



THE ATLANTIC COUNCIL  
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*with*

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Transcript

Let me thank you for the chance to be here again. I am going to run through some slides and I would also invite you to go look at the after-action reports I've done. I just got back ten days ago from Iraq and Kuwait, and a few weeks prior to that I was in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and then a few weeks prior to that I was in Saudi Arabia. This was sort of a run through the center of CENTCOM operations. And I do this to try and provide frank feedback for CENTCOM authorities, the White House, Pentagon and Congress etc and put out some form of academic report to my department at West Point where I still work, the Department of Social Sciences. I try to be objective and non-partisan and provide frank assessment. I am clearly rooting for the good side, but again, I think it has been in some cases, way too much denial of evidence that doesn't fit preconception.

Let me run through a couple of general assessments. Much of what I will say, given the nature of the audience in this room, won't come as a surprise. I was just the opening speaker at a conference on global terrorism at NDU a few months back and I had to come up with some general statements and here they are.

We have probably been inadequate in recognizing the enormous successes we have had against these 42 so-called terrorist organizations. By law the Secretary of State has to inform Congress of terrorist organizations that represent a threat to U.S. national interests and all sponsoring states. There were 47 FDOs the last time I looked, 11 sponsoring states. Even though many of our allies have suffered grievous damage, for example, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Spain, Great Britain, France and others, we have gone – since 9/11 when we had 3000 people murdered going about their daily business, without any serious attack. That isn't by accident. I think we ought to acknowledge that we have made incredible successful counter moves against international terrorism. Of the original al-Qaeda group a great number of them are actually dead or behind bars. Clearly the threat has morphed and taken on a different form. Arguably it is no less dangerous and in some ways more challenging to track. But the confrontation, using intelligence and law enforcement in the international community, which I might add we've had huge cooperation with our international partners which is quite something. If you look at the PEW Charitable Trust polling data, one of the problems we've got in diplomacy and international security right now is that never in the history of the United States have we faced

more widespread antipathy than we do today, and this is among traditional allies where the governments may still be cooperative and the people coefficient still may be warm and cooperative, the business relationships. But Poland, Great Britain, I mean you start looking, Columbia, across the face of the Earth, there is wide-spread animosity, much of it I think localized to the Administration, to the President, to our policies in Iraq or Afghanistan, to our Palestinian-Israeli policy. But none-the-less the animosity is there, and yet we find extremely effective cooperation both in law enforcement and intelligence. I think we actually have seriously damaged many of these terrorist organizations. There is one caveat. Tom Constantine used to always say, “you know Barry, the only thing that saves law enforcement is the incredible stupidity of the criminal class.” One can argue, as dangerous as it may be, that this has been an asset to us during the war on terror. This guy, Mr. Reed, the shoe bomber, wasn’t exactly James Bond. And to some extent they have been pathetically, badly organized, at least in dealing with us.

We’re still in danger. I would argue that one of the key challenges we face as Americans is the notion of homeland security. It’s gotten immeasurably better. I’ve been working the border security process since 1996. We’ve got 12,000 miles of land frontiers and 96,000 miles of sea frontiers. Prior to 9/11 they were darn near unmarked, never mind effectively guarded. There was completely inadequate border patrol. When I started working this issue I think there were around 3,000 of them. I got them to 9,000, and now they’re at 11,000 today. The right answer ought to probably be 45,000 people in Border Patrol. That number always offends the attorney generals and homeland security directors who ask “where did you get that number?” I made it up, whole cloth. Why would you think you could defend America’s frontiers with a force that is a fraction of the size of the New York Police Department? It’s the same thing with the Coastguard. It’s one of the most magnificent organizations in the American defense mechanisms within law enforcement; I think we’re up to 36,000 people. But again, the size of the Coastguard – their equipment capabilities are totally inadequate for the tasks we put in front of them. And you know the numbers that back-of-the-envelope analysts cite there is that there ought to be around 75,000 people with a world class aviation and maritime capability instead of one of the most aging fleets on the face of the Earth. So homeland security needs more energy and more political leadership, and yet it has gone from undefended to reasonably well-organized with plans and a set of objectives. I think the two guys that have run it, Tom Ridge who is world class central casting for a public servant – a nice Harvard boy, draftee, decorated for valor, governor, lawyer, congressman, cabinet member, and Secretary Chertoff who is extremely intelligent, but badly damaged by hurricane Katrina three months after he came into office. But he is intellectually honest in trying to do the best he can to take what is now the third biggest department of government and turn into something that can be a positive security aspect for the American people in the coming 25 years. They’ve made enormous progress, although one can argue they’re grievously under-funded, and again, the political energy put into it has been completely inadequate.

