

GENERAL RICHARD B. MYERS
Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff

Remarks

National League of Families
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Thank you JoAnn Shirley for that kind introduction. Good morning ladies and gentlemen! I'd like to welcome you to Washington. This is a city of beautiful monuments that testify to the great struggle to build and defend this wonderful Nation that we enjoy. In polished granite and stone we remember fallen heroes and past sacrifices in the cause of freedom. So it's a great privilege for me to be with a special group that represents families who have sacrificed so much for our Nation. To me, you are all living monuments to the highest ideals of sacred honor and sacrifice. Your cause is my cause and my heart goes out to all of you.

One of the best parts of my job is having the chance to travel the world and visit our men and women who are serving their country ... engaged in another great struggle. It means a lot to me to look these young soldiers, sailors, airmen, marines, and coastguardsmen in the eye and personally thank them for their service in challenging times. And they're not complaining about a thing. I know their Moms and Dads and families are worried about them. But they just go about their work. They are great heroes.

It's also great to be able to look you in the eye this morning and say "thank you" to all of you who have also given so much for your country. The sacrifice of those you hold most precious - your husbands, your brothers, your fathers, your sons - place you in the pantheon of American heroes.

Let me assure you that our government is exploring every possible avenue, every means of influence to achieve the fullest possible accounting for our fallen and missing heroes. President Bush made this very clear in his annual certification to Congress on Vietnam's cooperation. He indicated that the central guiding principle of his Vietnam policy is to achieve the fullest possible accounting of our POWs and MIAs. He also made it clear that Vietnam must do more to repatriate remains, open their archives further, and place particular emphasis on the last known alive cases and those lost in Laos and Cambodia. This is a quest that we must pursue relentlessly, wherever it takes us ... for as long as it takes us until all are accounted for. I tell you that this quest is important for me not only professionally, but also personally.

A long time ago, I had the opportunity to fly in combat in Vietnam. I was an F-4 pilot at the time. That experience shaped my life in so many ways. I flew a lot of combat flight hours and during that time I lost many friends, squadron mates and fellow crew members to enemy fire. Some were killed in action and we knew it right away. Others we weren't so sure. Some became POWs, some were not accounted for. They came from all across America and they all left wonderful families behind. One of them, Charlie Plumb, a Naval Aviator held captive for over six years, was a classmate of mine at Shawnee Mission North High School in Kansas City, Kansas. And I know many, many other former POWs.

On September 11th, as you all know, we found ourselves engaged in another war, a war that certainly wasn't of our choosing. Thousands of Americans were killed on that fateful day. They came from all across America and they all left families behind. And once again, we find ourselves in that very unpleasant situation of having lost loved ones but not able to recover

their bodies.

Here at the Pentagon we were able to identify the remains of everyone who died. But in New York, over 1800 persons, men, women and children, have not been accounted for. That's over 1800 families. You know, as well as the families in New York, the very, very personal pain that goes with this rather cold statistic. If the terrorists thought that inflicting this kind of pain would cause us to cower, I think they know now that they were wrong. We are now determined to take the fight to them. And it's a fight against a very different foe. And as citizens, you have a need to know what I think about this enemy and this war. These terrorists:

- Are small in numbers
- Their cells dispersed in many different nations
- Capacity to flow in and out of countries, including our own

We know that the terrorists are:

- Adaptable
- Patient
- Disciplined
- A shrewd and cunningly smart adversary

There are great differences between the terrorists and our coalition:

- Terrorists kill civilians; our job is to protect the innocent
- We saw the bin Laden video where the terrorists joked about the deaths of their pawns, while our deepest pain is when we lose one of our comrades-in-arms
- Terrorists seek violence and bloodshed; we seek peace
- Terrorists are driven by hate; we're motivated by compassion
- Terrorists are contemptuous of human life; we respect human dignity

The message I have for you is that this war is far from over. We have a ways to go. Terrorists have been and continue to plan the next attack:

- We know that the next time the terrorists desire to use weapons of mass destruction
- We don't know where their next move will be.
- We know that terrorists will kill hundreds of thousand if they can; they have no conscience.

It's because of these facts that we are determined to see this fight through. Our freedoms and our liberties are threatened by the most hostile and hate-filled foe that we've ever seen.

And when armed Americans go to battle in distant lands, they go knowing, partly based on your work, that their country will not abandon them. They know that if one goes down in enemy territory, that individual knows that we will do everything possible to achieve a rescue. And if that soldier, sailor, airman, marine or coastguardsman is taken prisoner, we will do everything in our power to seek his release. And if that individual should perish, we will bring him or her home to America. That's our commitment - always.

I think you can look at what happened this past March during Operation ANACONDA, the largest ground operation to date in Afghanistan, to see that this commitment to get our people back is strong. You may recall that during that battle, Petty Officer Roberts, a Navy SEAL fell from a helicopter that had come under hostile fire during the initial firefight. Now, as you know, we don't plan on that kind of thing happening, but in the fog and confusion of combat, it does. But as soon as they figured out that Roberts was gone, the focus of our entire team immediately shifted to one purpose: Rescue Roberts.

I'll tell you the heroism and courage of our people are absolutely remarkable - the stories quite compelling. They leave me with the deepest respect for our men and women in uniform today. On that day, our Rangers and SEALs showed a complete disregard for their own personal safety and flew directly back into some of the most intense ground fire ever seen. They could have taken cover; but, they didn't because it would have delayed the rescue. They knew the risks, they were scared, but they overcame that fear because they refused to leave a fellow warrior alone in hostile territory. In the rescue, we lost an additional 5 soldiers and 1 airman ... some of our Nation's best. Through it all though ... these men never wavered. They are heroes. They lived up to the finest tradition of our American Fighting Men and Women.

This was not an isolated incident. All together, we rescued 65 personnel isolated in hostile territory in Afghanistan during Operation ENDURING FREEDOM. Fortunately, these other rescues didn't result in a dramatic loss of life. But, I'm convinced that, if the mission requires it, our soldiers, sailors, airmen, marines and coastguardsmen would not have hesitated in their duty.

Now we're living in a time where dangers, once encountered only in distant lands, can now reach across vast distances and threaten each of us - military and civilian alike. Our men and women in uniform are hunting down these enemies of America's freedom and make no mistake about it, no matter how long it takes we will win this war. And in doing so, we will leave no one behind. We will keep the promises made to you and to our brave warriors and pray for their safe return.

Let me close with one final point. All of you, your families and this organization, reflect the very finest qualities and character of our Nation. Thank you very much for your service and sacrifice, past and present. It's what America is all about. May God bless you and May God bless America.