



## Bush Stresses Terror Threat and Urges Support for Iraq War

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WASHINGTON, Oct. 6 - President Bush used some of his toughest language today to assert that the war in [Iraq](#) was vital to a crucial struggle against terrorists who he said intended to build a "totalitarian empire" of global reach.

He said that the [United States](#) and its partners had disrupted at least 10 serious Al Qaeda plots in recent years - including three in the United States - and had blocked five attempts to case targets or infiltrate the country.

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J. Scott Applewood/Associated Press  
President Bush speaking today to the National Endowment for Democracy at the Reagan Building in Washington.

At the White House, the president's chief spokesman, Scott McClellan, said that "off the top of my head," he thought the president was referring to the arrests of an American citizen, Jose Padilla, in Chicago in 2002, and a Pakistani immigrant, Iyman Faris, in [Ohio](#), in 2003.

Mr. Padilla is accused of conspiring with Al Qaeda to commit various terrorist acts inside the United States. Mr. Faris was accused of planning with Al Qaeda to bomb the Brooklyn Bridge and a shopping mall in Columbus, Ohio, near his home.

Mr. McClellan said he would seek information on the other events the president had mentioned, but cautioned that it might be classified.

By citing such numbers and cases, but without offering further specifics, President Bush appeared

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to be seeking to focus attention on the sweep, high stakes and successes of the antiterrorism campaign at a time when the war in Iraq has become increasingly unpopular and has opened divides even in Mr. Bush's own Republican Party.

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During his somber 40-minute speech to a pro-democracy group, Mr. Bush spoke starkly of what he said were the reach and vast ambitions of terrorists either led or inspired by Al Qaeda. Terrorists, he said, aim not only to drive the United States out of the Middle East but to build "a totalitarian empire" reaching from [Spain](#) to [Indonesia](#).

Mr. Bush also used particularly harsh language in referring to [Syria](#) and [Iran](#).

"The influence of Islamic radicalism is also magnified by helpers and enablers," the president said. "They have been sheltered by authoritarian regimes, allies of convenience, like Syria and Iran, that share the goal of hurting America and moderate Muslim governments, and use terrorist propaganda to blame their own failures on the West and America and on the Jews."

Mr. Bush was adamant in arguing that the United States must remain in Iraq until that country has gained enough stability to function on its own without posing a threat to the United States and its allies.

White House aides had billed this as a major presidential address, and it echoed recent sentiments expressed by top American generals and Vice President Dick Cheney, who have asserted that Iraq is a vital bulwark against a global terror threat and that any premature American withdrawal would hand terrorists an enormous victory.

According to surveys of American public opinion, the war in Iraq has become increasingly unpopular and is weighing on the president's approval ratings.

After the president spoke today, the Senate minority leader, Harry Reid, Democrat of [Nevada](#), offered a toughly worded analysis, saying that Mr. Bush "continued to falsely assert there is a link between the war in Iraq and the tragedy of Sept. 11th, a link that did not and does not exist."

"The truth is the administration's mishandling of the war in Iraq has made us less safe, and Iraq risks becoming what it was not before the war: a training ground for terrorists," Mr. Reid said.

The House minority leader, Nancy Pelosi, Democrat of [California](#), assailed the president's rationale as flawed and built on false assumptions - that the United States needed to invade Iraq because under Saddam Hussein it had been stockpiling weapons of mass destruction that could have been made available to terrorists.

"The president's statement that Iraq is the central front on the war on

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terror is a mistake," she said. The Bush administration "has totally mismanaged the war in Iraq" and "now he's trying to justify his actions with a series of excuses that are not reasons for us to be there."

Ms. Pelosi also renewed calls for the president to present a plan for leaving Iraq. "The president," she said, "still has not put forth a strategy for success."

Judging by a 90-to-Senate vote on Wednesday for an amendment to prevent abusive interrogations by the military, members of both parties have begun to take a more assertive stance in questioning the way the war has been waged.

In his remarks, the president sharply rejected a suggestion - hinted at even by some in the military - that the very deployment of a large United States military force in Iraq was itself a catalyst for building the insurgent and terrorist ranks.

Some critics, he said, had claimed "that our presence in that country has somehow caused or triggered the rage of radicals." But, he continued, "I would remind them that we were not in Iraq on September the 11th, 2001, and Al Qaeda attacked us anyway."

Senator Reid said later that "the truth is, the administration's mishandling of the war in Iraq has made us less safe, and Iraq risks becoming what it was not before the war: a training ground for terrorists." He said that it was vital that the administration change course in Iraq.

As he has before, President Bush compared Islamic militants' ideology with the communist expansionism of the last century. The militants were being aided, he said, "by elements of the Arab news media that incites hatred and anti-Semitism."

"Against such an enemy, there's only one effective response," Mr. Bush said, in an apparent riposte to critics seeking an immediate withdrawal of American forces. "We never back down, never give in and never accept anything less than complete victory."

Alluding to the leader of Al Qaeda in Iraq, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, President Bush said that "Zarqawi has said that Americans are, quote, the most cowardly of God's creatures."

"But let's be clear," Mr. Bush continued. "It is cowardice that seeks to kill children and the elderly with car bombs, and cuts the throat of a bound captive, and targets worshipers leaving a mosque. It is courage that liberated more than 50 million people. It is courage that keeps an untiring vigil against the enemies of a rising democracy, and it is courage in the cause of freedom that once again will destroy the enemies of freedom."

President Bush's remarks today, delivered before the National Endowment for Democracy, a private pro-democracy group, at the Ronald Reagan International Trade Center here, recalled a warning issued last week by Gen. John Abizaid, the head of the United States Central Command, which oversees the campaign in Iraq.

General Abizaid told a Congressional hearing that Al Qaeda aspired to drive American forces out of the Middle East, to destroy [Israel](#), to create

a safe haven called the "caliphate," and to seize "the greatest prize of all," [Saudi Arabia](#) and the holy shrines there.

"The enemy that brought us 9/11 continues to represent one of the greatest dangers to this nation," General Abizaid said.

*Mark J. Prendergast contributed reporting from New York for this article.*

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