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Union League Club Gold Medal Award Ceremony

As Delivered by Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Friday, December 01, 2006

Thank you very much. I appreciate that extraordinarily warm welcome. It means a great deal to me.

Chaplain, thank you so much for your kind words, your prayer.

President Frank Giordano, thank you so much for your words.

Mr. Haab, Mr. Daniels, I appreciate this invitation to join this energetic and supportive group. No doubt some of you will be at the Army/Navy game tomorrow. (Laughter, applause, laughs.) I look forward to it as well.

And I thank you for this honor -- the prestigious Gold Medal Award -- particularly since it comes from an organization that has such a storied role in our country's history.

It's impressive to be with an organization that's hosted someone as notable as General "Black Jack" Pershing.

As a matter of fact, I feel a modest connection with him. I didn't know him -- (laughter) -- but the desk in the Office of the Secretary of Defense was "Black Jack" Pershing's desk, so I feel a connection. It used to be in the Eisenhower Building, the old War Department next to the White House....So I think about General Pershing from time to time.

And I understand General Eisenhower spoke here as well. I've been around so long that I actually did know President Eisenhower. (Laughter.) As a matter of fact, he helped me in my first campaign for Congress. I was running for Congress in 1962, and he was gracious enough to stop, have his picture taken, and tape a short word of support for a radio spot, saying something to the effect that "I hope you'll vote for Don Rumsfeld." Well, that was a big deal for a 29-year old, I'll tell you.

The other day I was out in Kansas and I stopped by the Eisenhower Presidential Library and Museum. And as I walked around, I saw some of the folks in those old black and white and some sepia photographs that I've actually worked with who were part of Eisenhower's era.

And I guess that's one of the advantages of living a long life. It can also provide somewhat of a perspective on the events of today.

And the perspective of history is, of course, important -- particularly considering the struggles and the challenges that face our world today. Some folks probably look around and see what's on television and what's

in the newspaper and come to the conclusion that the divisions, the partisanship we see in our country today has never been so great.

Well, I remember a time when activists actually -- one of them was the Barrigan brother -- he dug a grave in our front lawn when I was Secretary of Defense back 30 years ago, shortly after the Vietnam War. And just a few years before, when I was in Congress, President Lyndon Johnson couldn't leave the White House. They actually had to put buses around the building, and he couldn't go give a speech anywhere during that period.

And consider, in 1862, the year the Union League was founded. Early optimism about a quick end to the Civil War had faded. Union resolve had begun to wane as battlefield setbacks accumulated, and casualties were soaring.

President Lincoln initially issued a call for Union volunteers to serve not for three years, but for three months. In 1964, *Harper's Magazine* listed some of the names that Lincoln had been called during the span of just a few months: "Despot, liar, thief, braggart, buffoon, usurper, fiend" -- and those are the ones that were printable. (Laughter.)

And consider what General George McClellan, commander of the Union troops at one point, had to say about President Lincoln's Secretary of War, Edwin Stanton. He wrote:

[Quote]"He is the most unmitigated scoundrel I ever knew, heard of or read of. I think that had he lived in the time of the Savior, Judas Iscariot would have remained a respected member of the fraternity of the Apostles, and that the magnificent treachery and rascality of E.M. Stanton would have caused Judas to have raised his arms in holy horror and unaffected wonder." [Unquote]. (Laughter.)

Now -- I would say -- that is an award-winning way to criticize a Secretary of Defense. (Laughter.)

It calls to mind that quote from Winston Churchill when he said something to the effect that "I have derived continued benefit from the criticism at all periods of my life and I do not remember at any time suffering a lack thereof." (Laughter, applause, laughs.)

I thought tonight I'd take a few minutes to talk a bit about some of the lessons that have been learned over the past six years during a time of war. And to offer a few thoughts about the problems our country may confront in the future.

I feel a sense of urgency about the challenges that we face as a country, the challenges that the men and women in uniform face every day. For we are engaged in a complex, an unfamiliar, a little-understood, even after six years, protracted struggle: it is, as we know, the first war of the 21st century. This struggle is multidimensional and it's new, and things that are new take some time to absorb and understand and to synthesize.

We face an enemy that:

- Hides among civilian populations, using them as human shields;
- An enemy that's trained to accuse our forces of torture and war crimes to cause free societies to doubt themselves and to doubt their intentions;
- An enemy that's highly skillful at manipulating the media;
- An enemy that operates from countries that we're not at war with. How do you fight a war in countries you're not at war with -- countries that, without our help, are clearly not capable of stopping the terrorist activities themselves?

