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FROM HOMELAND DEFENSE TO NATION BUILDING:  
A FOREIGN POLICY FOR A CONSTITUTIONAL REPUBLIC

Friday, September 13, 2002

Featuring:

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and

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B-338

Rayburn House Office Building

Washington, D.C.

## P R O C E E D I N G S

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MR. CARPENTER: It's certainly a pleasure to be here this afternoon. I want to talk first about the foundation of American foreign policy, because any structure is only going to be as sound as the foundation on which it is built. And I believe the foundation of America's ought to be a rigorous defense of vital interests.

Now, in recent years, the concept of vital interests has come into some disrepute. In certain circles in the United States and in many other countries, it is almost considered bad manners and evidence of narrow-mindedness to bring up the concept of vital interests as the basis of American foreign policy. And the flipside to that is the tendency to define nearly everything as a vital interest. So if the Eastern Slobovians are mistreating the Western Slobovians in Lower Slobovia, that somehow becomes a vital interest of the United States. And if you want to substitute Bosnia for Lower Slobovia, feel free to do so.

I think that vital interests are absolutely essential if the United States is to have a sound and coherent foreign

policy. But the concept is not self-defining. We do have to have some boundaries to it. And I define a vital interest as something that has a direct and substantial connection to America's independence, its physical safety, its liberty, and, I would add in addition to what I have in the lecture document, the overall economic prosperity of the country.

Both the notion that it must have a direct and a substantial connection, those notions are extremely important. People who want to define everything as a vital interest engage in what I call daisy-chain reasoning -- that if an improbable development takes place, and then another improbable development takes place, and another three or four or five or six improbable developments take place, then we have a threat to a vital interest. Well, that's game-playing.

If a development truly menaces a vital interest, it has to have a direct connection to that interest. And it also has to have a substantial connection. If an adverse development takes place, it must be something more than just an annoyance or an inconvenience. It does have to threaten these items that I have listed.

I believe very strongly that America's military forces should be used solely for the defense of American vital interests, not for other goals, however desirable in the abstract those goals might be.

Taking this foundation, building American foreign policy on a foundation of the defense of vital interests, I have developed three key rules of an intelligent foreign policy. The first one could be described in technical language, but I think one of my colleagues put it best when he said, "Don't sweat the small stuff." And that is an important principle. Focus on the big issues -- developments that can truly threaten vital interests.

And two of those developments really stand out. One is terrorism directed against the United States. And I think, if we want to look at what constitutes a vital interest, it's interesting how the debates about whether Bosnia or whether nation-building constituted vital interests largely disappeared on September 11th, 2001. When we were attacked, we knew what a vital interest looked like. We didn't have to have agonizing debates about whether something was a vital interest or not. This was a vital interest, and it has required a change in strategic thinking in the United States.

I know for a fact that the overwhelming majority of civilian policymakers and military officers, on September 10th, 2001, would never have imagined that the primary duty of the American military would be to protect the American homeland and to retaliate for an attack on the American homeland. For more than five decades, American military power had been used solely

as an instrument of American foreign policy, often in far-flung regions of the world. That has had to change, and change dramatically. This is the number one threat to America's vital interests. It is likely to be the number one threat for a good many years to come.

I was writing on this back as far as 1995 and 1996, warning that this was going to be the primary security threat the United States would face. And unfortunately that has come to pass.

But there is another development that we cannot ignore entirely as we focus on the threat of terrorism. And that is the likelihood, in the coming decades, that we are going to see the rise of new great powers or the resurgence of old ones, and the possibility that one or more of those great powers may be hostile to the United States. We do have to anticipate that. We do have to develop strategies for dealing with it.

We have the luxury that that is not likely to be a problem for the next 10 or 15 years at least, but it will happen some day, and we have to be aware of the development. The most likely candidate for a peer competitor, if not an outright adversary, is of course the People's Republic of China. And how well we handle defense of vital interests is going to be heavily contingent on how well we manage relations with China over the next decade or two.

Now, those are the kinds of developments that affect vital interests, and it is important to make that distinction. The behavior of a major power like China, like Russia, like India, like the major powers of the European Union, like Japan, matter to the United States automatically. Whether Armenia or Azerbaijan controls Nagorno-Karabakh need not and should not matter to the United States. Those are the kinds of issues we can safely ignore. Nation-building, humanitarian interventions, and trying to export democracy, again, however much they might be desirable in the abstract, are not big issues and they do not warrant serious U.S. commitments.

