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Council on Foreign Relations: Progress in the Global War on Terrorism

By Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Douglas J. Feith, Washington, DC, Thursday, November 13, 2003.

My talk is about the war on terrorism. I'd like to start with a personal story.

September 11 in Moscow

On September 11, 2001, I was in Moscow with my colleague J.D. Crouch, discussing the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, an ancient text. As we were leaving the Defense Ministry in the late afternoon, the world entered a new era, for that was when the first plane hit the World Trade Center.

We asked the US European Command for the means to get back to Washington despite the general shutdown of US air traffic. EUCOM provided us a KC-135 tanker, which met us in Germany. We collected there a handful of other stray Defense Department officials also stranded by the suspension of commercial air traffic to the US. These included Under Secretary Dov Zakheim; Assistant Secretary Peter Rodman and his deputy, Bill Luti; and General John Abizaid, then on the Joint Staff and now Tommy Franks' successor as the Commander of the Central Command. All of us were frustrated to be away at such a moment and grateful to be getting back fast to the Pentagon, which was still smoldering.

Strategizing at 30,000 Feet

In the KC-135, we conferred and wrote papers about how to comprehend the September 11 attack as a matter of national security policy.

President Bush's statements even then showed that he thought of the attack, in essence, as an act of war, rather than a law enforcement matter. That point may now seem unremarkable, but think back to the 1993 World Trade Center bombing and to the attacks on Khobar Towers in 1996, on the US East Africa embassies in 1998 and on the USS Cole in Yemen in 2000. When such attacks occurred over the last decades, US officials avoided the term "war." The primary response was to dispatch the FBI to identify individuals for prosecution. Recognizing the September 11 attack as war was a departure from established practice. It was President Bush's seminal insight, the wisdom of which is attested by the fact that it looks so obvious in retrospect.

We in the KC-135 chewed over such questions as what it means to be at war not with a conventional enemy but with a network of terrorist organizations and their state sponsors. How should we formulate our war aims – how define victory? What should be our strategy?

As we mulled all this, the airplane's crew invited us to the cockpit to look down on the southern tip of Manhattan. We saw smoke rising from the ruins of the twin towers. Aside from sadness and anger, the smoke engendered an enduring sense of duty to do everything one could to prevent further attacks.

When we landed in Washington on September 12 we were primed to join the work the President had already gotten underway to develop a strategy for the war.

That work has held up well since September 2001.

The President and his advisors considered the nature of the threat. If terrorists exploited the open nature of our society to attack us repeatedly, the American people might feel compelled to change that nature – to close it – to defend ourselves. Many defensive measures come at a high price – that is, interference with our freedom of movement, intrusions on our privacy, inspections and an undesirable, however necessary, rebalancing of civil liberties against the interests of public safety. In other words, at stake in the war on terrorism are not just the lives and limbs of potential victims, but our country's freedom.

It isn't possible to prevent all terrorist attacks; there are simply too many targets in the United States to defend – too many tall buildings. It's possible, however, to fight terrorism in a way that preserves our freedom and culture. So the conclusion was that our war aim should be "to eliminate terrorism as a threat to our way of life as a free and open society."

Because the United States can't count on preserving our way of life by means of a defensive strategy, there was and is no practical alternative to a strategy of offense. We have to reach out and hit the terrorists where they reside, plan and train, and not wait to try to defeat their plans while they are executing them on US soil. To deal with the threat from the terrorists, we have to change the way we live or change the way *they* live.

The Three-Part Strategy

Accordingly, the President's strategy in the war on terrorism has three parts. One is disrupting and destroying terrorists and their infrastructure. This involves direct military action, but also intelligence, law enforcement and financial regulatory activity.

The list of senior members of al Qaida and affiliated groups who have been killed or captured since 9/11 is impressive and includes such key figures as:

- Khalid Shaykh Mohammad;
- Abu Zubaydah;
- Hambali; and,
- Mohammad Atef.

These and other successes against the terrorists demonstrate that international cooperation is alive, well and effective. We've worked jointly with the Philippines, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Spain, France, Jordan, Morocco and Egypt, among others.