Finally, and I think we ought to force ourselves to talk about this periodically. I do a lot of editorial boards around the country and I got jumped by some reporter that claimed I was using the threat of WMDs as an artificial way to galvanize the American people to better organize themselves for homeland security. Nonsense! For God’s sake, we teach new intelligence officers – don’t talk about intentions, talk about capabilities. And any reasonably astute third-rate

university physics lab, given enough time, can produce a nuclear device. It's not that hard. It's producing the fissile material mechanically that's hard, and even then, if you can get into the world marketplace and buy 40 kg of HEU you could probably construct a nuclear device in a year or so. And making certain kinds of chemical agents is no more difficult than making beer for God's sake. You can get the chemical formulas and manufacturing process off the internet. It won't be very good stuff, it won't be shelf stable, your VX may be third-rate manufacturing quality, but never mind the notion of radiological device. If I took the people in this room and someone gave us \$25 million we could fan out and come back a year later with three radiological devices. It wouldn't kill many people, but they'd contaminate a significant urban area and cause a significant uproar. I think it is requisite for us to think through these challenges of WMDs, obviously not just think about how you deter that action on the streets of New York City and Washington D.C., and not just the enormous amount of energy we're putting into our ports of entry to try and detect movement of radioactive devices in and out of the country, but also to get into the international community and create new international concepts in which the international community comes together and tries to confront these issues. So homeland security is a big deal. I would, just as a planning factor, put on the table that we will see WMDs employed against us or our allies in the coming ten years, period. We ought to force ourselves to think about it, how do we deter it, how do we get together with the international community and when it does happen, how do we remediate it.

Iraq. Everyone is following it day in and day out. Many of you have been there. Many of you have served there. Yes, it's a mess. Clearly there were mistakes made by Mr. Rumsfeld and his senior leadership team. We didn't have to be in this situation, but we are, so what do we do about it now? Here are some ideas. First of all, we can start off searching for the good news. One can argue that the good news is the decision-making process here in Washington and in theatre may well be much more balanced and thoughtful in the coming 24 months than it was in the last five years. We have been in combat in Afghanistan for five years now, so four years in Iraq. We ought to be quite pleased that we have this knew fellow, Secretary Bob Gates. He is brilliant, modest, introspective, experienced, known in the international community. He is a listener. He came into this office without any need to defend any of these past misjudgments, and that's good news. I think he and Secretary Rice, who is a person of enormous experience and intellectual energy and integrity, will end up as a much more powerful and balanced team than anything we've seen recently. For that matter, the White House Chief of Staff Josh Bolton is a reasonably non-ideological and pragmatic guy. They know they've got 24 months to unscrew this mess. So we ought to be positive about that.

If you look in-country, and I've watched David Petraeus since he was a captain, and I tell people including the President of the United States, that I think he may be the most talented person I ever met in my entire life. He didn't go in there to get winched off the embassy roof 24 months from now. The ambassador we sent in, Ryan Crocker, is equally capable. He has 15 years of experience in some very difficult demanding circumstances. I think this is a positive factor because at the end of the day, what may get out us of trouble in Iraq, is can we effectively get some bite, particularly among the Sunni and Shi'ia leadership, to have reconciliation talks that back them off standing on the edge of all-out civil war. I do not believe that this is impossible to imagine happening between now and Christmas. If it doesn't, we've run out of, and aviators talk

about this, running out of altitude, airspeed and ideas all at the same time, and this may well be the situation in Iraq. So we've got a great leadership team.

The other factor in Iraq that is widely discounted, and this astonishes me inside the beltway, is the caliber of the U.S. Armed Forces. Like many of you in the room, I've been watching these people since I was 17. My dad's a career soldier, with eight years in combat and three wars. We have never had more courageous, dedicated, clever and effective fighting forces in the country's history. There aren't enough of them, but their capabilities are simply awesome. The one- and two-star generals, tank commanders and brigade commanders have literally grown up in combat operations. If you throw in the Balkans, they've been at it now, at almost a World War II intensity level, for a decade, and it shows. The things that they are routinely capable of doing, such as deploying B-2 bombers in support of an 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne platoon eight thousand feet up in the Hindu Kush. It used to be the worse thing that could happen to you as a soldier was being within a mile of an 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne baton or a Marine baton. I mean, it was just intolerable the (inaudible) that would emanate. I was out in Ramadi listening to these terrific marines talking about what they were going to do to break up the Sunni tribal leadership and separate them from the foreign insurgents. One of those marine batons out there had three Army rifle companies attached to it and no marine companies. So routinely the integration of all arms and services, and supporting Navy and Air Force airmen, is remarkable. And they're not going to quit. You look at their reenlistment rates in combat, and also taking into account some smart personnel policies, there is a lot of money involved for some of these staff sergeants who re-up in Iraq. Nonetheless, when you look at the morale and commitment of these fighting forces, it's unbelievable.