The second rule is to recognize that there are many forms of engagement, and that one of the luxuries of being a superpower is that we have choices. Our superpower status is measured by our strengths, our intrinsic characteristics. The fact that we have a \$10 trillion economy, the fact that we have thousands of nuclear warheads, the fact that we have a conventional military force that completely dwarfs any capability by any other power, the fact that we have a culture that is pervasive in the world and gives us influence in many subtle ways, that is why we are a superpower.

I am so weary of people who argue that unless we undertake missions in obscure regions of the world that have no connection to America's vital interests that we will retreat into

an isolationist cocoon, that we will adopt a Fortress America strategy, cut ourselves off from the world, and raise the drawbridge. Please... the choice is not solely one between promiscuous global interventionism on the one hand and the kind of policy, unfortunately, we have had in recent years, and isolationism on the other. There are many other alternatives.

Recognize that there are various types of engagement in world affairs. Military engagement is certainly one, and I would argue it is probably the single most important one. But a close second is economic engagement. And diplomatic and cultural engagement, while more subtle, is also important. These are different axes of engagement. And there is no need to have identical positions along each axis of engagement.

Nor do we have to assume that on the political/military one we have to be at one extreme of the spectrum or the other. There are various positions along that spectrum that we can choose. And again, being a superpower means we have the luxury of choice, a luxury that most powers in the international system have not had historically and do not have today.

The third rule I would present is to recognize that multi-polarity in the world is not necessarily a bad thing for the United States. Indeed, the rise of other centers of power in the world can benefit America in important ways. A strong, cohesive security entity within the European Union would be able

to manage crises in strategic backwaters like the Balkans, instead of having a NATO-centric policy in which the United States is expected to take the lead in such missions.

A more active Japan could be an important stabilizer in East Asia and be the front-line power for dealing with crises in that region, instead of having the United States playing the role of point man in every crisis.

There is something truly bizarre about such things as dealing with North Korea when we consider that North Korea is surrounded by South Korea, China, Japan, and Russia. And yet, do any of those countries take the lead in trying to deal with a troublesome North Korea? No. They all look to the United States to deal with the problem.

Encouraging, not just merely accepting, the rise of other centers of power, particularly democratic, status quo, conservative powers, will provide enormous benefits to the United States. By protecting their own vital interests and stabilizing their own regions, such powers would provide indirection security benefits to the United States. Their exertions would create security buffers between the United States and the rise of security threats. In other words, they would have every incentive to try to take care of those threats before the threats reach the point where they could actually menace America's security.

Unfortunately, American policymakers have tried to discourage, rather than encourage, the emergence of other power centers. The most notorious example of that was the draft of the Defense Department's planning guidance document in 1992 that said it should be a goal of the United States to discourage other regional powers from even aspiring to play larger roles. And they were not talking about Russia and China; they were talking about the nations of the European Union and Japan. That to me is an incredibly shortsighted policy.

The role of the United States in the international system should be that of balancer of last resort, not intervener of first resort. Don't volunteer to be the point man. Keep your power in reserve. Put it into the balance when it becomes necessary to meet a serious security threat, but don't volunteer to take care of every matter, trivial as well as serious.

I want to say a few words about the war on terrorism, although you're going to hear a lot more about that in our presentation next week. But let me just say a few things about that. First of all, I think it is imperative to understand the proper nature of our war against the people who committed the September 11th atrocities. We need to keep our eye on the prize. The adversary is Osama bin Laden and his al-Qaida network and their Taliban allies. And that war is not even close to being finished. We like to pretend it is.

Al-Qaida and the Taliban have been badly damaged. They have been deprived of their base in Afghanistan. But there are al-Qaida cells in numerous countries around the world, and there are significant concentrations of al-Qaida and Taliban fighters in Pakistan. And it is one of the bitterest ironies of this war against terrorism that we seem to be willing to do almost anything -- go to war against Iraq, send training missions to the Philippines and Georgia -- but the one thing we won't do is discomfort our noble ally in Pakistan, the military dictator of that country, General Musharraf, by going after where the Taliban and al-Qaida are now located. That needs to be the next stage of the war on terrorism.