From our interrogations of detainees we know that the absence of large-scale attacks on the United States since 9/11 has not been for want of bad intentions and effort on the terrorists' part. We have been disrupting their plans and operations. Our strategy of offense – which is to say, forcing the terrorists to play defense – is sound.

The second part of our strategy targets the recruitment and indoctrination of terrorists. The objective is to create a global intellectual and moral environment hostile to terrorism. We refer to this part as "the battle of ideas." As the President's National Strategy for Combating Terrorism puts it: We want

terrorism "viewed in the same light as slavery, piracy or genocide: behavior that no respectable government can condone or support and all must oppose." This requires a sustained effort to delegitimize terrorism, and to promote the success of those forces, especially within the Moslem world, that are working to build and preserve modern, moderate and democratic political and educational institutions.

And the third part of the strategy, of course, is securing the homeland. The Bush Administration has created the Department of Homeland Security, while the Defense Department has organized a new Northern Command in which, for the first time, a combatant commander has the entire continental United States within his area of responsibility. And we are in the process, also for the first time, of fielding defenses against ballistic missiles of all ranges.

Coalitions

Our strategy envisions international cooperation. The war is global. We have forged formidable, adaptable partnerships -- a rolling set, because some coalition partners are comfortable helping in some areas, but not in others.

After 9/11, nearly a hundred nations joined us in one or more aspect of the war on terrorism -- in military operations against al-Qaida and the Taliban in Afghanistan; in maritime interdiction operations; in financial crackdowns against terrorists funding; in law enforcement actions; in intelligence-sharing; and in diplomatic efforts.

In Operation Enduring Freedom-Afghanistan, there are 71 members of the coalition; including contributors to International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), 37 countries have contributed military assets. In Iraq, 32 countries are now contributing forces.

The Terrorist/State Sponsor/WMD Nexus

As President Bush noted early on, the war's greatest strategic danger remains the possibility that terrorists will obtain chemical, biological or nuclear weapons. The list of states that sponsor terrorism correlates obviously and ominously with the list of those that have programs to produce such weapons of mass destruction.

The nexus of terrorist groups, state sponsors of terrorism, and WMD is the security nightmare of the 21st century. It remains our focus. We are treating this threat as a compelling danger *in the near term*. We are not waiting for it to become "imminent," for we cannot expect to receive unambiguous warning of, for example, a terrorist group's acquisition of biological weapons agents.

We know the list of terrorist-sponsoring states with WMD programs -- Iran, Syria, Libya and North Korea. Iraq used to be in that category, but no longer is.

Iraq -- The Case for Action

Iraq under Saddam Hussein was a sadistic tyranny that developed and used weapons of mass destruction, launched aggressive attacks and wars against Iran, Kuwait, Israel and Saudi Arabia and supported terrorists by providing them with safe harbor, funds, training and other help. It had defied a long list of legally binding UN Security Council resolutions. It undid the UN inspection regime of the 1990s. It eviscerated the economic sanctions regime. And it shot virtually daily at the US and British aircraft patrolling Iraq's northern and southern no-fly zones. In sum, containment of Saddam Hussein's Iraq was a hollow hope.

The best information available from intelligence sources said that (1) Saddam Hussein had chemical and biological weapons and was pursuing nuclear weapons, and (2) if Saddam Hussein obtained fissile material from outside Iraq, as opposed to having to produce it indigenously, he could have had

a nuclear weapon within a year.

Those assessments, and most of the underlying information, were *not* recent products of the intelligence community. They were consistent with the intelligence that pre-dated the Administration of George W. Bush. And they were consistent with the intelligence from cooperative foreign services and with United Nations estimates of weapons unaccounted-for.

It was reasonable, indeed necessary, for the US government to rely on the best information it had available. And while we haven't yet found (and may not find) stockpiles of chemical or biological weapons in Iraq, David Kay reports that the Iraq Survey Group has obtained corroborative evidence of Saddam's nuclear, chemical and biological programs, covert laboratories, advanced missile programs and Iraq's program (active right up to the start of the war) to conceal WMD-related developments from the UN inspectors.

