

War on Terror

The phrase “War on Terror” derives from a speech delivered by former U.S. president George W. Bush to a joint session of Congress on September 20, 2001. During the speech, a direct response to the September 11th (9/11) attacks nine days before, President Bush made the following statement:

“Our **war on terror** begins with Al Qaida, but it does not end there. It will not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped, and defeated.”

This was not President Bush’s first use of the phrase, but it was the most prominent. On September 16, 2001 (four days before the speech), President Bush used the phrase “war on terrorism” in remarks to the press at Camp David. Following the speech to Congress on September 20th, The Bush administration and the American media began referring to all post-9/11 military incursions as fronts in the “War on Terrorism.” The two most important fronts were the invasion of (and subsequent military action in) Afghanistan and the invasion of (and subsequent military action in) Iraq, though the Bush administration conceived of the War on Terror as a larger series of ongoing campaigns. According to the Bush Administration’s 2003 *National Strategy for Combating Terrorism*, the War on Terror has five main objectives:

- 1.) Defeat terrorists such as Osama Bin Laden;
- 2.) Identify, locate, and destroy individual terrorists and terrorist organizations
- 3.) Deny state sponsorship, support, and sanctuary to terrorists and terrorist groups
- 4.) Diminish or eliminate the conditions that foster terrorism
- 5.) Defend U.S. citizens and U.S. interests at home and abroad

President Bush was not the first U.S. president to declare war on terrorism; in 1984, U.S. president Ronald Reagan used the phrase to convince the U.S. Congress to pass legislation designed to freeze the economic assets of suspected terrorist organizations. President Bush’s successor, President Barack Obama, has not used the term “War on Terror” as frequently as President Bush, and in March 2009, the Department of Defense officially replaced the phrase “Global War on Terrorism” with “Overseas Contingency Operation.”

