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COMBATING TERRORISM

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Veterans Affairs and International Relations
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I want to thank the committee for inviting me to testify today on issues that everyone will agree are the very top of our national agenda at a moment of historic importance. I am honored to be included on a panel of such distinguished figures in the world of foreign policy and national security, and I am particularly pleased to appear before the subcommittee of Chairman Shays, with whom I had the opportunity to discuss these issues at an Aspen Institute breakfast several months ago and who, for many years, was my Congressional representative, since I come from Southern Connecticut.

The committee has asked several broad questions on the issues of terrorism and weapons of mass destruction; I would like to make some introductory comments on these subjects. I served on the National Security Council staff during the Clinton Administration as director for Transnational Threats with most of my responsibilities focuses on international counterterrorism. It is safe to say that during President Clinton's time in office, concern about terrorism in general and terrorism involving weapons of mass destruction in particular rose rapidly and become one of the foremost areas of activity and innovation. Overall, I would agree with the judgment of Barton Gellman of The Washington Post, who wrote on December 20th of last year, "By any measure available, Clinton left office having given greater priority to terrorism than any president before him. His government doubled counterterrorist spending across 40 departments and agencies. The FBI and CIA allocated still larger increases in their budgets and personnel assignments." I would add that that programmatic and budgetary expansion occurred against a backdrop of financial flat lines, as the Administration and Congress worked to balance the federal budget. I doubt that any comparable sized area of government activity saw a similar rise in funding. You are all familiar with the better known defensive measures, such as Nunn-Lugar-Domenici program for equipping and training of first responders for an attack involving weapons of mass destruction, the creation of the first ever national medical stockpile and the renovation of the public health infrastructure that began under President Clinton. Without efforts like these, we might well have had a far worse experience during the anthrax attacks of last year.

Nothing concerned the Clinton Administration more than the dangers of WMD proliferation and the possibility of these terrible weapons falling into the hands of rogue states and terrorists. On many aspects of these issues, my former colleagues who specifically worked on nonproliferation issues would be better suited to speak on the administration's concern about the efforts of Iraq, Iran and North Korea to acquire these weapons, but of course, everyone is familiar with the years of efforts the administration spent on degrading Iraq's capabilities through a variety of means including military operations such as Desert Fox, the strenuous efforts that were made with the Russians and others to ensure that Iranian programs to acquire WMD did not progress and the Agreed Framework with North Korea, to halt and roll back that country's nuclear program.

Regarding terrorist acquisition of WMD: It had been widely believed by government experts and independent scholars that terrorists were not, by and large, interested in acquiring a WMD capability because it would not serve their aims. Before the 1990s, the overwhelming majority of terrorist groups, whether state-sponsored or of the national liberation variety or some hybrid thereof, wanted to demonstrate that they were important enough and, in a way, responsible enough to be invited to the negotiating table to discuss their demands. The acquisition and/or use of WMD would have ruled them out for any treatment except complete destruction.

In the 1990s, that changed, first with the Aum Shinrikyo attack in Tokyo in 1995 and, more importantly, the rise of al-Qaeda. As you will recall, the Clinton Administration received intelligence in the summer of 1998 that al-Qaeda was seeking in earnest to acquire WMD, especially chemical weapons, and that the group was working together with the National Islamic Front government of Sudan to develop the nerve agent VX. Shortly thereafter, the U.S. embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam were destroyed by al-Qaeda bombs. In response, on August 20, 1998, the Clinton administration did something no other administration had ever done when it launched an attack that destroyed the al-Shifa plant in Khartoum, which was associated with both chemical weapons and bin Laden. In short, the administration sent a clear sign to terrorists and state proliferators alike that the United States would take all necessary measures to ensure that WMD did not fall into the hands of terrorists.

As everyone well recalls, the administration took what might charitably be called a shellacking for the attack on al-Shifa, both in the press and from some members of the Congress. It was widely alleged - and believed - that the administration had erred in striking Khartoum, that there was insufficient evidence for the attack and that other motives may have been at work. What has not been widely discussed is the vindication of the strike that appeared last year during the embassy bombings trial in New York, at which the star witness, an al-Qaeda defector, repeatedly noted on the stand that Osama bin Laden's organization was working to produce chemical weapons in Khartoum. This testimony was completely overlooked by the press. For a fuller discussion of the matter, I would be happy to supply you with copies of an article that I co-wrote on this subject that appeared in The New York Review of Books last fall. It is not going too far, I believe, to say that if the al-Shifa attack had been taken more seriously in the country, the public would have had a better notion of what al-Qaeda is about than it did on September 11 of last year.

