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Defense, Democracy and the War on Terrorism

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Remarks to the Black Sea Security Program, Kennedy School of Government,

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I want to thank Tad Oelstrom and the Kennedy School for inviting me back to Harvard.

Thirty years ago, I was a student here at the college majoring in Government and concentrating on international relations. Among the hot topics of the day were China-Taiwan, Cyprus, the proliferation of nuclear weapons, international terrorism and that hardy perennial, the Arab-Israeli conflict.

That those topics remain hot demonstrates a degree of regrettable continuity in world affairs. Nonetheless, international relations and the global security picture are drastically different now from what they were then. And no one can appreciate the transformation more acutely or personally than those of you who come from countries formerly within the Soviet empire.

On March 29, 2004, which was an appropriately sunny, warm and promising Spring day in Washington, I attended the White House ceremony at which President Bush welcomed into the NATO alliance our seven new members: Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia.

The event received less public attention in the United States than it deserved. It marked a grand achievement in international security affairs. It was



a bright moment in the history of human freedom.

That ceremony capped many years of effort. The effort began, not just a few years ago when the new allies formally entered NATO's membership action program, but decades ago, when they were still squarely, and it seemed to many, inescapably, within the Communist bloc.

For some of us, the project to liberate the people of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union from Communist tyranny was a lifetime project.

I deepened my intellectual engagement in that cause as a student here at Harvard and benefited especially from the lectures and books of Professor Richard Pipes, who headed Harvard's Russian Research Center.

We were part of a rather small minority in Cambridge who thought that working to bring about the collapse of the Soviet Union was not only a noble pursuit, but a realistic project. Richard Pipes joined the Reagan administration to implement that project and I had the honor and pleasure of working with him on the National Security Council staff before I crossed the Potomac River for my first stint at the Pentagon.

As many of us in the Reagan Administration saw it, the Cold War was fundamentally about protecting the freedom - the lives and civil liberties - of the United States and our allies.

We won the Cold War while avoiding World War III, a rather amazing strategic accomplishment for which the world is a better place. But we find that our lives and civil liberties - our security and freedom - are threatened seriously again - now from other quarters - in particular from al Qaida and its network of fellow terrorist groups and their state and non-state supporters.

As promoting freedom for others was a potent element of our strategy for winning the Cold War, so it serves as an important element in our strategy for winning the war on terrorism today.

Some assume that when US policymakers discuss promoting freedom we mean creating systems of government in other countries that look like the American Constitutional system. But that isn't the case.

The 18th century British political philosopher Edmund Burke gives us some useful guidance in thinking about the championing abroad of freedom

cautioned against enthusiasm for theory -- against the dangers to liberty and human happiness that can arise from political abstractions. He warned that successful political institutions are rooted in tradition and rely on organic connections to the local soil and culture.

These are weighty admonitions. They tell us to respect the importance of the differences between societies long accustomed to democratic practices and other societies. And they highlight for us the magnitude of the task of encouraging democratic development in the latter societies.

Burke's admonitions, however, do not mean that countries without experience of democratic government are doomed forever to remain undemocratic. There are too many examples from the last half-century of successful new democracies in Asia, Latin America and Europe for us to believe that.

Successive US administrations have promoted freedom abroad for a variety of good reasons. Among the principal good reasons for our doing so now is the role that democratic institution-building can play in our strategy for the war on terrorism.

We cannot win this war if all we do is disrupt and attack terrorist networks. Terrorist groups can recruit and indoctrinate new terrorists faster and far more inexpensively than the US and its coalition partners can capture or kill them.

Victory for the coalition will require us to counter ideological support for terrorism - to reduce the flow of new recruits into the terrorists' ranks. This task has at least two parts: First, the de-legitimation of terrorism, making terrorism (as President Bush has put) like the slave trade, piracy on the high seas and genocide, activities that no respectable person can condone, much less support.

The second part is support for models of political and philosophical moderation, especially in the Muslim world. Championing freedom can make a crucial contribution here.

As the distinguished scholar of Islam, Professor Bernard Lewis, put it: "The war against terror and the quest for freedom are inextricably linked - neither can succeed without the other."

That's why President Bush outlined what he calls a "forward strategy for freedom in the Middle East." As he puts it, so long as freedom does not

flourish, the Middle East "will remain a place of stagnation, resentment and violence ready for export."

President Bush does not have the view that a particular governmental structure suits every person and every society. But he does believe that the aspiration for freedom is inherent in people everywhere. The societies that best satisfy that hope are those that enjoy the greatest stability, creativity and prosperity.

President Bush often speaks of the sources of the liberal impulse - the God-given desire for personal freedom. But he does not believe in "one size fits all" or "cookie cutter" answers to the complex questions facing developing countries. President Bush, if I can put it this way, champions freedom without violating the precepts of Edmund Burke.

We know from experience that some of the world's more grievous ills can be solved or mitigated by giving people governments that allow them to live freely. The good effects reach far beyond politics. Liberal democratic societies tend to enjoy greater health, more trade, richer exchanges of ideas and other large blessings.

The development of diverse democratic institutions in the states of the former Soviet Empire represented here tonight is an example of the process at work.

The political development of your countries demonstrates how democracy can conduce to peace - how it can create states that become stronger, safer and more prosperous, without threatening their neighbors.

This is also what we hope to achieve in Iraq.