We must not allow the war against the September 11th attackers to become an amorphous war against terrorism per se. There are lots of insurgent movements in the world. Most of them, from time to time, use terrorist tactics. But they have adversaries other than the United States.

The Irish Republican Army may still be a bit of a problem for Great Britain. The Basque separatists may be a problem for Spain. The Kashmiri insurgents certainly are a problem for India. The FARC rebels in Colombia are a problem for that government. But they do not generally attack American targets. They are not necessarily our adversaries. And if we declare a war on terrorism per se, we make other countries'

enemies into our enemies. And I would argue we have enough enemies of our own; we don't need to acquire others needlessly.

In addition -- and again, you will hear far more of this next week -- the war on terrorism should not become a pretext for such things as settling old scores against Saddam Hussein. A war against Iraq would be a dangerous distraction for the United States. I would argue that if we go to war against Iraq, the happiest person in the world, assuming he is still alive, would be Osama bin Laden, because we would take him out of the center of the bull's eye and focus on Iraq and Saddam Hussein instead. And we would move one step closer to transforming this war from a war against the murderers of September 11th into a general struggle between the West and the Islamic world. And that is exactly what bin Laden wants.

Finally, what is needed for the United States is a new foreign policy of strategic independence. And it has a basic principle -- don't get involved in other people's fights unless America's own vital interests are at stake.

Now, generally speaking, in the security realm, that means unilateralism rather than multilateralism, but it does not necessarily foreclose multilateralism in some specific instances. It is generally unilateralism, but it is a restrained unilateralism, in marked contrast to the kind of muscular,

belligerent, imperial unilateralism advocated by some neoconservatives and others in the United States.

Specific independence rejects the role of America as the world's policeman, and it equally rejects the role of America as the world's social worker. It would husband America's great economic, political and strategic advantages -- and we have them beyond anything any other great power in history could ever imagine. We ought to exploit those and not waste them frivolously.

And finally, I would argue that strategic independence is the only foreign policy consistent with the values of a constitutional republic. And to me that is a very important point. America was not designed by the Founders to be an empire. We are not well suited to be an empire. And if we try to play that role, we are going to transform this country domestically as well as internationally, and do so in most undesirable ways. The reality is mobilizing for war, always staying mobilized for war, and waging wars incessantly, will have crucial domestic consequences.

That kind of mobilization means inevitably, regardless of anyone's intentions, that power flows from the private sector to government. Within the government sector, it flows from the State and local level to the Federal level. And at the Federal

level it flows from the judicial and legislative branches to the executive branch. That is not healthy for a pluralistic society.

The distinction we ought to make is one that Secretary of State John Quincy Adams made back in 1821, and his principles are just as applicable today as they were then, when he emphasized that America did not go abroad in search of monsters to destroy, that it was the well-wisher to the freedom and independence of all, but it was the defender and vindicator only of its own.

That quote has been cited on a number of occasions, but Adams had something more to say. And it showed that his principles and the principles of the founding generation and the next generation were not just designed for a weak America, but were designed for a strong America. Adams warned, if we ever abandoned that distinction, America, he said, might become the dictatress of the world -- it was potentially that strong -- but it would no longer be the master of its own spirit.

Aside from the prudential considerations that we have to make when we adopt a foreign policy, that is an absolutely fundamental consideration. We don't want to transform America into the new Rome -- and I mean the Roman Empire not the Roman Republic -- and yet, I think we have a grave danger of doing exactly that.

I will close with that and turn it over to my colleague, Doug Bandow, who will go into much greater detail about the things we don't need to worry about.

Thank you.

(Applause.)

DOUG BANDOW,  
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MR. BANDOW: I think that Ted's comment about America becoming a new Rome is a very apt place to begin. Because if you look at the United States and you think about America's role in the world, it's hard to think of a time in human history of a country that has been so dominant as the United States except imperial Rome. If one thinks about the lack of a hegemonic competitor, one thinks about the fact that the United States is allied with every major industrialized state on earth; one thinks about the fact that the U.S. accounts for about 40 percent of all military spending on earth, that we spend as much as the next eight countries combined, six of whom are close friends; where the U.S. spends as much to defend a country like South Korea as South Korea spends to defend itself; where the U.S. spends 20 times as much as the rogue states that we view as our most obvious enemies, such as Iraq; that the President's proposal to

increase military spending in 2003 by \$46 billion, and that that amount of money is more than any other nation on earth currently spends in toto, other than Russia.

