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## Fighting Terrorism

*Douglas J. Feith, Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, To the American Jewish Committee Washington, D.C., May 8, 2002.*

### Fighting Terrorism

Good morning. Nice to be here. I have a number of friends in this American Jewish Committee audience.

I'd like to talk with you about the war on terrorism - to discuss the progress of the war and share some thoughts about its nature, our objectives and our strategy.

Our enemy in the war on terrorism is not a state or a group of states. Our enemy is not organized as a conventional military force. We cannot define victory as the conquering and subduing of a particular piece of territory or a people. We cannot expect that our own territory will be spared major damage so long as our armed forces remain undefeated. This is indeed a most unusual war - different from any that we fought in the past.

We're fighting not a nation but a terrorist network - one might even say a network of networks, an amorphous structure present in many countries, including those of our allies, and in the United States itself.

So it's a complicated struggle on multiple fronts. And we can't rely on conventional armed power to the extent we relied on such means in past wars. That's why administration officials so often stress that we must bring to bear the full range of instruments of US national power, including intelligence, financial, diplomatic and, not least, moral, as well as military tools.



Fundamental to our strategy is the recognition that we can't just defend ourselves at our own borders. We have no choice but to take the offensive.

Our country is too big, too vulnerable too full of tall building for us to do otherwise.

We're vulnerable because of the kind of country we are:

- We're open to the world for commerce, travel and communications.
- We welcome people from all over and let them live their lives as they wish, building their own institutions, practicing their own religion, living according to their own lights.
- We respect people as individuals and afford them a large degree of privacy.
- Accordingly, we have constraints against the surveillance of domestic groups.

That is the kind of country we are and that is the kind of country we want to be. If we're to preserve our freedom and our way of life, we must play offense, not defense against terrorism. We must destroy terrorism at its sources:

First of all, we have to deny terrorists a secure base of operations - a safe haven where they can recruit and train more terrorists, plan operations, acquire equipment and supplies, where they can rest and regroup after terrorist attacks.

In some cases, this means the United States will cooperate with friendly governments, helping them make their authority effective over their entire territory. Examples are the Philippines, Yemen and Georgia.

In other cases, it means forcing regimes to stop supporting terrorists or providing safe haven to them.

- We demanded that the Taliban stop supporting the al Qaida terrorist organization.

- When they refused, we took decisive action to rid Afghanistan of the terrorists and those who supported them.

Our action in Afghanistan has already constructively perturbed the atmosphere of toleration of terrorism.

Many states that had been tolerant of terrorism, or not at all active in fighting it, have changed their policy.

In some cases, the change in behavior does not bespeak a change of heart. Some regimes may simply fear that they could become the next Taliban - they may believe that, for now at least, it's prudent at least to appear to be cooperating in the war on terrorism.

- But in other countries, such as Pakistan, the change has been dramatic and, we think, reflects a genuine desire to take a new and better path.

But, as I said, we're fighting a widespread network - one present even in countries where the governments oppose terrorism.

Pressing our offensive, therefore, now involves many actions that are less dramatic than the war in Afghanistan has been:

- For example, law enforcement activities, the freezing of bank accounts, interception of the movement of terrorists from one country to another or the interception of shipments of weapons or money.

But we don't rule out additional military actions, directed against unrelenting state sponsors of terrorism.

As President Bush said in his State of the Union speech, we must pay particular attention to states that have supported terrorism and are developing weapons of mass destruction.

• These states, the President said,

could provide these arms to terrorists, giving them the means to match their hatred. They could attack our allies or attempt to blackmail the United States. In any of these cases, the price of indifference would be catastrophic.

So, as the President stated:

The United States of America will not permit the world's most dangerous regimes to threaten us with the world's most destructive weapons.

ultimately, our goal is to change the international environment concerning terrorism.

We should confront an unpleasant fact: During the past three decades or so, there developed in the world an atmosphere of tolerance for terrorism.

- Many excused it: in one famous phrase that often passed for sophisticated discourse: "one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter"
- Some countries supported it - perhaps not openly, but often without even bothering to cover their tracks.
- There were important failings in this regard all around the world, including in the United States.

In place of this atmosphere of tolerance, the United States aims now to establish an international norm of intolerance of terrorism.

In short, we want the international community to view terrorism as it now views piracy, slave-trading or genocide - activities that no-one who aspires to respectability can tolerate, let alone support.

This takes us into the realm of ideas.

It's important that we state our case clearly, even bluntly.

- As President Bush has declared: "Terrorism is evil."
- However much the language of morality elicits sniffs from some of our sophisticated critics abroad and at home, we don't flinch from using it. Moral clarity is a strategic asset.

It'll take time to reverse the pernicious effects of the last several decades - but we'll be steadfast in making our case.

- It bears noting that military victory - while not exactly a logical argument - does have its uses in the battle of ideas.
- After all, in the 1930s, fascism, despite (perhaps because of) its inhumanity, had a strong intellectual following. It was in vogue and its influence spread throughout Europe years before Nazi military conquests began. It wasn't defeated solely - or even primarily - by arguments, but by Allied tanks and bombers. Nothing fails like failure. Ideas associated with catastrophe for their adherents tend eventually, if not suddenly, to lose influence.

But there's a second aspect of the war of ideas that I want to address - and I think it's more significant:

- An important ideological source of global terrorism is an extremist interpretation of Islam that emphasizes intolerance and brutality in religious matters and hatred of the West in political matters.

This extremist school perverts the humane ideals of Islam.

- But unfortunately, it has much resonance in the Islamic world.

There's a struggle going on within Islam. Non-Moslems are not parties as such in this struggle. But the whole civilized world has an interest in

helping those in the Moslem world who reject extremism and espouse the more moderate, tolerant, peaceful kind of Islam.

