

## Keynote Address:

### President Bush and the Middle East (full transcript)

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Stephen Hadley served as national security advisor in the George W. Bush administration.

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In-Depth Reports

**O**n October 15, 2004, Stephen Hadley addressed the 2004 Weinberg Founders Conference. Mr. Hadley is assistant to the president and deputy national security advisor. Following is transcript of his presentation.

**[Read a summary of his remarks. \(templateC05.php?CID=2175\)](#)**

I want to talk tonight a bit about the way ahead in the Middle East-how we can achieve progress in the region and how that progress can benefit not only the people of the region, but the rest of the world. And we have an opportunity to make progress, but to seize that opportunity, we will need to champion the cause of freedom and democracy in the region. And we will need to make progress in the war on terror. For today, the greatest obstacles to progress are the adherence of an ideology of terror, mass murder, and hatred. So, to understand the prospects for true progress in the Middle East, we need to understand how to make progress on the war on terror.

In February of 1998, al-Qaeda issued a declaration of war against the United States. It includes the following directive: "The killing of Americans and their allies, civilian and military, is an individual duty of every Muslim in any country in which it is possible." This is an enemy who makes no distinction between military and civilian targets, between men and women, between adults and children. This is an enemy that is as dangerous as any enemy we have ever faced.

The president has adopted a two-pronged strategy to win the war on terror: First, we will confront terror networks and the states that support them. And second, we will support the spread of democracy, prosperity and reform as the alternatives to tyranny, hopelessness, and despair. Our immediate security depends on the first prong; our long-term victory depends on the second. And this strategy frames our approach to the Middle East peace.

On September 11, 2001, President Bush made a decision. America will not wait for its enemies to strike before acting against them. We will instead take the fight to the enemy. We will fight the terrorists in their sanctuaries, not in our homeland. [Applause.]

The war that the terrorists began will be fought and finished on our terms, not theirs.

The first battle of that war was to strike the al-Qaeda network, to capture or kill its members, to cut off its finances,

and to take away its safe havens. Since then, more than three-quarters of al-Qaeda's known leaders and associates have been detained or killed. And we've ended their sanctuary in Afghanistan.

Three years ago, Afghanistan was home to dozens of training camps that graduated thousands of trained killers over the course of half a decade. Today, those camps have been destroyed. The Taliban regime, which sheltered and supported al-Qaeda, has been overthrown, and a free Afghan government is helping American soldiers hunt Taliban and al-Qaeda terrorists. And last week, millions of Afghans voted in an historic presidential election. We won't know the results for another two weeks, but we already know that the Afghan people and the cause of freedom are the winners.

Our terrorist enemies are not limited to al-Qaeda. Terrorist sanctuary was not exclusive to Afghanistan. Terrorist ambitions did not end on September 11. The only way to secure our nation over the long term is to wage a broad war against this global menace. So, rather than seeking a narrow win, President Bush is working for a broad victory, a lasting peace, and a better world.

Since September 11, America has built a coalition of some ninety countries that are sharing intelligence and working together to combat the threat from transnational terrorism. Together with our partners, we've disrupted terrorist plots and broken up terrorist cells in France, Germany, Jordan, Oman, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Morocco, Singapore, the United Arab Emirates, and the United Kingdom.

Afghanistan, under the Taliban, made the wrong choice, and the Taliban regime suffered the consequences. Through twelve years and seventeen UN Security Council Resolutions, Iraq, under Saddam Hussein, also made the wrong choice. After exhausting diplomacy and giving Saddam one last chance for peace, war became the weapon of last resort. We knew Saddam Hussein's record of aggression against his neighbors and his support for terror. We knew his long history of pursuing and even using weapons of mass destruction. As the Duelfer report shows, the sanctions imposed on Saddam were not only failing, but he was actually leveraging them to his advantage.

Our choice was not between a benign status quo and the bloodshed of war; it was between war now or a greater threat in the future. After September 11, our country had to do things differently, taking threats seriously before they fully materialized. We could not afford to underestimate the threat from places like Iraq, where weapons of mass destruction and support for terror converged.