The United States' position is extraordinary in terms of its dominance around the globe. And that gives us, as Ted indicated, an opportunity to make choices that other nations cannot make, but it also shows the dangers that we face in terms of what America's role should be and the impact on American society at home.

There are no traditional security justifications to justify this kind of dominance. There is simply no competitor in the way that we had during the Cold War. There is no Soviet Union. There is no there there, as Gertrude Stein once said of Oakland, where Russia's military has essentially imploded, where China, though over the long term is potentially a very serious competitor, remains today a very poor country, once you get outside of the urban areas. It retains a military that remains fairly backward and undeveloped.

And beyond that, the hostile states out there that we tend to focus on, such as North Korea, threaten not the United States but American allies. And they threaten American allies which have enormous resources to defend themselves. South Korea, for example, has 40 times the GDP of the North, 2 times the population, a vast technological edge, and indeed has been

receiving weapons from Russia to help pay off old debts of Russia to South Korea. In this world, one has to ask, why is the United States defending South Korea, 50 years after the Korean War?

So one has to look, then, beyond traditional security justifications to maintaining this kind of new imperial order that we seem to be heading into. And the temptation that we seem to be falling into, encouraged by many very actively, is nation-building. The notion that the United States needs to reorder the globe. The belief is that the U.S. has to rebuild failed states, has to bring democracy around the world, has to spread American ideals, by force if necessary. Of course, the potential targets in a world of tragedy are many. But the justifications of engaging in this kind of policy, I would argue, are few.

One of the arguments that is brought forth is the notion that it is in America's interests to maintain global stability, and that therefore we have an interest -- again, the kind of interests that Ted mentioned in terms of Upper or Lower Slobovia -- that the United States has a vital interest in maintaining stability, and that that stability has to be preserved, in fact, all over the globe. Yet the world has always suffered from pockets of instability. And distant pockets of instability have rarely had any discernable impact on American national interests.

More fundamentally, trying to maintain stability in such places generally requires a political solution to deep-seated political problems, not something that is easily imposed from outside, imposed by an outside power, and imposed, frankly, by an outside power that often has absolutely no understanding of the deep-seated conflicts that it is trying to deal with. And unfortunately, attempting to impose order very often creates its own forms of instability.

If, for example, one goes to the Balkans and provides an air force to the ethnic guerrilla group, the Kosovo Liberation Army, one has in fact empowered the most aggressive, the most expansive and expansionist movement in the region. And what one gets out of that then is massive ethnic cleansing. Under our watch in Kosovo, one sees organized crime, one sees problems of actually Muslim terrorism there. One sees an undermining of the stability of Macedonia, a neighboring state, all coming out of this attempt apparently to impose stability on the region.

Far better to examples like this is to basically create firebreaks to war, to recognize that there is nothing that warrants the getting involved of any major power. And I would argue in fact that that worked very well in the Balkans before the U.S. decided that it had to try to save Bosnia and get involved in Kosovo. For the Yugoslav civil war actually went on longer than World War I, without any major power getting

involved, because all made the correct judgment that nothing warranted war in that case.

Indeed, all of them in certain ways harkened back to the old Bismarckian aphorism that the Balkans are not worth the bones of a healthy Pomeranian grenadier. There is nothing in fact that warranted getting involved in those kind of conflicts, so all the major powers stayed out.

Another argument for kind of nation-building and global meddling is the whole notion of maintaining international norms, that there are principles of international law that must be maintained and uphold them around the globe. Yet, it is very hard to see in Washington's policy very much principle consistency anywhere. In Bosnia, for example, in which it was said this was aggression because Bosnia itself was an independent state, of course it was an artificial country, created with international support out of a civil war. And usually the United States has taken the position in the past that we don't support secessionist movements. In this case we happened to do so.

Indeed, the West decided in the Balkans that Slovenes, Croats and Muslims all were entitled to secede from Serbian-dominated territory, but that Serbs had no right anywhere to secede from even the most brutal co-ethnic groups, such as the Croats and the tender mercies of Franjo Tudjman in Croatia. And what we find is that the Kosovars and Montenegrins are entitled

not to full independence, but they are entitled to halfway. They can have autonomy, but they cannot have the independence that they desire. There is no principle here. What is going on is some very strange belief in terms of perceived national interests on America's part and some mishmash of international principles that frankly makes no sense.