The Iraqi dictator posed a serious threat. Given the nature of that threat, seen in light of our experience with the surprise attack of 9/11 and the crumbling, one after another, of the pillars of containment, it would have been risky in the extreme to have allowed him to remain in power for the indefinite future. Intelligence is never perfect. But that is not grounds for inaction in the face of the kind of information the President had about Saddam Hussein's Iraq.

Saddam's demise has freed Iraqis of a tyrant, deprived terrorists of a financier and supporter, eliminated a threat to regional stability, taken Iraq off the list of rogue states with WMD programs and created a new opportunity for free political institutions to arise in the Arab world. All of this serves our cause in the Global War on Terrorism.

Experiments in democratization

In Iraq and Afghanistan, democratization has begun. Success will strengthen the forces of moderation in the Muslim world. It could create a new era in the Middle East. Already, since Iraq's liberation, talk of reform and democracy is more common and more intense in the Arab world. It would be desirable if the Middle East reached a political turning point similar to the points in history when Asian democracy and Latin American democracy blossomed and spread rapidly.

As the President said last week at the National Endowment for Democracy: "It should be clear to all that Islam – the faith of one-fifth of humanity – is consistent with democratic rule. Democratic progress is found in many predominantly Muslim countries ... More than half of all Muslims in the world live in freedom under democratically constituted governments."

Opposition to democratic rule motivates extremists in both Afghanistan and Iraq to try to tear down the newly formed institutions. They see the potential for modernization, democratization and liberalization of the economy and they oppose and fear what they see.

Extremism of the type that fuels terrorism is a political phenomenon. It's driven by ideology and ideologies, we know, can be defeated. Like Soviet Communism and Nazism, radical Islamism can be discredited by failure.

When the Soviet system collapsed, it helped demonstrate that our nation's positive message -- individual liberty, the rule of law, tolerance and peace -- has global appeal. Soviet communism was discredited practically and morally by its ultimately undeniable failures to deliver goodness or happiness. Radical Islamism -- an ideological stew of historical resentments, political hatreds, religious intolerance and violence -- can be expected to have a similar end. Like communism, it promises a utopia that it can't deliver.

As the President noted: "Many Middle Eastern governments now understand that military dictatorships and theocratic rule are a straight, smooth highway to nowhere. ... The good and capable

people of the Middle East all deserve responsible leadership. For too long, many people in that region have been victims and subjects – they deserve to be active citizens."

In Afghanistan and Iraq – as well as elsewhere in the region – this process has begun.

Afghanistan

Afghanistan has a way to go before it achieves a stable, permanent government. Taliban forces are working to regroup and attack, often from bases in the rough terrain of the tribal areas just across the Pakistan border. Afghanistan's central government needs more skilled administrators. It needs better control over the country's customs revenues. And important open questions remain as to the right relationship between the central government and the local governors and military commanders.

But Afghanistan has come far since its liberation from the Taliban only two years ago. President Karzai is increasingly extending the government's authority across the country:

- President Karzai has replaced about one-third of the provincial governors.
- Reform of the Defense Ministry is underway and producing greater ethnic balance.
- The government and the Constitutional Commission have just produced a draft constitution that the *loya jirga* may approve next month.
- National elections in Afghanistan are scheduled for next year.
- International assistance to Afghanistan is increasing.
- A modern ring road – a boon to commerce, security and national unity – is being built around the country. The Kabul-to-Kandahar portion is to be usable by December of this year.
- And NATO has taken over the UN-mandated ISAF in Kabul, and is expanding its peacekeeping role outside the capital.

Afghanistan's courage and unity will continue to be tested. But it appears that Afghanistan is passing these tests. It's a country on the rise. And it's a country that's no longer affording terrorists the quiet enjoyment of bases of operation.

Iraq

Iraq, too, is a story of difficulties, but also progress and promise. Iraqis, like Afghans, know that they have been liberated from tyranny. They recognize their stake in the Coalition's success, even though a thick residue of fear inhibits many from contributing to that success.

Our strategic goal in Iraq is to give Iraq back to the Iraqi people—well-launched on the road to freedom, security and prosperity. We can't build the new Iraq for them – but we can make sure that, when we leave, they are in a position to build it themselves. Our foremost objective is to improve the security situation to make political and economic development possible. We recognize that security, freedom and prosperity are tightly interrelated. There is no solution to the security problem without progress on the economic and political fronts.

