

Commencement Address at West Point

George W. Bush

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1 Thank you very much, General Lennox. Mr. Secretary, Governor Pataki, members of the United
2 States Congress, Academy staff and faculty, distinguished guests, proud family members, and
3 graduates: I want to thank you for your welcome. Laura and I are especially honored to visit this
4 great institution in your bicentennial year.

5 In every corner of America, the words "West Point" command immediate respect. This place
6 where the Hudson River bends is more than a fine institution of learning. The United States
7 Military Academy is the guardian of values that have shaped the soldiers who have shaped the
8 history of the world.

9 A few of you have followed in the path of the perfect West Point graduate, Robert E. Lee, who
10 never received a single demerit in four years. Some of you followed in the path of the imperfect
11 graduate, Ulysses S. Grant, who had his fair share of demerits, and said the happiest day of his
12 life was "the day I left West Point." During my college years I guess you could say I was a Grant
13 man.

14 You walk in the tradition of Eisenhower and MacArthur, Patton and Bradley - the commanders
15 who saved a civilization. And you walk in the tradition of second lieutenants who did the same,
16 by fighting and dying on distant battlefields.

17 Graduates of this academy have brought creativity and courage to every field of endeavor. West
18 Point produced the chief engineer of the Panama Canal, the mind behind the Manhattan Project,
19 the first American to walk in space. This fine institution gave us the man they say invented
20 baseball, and other young men over the years who perfected the game of football.

21 You know this, but many in America don't -- George C. Marshall, a VMI graduate, is said to
22 have given this order: "I want an officer for a secret and dangerous mission. I want a West Point
23 football player."

24 As you leave here today, I know there's one thing you'll never miss about this place: Being a
25 plebe. But even a plebe at West Point is made to feel he or she has some standing in the world.
26 I'm told that plebes, when asked whom they outrank, are required to answer this: "Sir, the
27 Superintendent's dog, the Commandant's cat, and all the admirals in the whole damn Navy." I
28 probably won't be sharing that with the Secretary of the Navy.

29 West Point is guided by tradition, and in honor of the "Golden Children of the Corps," I will
30 observe one of the traditions you cherish most. As the Commander-in-Chief, I hereby grant
31 amnesty to all cadets who are on restriction for minor conduct offenses. Those of you in the end
32 zone might have cheered a little early. Because, you see, I'm going to let General Lennox define
33 exactly what "minor" means.

Every West Point class is commissioned to the Armed Forces. Some West Point classes are also commissioned by history, to take part in a great new calling for their country. Speaking here to the class of 1942 -- six months after Pearl Harbor -- General Marshall said, "We're determined that before the sun sets on this terrible struggle, our flag will be recognized throughout the world as a symbol of freedom on the one hand, and of overwhelming power on the other."

Officers graduating that year helped fulfill that mission, defeating Japan and Germany, and then reconstructing those nations as allies. West Point graduates of the 1940s saw the rise of a deadly new challenge -- the challenge of imperial communism -- and opposed it from Korea to Berlin, to Vietnam, and in the Cold War, from beginning to end. And as the sun set on their struggle, many of those West Point officers lived to see a world transformed.

History has also issued its call to your generation. In your last year, America was attacked by a ruthless and resourceful enemy. You graduate from this Academy in a time of war, taking your place in an American military that is powerful and is honorable. Our war on terror is only begun, but in Afghanistan it was begun well.

I am proud of the men and women who have fought on my orders. America is profoundly grateful for all who serve the cause of freedom, and for all who have given their lives in its defense. This nation respects and trusts our military, and we are confident in your victories to come.

This war will take many turns we cannot predict. Yet I am certain of this: Wherever we carry it, the American flag will stand not only for our power, but for freedom. Our nation's cause has always been larger than our nation's defense. We fight, as we always fight, for a just peace -- a peace that favors human liberty. We will defend the peace against threats from terrorists and tyrants. We will preserve the peace by building good relations among the great powers. And we will extend the peace by encouraging free and open societies on every continent

Building this just peace is America's opportunity, and America's duty. From this day forward, it is your challenge, as well, and we will meet this challenge together. You will wear the uniform of a great and unique country. America has no empire to extend or utopia to establish. We wish for others only what we wish for ourselves -- safety from violence, the rewards of liberty, and the hope for a better life

In defending the peace, we face a threat with no precedent. Enemies in the past needed great armies and great industrial capabilities to endanger the American people and our nation. The attacks of September the 11th required a few hundred thousand dollars in the hands of a few dozen evil and deluded men. All of the chaos and suffering they caused came at much less than the cost of a single tank. The dangers have not passed. This government and the American people are on watch, we are ready, because we know the terrorists have more money and more men and more plans.