And yet, if one looks further abroad, one looks for example at the Kurds, one finds that the United States is very supportive of protecting the Kurds' lives, liberty and property in Iraq, but the U.S. is very supportive of Turkey's efforts to crush Kurds within Turkey. It is very hard to find the principle there.

The problem is in fact, if you look at conflicts like this, given the deep-seated nature of those conflicts, it is very hard to come up with any right answer in any particular case. It is very hard for us to discern the proper moral response. And it is particularly problematic in practice to try to micromanage conflicts like that, to come out of it and give us exactly the result that we want.

It is no surprise that the Kosovars want independence and not autonomy, and it is very hard to see over the long term how we are going to maintain today's situation. And you can multiply that in other areas where we might try nation-building.

Another argument, and in many ways my favorite, is the whole notion -- and I think Ted touched on this -- that we have to exercise global leadership. Nobody else will take care of this. The Balkans of course is a classic example. If the Europeans won't solve this, we must do so. If nobody else will deal with this problem, we must do so. The mere fact that other countries won't act does not mean that the U.S. has to act. It doesn't mean that it's a problem that requires American attention.

U.S. leadership is inevitable. We have the largest, most productive economy on earth. We have a globally dominant culture. We have a political philosophy that is enormously attractive abroad. This country is going to be a superpower almost in spite of itself.

Real leadership means using all of its attributes with discernment, choosing between violent peripheral interests, carefully weighing costs and benefits. It does not mean jumping into every conflict, every dispute, every source of instability, and trying to solve it. It is particularly important to recognize that 280 million Americans have no monopoly on the knowledge and understanding necessary to try to resolve conflicts around the globe.

Moreover, we must recognize that other nations and peoples don't necessarily view themselves as being useless mounds

of clay, sitting around to be molded by the United States. That very often, people in other countries and places have a very different vision in terms of how their society should look and may not take kindly to America's attempt to build a nation for them.

The danger of this kind of fatal conceit that Friedrich Hayek talked about is readily evident when it comes to domestic social engineering. It is even more problematic when we go international. Indeed, if you start looking around the world at America's attempts at nation-building, it is very hard to find successful examples. When we point to Bosnia or Haiti or Kosovo or Lebanon or Somalia, where are the great successes?

In Bosnia, we have an artificial state where two-thirds of the people would like to get out immediately; a state which exists only because we have imposed a high representative who makes the decision in terms of what the flag will look like, who decides what the national anthem will be, who decides on the currency, and who has the power to throw out elected officials that he doesn't like and to demand that the media run video clips of the American Secretary of State. Well, this may be democracy I suppose, but it is more Boss Tweed democracy than anything I would prefer to recognize.

Haiti, we managed to move from military dictatorship to presidential dictatorship.

Kosovo has given us an experience where we saw a quarter of a million Serbs, Jews, Gypsies, and even non-ethnic Albanian Muslims ethnically cleansed after we were technically in charge.

Lebanon was a wonderful success of getting 241 marines blown up at the U.S. barracks.

Somalia remains in chaos.

Where are the successful examples of nation-building?

About the only examples one can argue worked in any sense are Germany and Japan. The problem of course in this case is these were countries that were totally defeated at war. Their political leaderships had been completely discredited. There were significant reservoirs of tradition there in terms of legal and cultural and economic that could be called upon. These were ethnically homogeneous societies that were in fact real countries that had had real governments, in contrast to most of the places around the globe where we are trying to do nation-building.

Very few potentially failed states to be built have even one of these characteristics, let alone all of them. So, to point to these as examples of what America could do in Iraq or America could do in Afghanistan points very far afield.

The argument that we have now today about nation-building is to forget all the other things we've ever thought, we need to nation-build to stop terrorism. This of

course is the issue of Afghanistan. We look at Afghanistan and, boy, this shows why we have to nation-build, because looked what happened there. But Afghanistan shows the limits of the argument in terms of going to nation-building. There is of course the charge that the U.S. made a major mistake by abandoning Afghanistan after the Soviets were forced from that country.

But it is not at all clear to me what Washington was supposed to do once the mujahedin had driven out the Soviets. We would what, put in a major military force to impose a central government -- rather like the Soviets had tried? That didn't seem to work very well.