- The moderate kind of Islam flourishes in many Islamic countries.
- Two especially significant examples are Turkey, which stands out as a predominantly Moslem country that has a democratic form of government and is a longstanding and valuable ally of the United States,
- And Indonesia, the country whose Muslim majority is the largest in the world.

The Western world has a large stake in the prosperity and stability and overall success of such countries.

Unfortunately, extremist Islam has been making inroads around the world lately. It has large financial resources, which its adherents use

- to finance, and hence control, Islamic institutions, especially schools, throughout the world
- to propagate hatred of the West and the notion of inevitable warfare between Islam and the West, and
- to support terrorism - that is, to legitimate violence against innocent people.

The Western world has an interest in helping the moderate voices of Islam to be heard, and to protect them against retaliation.

I would like to close with a few words concerning the campaign of suicide bombing which has been waged against Israel in recent weeks - the most salient problem on the anti-terrorism agenda at present.

It's often argued that the phenomenon of suicide bombers -- terrorists who perform attacks that they know they cannot survive -- demonstrates that we aren't dealing with people who calculate the benefits and costs of their actions.

In this vein, we frequently hear that suicide bombing is the product of the combination of poverty and hopelessness.

Westerners -- we whom Usama bin Laden has sneeringly referred to as "lovers of life" -- cannot easily understand how a young man (or woman) straps on several pounds of high explosive and then blows himself up in a crowd of civilians. We assume that only a person ensnared by deep despair could do such a thing.

- This diagnosis implies its own solution -- that the world should address what is called the "root causes of terrorism," the poverty and political hopelessness that many people imagine are the traits and motives of the suicide bombers.
- This diagnosis, however, doesn't jibe with actual experience. And it misleads us about the wisest strategy.

When we look at the records of the suicide bombers, we see that many aren't drawn from the poor.

- Mohammed Atta, for instance -- a key figure in executing the September 11 attack -- was a middle-class Egyptian whose parents were able to send him to study abroad. And his education meant that he could look forward to a relatively privileged life in Egypt -- hardly grounds for extreme despair.

Indeed, as we learn from a recent New York Times interview with Hamas leaders in Gaza, what characterizes the suicide bombers -- and especially the old men who send them off on their missions -- is rather hope than despair:

First of all, the bombers cherish a perverse form of religious hope. The promise of eternity in paradise is a tenet of many faiths, a noble incentive and consolation to millions of people. It's as cynical as it is sinister that leaders of al Qaida, Hezbollah, Hamas and other groups convince young people that eternity in paradise is available as a reward for the murder of innocents.

Second, there is the bomber's hope of earthly glory and reward -- praise as a hero from political leaders and honor for one's parents and a \$25,000 check to the bomber's family from Saddam Hussein. President Bush has condemned

[t]hose governments, like Iraq, that reward parents for the sacrifice of their children ....

Those who encourage homicide bombing, as the President said,

are guilty of soliciting murder of the worst kind.

Third, there is the homicide bomber's political hope. As that New York Times interview makes clear, Palestinian extremists think they have finally discovered a winning strategy.

The recent outpouring of open support in the Arab world for homicide bombers -- from Mrs. Arafat, from a senior Arab diplomat, from clerics associated with prestigious universities -- reflects excitement at the thought that bombings are producing success. It is the kind of triumphalism characteristic of a mentality that believes in "the worse the better."

This suggests a strategic course for us: attack the sources of these malignant hopes.

Regarding the religious hope: Many Islamic religious leaders seem uncomfortable with suicide bombing -- but many of them have been silenced or intimidated to voice support for the terrorists. As I have mentioned, the civilized world should exert itself to support moderate clerics, defend them and provide them with platforms to protect their religion from extremists who want to distort and hijack it.

The civilized world should also deal with political leaders who heap honor (and money) on the suicide bombers and their families. President Bush, speaking of suicide bombers, said: "They are not martyrs. They are murderers." Other world leaders have the responsibility to reinforce this message.

Finally, as to the suicide bombers' political hopes, we must ensure that terrorism is not seen as a winning strategy. This is today's immediate



challenge: For example, we have to make it understood that the Palestinian homicide bombers are harming, not helping, their political cause.

Arab-Israeli peace is a goal craved by all decent people. The Bush administration is engaged in the pursuit of this goal.

We recognize that peace can be achieved only when the conditions are right: and the most important condition is the state of peoples' minds. Thus, we must take seriously the incitement to hatred that creates the intellectual atmosphere in which terrorism can flourish. If we seek the "root cause" of terrorism, this is where we'll find it.

Peace diplomacy in the Middle East has been an intense activity for decades. It's now clear that we have not focused enough attention on the relationship between peace and education. We spend a great deal of attention on what diplomats say to each other. We need to pay closer attention to what teachers instill in their students. Therein lies the key to peace.

Changing the intellectual fashions in the world regarding terrorism -- and ultimately de-legitimizing it altogether, without regard to the various causes espoused by the terrorists -- won't be easy. But its importance as a strategic requirement is right up there with the destruction and disruption of terrorist operational infrastructure.

The Bush administration appreciates the complexity of its tasks -- in the war on terrorism and in Middle East diplomacy. The President approaches these tasks with the steadiness and energy appropriate to the magnitude of the stakes.

We have our nation and its liberties to protect, our friends to assist, and our adversaries to deter and defeat. This is a rare period of flux in world affairs. We have opportunities to do good for ourselves and for others -- in the Middle East and other regions of the world -- by enhancing security, suppressing terrorism, eliminating weapons of mass destruction, promoting freedom and prosperity and opening paths to peace. The American people expect this administration to rise to the occasion. We shall do our best.

Thank you.

*Mr. Feith was the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy from July to August 2005*

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