In contrast to Saddam's Iraq and Taliban's Afghanistan, other nations have made a different choice and the right choice in the war on terror. Libya, a longtime supporter of terror and a pursuer of the world's most dangerous weapons, has chosen a new path. It has given up its chemical weapons, and elements of its nuclear weapons program are now under lock and key in a U.S. laboratory in Oakridge, Tennessee.

Not long ago, al-Qaeda was actively recruiting in Pakistan, without serious opposition. Today, Pakistan is a friend and an ally; and has helped capture such killers as Khalid Sheikh Mohammad, the operational planner behind the September 11 attacks.

Until recently, terrorists drew support from contacts inside Saudi Arabia and faced little scrutiny from the government. Today the Saudi government is shutting down the facilitators and financial supporters of terrorism and has captured or killed many of the top al-Qaeda leaders within its borders. While there is more to do in each of these countries, they are now on the right path.

A third group of states have yet to make the right choice on the war on terror. And in each case, we are pursuing a vigorous diplomatic strategy along with our friends and allies.

Iran's oppressive theocracy seeks weapons of mass destruction and long-range delivery systems; they sponsor terror, oppose peace in the Middle East, and meddle in the affairs of neighboring countries -- most notably in Iraq.

We are working with our partners in the international community to shine a spotlight on the regime's abuses at home and abroad. And we are working with other nations and with the International Atomic Energy Agency to expose Iran's nuclear weapons program and to persuade Iran to abandon this effort.

We made it clear to the regime in Syria that it cannot serve as a safe haven for terrorists and that it must take steps to halt the activities of states, individuals, and organizations that direct and engage in violence and terror. We have called on the Syrian government to halt its pursuit of weapons of mass destruction and, in accordance with UN Security Council Resolution 1559, to withdraw Syrian forces from Lebanon and allow the Lebanese army to extend its authority throughout the country. We believe there may be hope for improved relations with Syria, but only if there is a change in Syrian behavior and performance.

In this global war on terror the stakes are enormous, but so is the opportunity. Two years ago, a group of Arab scholars working for the UN published the Arab Human Development Report. In it, they argued that "There is a substantial lag between Arab countries and other regions in terms of participatory governance." And they explicitly linked this lag to lower income, slower growth, weaker education and health care, and many other problems plaguing the region. As the president has said, these are not the failures of a culture or a religion. Rather, these are the failures of political and economic doctrines.

By addressing the needs of the region for political and economic reform, the president believes we are not only improving the lives of its people, but we also contribute to progress in the war on terror. The president's long-term vision is to make the world safer by making it better. But the goal of a better world requires that conventional wisdom be challenged and that failed approaches be changed. From his first days in office, the president has demonstrated a willingness to do this.

One of these failed approaches concerns America's historic approach to the Middle East. For too long, America looked the other way while people in the region suffered under oppressive regimes. For too long, the West sacrificed its democratic principles on the altar of maintaining stability. But sixty years of excusing and accommodating the lack of freedom in the Middle East did nothing to make the world safer. Because, in the end, stability cannot be purchased at the expense of liberty.

President Bush has long believed that as long as the Middle East remains a place where freedom does not flourish, it will remain a place of stagnation, resentment, and violence ready for export. The president's approach is a forward strategy of freedom to promote democracy throughout the Middle East. He believes that -- as in Europe, as in Asia, as in every region of the world -- the advance of freedom leads to peace. This strategy requires the same persistence and energy and idealism we've shown before, but it will yield the same results.

The failure of past thinking seems self-evident, and yet the skepticism that met the president's new forward strategy for freedom was pointed. Many predicted that we'd never see the very first steps toward democracy in the region that we've already seen come to pass. Some thought Afghanistan too primitive for democratic elections. Some predicted that Iraq would break apart into Sunni, Kurd, and Shia enclaves. Yet, we are witnessing today in both countries the power of freedom and democracy to provide the basis for national unity and the means to bridge gaps between religion, cultures, and tribes.

The president's initiatives and these first successes, have encouraged a broader debate in the region. In recent months, political, civil society, and business leaders from the Middle East have met to discuss modernization and reform and have issued stirring calls for political, economic, and social change.

Jackson Diehl recently wrote in the Washington Post that "Independent human rights groups and pro-democracy movements around the region are continuing to sprout, gather, and issue manifestos." From Morocco to Jordan to Bahrain, we're seeing elections, new protections for women, and the beginnings of political pluralism.