We would simply hand out, what, more money to the same groups that we funded to actually drive out the Soviets? That would have put more money into the hands of radical Muslims who today are terrorists.

What policy could we have conceivably followed at the end of that war to have built that nation? It's very hard to imagine.

Indeed, Afghanistan's problems result from far too much outside intervention, a coup d'état, Soviet intervention, its Pakistani support for the Taliban. It was America funneling its aid through the worst and the most radical elements there. There was far too much outside intervention. The problem was not that we didn't intervene enough. The problem was that everybody

outside got involved and destroyed that domestic political process.

Of course today what we find is that terrorism can arise in two different circumstances where you could argue we have kind of failed states and we have essentially candidates for nation-building. The first is a situation of chaos, where there is simply no central power -- no power to stop terrorists from being active.

The second case is where you have government support for terrorists, as we had with the Taliban. But of course these are both very different circumstances. In the case of chaos, yes, terrorists can go there, but of course they are uniquely vulnerable. Without state support, the best answer is military action against them. Take them out. Quite bluntly, kill them.

In the other case, where you have government support, it strikes me the best response is to focus on the government with a policy of deterrence. The ruling elites in societies that support terrorists should understand they will no longer be ruling elites. That's very clear. Certainly that's the lesson of Afghanistan. You're the Taliban. You harbor those people. You will no longer rule that country. And that is a lesson we will apply to other nations.

Unfortunately the notion of nation-building as a solution, well, number one, nation-building may be far harder

than trying to stop terrorism. Nor is nation-building likely to be sufficient to try to stop terrorism. Consider the fact that al-Qaida is estimated to be active in 68 different countries in one form or another. Are we going to nation-build every one of those? And how about the 42 other terrorists groups that are active out there in different countries, how many candidates of nation-building do we want to take on?

I would far more prefer to focus on stopping terrorism than on nation-building. What we want, frankly, is victory and deterrence; we don't want nation-building. If nation-building is really necessary, let's do it. But that is not the goal; it's the mean. The goal has to be to stop terrorism.

There are some kitchen sink arguments that one often hears. We certainly saw that in the issue of Kosovo. I was kind of astounded at the time, where a number of people argued that we had to go into Kosovo to save NATO. What role was there for NATO, it was said, if we don't go into Kosovo?

Now, my view has always been that you have alliances to stop war; you don't go to war to save alliances. You make a decision. Do you need NATO? Now, if you don't need NATO, you certainly don't go to war to save NATO. You certainly don't go to war, as Bob Hunter complained, because it would look bad to have your anniversary conference going on in NATO over in Europe

while conflict is raging in the Balkans. That's a rather poor reason to go to war in Kosovo.

The strongest argument, the best argument, for nation-building is the purely humanitarian one, which is that you want to save lives. We look around the globe, and it is a world of tragedy. There is no doubt. Hundreds of thousands, millions of people, die in hideous conflicts around the globe. Unfortunately this has never had any relevance to American policy. The whole notion that American policy is humanitarian grounded I think is simply belied by the facts.

At the time the U.S. decided it had to bomb Serbia to save Kosovars, hundreds of thousands of people were being slaughtered in Sierra Leone. Now, the Secretary of State made great, wonderful appeals about the outrage of the international community in Kosovo. At the same time people were being maimed, having their arms cut off and were being slaughtered in Sierra Leone, you heard not one peep, not one interest, not one threat to bomb anybody -- no interest at all. Indeed, the greatest slaughters around the globe, where hundreds of thousands, or even millions, are killed have never gained the slightest interest among Western policymakers.

I saw no major petition signed by former secretaries of state and former prime ministers demanding that we get involved in Rwanda or Burundi or Angola or Nepal or any other place where

you had many being killed. It turned out that the concern of those who claim humanitarian motive, well, they are concerned when white Europeans are being killed. They are concerned if those deaths are on TV. And they are concerned if those doing the killing are countries that are unimportant or adversaries of the United States.

So if Russia is involved in Chechnya, you certainly won't do anything. It's a major country.

Indonesia kills people in East Timor, you certainly won't threaten to use force.

If Turkey kills Kurds, you certainly aren't going to do anything there. Indeed, we will sell them weapons so they can kill more Kurds.

What we find then is American policy has absolutely nothing to do with humanitarianism.