The adoption last fall of our timetable to turn over sovereign authority to the Iraqis on July 1, 2004 has been useful in stimulating political reconstruction in Iraq.

The coalition's strategic aim in Iraq is to put the Iraqis in a position to run their own country. The US has no desire whatever to run Iraq, let alone (as the conspiracy mongers allege) to exploit it.

- Strategic success will be Iraqis creating for themselves an Iraq that gives freedom and prosperity to its own people and does not threaten its neighbors or others.
- The setting of deadlines - for example, the end of February deadline for the adoption of the so-called Iraqi interim constitution and the end of June deadline for the handover of sovereign authority - has had the intended effect of encouraging Iraqis to become more active in running their own ministries and in getting work completed in the Iraqi Governing Council.
- The interim constitution, which was completed only three days after the deadline, is an admirable document, the fruit of impressive political skill and the art of compromise on the part of the Iraqi Governing Council.
- Iraqis have stepped forward to manage the health ministry, the oil ministry and other key national ministries. And Iraqis are doing good work in the over 250 local governing councils also.
- The security situation in Iraq poses a number of serious problems now, as you all know from the newspapers. But we intend to proceed with the political reconstruction of Iraq - and the turnover of sovereign authority on July 1 - because that can help improve security in the country.
- The coalition will not be abandoning Iraq on July 1. On the contrary, as the interim constitution provides, coalition forces will remain to help provide security and to continue to train Iraqi security forces after July 1. The coalition will be pleased to withdraw its forces from Iraq when Iraqi security forces - police, civil defense forces, army and other elements - are ready to handle the remaining security challenges. The Coalition is working to improve the skills, leadership and equipment of Iraq's new security forces. It will take some time, but it is a crucial mission and the Iraqis want to be in a position where they can provide for their own security.
- As President Bush has recently reaffirmed, the United States will see our mission through in Iraq. Success in Iraq can contribute importantly to success in the war on terrorism generally. The building of democratic institutions in Iraq is crucial to fighting the battle of ideas within the war on terrorism. Iraq could become a model of moderation, freedom and prosperity. The stakes there are high.

Now, I'd like to turn to a few thoughts on U.S. defense policy.

As soon as President Bush came into office, he asked the Defense Department what changes we should make to position the United States properly in the world to perform our military missions in the decades ahead. The name given to this task is "transformation." The President has exhorted the Defense Department to think boldly and remake itself thoroughly, changing the way we:

Train and equip our forces,

Use them, for combat, stability operations and otherwise,

Position those forces around the world ,

Work with allies and partners, and

Conduct procurement and other business activities.

Some people think of "transformation" narrowly as a matter of using new technologies to produce better weapons. But the concept is more comprehensive.

A key facet of transformation is realigning our global defense posture - that is, updating the types, locations, numbers, and capabilities of our military forces, and the nature of our alliances.

As the President stated, "A fully transformed and strengthened overseas force posture will underscore the commitment of the United States to effective collective action in the common cause of peace and liberty."

The force posture changes we have in mind aim to increase our ability to work with other countries in military operations. Despite all that one hears these days about unilateralism, this Administration recognizes that our alliances and partnerships with other countries are a key strategic asset of the United States.

Unilateralism, I suppose, is such a common political accusation precisely because a U.S. national security official would have to be a fool to be

a unilateralist. With all due modesty, we are smarter than that.

We plan to realign our defense posture to increase our ability to fulfill our commitments abroad. As we do so, we'll be guided by the

following considerations:

- First, develop flexibility to contend with uncertainty. We no longer think we know where we might in the future have to do military operations. So we no longer think that forces will fight where they are based. Accordingly, we need light, agile forces - usable forces - easily and quickly deployable to help prevent problems from becoming crises and crises from becoming wars - and, if necessary, to win wars.
- Second, encourage transformation in allied roles and capabilities.
- Third, adopt a global not a regional perspective regarding the use of forces. We need a single military force capable of moving to a fight anywhere in the world. The idea that forces are assigned to a commander for a specific region is passé.
- And fourth, recognize that the key defense measurement is capabilities, not numbers of forces or numbers of platforms. New technologies and new doctrine and tactics make it possible for a relatively small force to achieve military results now that in early times would have required a far larger force.

Europe, and especially our new NATO allies, will play an important role in this aspect of our transformation.

Most of your countries are already active in the war on terrorism. Your support to coalition operations in the war on terrorism is highly valued.

Over fifty nations are supporting Afghanistan and Iraq stability and humanitarian relief operations.

It should come as no surprise to any of us that nations that so recently gained their own freedom are at the forefront of the effort to help the Afghan and the Iraqi people to achieve freedom for themselves.

while some of your countries are NATO allies, the support and cooperation of the non-NATO partners here make you all allies in action, if not allies by treaty.

President Bush has stated that "The door to NATO will remain open until the whole of Europe is united in freedom and peace." At the NATO Istanbul Summit in June, NATO will formally reaffirm its Open Door Policy.

I want to close by offering a tribute to the coalition forces in Afghanistan and Iraq, and especially to the US forces, who are responsible for so much of the effort. They are skillful. They are brave. They understand the importance of their mission. And they will succeed. We thank them for protecting our freedom.

And I thank you for the opportunity to speak with you tonight.

Mr. Feith was the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy from July 2001 to August 2005

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U. S. DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