The gravest danger to freedom lies at the perilous crossroads of radicalism and technology. When the spread of chemical and biological and nuclear weapons, along with ballistic missile technology -- when that occurs, even weak states and small groups could attain a catastrophic power to strike great nations. Our enemies have declared this very intention, and have been

74 caught seeking these terrible weapons. They want the capability to blackmail us, or to harm us,
75 or to harm our friends -- and we will oppose them with all our power.

76 For much of the last century, America's defense relied on the Cold War doctrines of deterrence
77 and containment. In some cases, those strategies still apply. But new threats also require new
78 thinking. Deterrence -- the promise of massive retaliation against nations -- means nothing
79 against shadowy terrorist networks with no nation or citizens to defend. Containment is not
80 possible when unbalanced dictators with weapons of mass destruction can deliver those weapons
81 on missiles or secretly provide them to terrorist allies.

82 We cannot defend America and our friends by hoping for the best. We cannot put our faith in the
83 word of tyrants, who solemnly sign non-proliferation treaties, and then systemically break them.
84 If we wait for threats to fully materialize, we will have waited too long.

85 Homeland defense and missile defense are part of stronger security, and they're essential
86 priorities for America. Yet the war on terror will not be won on the defensive. We must take the
87 battle to the enemy, disrupt his plans, and confront the worst threats before they emerge. In the
88 world we have entered, the only path to safety is the path of action. And this nation will act.

89 Our security will require the best intelligence, to reveal threats hidden in caves and growing in
90 laboratories. Our security will require modernizing domestic agencies such as the FBI, so they're
91 prepared to act, and act quickly, against danger. Our security will require transforming the
92 military you will lead -- a military that must be ready to strike at a moment's notice in any dark
93 corner of the world. And our security will require all Americans to be forward-looking and
94 resolute, to be ready for preemptive action when necessary to defend our liberty and to defend
95 our lives.

96 The work ahead is difficult. The choices we will face are complex. We must uncover terror cells
97 in 60 or more countries, using every tool of finance, intelligence and law enforcement. Along
98 with our friends and allies, we must oppose proliferation and confront regimes that sponsor
99 terror, as each case requires. Some nations need military training to fight terror, and we'll provide
100 it. Other nations oppose terror, but tolerate the hatred that leads to terror -- and that must change.
101 We will send diplomats where they are needed, and we will send you, our soldiers, where you're
102 needed.

103 All nations that decide for aggression and terror will pay a price. We will not leave the safety of
104 America and the peace of the planet at the mercy of a few mad terrorists and tyrants. We will lift
105 this dark threat from our country and from the world.

106 Because the war on terror will require resolve and patience, it will also require firm moral
107 purpose. In this way our struggle is similar to the Cold War. Now, as then, our enemies are
108 totalitarians, holding a creed of power with no place for human dignity. Now, as then, they seek
109 to impose a joyless conformity, to control every life and all of life.

110 America confronted imperial communism in many different ways -- diplomatic, economic, and
111 military. Yet moral clarity was essential to our victory in the Cold War. When leaders like John
112 F. Kennedy and Ronald Reagan refused to gloss over the brutality of tyrants, they gave hope to
113 prisoners and dissidents and exiles, and rallied free nations to a great cause.

114 Some worry that it is somehow undiplomatic or impolite to speak the language of right and
115 wrong. I disagree. Different circumstances require different methods, but not different moralities.
116 Moral truth is the same in every culture, in every time, and in every place. Targeting innocent
117 civilians for murder is always and everywhere wrong. Brutality against women is always and
118 everywhere wrong. There can be no neutrality between justice and cruelty, between the innocent
119 and the guilty. We are in a conflict between good and evil, and America will call evil by its
120 name. By confronting evil and lawless regimes, we do not create a problem, we reveal a
121 problem. And we will lead the world in opposing it.

122 As we defend the peace, we also have an historic opportunity to preserve the peace. We have our
123 best chance since the rise of the nation state in the 17th century to build a world where the great
124 powers compete in peace instead of prepare for war. The history of the last century, in particular,
125 was dominated by a series of destructive national rivalries that left battlefields and graveyards
126 across the Earth. Germany fought France, the Axis fought the Allies, and then the East fought the
127 West, in proxy wars and tense standoffs, against a backdrop of nuclear Armageddon.