Now, if one wants to do something on humanitarian grounds, you have to come up with a policy that isn't cynicism but that is genuine charity. If you do that, you really either have to intervene everywhere or you have to come up with some set of criteria that makes some sense. But the question is, what would that be?

Well, there was an attempt three years ago -- Stephen Solarz, former Congressman, and Michael O'Hanlon, of the Brookings Institute, had a very interesting article in the

Washington Post Outlook section. They argued, they said, this is right, we need some criteria. They suggested that America intervene for humanitarian grounds if the death rate in another society is higher than the American murder rate.

So, can you imagine this in operation? A new mayor takes office in New York and the murder rate falls, we have to suddenly intervene in 20 other countries.

(Laughter.)

MR. BANDOW: But now, the next election, they flip, and the new guy comes in and messes up the policing system. Lots more Americans are being killed. We can withdraw from around the world. Now, this is an interesting argument, but is this really serious foreign policy? No, of course not.

I think the most fundamental issue in terms of humanitarian intervention is that, in the end, the greatest obligation of the U.S. Government is to its own citizens. It is not that the lives of other people around the world don't count. It is not that Americans intrinsically are more important or more worthwhile than anyone else. The point is that political officials of the United States of America have their greatest obligation to their own people, including those in uniform. And you should risk those citizens and risk those people only when there is some fundamental interest at stake for their own political community.

One does not wander around the globe, treating soldiers and service people as kind of gambit pawns in some grand chess game. In the end, it has to come back to fundamental American interests before you are willing to risk those lives in some sort of a conflict.

Now, while I view the benefits of nation-building as quite limited at best, there are a number of costs that are potentially very significant. And those have to be taken into account when thinking about engaging in nation-building. The first of course is, if you want to do it, it is expensive. The military budget is the price of your foreign policy.

If you want to run the world, that is, garrison the world. If you want to garrison failed states, and not just for a year or two but decades -- I mean, Bill Clinton said we would be in Bosnia for one year, and we're still there -- if you want to do that, you need soldiers, you need force structure. It is expensive. It is going to cost you money. And certainly the burden that we see today on service people is fairly significant.

That burden has had an impact not only in terms of their own personal lives -- and I can speak from experience; my brother-in-law spent six months in Saudi Arabia, hardly a garden spot for an American -- but what you find is we see a problem in terms of retention and recruiting, where people say, look, I

don't want to be six months on station here. This isn't why I joined.

You find potential soldiers and their families saying, you know, it's one thing to defend the country, but it is quite something else to do some of this other stuff. And the longer the deployments and the more places we deploy people, along with the spread of weapons of destruction, means it is more likely that Americans will be dying. And we have been very lucky so far. In Bosnia, not one death as a result of conflict. But over time, we can't expect that kind of luck to last.

But I think the most important problem in the context of 9/11 is that nation-building itself can foster more terrorism. There are many reasons why people hate America. And most of those don't lead to people killing and being willing to kill in their attempt to kill. But one reason they do so is if they perceive themselves to be at war with the United States. And we see that with Israel. We see that with Sri Lanka. We see that with India. All countries that have suffered not only violent terrorism, but suicidal terrorism, where people have been willing to kill themselves in an attempt to kill others.

All of those places, the terrorism flows out of political disputes, hatreds and grievances. Well, we generate that when we intervene around the world. It is not justified; it is horrid. But we have to take into account that American action

itself may unintentionally foster terrorism against us. So we have to take that fact into account in developing policy. Is it worth it?

That means it makes a lot of sense to intervene to stop people from killing us. It makes a lot less sense to intervene to kind of promiscuously try to mold the globe, where coming out of that may very well be additional attacks on the United States.

In the end, I would argue the United States has to, in terms of foreign policy, relearn the virtues of restraints, that not all international messes can be cleaned up. They certainly can't be cleaned up at acceptable cost. And there is no need for the United States to try to clean up many of them, especially where other regional powers are quite capable of doing so and have far greater interests at stake.

So America should engage in nation-building only if it furthers a fundamental goal of the United States. It should not engage in nation-building for its own sake. Promiscuous meddling in an attempt to remake the globe is simply a fool's errand and one that is going to simultaneously sacrifice the principles upon which this nation was built as well as risk the lives and freedom of Americans.

Thank you.

(Applause.)

(End of Remarks.)