely has cells inside our own country. We've improved our security arrangements, reorganized intelligence capabilities, surveilled and interrogated the enemy, and worked closely with friends and allies to track terrorist movements.

All of these steps have been necessary to harden the target and to protect the American people. But



we've also understood, from the early hours of September 11th, that we cannot wage this fight strictly on the defensive. We have to go after the terrorists, shut down their training camps, take down their networks, deny them sanctuary, and bring them to justice. In that effort, some of the most difficult and dangerous work has been carried out by the U.S. Army. America is the kind of country that stands up to brutality, terror, and injustice. And you are the kind of people we depend on to get the job done. (Applause.)

The standards of this Academy only highlight the deepest and most fundamental difference between the United States and our sworn enemies. A month ago, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs, General Pace, spoke to this class about each officer's duty to follow a moral compass in all of his or her actions. In these four years you have learned the rules of warfare and professional military ethics. You've studied the tenets of morality. You've reflected on the seven Army values: of loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service, honor, integrity, and personal courage. You have lived by a code of honor, and internalized that code as West Point men and women always do.



As Army officers on duty in the war on terror, you will now face enemies who oppose and despise everything you know to be right, every notion of upright conduct and character, and every belief you consider worth fighting for and living for. Capture one of these killers, and he'll be quick to demand the protections of the Geneva Convention and the Constitution of the United States. Yet when they wage attacks or take captives, their delicate sensibilities seem to fall away. These are men who glorify murder and suicide. Their cruelty is not rebuked by human suffering, only fed by it. They have given themselves to an ideology that rejects tolerance, denies freedom of conscience, and demands that women be pushed to the margins of society. The terrorists are defined entirely by their hatreds, and they hate nothing more than the country you have volunteered to defend.

The terrorists know what they want and they will stop at nothing to get it. By force and intimidation, they seek to impose a dictatorship of fear, under which every man, woman, and child lives in total obedience to their ideology. Their ultimate goal is to establish a totalitarian empire, a caliphate, with Baghdad as its capital. They view the world as a battlefield and they yearn to hit us again. And now they have chosen to make Iraq the central front in their war against civilization.

In Iraq today, the al Qaeda network that struck America is one of the elements trying to destroy a democratic government. They are surging their capabilities, attacking Iraqi and American forces, and killing innocent civilians. America is fighting this enemy in Iraq because that is where they have gathered. We are there because, after 9/11, we decided to deny terrorists any safe haven. We are there because, having removed Saddam Hussein, we promised not to allow another dictator to



rise in his place.

And we are there because the security of this nation depends on a successful outcome. The war on terror does not have to be an endless war. But to prevail in the long run, we must remove the conditions that inspire such blind, prideful hatred that drove 19 men to get onto airplanes and come to kill us on 9/11. We know from history that when people live in freedom, answering to their own conscience and charting their own destiny, they will not be drawn to the ideologies of hatred and violence. We know, as well, that when people are given the chance to live in freedom, most of them will make that choice.



The people of Iraq now have a chance to secure their country's future. More than 300,000 of them have joined security forces -- despite all the threats, and murders, and car bombs at recruiting stations. And when it was time for national elections, the Iraqi people defied the killers and voted at a higher rate of turnout than we have here in the United States. In the struggle against terror, no country has had more battlefield deaths, or lost more civilians, than Iraq itself. They and their elected leaders are striving to preserve democracy against direct attack by merciless enemies. And they can know that our country, as in other times and other places, stands firmly for the cause of democracy.

The stakes are high on both sides, and it is still tough going in that country. General Petraeus has said the operational environment is the most complex and challenging he's ever seen. Yet there's reason for confidence as more locals get into the fight, as more good intelligence comes in, as the government stays focused on the hard work of national reconciliation.

There is another reason for confidence in this effort. The single most reliable fact of this war is the skill and courage of the American soldiers fighting it. You're about to become leaders in an amazing Army -- an all-volunteer force that has carried out tough missions in a time of great need for our country. They have endured long deployments, separation from family, and loss of comrades. They have fought boldly and courageously, from the cold mountains of Afghanistan to the dust and heat of the Middle Eastern desert. Now they're going to look to you for leadership, and it'll be your job to provide that leadership and to take care of them.

With your commissions, a great deal will be expected of you. And you're entitled to expect some things in return. You deserve the tools and the backing to do your work, wherever duty takes you. At the same time, you deserve the support that makes life easier for your loved ones, because uniformed service is a shared commitment, and nobody in America shows more patience and understanding than our military families. (Applause.)





Down in Washington, D.C., we air differences and argue back and forth on matters of policy. It's always that way, and there's nothing wrong with it. But we need to remember that when all the speeches are given, and the debates fall silent, and the decisions are made, it falls to men and women like you to bear the battle. May all of us who sit at desks and set policy never fail to appreciate that. (Applause.)

Last night, President Bush signed into law the war supplemental that we worked hard to achieve. As we look to the future, I want to say this to the graduates, and to all the men and women of the Corps, and to the families gathered in this stadium today: Whatever lies ahead, the United States Army will have all the equipment, supplies, manpower, training, and support essential to victory. I give you this assurance on behalf of the President. You soldier for him, and he will soldier for you. (Applause.)

With each man and woman who passes through this Academy, the mission of West Point -- to build a "leader of character committed to the values of Duty, Honor, Country and prepared for a career of professional excellence and service to the nation". Today, the 26th of May, 2007, West Point has again fulfilled that mission, with nearly one thousand exceedingly well prepared second lieutenants.

Many in this country dream of becoming commissioned officers in the United States Army. Yet of these, only a small fraction ever reach that goal. The ones who have done so today have chosen a motto for their class: "Always Remember, Never Surrender." Those are not idle words for a group in which more than 70 percent are going into combat arms. And it makes everyone in this stadium all the more proud to witness your commissioning. (Applause.) We admire the Class of 2007 for the men and women you are, and for the officers you've now become.

As we meet, members of the United States armed forces are serving in nearly 80 different countries -- from the broader Middle East, to Europe, to Southeast Asia, to Latin America, and to Africa. At every post, they serve honorably to keep the commitments of our great nation. We're a country that proclaims high ideals. And more than that, we're a country that stands up for those ideals, by defending the innocent, bringing hope and relief to the helpless, and confronting the violent. This world we live in is a better place for the power, and influence, and the values of the United States of America. Americans are rightly proud of our country. We're a patriotic people, and we show that devotion in many different ways. And the bravest way of all is to take up the profession of arms.

On your first day of Army life, each one of you raised your right hand and took an oath. And you will swear again today to defend the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic. That is your vow, that is the business you're in. Your country has prepared you, and now your country is counting on you. I know that each one of you will serve with skill, and carry yourself with honor, and take care of your soldiers, because that is the way of the West Point officer.

Thank you for your service. Godspeed to the United States Military Academy Class of 2007. (Applause.)

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