Bush Shields U.S., Cheney Says
The vice president says "sound policy decisions" by the president, and a vigilant government, have deterred terrorist strikes since 9/11.
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RENO — Vice President Dick Cheney said Monday that "sound policy decisions" by the Bush administration were the reason the United States had not been attacked by terrorists since Sept. 11, 2001.

Speaking at a Veterans of Foreign Wars convention here as the fifth anniversary of the attacks approached, Cheney said that terrorists had mounted successful attacks on targets overseas, including Madrid; London; and Jakarta, Indonesia — but not in the United States.

"No one can guarantee that we won't be struck again. But to have come this far without another attack is no accident," Cheney said, crediting "sound" decisions by President Bush and vigilance by U.S. agencies and the military.

Cheney's claim of credit for the absence of attacks, a frequent theme in his recent speeches, contrasts sharply with criticism by Democrats and others who charge the administration has left the U.S. more vulnerable to terrorism by focusing on the war in Iraq.

The Sept. 11 anniversary and the November congressional elections will feature a struggle between the administration and its opponents to influence public impressions of 9/11 and the war in Iraq. Bush and his top war advisors are pushing the administration's case in high-profile appearances before veterans groups this week to address that fight.

Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld also addressed VFW members Monday, warning against a weakening of U.S. will. Rumsfeld, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Bush also planned to address the American Legion, which is holding a convention this week in Salt Lake City.

In his address, Cheney said that Iraq was a key part of the administration's anti-terrorism effort and that pulling out would be a mistake.

"A precipitous withdrawal from Iraq would be a victory for the terrorists, an invitation to further violence against free nations, and a ruinous blow to the future security of the United States," he said. "We have only two options in Iraq — victory or defeat."

Before his VFW address, Rumsfeld echoed some of Cheney's comments in an address at Fallon Naval Air Station in Nevada. Referring to the congressional elections, Rumsfeld said coming weeks would bring more vigorous debate about the war in Iraq.

"The important question is not whether we can win. Of course we will win," he said. "The real question is will we have the will to persevere. Whether we have the grit to carry on."

Later, during questions from the audience of about 300 sailors, Rumsfeld said U.S. enemies were trying to weaken American will by manipulating the media and planning attacks for maximum publicity.

"The constant drumbeat of things they say, all of which is not true, is harmful, it is
cumulative," Rumsfeld said. "It does weaken people's will, and lessen their
determination, and that is worrisome."

But Rumsfeld questioned why people were debating whether or not Iraq was part of the
war on terrorism, citing brutal insurgent attacks and statements by terrorist leaders
about the central role of Iraq to their cause.

"We should have no illusion … how Iraq fits into the war on terror," Rumsfeld said.
"How can so many be debating this issue? It strikes me the answer is there for all to see."

Speaking later before VFW members, Rumsfeld said that Americans had learned to give
troops sent to war the resources and support they needed.

"And surely, we've learned the danger of giving the enemy the false impression that
Americans cannot stomach a tough fight," he told the veterans group

"While some at home argue for tossing in the towel, the enemy is waiting and hoping
that we will do just that," he said.

Rumsfeld said that in every war, there had been "setbacks and difficulties" and
compared critics of the Iraq war to critics of World War II. Without naming him,
Rumsfeld singled out then-U.S. Ambassador to Great Britain Joseph P. Kennedy.

"When Hitler was bombing London in 1940, a former U.S. ambassador came home and
declared, 'Democracy is finished in England,' " Rumsfeld said. "And he said, 'It may be
[finished] here' as well. Think of that."

Kennedy, father of President John F. Kennedy, had opposed U.S. involvement in the
war and doubted the British could defeat Germany. The elder Kennedy resigned his
diplomatic post as war plans progressed and before public support for U.S. involvement
surged after Japan attacked Pearl Harbor in 1941.