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Bush: America Is Safer and Winning War on Terror

President Bush sent a message to Congress and the nation Thursday, declaring that America is committed to defeating terrorism and winning "the decisive ideological struggle of the 21st Century."

Bush, in the third straight day of speeches aimed at reasserting the administration's plans for wining the War on Terror, told an audience in Atlanta that "we've learned the lessons of 9/11."

"We've transferred adversaries into allies," Bush told the Georgia Public Policy Foundation, in a reference to Iraq and Afghanistan. "America is safer and America is winning the War on Terror."

The president also declared the administration's intentions to pursue wider powers to fight the war, including an appeal of the recent federal court decision voiding warrantless wiretap by the National Security Agency. Bush said the program is vital to America's ability to eavesdrop on international communications involving Americans with suspected ties to terrorists.

"We strongly disagree with the federal wiretap ruling," Bush said, adding that the administration is "appealing it and we believe our appeal will be successful."

The president also repeated his plea for Congress to approve a military tribunal process to try some of the most dangerous suspected terrorists. He announced Wednesday that 14 of the most dangerous suspected terrorist leaders — including Khalid Sheik Mohammed, the alleged architect of the 9/11 attacks — had been transferred from a previously secret CIA prison program to the U.S. military's detention center at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

"The sooner the Congress authorizes the military commissions I have called for, the sooner Khalid Sheik Mohammed will receive the justice he deserves," Bush said.

The goal is eventual trials, but Congress has to approve a process for doing so after the Supreme Court said Bush's original plan for tribunals is unconstitutional and violates international laws.

The president highlighted changes in national security preparedness as a result of the 9/11 attacks to show how new strategies in place would make it more difficult for terrorists to stage a repeat.

"In order to protect this country, we will bring steady pressure, unrelenting pressure on Al Qaeda and its associates," Bush said.

He cited the elimination of Afghanistan and Iraq as safe havens for Al Qaeda.

"We've kept the terrorists from achieving their key goal of seizing control of some our most valuable allies in the War on Terror," Bush said. "This coalition includes two nations that used to sponsor terror but now help us fight it: the democratic nations of Afghanistan and Iraq."

Bush also pointed to international finance crackdowns, the new ability of the CIA and FBI to share data and intelligence, a broad restructuring of the intelligence bureaucracy to make connecting dots easier, consolidated terrorist watch lists and immigration changes that make air travel and communities safer — including the passage of the USA Patriot Act — as measures that have strengthened America's national security.

"No one can say for sure that we would have prevented the attacks" had these measures been in place, Bush said. The terrorists, however, "would have found it harder to finance... and succeed in striking their targets," he said.

The president also emphasized what he called "The Freedom Agenda."

"Free nations are peaceful nations," he said. "Democracies do not attack each other... and are less likely to fall under the sway of radicalism," a reference to the recent war between Israel and Hezbollah radicals who have attempted to seize control of Lebanon.

Bush said that America was committed to "supporting the voices of tolerance and moderation in the Muslim world," and that he believed it was important to "change the conditions that give rise to hatred" in order to "make America, the Middle East more secure."

"The free world must draw full measure of our strength and resources to prevail against terrorism," Bush said, adding:

"We will stay, we will fight and we will win in Iraq."

• Raw Data: List of 14 Terror Suspects

The series of Bush speeches are leading up to his trip to New York on Monday's fifth anniversary of the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks. Bush will visit Ground Zero, the Pentagon and the Pennsylvania field where Flight 93 passengers forced hijackers to crash to avoid further loss of life.

Bush detailed on Wednesday how the administration plans to legally try the more than 400 detainees held at Guantanamo Bay. The suspects will be transferred to Defense Department custody as a first step in preparing them for trial, a senior administration official. The suspects would be afforded some legal protections consistent with the Geneva Conventions, he said.

In addition to Sheik Mohammed, believed to be the No. 3 Al Qaeda leader before his capture in Pakistan in 2003, the suspects include: Ramzi



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Binalshibh, an alleged would-be Sept. 11 hijacker, and Abu Zubaydah, whom U.S. intelligence officials believe was a key link between Usama bin Laden and many Al Qaeda cells. Zubaydah was captured in Pakistan in March 2002.

The announcement of the prisoner transfers is the first time the administration has acknowledged the existence of CIA prisons, which had been reported in the media and the subject of friction between Washington and some allies in Europe. The administration has come under criticism for its treatment of terrorism detainees.

Bush referred to his comments on the CIA program as "limited disclosures" to enable intelligence officials to continue to investigate terrorists' knowledge of future attacks.

The Supreme Court ruled in June that military tribunals were never authorized by Congress and would violate U.S. and international law. Since the ruling, administration officials have been working on a new proposal to try terrorism suspects.

The legislation on how to try terror suspects faces obstacles over differences between the White House and Congress. Republican leaders and the White House say the legislation will be worked out.

Some lawmakers object to whether prosecutors could use sensitive evidence that defendants would not be allowed to see. Some Republicans say it violates constitutional rights of due process and could encourage other countries to use the same procedure against captured U.S. military personnel.

Some military lawyers back a system similar to the current system of military courts martial. Attorney General Alberto Gonzales has objected to rules that would give terror suspects the right to remain silent or challenge hearsay evidence.

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