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National Press Club

Remarks as Delivered by Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld, Washington, DC, Friday, September 10, 2004.

Tomorrow we will commemorate the third anniversary of the terrorist attacks against our country on September 11th, 2001. But today I want to talk about a different anniversary and take a moment to consider what was happening, where we were, what many folks thought about our world, not on the 11th, but on the 10th of September three years ago.

There are those who might be tempted to think that if we would only pull back, if our country would only withdraw from this global struggle against extremists and let events abroad run their course, let those folks go about their business, that somehow the combat, the conflict, the ugliness on our TV screens and newspapers would go away, and that we could return to that more comforting time that preceded the September 11th attacks.

But if you think about it, that's not the way the world really was before September 11th. Consider the world of September 10th and before. Two Americans and six others stood on trial by the Taliban in Afghanistan for the crime of preaching their religion. The leader of the opposition Northern Alliance, Massoud, lay dead, his murder ordered by [Osama bin Laden], the Taliban's co-conspirator. An Iraqi newspaper put out by Saddam Hussein's son Uday called on European corporations to pressure their governments to break with the United States and Britain, so that the sanctions would be lifted.

Meanwhile, the Iraqis were bragging about having shot down a U.S. drone in late August. Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz vowed that Iraq would inflict losses on the U.S. and Britain -- flying in the southern and northern no-fly zones. Our planes were being shot at every week. Libya's undeclared nuclear weapons program proceeded apace, with technologies and materials being supplied, in part at least, by a network -- a secret network headed by the rogue, A.Q. Khan, a man who also aided the nuclear programs of North Korea and Iran and possibly others. All of this was before September 11th.

Closer to home, a man named Hani Hanjour and his associates checked into a Marriott Residence Inn in Herndon, Virginia, about 20 miles from here, and they would board the American Airlines Flight No. 77 at Dulles the next morning. And in New Jersey, a young Todd Beamer postponed until the following morning a business trip to California because he and his wife Lisa had just returned from Europe and he wanted to spend an extra day with his children.

September 10th, 2001, was not the last day of world innocence. It was, however, the last day of America's lack of understanding of a worldwide extremist movement determined to terrorize, to defeat, to destroy civilized people everywhere.

Consider the world as it stands three years later. The Taliban regime is gone. Those still not killed or captured are on the run. Despite a campaign of violence and intimidation, over 10 million Afghans have registered to vote, including 4 million women, despite the intimidation. And they've registered to vote in what will be the first free election in that country's history.

Saddam Hussein's regime is finished. His sons are dead. He's in a prison cell, where he awaits the justice of the Iraqi people, which he will soon face. Libya has said now that it is renouncing its illicit weapons programs, and it says it will cooperate with the efforts to stop the spread of weapons of mass destruction and that it's seeking to reenter the community of civilized nations. Time will tell, but so far, so good. A. Q. Khan's arms network has been shut down. The Pakistan government is a staunch and courageous ally against extremism and terrorism. And a few short years after Osama bin Laden ridiculed the American soldier as a paper tiger, saying that after a few blows, they run in defeat, the names of Todd Beamer and Pat Tillman, and so many other brave Americans, live as symbols of our country's courage and determination.

In the last three years, under the leadership of President Bush and the 85 or 90 countries in the coalition, probably the largest coalition in the history of mankind, we've changed strategies, assumptions, and our view of the world.

While some may still find false comfort in the pre-September 11th thinking, our enemies have been living in the September 11th world for a very long time. Al Qaeda, if you think about it, first attacked the World Trade Center not in 2001, but in 1993. Later, attacks against the Air Force barracks in Saudi Arabia, U.S. embassies in East Africa in 1998, the U.S. sailors aboard the USS Cole, and the attacks continue. Since September 11th, extremists using knapsacks, passenger cars, trains, letter openers have killed hundreds more in places like Spain, Turkey, Kenya, Indonesia, and other countries.

We've witnessed the horror of terrorists taking Russian children hostage on their first day of school, resulting in the death of hundreds of children. I don't suppose there's a mother or father in America or anywhere in the world who dropped a child off for the first day of school who did not wonder could that happen to them. The answer is it could, which is why it is so important that in the global war on terror we recognize that we have to fight this battle where the terrorists are rather than waiting for them to force us to fight, God forbid, in our own schools.

And if these enemies of civilized society gain chemical or biological or nuclear weapons -- which they seek, let there be no doubt about it -- it's not inconceivable that an attack on a city here or elsewhere in the world could cause not the 3,000 dead from September 11th -- innocent men, women and children of all faiths -- but of 30,000 or even 300,000.

