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## Speech

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## Memorial Service in Remembrance of Those Lost on September 11th

*Remarks Prepared for Delivery by Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld, The Pentagon, Arlington, VA, Thursday, October 11, 2001 (Check Against Delivery).*

We are gathered here because of what happened here on September 11th. Events that bring to mind tragedy – but also our gratitude to those who came to assist that day and afterwards, those we saw at the Pentagon site everyday -- the guards, police, fire and rescue workers, the Defense Protective service, hospitals, Red Cross, family center professionals and volunteers and many others.

And yet our reason for being here today is something else.

We are gathered here to remember, to console and to pray.

To remember comrades and colleagues, friends and family members -- those lost to us on Sept. 11th.

We remember them as heroes. And we are right to do so. They died because – in words of justification offered by their attackers – they were Americans. They died, then, because of how they lived -- as free men and women, proud of their freedom, proud of their country and proud of their country's cause—the cause of human freedom.

And they died for another reason – the simple fact they worked here in this building -- the Pentagon.

It is seen as a place of power, the locus of command for what has been called the greatest accumulation of military might in history. And yet a might used far differently than the long course of history has usually known.

In the last century, this building existed to oppose two totalitarian regimes that sought to oppress and to rule other nations. And it is no exaggeration of historical judgment to say that without this building, and those who worked here, those two regimes would not have been stopped or thwarted in their oppression of countless millions.

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But just as those regimes sought to rule and oppress, others in this century seek to do the same by corrupting a noble religion. Our President has been right to see the similarity – and to say that the fault, the evil is the same. It is the will to power, the urge to dominion over others, to the point of oppressing them, even to taking thousands of innocent lives – or more. And that this oppression makes the terrorist a believer – not in the theology of God, but the theology of self – and in the whispered words of temptation: "Ye shall be as Gods."

In targeting this place, then, and those who worked here, the attackers, the evildoers correctly sensed that the opposite of all they were, and stood for, resided here.

Those who worked here – those who on Sept. 11 died here – whether civilians or in uniform, -- side by side they sought not to rule, but to serve. They sought not to oppress, but to liberate. They worked not to take lives, but to protect them. And they tried not to preempt God, but see to it His creatures lived as He intended – in the light and dignity of human freedom.

Our first task then is to remember the fallen as they were – as they would have wanted to be remembered – living in freedom, blessed by it, proud of it and willing – like so many others before them, and like so many today, to die for it.

And to remember them as believers in the heroic ideal for which this nation stands and for which this building exists—the ideal of service to country and to others.

Beyond all this, their deaths remind us of a new kind of evil, the evil of a threat and menace to which this nation and the world has now fully awakened, because of them.

In causing this awakening, then, the terrorists have assured their own destruction. And those we mourn today, have, in the moment of their death, assured their own triumph over hate and fear. For out of this act of terror -- and the awakening it brings -- here and across the globe -- will surely come a victory over terrorism. A victory that one day may save millions from the harm of weapons of mass destruction. And this victory – their victory -- we pledge today.

But if we gather here to remember them – we are also here to console those who shared their lives, those who loved them. And yet, the irony is that those whom we have come to console have given us the best of all consolations, by reminding us not only of the meaning of the deaths, but of the lives of their loved ones.

"He was a hero long before the eleventh of September," said a friend of one of those we have lost -- "a hero every single day, a hero to his family, to his friends and to his professional peers."

A veteran of the Gulf War – hardworking, who showed up at the Pentagon at 3:30 in the morning, and then headed home in the afternoon to be with his children – all of whom he loved dearly, but one of whom he gave very special care, because she needs very special care and love.

About him and those who served with him, his wife said: "It's not just when a plane hits their building. They are heroes every day."

"Heroes every day." We are here to affirm that. And to do this on behalf of America.

And also to say to those who mourn, who have lost loved ones: Know that the heart of America is here today, and that it speaks to each one of you words of sympathy, consolation, compassion and love. All the love that the heart of America --- and a great heart it is --- can muster.

Watching and listening today, Americans everywhere are saying: I wish I could be there to tell them how sorry we are, how much we grieve for them. And to tell them too, how thankful we are for those they loved, and that we will remember them, and recall always the meaning of their deaths and their lives.

A Marine chaplain, in trying to explain why there could be no human explanation for a tragedy such as this, said once: "You would think it would break the heart of God."

We stand today in the midst of tragedy — the mystery of tragedy. Yet a mystery that is part of that larger awe and wonder that causes us to bow our heads in faith and say of those we mourn, those we have lost, the words of scripture: "Lord now let Thy servants go in peace, Thy word has been fulfilled."

To the families and friends of our fallen colleagues and comrades we extend today our deepest sympathy and condolences – and those of the American people.

We pray that God will give some share of the peace that now belongs to those we lost, to those who knew and loved them in this life.

But as we grieve together we are also thankful – thankful for their lives, thankful for the time we had with them. And proud too — as proud as they were – that they lived their lives as Americans.

We are mindful too – and resolute that their deaths, like their lives, shall have meaning. And that the birthright of human freedom – a birthright that was theirs as Americans and for which they died – will always be ours and our children's. And through our efforts and example, one day, the birthright of every man, woman, and child on earth.



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