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## Freedom, Safety and Sovereignty by Douglas J. Feith

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*Remarks at Council on Foreign Relations*

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I appreciate the opportunity to address the Council on Foreign Relations, this productive and influential body. The Council has many claims to fame, including its having been featured in a diverse set of inane conspiracy theories - figments of the fevers of both the left wing and the right. I can now empathize. As one bugbear to another, I say: It's good to be here.

The Policy organization, my office at the Pentagon, is now doing its part in the Quadrennial Defense Review - the QDR - which the Congress has mandated. The review requires organizations throughout the Defense Department to consider which capabilities we'll need in coming years.

The foundation of the QDR is a defense strategy that nests within our national security strategy. So we've been obliged to think and re-think our most wide-ranging and basic strategic ideas. It's a healthy practice to review the basics - to question the formulation of our national security aims and re-chew our policy assumptions. Stale thought makes for bad strategy.

A key element of the President's strategy is the interest that the United States has in seeing freedom and democracy gain ground in the world.



President Bush, as you may have noticed, had something to say on this point in both his inaugural and State of the Union speeches recently. Under his direction, Administration officials are considering how best to increase safety and safeguard civil liberties at home by, among other means, supporting freedom abroad. As we do this work, we're paying particular attention to four phenomena in the world: the spread of weapons of mass destruction, terrorist extremism, the risks posed by failed or failing states, and the strategic choices facing important powers in the world, especially countries like China that are growing rapidly.

Our nation's most basic interest is to protect the freedom of the American people-our ability to govern ourselves under the Constitution. The sovereignty of the United States is another way of referring to this freedom. The United States strengthens its national security when it promotes a well-ordered world of sovereign states: a world in which states respect one another's rights to choose how they want to live; a world in which states do not commit aggression and have governments that can and do control their own territory; a world in which states have governments that are responsible and obey, as it were, the rules of the road.

Now, if the essence of sovereignty is that no state dictates how another organizes itself, how can respect for sovereignty be squared with President Bush's promotion of democracy?

I believe President Bush has answered this question by explaining that promoting democracy is not the same thing as asserting a right to impose governments on other states that are simply minding their own business. It would be a contradiction in terms to push democracy down the throats of people. Democracy means self-government and people can have it only if they choose it for themselves.

Over the years, U.S. presidents have encouraged democracy. And after wars, the United States has laid the foundation for democracy in countries like Japan , Germany , Afghanistan and Iraq . But democracy can't be sustained as an imposition. It requires that the people not only want it, but are willing to do the hard work to create and preserve the institutions important or necessary for democracy such as: multiple centers of power; a culture of compromise; basic freedoms - of conscience, religion and speech; an independent judiciary; private property; a free press; and fair elections.

Democratic institutions have proliferated around the world in recent decades, including in places with non-Western traditions and without a history of democratic politics. These institutions spread because they succeed. In liberal democratic countries people enjoy greater freedom, prosperity and domestic tranquility than in non-democratic countries. That's what I mean by "success." One can make this observation and encourage countries to adopt democracy without offending the principle of sovereignty.

Nor does respect for sovereignty require us to ignore the depredations of tyrannical regimes. As President Bush has said, " America will not pretend that jailed dissidents prefer their chains, or that women welcome humiliation and servitude, or that any human being aspires to live at the mercy of bullies." Even if the United States at a given moment is not in a position to help relieve such misery, Americans associate themselves with other peoples' aspirations for freedom. President Bush has often said, most recently to the citizens of Iran , that where people stand for their own liberty, America will stand with them.

Promoting democracy marries pragmatism and humane principle. Hence the President's declaration that " America 's vital interests and our deepest beliefs are now one." The safety and liberties of Americans are more secure in a world rich in countries that respect the rights of their citizens. Skeptics (undoubtedly well represented here, in so sophisticated an audience) are naturally suspicious of claims that principle coincides with advantage. But is it not the task of statesmanship to harmonize, to the extent possible, what is right with what is beneficial?

Since the colonial era, Americans have seen our country as a "light unto the nations" - an exemplar of freedom through self-government. Even those who have argued most forcefully that America ought not go abroad looking for dragons to slay have recognized that the American example of self-government is a powerful force in the world.

The United States carries out its policy of promoting democracy not in a simple, black-and-white morality tale, but in the real world, a sphere of moral complexity and life-and-death challenges. Despite the preeminent position of the United States in the world, we are not all-powerful. We don't have the luxury of restricting our cooperation in national security affairs exclusively to states with political arrangements of which we approve, any

more than Franklin Roosevelt and Winston Churchill could afford to be overly delicate about the nature of Stalin's regime. Indeed, as Churchill remarked, " If Hitler invaded hell I would make at least a favorable reference to the devil in the House of Commons." But the United States can boast that our influence on our non-democratic partners has tended over time to broaden the domain of human freedom.

Consider the historical record. The governments of South Korea and Taiwan , for example, were non-democratic, even at times repressive, yet the U. S. , for practical reasons, maintained close ties with them during the Cold War. Both were cited as instances of American inconsistency - and both are now vigorous democracies. A similar point could be made about the Philippines , Indonesia , El Salvador and others.