For the past three-and-a-half years, the Department of Defense has been undertaking efforts to reform and improve the way that our forces -- your forces -- are organized, equipped and positioned to meet the

security needs of the 21st century. We're reshaping and modernizing our global force posture away from Cold War obsolescence.

The world has changed markedly since the conflicts of the last century ended, when the Soviet tanks were poised to roll across the North German plain and when South Korea was an impoverished nation devastated by war. But our military arrangements, while having been reduced somewhat, have not changed dramatically. Our forces must be where they're wanted, they have to be where they're needed, and they have to be where they can be deployed quickly, and they have to be deployed without burdensome restriction, legal, political or otherwise.

We're restructuring and transforming our military.

The Army is now led by a forward-looking chief of staff, General Pete Schoomaker. It's significantly increasing the number of agile, more self-sufficient combat brigades available for rapid deployment from 33 up to 43, and possibly to 48. He's rebalancing specialties between the active component and the reserve components, which is so needed, so that National Guard and reservist soldiers will not be called up so often.

We're developing, testing and beginning to deploy limited defenses against ballistic missiles to deter rogue states from attempting to think that they can blackmail America or our friends and allies. And we're updating our existing alliances and building new relationships based on security realities of this new century, and not the last century. Countries like Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, Yemen, Pakistan, India -- to cite but a few examples -- are now partners in the fight against extremism in the Middle East and in Central Asia.

These reforms and initiatives are so urgent because of the ruthlessness of the enemies we face. Their tactics vary, but their objectives are consistent. The terrorists and the extremists hope to intimidate and to demoralize the American people and our allies with their threats and with their attacks.

I mentioned the schools in Russia and the hundreds of children. But the chopping off of heads on television, on video, so people can see it; taking pliers and pulling tongues out, and cutting them off; chopping off hands; attacking indiscriminately, or maybe I should say discriminately, the most innocent and the most vulnerable for the purpose of terrorizing -- terrorizing to alter behavior on the rest of the people in this world.

They seek to drive our coalition out of the newly liberated countries of Afghanistan and Iraq and to re-impose dictatorial regimes. They will fail; let there be no doubt. And they're conducting a reign of terror against those who represent hope and freedom -- the mayors, the city councilmen, the women who register to vote in Afghanistan, and the volunteers who sign up to join the Iraqi army or the National Guard or the Iraqi police force.

I'm sure you all read about the bus that was stopped by some Taliban near the Pakistan border, and they went through the women's possessions to see if they had registered to vote, and the ones that had registered to vote were killed.

No one should underestimate the powerful impact of human freedom. Today Iraqis are among those in our globe who are allowed to say what they want and go where they want and write and watch and listen to whatever they want when they want to do it, and to criticize their own government. Governments and people throughout the Middle East are taking notice of that. The assassins and the terrorists we are fighting know that the rise of a free, self-governing Afghanistan and a free, self-governing Iraq will give powerful momentum to reformers throughout the region and it will discredit their extremist ideology.

Free people battled their kind before in struggles against dictators, fascists, communists of the last century. Freedom has always required sacrifice. And, regrettably, it has always cost lives. The attack on Pearl Harbor alone claimed the lives of some 2,400 Americans on one day. Roughly 400,000 more American troops would be killed before they overcame repeated defeats in those early years of World War II and demoralizing setbacks to eventually achieve victory years later.

I mention this because we've now lost over 1,100 Americans in the global war on terror -- in Iraq, in Afghanistan, elsewhere on the globe. The reality is that as advanced as our capabilities are, the truth is that war is ugly and it takes lives.

It's important to keep in mind that the civilized world passed the 1,000th casualty mark at the hands of extremists long ago; I mean, 3,000 on September 11th alone; in a series of attacks that included the bombing of our embassies and military barracks. It was the murder of so many and the destruction of so much in one morning on our soil three years ago that brought home what we're up against in this ongoing struggle.

As long as we continue our mission, as long as we work to change terrorists' way of life before they succeed in changing our way of life, as long as we avoid a return to the false comfort of September 10th, 2001, victory will come, just as it has in conflicts in the past.

For all of the enemy's ruthlessness -- and it is total, there is nothing they will not do, indeed there is nothing they have not done -- we have an enormous advantage. I say "we." I don't mean the people of the United States; I mean the people in the 85 or 90 nations across the globe that are cooperating in this effort, in this war against -- this struggle against extremism. And the advantage is that the great sweep of human history is for freedom. And that is on our side.

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