128 Competition between great nations is inevitable, but armed conflict in our world is not. More and
129 more, civilized nations find ourselves on the same side -- united by common dangers of terrorist
130 violence and chaos. America has, and intends to keep, military strengths beyond challenge,
131 thereby, making the destabilizing arms races of other eras pointless, and limiting rivalries to
132 trade and other pursuits of peace.

133 Today the great powers are also increasingly united by common values, instead of divided by
134 conflicting ideologies. The United States, Japan and our Pacific friends, and now all of Europe,
135 share a deep commitment to human freedom, embodied in strong alliances such as NATO. And
136 the tide of liberty is rising in many other nations.

137 Generations of West Point officers planned and practiced for battles with Soviet Russia. I've just
138 returned from a new Russia, now a country reaching toward democracy, and our partner in the
139 war against terror. Even in China, leaders are discovering that economic freedom is the only
140 lasting source of national wealth. In time, they will find that social and political freedom is the
141 only true source of national greatness.

142 When the great powers share common values, we are better able to confront serious regional
143 conflicts together, better able to cooperate in preventing the spread of violence or economic
144 chaos. In the past, great power rivals took sides in difficult regional problems, making divisions
145 deeper and more complicated. Today, from the Middle East to South Asia, we are gathering
146 broad international coalitions to increase the pressure for peace. We must build strong and great
147 power relations when times are good; to help manage crisis when times are bad. America needs
148 partners to preserve the peace, and we will work with every nation that shares this noble goal.

149 And finally, America stands for more than the absence of war. We have a great opportunity to
150 extend a just peace, by replacing poverty, repression, and resentment around the world with hope
151 of a better day. Through most of history, poverty was persistent, inescapable, and almost
152 universal. In the last few decades, we've seen nations from Chile to South Korea build modern
153 economies and freer societies, lifting millions of people out of despair and want. And there's no
154 mystery to this achievement.

155 The 20th century ended with a single surviving model of human progress, based on non-
156 negotiable demands of human dignity, the rule of law, limits on the power of the state, respect
157 for women and private property and free speech and equal justice and religious tolerance.
158 America cannot impose this vision -- yet we can support and reward governments that make the
159 right choices for their own people. In our development aid, in our diplomatic efforts, in our
160 international broadcasting, and in our educational assistance, the United States will promote
161 moderation and tolerance and human rights. And we will defend the peace that makes all
162 progress possible.

163 When it comes to the common rights and needs of men and women, there is no clash of
164 civilizations. The requirements of freedom apply fully to Africa and Latin America and the entire
165 Islamic world. The peoples of the Islamic nations want and deserve the same freedoms and
166 opportunities as people in every nation. And their governments should listen to their hopes.

167 A truly strong nation will permit legal avenues of dissent for all groups that pursue their
168 aspirations without violence. An advancing nation will pursue economic reform, to unleash the
169 great entrepreneurial energy of its people. A thriving nation will respect the rights of women,
170 because no society can prosper while denying opportunity to half its citizens. Mothers and
171 fathers and children across the Islamic world, and all the world, share the same fears and
172 aspirations. In poverty, they struggle. In tyranny, they suffer. And as we saw in Afghanistan, in
173 liberation they celebrate.

174 America has a greater objective than controlling threats and containing resentment. We will work
175 for a just and peaceful world beyond the war on terror.

176 The bicentennial class of West Point now enters this drama. With all in the United States Army,
177 you will stand between your fellow citizens and grave danger. You will help establish a peace
178 that allows millions around the world to live in liberty and to grow in prosperity. You will face
179 times of calm, and times of crisis. And every test will find you prepared -- because you're the
180 men and women of West Point. You leave here marked by the character of this Academy,
181 carrying with you the highest ideals of our nation

182 Toward the end of his life, Dwight Eisenhower recalled the first day he stood on the plain at
183 West Point. "The feeling came over me," he said, "that the expression 'the United States of
184 America' would now and henceforth mean something different than it had ever before. From here
185 on, it would be the nation I would be serving, not myself."

186 Today, your last day at West Point, you begin a life of service in a career unlike any other.
187 You've answered a calling to hardship and purpose, to risk and honor. At the end of every day
188 you will know that you have faithfully done your duty. May you always bring to that duty the
189 high standards of this great American institution. May you always be worthy of the long gray
190 line that stretches two centuries behind you.

191 On behalf of the nation, I congratulate each one of you for the commission you've earned and for
192 the credit you bring to the United States of America. May God bless you all.