We don't want to stretch our luck. People talk about the third combat tour being the knee of the curve – some of these units are on their fifth combat tour. One of the truck units at Three Corps that I just saw while I was doing combat leadership talks for the deployed, headed out on its fifth combat tour. Within the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne, one of those batons was home essentially two months before it turned around and went back. It's now on a piece of paper scheduled to return after a year within seven months of closing home station. So these guys are completely all out. It's a real war. There 28,000 killed or wounded. If you are a Marine gunnery sergeant or army transportation First Lieutenant, you are definitely in a shooting operation. The level of casualties, I think, is a fraction of what I would have expected given the amount of combat action – 3,000 IEDs a month, thousands of attacks by fire, units and their forward operating base routinely being rocketed and mortared. So it is a very tough situation for these troops. How is it all going to turn out? If you took a snapshot, realistically go on the ground, and I get in some very bizarre conversations back here such as if only the mass media told us the real truth, all the goodness one finds in Iraq, my God you know, where have you been? Baghdad is the most dangerous city on the face of the Earth. It is worse than Saigon two weeks before it went under. The government doesn't have sway almost anywhere in the country with any function of government. Now, the good news is there is a government, a constitutional mechanism, an outreach process that's going on which might well work. There is a new tactic of trying to regain control of the urban areas using U.S. combat units in small detachments, operating with Iraqi Army and Police. This is a risky, but smart move if you're trying to develop a bubble of security within which governance might well develop. You always hate wasting time arguing about things that aren't going to happen. We're not withdrawing from Iraq precipitously in the coming year. The Democrats aren't going to force that unless they lose their senses and demand accountability for the

outcome in Iraq. The funds will flow to the fighting forces. The Army, Marine Corps and Specials Ops are not going to crack. They're going to sustain this campaign, clearly, for 24 months. Probably it will be the next president that will pull the plug in the first year in office. But in the short run, the probable consequences of immediate withdrawal are so severe to our national and regional interest we're just not going to do it. Our allies are going to leave, almost entirely by next summer, and we're going to be on our own. Where is it? I don't know. But again, if I had to bet, we will probably somehow pull this off.

Afghanistan. There is a lot of experience in the room on this one also. Everything about Afghanistan is the anti-Iraq. There isn't a point of contact. You don't want to overstate the positive aspects of Afghanistan; however, you sort of back off - and I talked to an army aviation brigade commander aviator and he said he's done three combat tours here in Afghanistan since the beginning. He's flown this country at 1,000 feet up and watched it, and it is night and day between the month they went in there and where they are today. It was grossly under-resourced. I mean, there was some silly stuff floating around. Poor Mr. Rumsfeld actually thought that he and his briefings, and 300 (inaudible) won the war in Afghanistan. It was actually a conventional fight between two 14<sup>th</sup> century armies armed with automatic weapons with our side backed up by the U.S. Air Force and Navy. It was a conventional battle. When the conventional battle was won, in my judgment, we grievously under-resourced the entire operation for the next several years. Now, apparently Secretary Rice and Gates have turned this around. Maybe we've got \$10 billion headed to Afghanistan. We've doubled the troop strength on the ground. NATO is in, thank God, with some rather shaky rules of engagement and some inadequate military capabilities, but they're there: the Canadians and the Brits, a Portuguese company, a Dutch battalion, and French commando unit who are actually in a very serious fight down in the south, in Helmand province and Kandahar. The Canadians have been in their biggest battle since World War II and they've done a terrific job. So if you want to win the war in Afghanistan you have to establish government at the district level. It means you've got to build roads. Two-thirds of the \*ring\* road is done. Now we've got to...you've got to create the mechanisms of civil government there. They don't exist. Uniformed police, jails, prosecutors, squad cars, somebody who agrees to serve as mayor who doesn't get assassinated within three days - this is the challenge in Afghanistan. I love the country, the way it looks, the unbelievable strength and survivorship of its people. If you talk to one of our embedded training teams with these (inaudible) battalions, they'll say they love these guys. They're incredibly grateful for everything we do for them. With the exception of girl's schools which get burned as promptly as the Taliban can get their hands on them, by in large, when we do infrastructure development the people tell the Taliban it's the first thing they've had in 100 years, leave it alone, or we will nail you to the bridge. So the infrastructure investment tends to be positive over time. I think we have this magnificent soldier John Abizaid who was over in CENTCOM until recently. I started to make him uneasy by talking about ...to talk about this fight, that three or four years ago when I was over there the Taliban were out, foreign fighters were out. When you were running into contacts they were in squad-size units from four to ten people. Then I went back a year or so later and they were up to company-size units. And then last year when I went back these guys were in battalion-size formations with 300 or 400 people. They were well armed with shiny new REI camping gear. They've got commercial, encrypted communications. They've got money. Somebody has been training them on how to shoot and how to camouflage. You can also argue that it is really a cadre that has that professionalism by and large, foot soldiers are 12 or 16-year-