When it comes to the desire for liberty and justice, there is no clash of civilizations. The march of democracy and freedom will strike a major blow against our terrorist enemies, and they know it. Here is what the terrorist Abu Musab al-Zarqawi wrote about the prospect for a democratic Iraq. He wrote, "Democracy is coming to Iraq and there will be no excuse thereafter. We pack our bags in search of another land. This is suffocation."

These terrorists are learning what we have known for decades: real stability comes from a democratic peace. This was the lesson of post-World War II Europe and the post-Cold War world. As people see they can realize their aspirations through peaceful means, the temptation to resort to violence lessens. This will make the region more peaceful and America more secure. Al-Zarqawi knows that vibrant, successful democracies at the heart of the Middle East will discredit their radical ideology. And we know that there is not a democracy in the world today that threatens the United States.

Democracy and reform are also at the heart of President Bush's approach to the Arab-Israeli conflict. Here, too, the president saw a strategic opportunity and was not afraid to break with conventional wisdom to pursue it. That conventional wisdom held that Yasir Arafat's position as the Palestinian arbiter of progress was sacrosanct. It also presumed that the negotiation of borders was the starting point for progress toward an overall settlement. And finally, conventional wisdom -- again trying to purchase stability at the price of liberty -- ignored the corruption and oppression within the Palestinian community. But just as the tradeoff failed the region as a whole, so has it failed the Palestinian people. And so has it failed the cause of peace between Israelis and Palestinians.

President Bush believes that the kind and quality of Palestinian government is as important to Middle East peace as the disposition of borders. The Palestinian state must have a government that is worthy of the dreams of the Palestinian people for their children, and that is a government that the Israeli people can feel comfortable having as a neighbor. This means a government based in democracy, rule of law, respect for human rights, and a leadership willing to fight terror. [Applause.]

Such a government could be a real partner for Israel in the solution to the difficult problems involved in a permanent peace in the Middle East. Creating such a government is the right road to the president's vision of two states, Israel and Palestine, living side-by-side in peace and security.

Already, the president's policy has changed the terms of the debate in the Middle East. Palestinians are beginning to demand accountability and transparency from their government. They are beginning to voice their frustration with corruption, endless violence, and an ever-declining living standard.

The Palestinian people must replace the failed leadership of decades and build a functioning democracy based on tolerance and liberty. A Palestinian state will require a vibrant economy where honest enterprise is encouraged by honest government.

The United States, the EU, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund are ready to work with a committed Palestinian leadership to reform and develop the Palestinian economy and to help build democratic and accountable political institutions. The world awaits the emergence of a genuine and courageous Palestinian leadership to guide the Palestinian people to a better future. America and the international community stand ready to help.

Other states have responsibilities as well. Arab states committed to peace will end incitement to violence in their official media; cut off public and private funding for terrorism, and establish normal relations with Israel.

Israel must take concrete steps to support the emergence of a viable Palestinian state. Israeli forces will need to withdraw fully to the positions they held prior to September 28, 2000. And, as the Roadmap states, Israeli settlement activity in the occupied territories must stop. As violence subsides, freedom of movement must be restored, permitting innocent Palestinians to resume work and normal life.

Prime Minister Sharon's plan for disengagement from Gaza can significantly advance this vision. The plan stands to do more than just begin the withdrawal of Israeli forces and the dismantling of all Israeli settlements in Gaza and four settlements in the West Bank. It offers the Palestinian people a down payment on a Palestinian state and an opportunity to run their own affairs in Gaza. This disengagement plan should provide a new impetus for reform of Palestinian institutions and the emergence of new leadership.

President Bush's policies represent a positive path to a safer and better Middle East. They are giving hope to people throughout the region, who courageously advocate the blessings of liberty. They offer an alternative future to the ideologies of terror, hatred, and oppression.

Since he announced his Middle East Roadmap two years ago, history has taken the measure of the parties, leaders, and interests in this drama. Some have shown themselves to be of the future, some of the past. But we are seeing the beginnings of a positive trend. The president believes that a better future for Arabs, Palestinians, and Israelis is within the grasp of those willing to reach for it. Thank you very much. ❖

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