U.S. devotion to a well-ordered world of sovereign states has been called into question also because of our warnings about the threat of weapons of mass destruction in the hands of bad actors. In his State of the Union message in 2002, President Bush said: "We'll be deliberate, yet time is not on our side. I will not wait on events, while dangers gather. I will not stand by, as peril draws closer and closer. The United States of America will not permit the world's most dangerous regimes to threaten us with the world's most destructive weapons." Some criticized those words as a repudiation of classic notions of sovereignty.

It's instructive to reflect, however, on how the concept of sovereignty has evolved over the years. The traditional idea was that governments should be immune from interference as to actions at home short of actual aggression against another state. But in the mid-20 th Century, for example, the civilized world modified the concept of sovereignty in light of the Nazis' crimes against humanity. Genocide is now widely recognized as a matter of international concern and, despite the importance of sovereignty, governments are deemed outlaws if they commit genocide, even against their own citizens.

Then, in the 1990s, notwithstanding that Kosovo belonged to Serbia , the United States and our NATO allies did not permit the Milosevic regime to use the concept of sovereignty to shield its gross mistreatment of the Kosovars against international intervention. So, even without an authorizing resolution from the UN Security Council, NATO took action against Serbia .

As the enormities of genocide and other acts of gross inhumanity perturbed established ideas about international law, weapons of mass destruction now challenge statesmen of the civilized world. Even a small and poor state may now be in a position to produce the means to cause devastation to other people - damage far beyond the ability of such a state ever to remedy or recompense. The world has decided that sovereignty shouldn't protect a government perpetrating large-scale crimes against humanity within its own borders. Before us all now hangs the question of how long-standing ideas about sovereignty can be squared with the dangers of biological or nuclear weapons. Should governments with troubling records of aggression, support for terrorism, human rights abuses and the like be allowed to invoke sovereign rights to protect their development of catastrophic weapons that threaten the sovereign rights of others in the world? This is a question for which there is no simple, objective answer.

The importance of promoting a well-ordered world of sovereign states was brought home to Americans by 9/11, when terrorists enjoying safe haven in remote Afghanistan exploited "globalization" and the free and open nature of various Western countries to attack us disastrously here at home. Sovereignty means not just a country's right to command respect for its independence, but also the duty to take responsibility for what occurs on one's territory, and, in particular, to do what it takes to prevent one's territory from being used as a base for attacks against others.

In the war on terrorism, one of the key strategic challenges is this: How can we fight a global war against enemies who are present in so many countries with whom we are not at war? Indeed, many of these countries are friends of ours.

To contemplate that question is to come to understand why the United States cannot possibly win the war on terrorism by military means alone - or by itself alone. The United States can win the war - it can defeat terrorist extremism as a threat to our way of life as a free and open society - only through cooperation with allies and partners around the world.

Now, this may strike you as a shockingly non-unilateralist pronouncement. Perhaps you will conclude that it represents the new diplomatic tone of the new term of this Bush presidency. In fact, recognition that allies and partners are indispensable to the war effort has animated U.S. strategy since 9/11. Top U.S. officials have said so for years, though statements to this effect tended to be ignored or underplayed by folks wedded to the thesis,

as common as it is false, that the administration is run by fools committed to go-it-alone-ism in national security affairs. But I digress.

Let's get back to the key question: How can we fight a global war against enemies who are present in so many countries with whom we are not at war?

A key part of the answer is cooperation with partner countries. As a practical matter in most cases, only they can act as required against the terrorists on their territory. The required action may be law enforcement; it may be intelligence work; it may be a military operation; or it may be the development of an educational system that can compete with extremist madrassa schools.

We're working with allies and partners to develop common views on the nature of the threat of terrorist extremism. We're assessing with them the capabilities needed to confront it. We urge our partners to do their duty as sovereign states to regulate their borders and otherwise control their territories.

And we're working to build their capacity to perform that duty. So the United States not only encourages partner action, but helps to enable it.

This accounts for such various, not obviously related projects as:

- the training and equipping of the Afghan and Iraqi security forces, military and police;
- counter-terrorist train-and-equip efforts in Pakistan , Yemen , the Philippines , Georgia and elsewhere;
- educational assistance programs in various countries;
- the President's Global Peace Operations Initiative, to help train, sustain and rapidly deploy forces (initially mainly in Africa ) for peacekeeping and for the more difficult missions known as "peace enforcement;" and
- the establishment of the new Reconstruction and Stabilization Office at the State Department to help countries develop the tools they need for civil administration.

The main elements of U.S. strategy in the war on terrorism are: one, protecting the homeland; two, disrupting and attacking terrorist networks; and three, countering ideological support for terrorism. The third - the ideological fight - we see as the key to victory.