The enemies of our strategic goal are:

1. Former regime loyalists – Saddam's "dead enders;"
2. Foreign fighters – "jihadists;"
3. Terrorist groups—al Qaeda and its allies; and
4. The scores of thousands of criminals that Saddam released from his prisons in the months before the war.

We don't underestimate the task we face – we recognize that the enemy has a number of strengths. For example, the country is awash in munitions, our enemies have access to a lot of money and

Saddam remains at large. It doesn't take an enormous effort to attack small numbers of soldiers every week. And the international jihad network has opted to support the fight against the Coalition in Iraq – making Iraq the central battlefield now in the Global War on Terrorism.

But we also know that our enemies have vulnerabilities. For example, the former regime is not popular in the country, and it had and has a very narrow base of public support. Moreover, Iraqis resent the presence of foreign jihadis who have chosen Iraq as the battlefield on which to confront the US. Few Iraqis support the jihadis' ideology.

Another enemy vulnerability is his relatively small geographic base: The vast majority of the attacks against Coalition forces in recent month have occurred in Baghdad and in Saddam's former stronghold north and west of the capital. In large parts of the country in the north and south the population is well-disposed to the Coalition and those areas are relatively free of such attacks, though there have been horrific bombings in Mosul, Hajaf and, yesterday, in Nasariyah.

We believe the enemy strategy is to:

1. Break Coalition will, through daily attacks on Coalition forces;
2. Target embodiments of success, through attacks on infrastructure and police;
3. Divide and intimidate Iraqis, through assassinations of civilians, including attacks on the Governing Council;
4. Portray the Coalition (especially the US) as imperialist and exploitative;
5. Drive out international organizations and NGOs; and,
6. Slow down progress towards self-rule in the hope that the Coalition will run out of patience and leave.

Coalition forces are taking the initiative to search out the enemy, defeat his efforts and cut off his bases of support. We are doing this through direct action based on specific intelligence, such as the raid conducted against Uday and Qusay and the recent raid by the 82nd Airborne which netted two former Iraqi generals in Fallujah, who are suspected of being key financiers and organizers of anti-coalition activities in the city.

Our forces are innovating at the tactical level. They are using battlefield surveillance radars to locate mortar positions. They're developing and deploying technical means to deal with roadside bombs. And they're continually developing special convoy security measures. Coalition forces have stepped up efforts to guard the borders to prevent the infiltration of foreign fighters and terrorists.

Although the Coalition is doing a lot, the strategic solution to the security problem in Iraq is to enable Iraqis to provide for their own security. And so, the Coalition is organizing and equipping Iraqis and putting them in positions of responsibility for their own security. Having more Iraqis active in their security forces will yield several benefits in helping to reach our strategic objectives. Iraqis have more familiarity with the people and terrain of Iraq. Iraqis can provide better intelligence on the locations of terrorists. A leading role for Iraqi security forces will also show that Iraq is on a rapid course to self-rule and reduce friction between Coalition troops and the population.

More than 100,000 Iraqis are already active in the five security forces: Police; Border Police; Site Protection Service; Civil Defense Corps; and the New Iraqi Army. This number has been growing rapidly – in early September it stood at 62,000. The Iraqi security forces have proven effective in a number of actions. They are taking on an increasing share of the security burden and are suffering casualties.

As I have said, we understand how tightly interrelated the governance, economic and security problems are. Therefore, a key element of our security strategy is improving the lives of the Iraqi people and building Iraqi political institutions. Regarding essential services: Oil production now exceeds 2 million barrels a day and provides revenues for Iraqi salaries and other government

expenses. Electricity production has attained pre-war levels. Iraq's educational system has been reestablished. There are a record 97,000 university-level school applications. Levels of healthcare comparable to the pre-war level have been achieved.

As you know, the Congress has recently appropriated a large sum of money (approximately \$20 billion) for Iraqi reconstruction, including the building up of the security forces. But the US isn't bearing the whole burden: at the recent donors' conference in Madrid, other countries and international institutions pledged about \$13 billion. The major donor countries, aside from the US, were: Japan, Saudi Arabia, the United Kingdom, Kuwait, Spain, Italy, Canada, UAE and South Korea.