Let me say a few words about unilateral and multilateral action to combat terrorism. This is an area in which there are no easy rules, but rather where good judgment is required. In the first instance, it is vitally important that the U.S. make clear to all potential foes that it will not hesitate to respond forcefully to terrorist attack. There are several important considerations here including speed of response and efficacy. I believe that General Scowcroft and the first Bush Administration were indeed wise in the course they charted when it became clear that Libya was behind the bombing of Pan Am 103. That determination came many months after the bombing, and after several rounds of tit-for-tat retaliations with the Libyans. By choosing a multilateral approach based on law enforcement and UN sanctions, the Bush administration laid the groundwork, and the Clinton administration continued in a process that has led Libya to get out of the terrorism business, however unsatisfactory some of its behavior remains.

By contrast, the rapid determination of responsibility for the attempt on the life of former President Bush in 1993 and the embassy bombings in 1998 led to military action. In both of these cases, both timing and the fact that U.S. has little interest in engaging in a long-term behavior modification program made military action the right choice.

There are multilateral actions that are essential to the fight against terrorism, and there are circumstances in which the U.S. should act quickly, decisively and unilaterally. I think I have made clear some of the latter kinds of cases. It is important to underscore the key multilateral measures that we need to combat terrorism. The assistance of other countries is vital, I repeat, vital, to depriving terrorists of bases from which to operate, whether they are clandestine cells operating in Europe or larger terrorist training camps or infrastructure in failed states like Afghanistan. This assistance is also essential to ensure that terrorists cannot acquire the official

documentation they need to travel, to cut off their finances and to make it harder for them to acquire explosives and components for WMD.

My own concern is that after the initial flush of solidarity from the world community that we experienced after September 11, many other countries are slowing their cooperation because of their determination that they are not going to be a target and in some anger at what they perceive as the overly unilateral approach of the United States. We need these countries' assistance - that cannot be underscored enough. I think any western country that believes it is immune from attack may be making a fateful error. As long as al-Qaeda can find a place to burrow in on the European continent - or perhaps in South America or East Asia or elsewhere - then we are at much greater risk than we should be. I hope the administration recognizes this. We clearly need both multilateral and unilateral efforts.

Let me say a few words, finally, about Iraq, Iran and North Korea. Are they an 'evil axis'? I confess to being uncomfortable with the phrase, above all because the word axis suggests that these countries are a partnership or alliance. They are decidedly not that. The enmity between Iraq and Iran has cost more lives than almost any conflict in the last quarter century. North Korea is called the hermit kingdom with good reason. Similarly, if we misperceive them as a single group, we may too easily fall into dealing with them in a cookie cutter way that undermines our effort. Diplomatic means maybe more effective with some; military means may be required for dealing with others.

All of these countries pose dangers to the United States to varying degrees. To my mind, there is one entity in the world that poses a distinctly greater threat to America than any other, and that is al-Qaeda. As it has shown conclusively, al-Qaeda cannot be deterred; it can only be defeated. Al-Qaeda possesses an ideology that calls for the creation of maximum casualties and destruction, and, given the opportunity, the group will use weapons of mass destruction against the U.S. - I have no doubt about this. There are no prudential calculations of any kind we know that cause al-Qaeda to restrain its violence. The battle against al-Qaeda must be America's highest priority, and in light of the uncertainties regarding the whereabouts of Osama bin Laden and Ayman Zawahiri and the possibility that there are operations in the pipeline, it is far too early to say the group has been beaten. Moreover, the ability of al-Qaeda to reconstitute itself and resume operations will depend in large measure upon the cooperation we receive from friendly governments in the Middle East and Persian Gulf regions. That issue needs to be factored into any decision to take the war on terrorism into another theater - in particular, against Iraq.

It is also important to have as much clarity as possible about the relationships between the 'axis of evil' nations and al-Qaeda. There is no substantial body of evidence to my knowledge of serious, sustained cooperation between al-Qaeda and any of these countries. There are reasons to be concerned: indications that bin Laden has met with senior Hezbollah figures or that Mohammed Atta met with an Iraqi intelligence agent in Prague - these are without a doubt reasons for vigilance and increased intelligence collection. But by themselves, they are not warrant enough for linking al-Qaeda with either country. In addition, these countries both have strong reasons not to assist bin Laden, who they could not control and whose organization believes that Shiites are heretics and Saddam Hussein is secular ruler of the kind who has destroyed Islam.

The United States needs to deal with Iraq, Iran and North Korea, and it may well choose a military option for dealing with Iraq. But we should not lose sight of the fact that today we face one clear and present threat with a record of mass murdering American civilians. That, I believe, must remain utmost in our minds as we go forward.

Thank you.