We have overthrown two regimes that supported terrorists - that of the Taliban in Afghanistan and of Saddam Hussein in Iraq - and induced a third - Qaddafi's in Libya - to change its policies. All of this has contributed to forcing our extremist enemies to shift some of their attention from offense to defense. All of this has helped interfere with their communications, planning, weapons programs, training and operations, as have our disruptions of terrorist financial flows and the capture or killing of approximately two-thirds of the known leadership of al Qaida. But we recognize that, if all we do is disrupt and attack terrorist networks, we'll not defeat our enemies.

Our goal is not only to deny the terrorists what they need to operate, but ultimately to deny them what they need to survive. This is why it is crucial to counter ideological support for terrorism.

As we see it, this effort, a long-term undertaking, has two components. First, we have to de-legitimize terrorism. As the President has said, we intend to make terrorism like the slave trade, piracy, or genocide - activities that nobody who aspires to respectability can condone, much less support. It will take a lot of work to change the way millions of people think, and to undo the effects of decades in which terrorism was tolerated and even, on occasion, rewarded.

The second component of our effort to counter ideological support for terrorism is support for models of moderation, democracy, sound economics and healthy civil society that can compete with the bloody blandishments of the extremists. As President Bush, referring to the Greater Middle East, has explained, "As long as that region is a place of tyranny and despair and anger, it will produce men and movements that threaten the safety of Americans and our friends. We seek the advance of democracy for the most practical of reasons: because democracies do not support terrorists or threaten the world with weapons of mass murder." This is why the political and economic reconstruction of Afghanistan and Iraq are crucial to success in the war on terrorism.

The problems that I've been discussing thus far are by no means the sole focus of folks in the Defense Department. As important as are the war on terrorism and WMD proliferation, we retain our interest in relationships among the world's major powers.

Throughout history, regulating such relationships has tested the skills of statesmen. The test gets especially tough as it becomes necessary to accommodate the shifts in relative strength among those states, especially the rise of new powers. A failing grade has all too frequently come in the form of war, when the international system proved unable to balance the demands of the rising powers and the interests of the older ones.

Over the last ten to twenty years, the world's state system has managed a number of grand adjustments gracefully and pacifically, including the disintegration of the Soviet empire, the unification of Germany, the blossoming of India and the enlargement of NATO.

Of the new powers that are rising - developing economic strength and willing to engage in the world, through trade and otherwise - the country that can be expected to have the greatest effect on international relations is China.

As in India and other rapidly developing countries, the people in China have benefited palpably from their government's economic liberalization and from the world's general willingness to accommodate their rise by, for example, admitting them into the global trading system. China has cultivated confidence on the part of international business people that it will remain stable and hospitable to them for trade and investment.

As is the case with other major players too - Russia, India, Japan, the European Union and, I would say, the United States - China can be seen as facing a strategic crossroads. The world is in rather high flux, international relations don't now have the structure and the alignments that existed during the Cold War, or even in the decade preceding 9/11. Countries are making choices that will determine what kind of world they want to live in. These countries have to define their aspirations for the future, what in the past might have been called their conception of "national greatness."

For a country like China, the fundamental choice is whether it wishes to join the group of advanced economies whose relationships are governed by "rules of the road" of the international state system and who define their national purpose with reference to the freedom, well-being and prosperity

of their citizens.

As the U.S. record makes clear, we don't see the world economic system as a zero-sum game - we envision the possibility of rising economic tides, as the saying goes, that lift all boats. China, for its part, was able to develop rapidly because it abandoned the radicalism of the Mao years. If it wants to continue to prosper, it will choose a benign path that will allow the world to accommodate its rise peacefully. The question is: do its leaders see that China's long-term interests - including its opportunities to profit from foreign investment and trade - hinge on its becoming a respected and responsible member of an international community, and that this will in turn require that it forego the threat or use of force to pursue reunification? Sensitive and explosive issues, such as relations between China and Taiwan, should be addressed within the existing diplomatic framework, the essence of which is that all matters be resolved consensually and peacefully.

Other key players in the world can help the Chinese leadership understand that China's future prosperity, stability, and dignity depend to a significant degree on China's continued political development toward a freer society governed by a more representative political system. Such a society would be less likely to see military force as useful, and more likely to seek international influence through the attractiveness of the society it builds at home.

The world's recent successes in managing great power relationships are a credit to the flexibility of the state system and the vitality of the conflict-averting "rules of the road" that I have referred to. Rising powers have understood that their worthy hopes can be realized within a well-ordered system of sovereign states. The United States and our allies and partners have an interest in fostering an environment in which China comes progressively to share that understanding.

### **Conclusion**

This discussion of U.S. policy has been, I realize, a bit abstract. Some of what we do in the Defense Department is like that, and some is more down to earth. I would like to conclude by mentioning the people in the Department who are not only down to earth, but the earth they are down to is

The men and women of the U.S. armed forces serving in combat abroad are contributing bravely and brilliantly to achieving the national purposes I have been outlining. They are disrupting terrorist networks, helping set the conditions for the Afghans and Iraqis to create their own democratic institutions and helping shape the global environment so that Americans can enjoy safety and civil liberties and continue to serve their historical role in the world as supporters of freedom. They make us proud and deserve our grateful recognition. We should all thank them. And I thank you.

*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