As for the building of Iraqi political institutions, the Governing Council has been operating since July and has appointed interim ministers to run Iraqi ministries. The Governing Council has won international recognition in UN Security Council resolution 1511 and from the UN General Assembly and the Arab League. In addition to the national-level council, there are more than 250 councils at the provincial and municipal levels; these represent important steps toward Iraqi self-rule. An Iraqi runs the Central Bank and an Iraqi council of judges has been established to supervise the prosecutorial and judicial systems.

As you are aware from recent press reports, we are continuing our efforts to build up the Iraqis' capability to run their own affairs. And we are working with the Governing Council to help them develop a timeline for drafting a new Constitution and holding elections under it, as called for in UN Security Council resolution 1511. Our guiding principle is that as much authority as possible should be transferred to Iraqi institutions as soon as possible.

We understand how important it is to communicate effectively with the Iraqi people. Our basic message is two-fold: first, we intend to stay the course -- to fulfill our responsibilities and ensure that Iraq is well launched on the path to freedom, security and prosperity. Second, we do not want to rule Iraq, nor will we stay any longer than is necessary. We understand that there is some tension between these two messages -- but we are conveying both of them. Neither is subordinated to the other.

Although the major combat operations that toppled the Saddam regime were over by May 1, the war to determine the future of Iraq continues. The stakes are large: if Iraq can be launched on the path toward freedom, stability and prosperity, the terrorists will have suffered a major defeat and the people of the Middle East will have an alternative model to follow. Our enemies understand this, and we must expect them to throw all their resources into the fight. This struggle will take time -- time to root out enemy fighters and supporters within Iraq, time to gain control of the borders, and, most of all, time to help the Iraqis rebuild their political and security institutions to the point that they will be able to take over the main burden of the fight.

Visitors returning from Iraq commonly comment that what they saw there jibed not at all with the picture of the country that outsiders get from television and newspapers. This is hardly surprising: If all one knew about life in the US was what one saw on local TV news broadcasts, one would imagine that life in America is nothing but murders, power outages, fires and the like. Because we live here, we know that a lot else is going on -- business and industrial work, cultural and educational life, politics, government and social activities. There's a lot going on in Iraq too that doesn't make the evening news.

Stay the Course

From its inception in the days following 9/11, the President and his team have implemented their strategy for the war on terrorism with steadiness, prudence and good results. The plans for our combat and post-combat operations in Afghanistan and Iraq get challenged from time to time, as is inevitable and good in a democracy. Though these plans have, by and large, worked well, we review and revise them continually, as Jerry Bremer's current visit to Washington highlights.

Those plans were and are the product of much cooperation across the US government and with key allies. They helped us avert many ills – for example, Iraq has *not* found itself with masses of internally displaced persons and international refugees, starvation, a collapse of the currency, destruction of the oil fields, the firing of SCUD missiles against Israel or Saudi Arabia or widespread inter-communal violence. There is value in pausing and reflecting on the anticipated catastrophes that we were spared through a combination of foresight, military skill and the kind of luck that tends to favor forces that plan and work hard and wisely.

The United States and its coalition partners are on sound courses in Afghanistan and Iraq, though much remains to be done in both places. As long as we're making progress in rebuilding the infrastructure, in allowing normal life to return and, most importantly, in helping the Afghans and the Iraqis develop political institutions for the future, we are on the path to success – despite the attacks of the terrorists and former regime supporters.

Staying the course won't be easy or cheap. We are reminded of this every time we hear of another attack on US or Coalition forces. The President asked Congress to make available the necessary resources and Congress has done so. To crown our military victories with strategic victories, we'll have to succeed in both the civil and the military aspects of our efforts in Afghanistan and Iraq.

In the Global War on Terrorism, we are achieving our goal: We are defeating terrorism as a threat to our way of life. Our coalitions are on the offensive, the terrorists are on the run and the United States has preserved our freedom. The world is safer and better for what we have accomplished. Americans have much to be proud of.



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