old boys getting paid \$12 a day to carry a gun. He is a second or third son – he has no land, no wife. He decides that if he works for the Taliban for six months or so he can get a nest egg. I don't personally think that the ideological war in Afghanistan has been lost for sure, and I'm not sure the Taliban have any real sway there. The sort of extreme Islamic thought – beards, no photographs, no albums, no family burial plots, that wasn't what Afghanistan was all about. I think one of the challenges we clearly face in Afghanistan is that no-one governs successfully in that country and no-one has for 1000 years. When you're dealing with the Taliban, you could argue that is just a Pashtun who doesn't know . . . ., black turban, black baggy pants, he's got an automatic weapon and he's shoots at foreigners and infidels – and he's paid \$12 a day to do it. So we've got our work cut out for us. I can't imagine this thing being completed in under 25 years. So if we stay with them, if we work on political and economical development, if we assist them with security, if we finally don't miserably under-resource the creation of Afghan Police and Army units with junk equipment trying to save pennies a day – and the fight in Iraq is costing us \$9 billion a month – the fight in Afghanistan is costing us about \$1.4 billion a month, and then we find it troublesome to give them U.S. automatic weapons or body armor or armored vehicles, it's incredible. By the way, you can't get out of either one of those countries for God's sakes unless they have rotary wing aviation and some form of ground attack aircraft, and some form of C-130 internal airlift. If you look forward in five years and say we achieved our directives and have largely pulled out, what we did to get us there is necessary, but not sufficient condition. Flashing back to the Iraq situation – three C-130s, a handful of BTR 80s and armored vehicles, 70 junk Soviet helicopters. Why aren't they getting CH47 D and UH 60. These people are some of the most intelligent, courageous and well organized, well educated people anywhere in the Arab world. It takes two to five years to do that kind of thing, but if you want to get out of there you have to do something to the resource expenditure as it relates to the size of the problem.

We should probably open it up to some general discussion, but here are some quick snapshots for you. I think one of things I ought to say is that to our credit, if you go back to pre-9/11 to today, a lot of things have actually gotten quite better. I know there are problems festooned around any of these positive statements I make, but I would argue, our relationship with the Russians, the Pakistanis, the Indians, the Japanese, the Saudis and others is measurably more rational today than it was pre-9/11 and is likely to remain so. I think our economy is probably going to remain in many ways, one of the dominant economies on the face of the Earth, mostly, I might add because we have 3 million illegal aliens stumbling across our border every year who run our agricultural system, meat packing construction etc. We're still the location of choice for the graduates of the Indian Institute of Technology or Nigerian kids that understand petroleum engineering. There is a huge infusion of foreign talent that keeps our marketplace at a boil. So there are some thoughts. Now there are some problems on the horizon too. One of them, I keep banging away at is Cuba. In the same order and magnitude to understand the Cold War . . . .Warsaw Pact and NATO. I went to Cuba as an academic about a year after 9/11, with the support of the Secretary of State and government, and spent 12 hours sitting. . . .Castro is very interesting to me. I came back. . . .and I always start my pitch "When Castro dies," and I get stopped. People have been telling us for years that Castro is going to die and I have it under very good authority he's going to die. If you look at this goofy, failing Marxist dictatorship, you've got a bunch of smart 45 year olds in the Interior Border police, army, talking to each other, and say when these old fools are dead we're going to take over and run it our way and it's going to

be different. But we're not talking to them. And I think there is a good chance that 18 months after Castro is dead we will have half a million Cubans at sea trying to get into the U.S. border communities, Central America etc. Who is supposed to take care of that. The U.S. National Guard is shot. They've got 40% of their equipment. In the coming years we're going to send nine of their brigades back into combat in Iraq. Who is going to do that sort of thing? We've got a problem with Mr. Chavez in Venezuela, and energy and the failure of democracy in the Latin American region. We've got the potential miscalculation of this sociopath running North Korea. We don't understand how he makes decisions. It's possible for that to go wrong. So there are challenges out there on the horizon. But on balance I probably think we're going pretty well. On that note, let me thank you for the chance to make these opening remarks and respond to comments.