



**CONFERENCE  
IN BAKERSFIELD**

Bakersfield, 9<sup>th</sup> October 2004

America did not invent modern democracy. The British must be credited for that. But nobody can dispute the fact that your country, this great nation, has done the most to preserve and extend freedom and liberty throughout the world.

You fought totalitarianism and tyranny in Europe, and you actually defeated Nazism and Communism, the two extreme threats to our freedom and prosperity in the 20th century. You paid a high price, as the many war cemeteries that exist prove, but we all enjoy the benefits of your vision and sacrifice.

America is loved in its role as the leader of the free world, the leader of the West. But at the same time, some resent your special status. Some will never accept the fact that, following the Soviet collapse, you became the only real superpower, and that you are a truly benevolent superpower.

There is more to this matter. In some quarters, you were, and you still are, even hated. This hatred is based on what you are, not on what you do, a hatred based on what you believe, not on how you act.

Many in the Muslim World, including the fundamentalists who present themselves as the sword of the prophet, see America as a subversive force. They call you the Great Satan, because the trinity of science, democracy and the free market make America an irresistibly powerful temptation for all people who wish to gain human dignity and prosperity. Everywhere.

And they are right. You are, as a nation, a powerful tool for change throughout the world. A force for good, promoting development, democracy and security.

On September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001, as in Madrid last March 11<sup>th</sup>, Islamic terrorists attacked you, attacked us, because they wanted to end our dreams, they wanted to abolish our way of life: tolerance and equal rights for everyone, irrespective of gender, race or faith, individual choice, and individual rights.

On September 11<sup>th</sup> Bin Laden declared war on the USA and on the modern world.

Two types of people emerged after those events: those who believe the world should remain the same; and those who believe we are now living under radically different conditions, threatened by a new existential menace called Islamic terrorism.

A second distinction can also be made between those who tend to believe that we cannot fight terror successfully and, therefore, had better adopt a conciliatory approach, learning to live with and manage terrorist demands; and those who believe terrorism can be dealt with and that terrorism can be defeated.

I belong to the group that believes that the terrorist attacks did, indeed, change the world, and also to the group that believes that terror can be fought, stopped and defeated. There is no magical

recipe to achieve this, although an approach does exist founded on sound strategic choices, moral clarity and patient policies.

Back in 1995, when I was leader of the Opposition in Spain, the Basque terrorist organization, ETA, ordered that I be assassinated. They used a car bomb, but I survived. During my last days as President of the Spanish Government I suffered the worst terrorist attack in our history. Four trains were bombed, 192 civilians were killed and more than 1,500 were injured, many of whom are still recovering.

Believe me, when it comes to terror, I know what I am talking about.

But I also know, as I knew then, that fear must be confronted, that the worst mistake is to try to make concessions, because terror cannot be appeased or contained. There is no other alternative than to defeat it.

Bin Laden attacked New York and Washington because he wanted to bring America to her knees. He wanted to show you and show the rest of the world that the only superpower, America, was in fact a “paper tiger”. Fortunately, he miscalculated.

He miscalculated, not only in terms of his bold attack, but in terms of the reaction he aroused in the American leadership, backed by the strong support of you, the American people. American troops went to Afghanistan, not in search of revenge, but in search of justice; they did not go there in order to punish, but in order to find security.

And today their mission in Iraq is not based on a shellfish dream, but on a desire to promote a democratic future for the Iraqis and a change throughout the whole region that could bring hope to many millions of decent Arab and Muslim people.

No democrat should be ashamed of these goals.

You have enemies, it is true. But, as I said before, they do not hate you because your actions are wrong. On the contrary, they cannot bear what you do best: defending freedom and promoting prosperity.

But you must remember that you also have friends. You are not alone in fighting barbarism. Months before the military intervention in Iraq, I was asked by a journalist whether I was going to support President Bush's policy to remove Saddam Hussein from power. I replied to him: "If you are asking me to choose between President Bush and Saddam, my choice is clear. I choose President Bush". I did the same with President Clinton in 1998. It was not a decision made on partisan grounds or personal feelings. It was a rational choice between freedom and tyranny, between justice and injustice, between morality and selfishness, between security and vulnerability.

You have all the necessary resources to prevail. But there is something you should avoid if you wish to secure victory over terror. You must learn to be patient, although patience and endurance have nothing to do with feelings of defeatism.

This is going to be a long war, simply because it cannot be won by simply chasing terrorists all over the world. Success will also depend on transforming societies where anti-Western, anti-American and anti-modern feelings are skillfully nurtured. And this will be a slow process.

Nevertheless, this is not the first time in history that you have successfully fought your enemies and changed the very nature of their countries. Look at Germany or Japan some 50 years ago and look at them today!

This is what has made America so great. And you can be sure that this is what will make America even greater tomorrow.