

It may not have many ships, but I'm told, has more admirals than any other Navy in the world [laughter], which I just used as an excuse to tell you a joke that I really love. It was one of those kinds of jokes that President Reagan liked so much. Back in the bad old days of the old Soviet Union, about the only good thing that was produced in the evil empire were jokes—black humor about what it was like to live under tyranny. And one of those jokes concerns a country that also had no coastline—Czechoslovakia. The story, it seems, was that a society woman found herself at a dinner seated next to the Czech minister of Naval Affairs. And she said, "I don't understand this, I thought Czechoslovakia doesn't have a coastline." He said, "We don't." "Well," she asked, "then how can you have a Navy?" And he said, "We don't." She said, "Well then how can you have a Minister of Naval Affairs?" To which he said, "Well, the Soviet Union has a Minister of Justice." [Laughter]

At any rate, time to get serious. Last July on the first of four trips I have now made to Iraq, we visited up north with the 101st Airborne Division. A brigade commander told me that when he explained their mission to his soldiers, what he told them is, what they're doing is every bit as important as what their grandfathers did in defeating fascism in Germany or Japan in World War II or what their fathers did in defeating communism in Korea or Europe during the Cold War.

That colonel, I think, is right. Our forces today face the most recent evil mutation of totalitarianism. It's not religion. It's an evil.

And in fighting that evil, America's troops today are helping to transform two formerly totalitarian states that are becoming America's newest allies, allies in the free world and champions of moderation and freedom in the Muslim world.

It's no exaggeration to say that Americans serving today are changing history in a way that will make America and the world safer for us and for our children and for our grandchildren. And at an individual level, I can also tell you, there may not be as many of them, but they're every bit as great as that "Greatest Generation."

September 11th delivered a rude and bloody awakening to Americans—and the recognition that we're in the middle of a war that had been declared on us some years before. We didn't go looking for this fight—it came to us.

Terrorist extremists declared war, not only on the civilized world and on the ideas of freedom and pluralism, democracy and economic development, they declared war particularly on Muslims who don't share their twisted view of the teachings of that great religion. In their attacks, they routinely murder innocents, including innocent Muslim women and children.

Certainly one of the lessons of September 11th has to be that the United States and the free world must be vigilant. We must be committed to connecting the dots and acting before it's too late to act. When terrorists plot their next attacks, rarely do they telegraph their exact coordinates from their dark and murky world. If we wait until their intentions are clear, clear beyond a reasonable doubt, we will probably have waited too long.

In the case of both Iraq and Afghanistan, both of those totalitarian regimes were given chances to come clean. Both of them failed the test. In Saddam's case in particular, he thumbed his nose at the expressed will of the international community, expressed in 17 successive U.N. Security Council Resolutions. The 17th and final one, U.N. Resolution 1441, required that he declare everything that he had and not obstruct inspectors. David Kay, who was best known for his comments on the quality of intelligence—and I might say he commented not just on intelligence in this administration or in the last administration, he was commenting on intelligence not just in the United States, but in France and Germany, all around the world.

There were reasons people got it wrong—because Saddam was hiding what he had. But David Kay himself