- And an enemy that has indicated its determination to obtain weapons of mass destruction to threaten to kill innocent civilians -- men, women and children -- in large numbers.

This is a struggle where many battles -- and many successes -- take place in secret. Success will require us to be vastly more effective in bringing all elements of our national power, not just military means alone -- to bear in this struggle.

And then there are the challenges that may be unforeseen -- the unknown unknowns:

- Cyberterrorism and possibly cyberwarfare are on the electronic nerve centers of our financial and national security systems, for example.
- Diseases and pathogens that can mutate quickly and spread easily before public health systems can respond.
- The uncertainty about the important choices -- economic, political and military -- that China will be making in the years ahead.
- And undoubtedly some challenges that have not even yet been contemplated.

Yet, in this new, uncertain area -- era of a vastly different and a very difficult kind of warfare, we are coping with some national and some international institutions that were designed for a wholly different era -- the Cold War -- for a notably different set of circumstances, and for distinctly different adversaries than those we face today.

This is a challenge of historic proportions -- one that has occupied considerable thought by leaders of our country, and by friends and allies as well. I sense that we're, even today, only beginning to understand, embrace and tackle these new challenges.

Because this will be a long struggle, I thought it might to be helpful to try to outline some of the issues I believe successive administrations will likely encounter in the years ahead.

I mentioned President Eisenhower, who spoke here at the height of the Cold War. Our country was able to prevail in that struggle due in part to the programs/policies that were created during the Truman administration in the aftermath of World War II. Within the U.S. government, in a relatively short period of time after the war, the country saw the establishment of the Department of Defense, the National Security Council and the Central Intelligence Agency.

To better tell freedom's story abroad and to try to rebut Soviet propaganda, the United States created the U.S. Information Agency and Radio Free Europe.

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization was formed to ally Western nations. The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund were created to try to help raise living standards and promote economic freedom.

Today, informed by the past several years of this still-new conflict, thoughtful people are beginning to rethink how to adapt these institutions or, if necessary, to build new institutions that will be better suited to our new circumstances.

One area in need to attention is the U.S. government's ability to help our partners and allies build the capacity, the capability to enable them to better govern their own real estate and to defend themselves. The War on Terror, after all, is in large part a struggle within the Muslim world. It is a battle between the vast majority of mainstream Muslims against a relatively small minority of violent extremists who seek to impose their vicious, dark vision on the Middle East and beyond.

For example, after the U.S. and Coalition forces toppled the Taliban in Afghanistan, the United States faced the

urgent task of trying to help the Afghan people develop an army and the institutions that would enable them to defend their newly liberated country.

But there was no category for this kind of assistance in the U.S. federal budget, so it took many months, many, many months, before we were able to get the funding necessary to begin training and equipping the Afghan security forces, and to help them sustain that new army. The Department of Defense faced similar bureaucratic challenges with regard to training police forces in both Afghanistan and in Iraq, something that the Department of Defense was not authorized to do and therefore could not do, and therefore did not get done for a long period.

The State Department has similar problems. Much of the foreign aid budget comes with "earmarks" whereby Congress can override recommendations of the executive branch as to which programs to fund. And the budget cycle, from preparation to consideration to approval to execution, in the 21st century takes three years. The world is moving way too fast for that.

Clearly, the United States cannot be successful if we continue to operate with a patchwork of old rules and authorities for foreign assistance that were fashioned so many decades ago.

Another area in need of fresh thinking and reform is strategic communications.

Terrorists plan and design their headline-grabbing attacks, using every means of communication. They have media committees that meet regularly, decide how they can manipulate the media. The goal, of course, is to try to intimidate and break the collective will of free people. They know that a single news story, skillfully manipulated, can be as damaging to the will of a free society as a successful military attack.

We saw this with the untruthful allegation that U.S. soldiers at Guantanamo had flushed a Quran down the toilet-- a lie that flew around the world several times and led to riots and deaths in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Much of the world lacks a free and responsible and balanced media willing to report accurately so that free people can understand the difference between truth and lies, however sensational and gripping those lies may be.

The United States has an urgent need to get its message of truth out -- broadly, powerfully and repeatedly. As such, it may well be time to launch a new organization to serve as a channel to help inform and educate and compete in this critical worldwide battle of ideas. We need to take better advantage of our country's great wealth of talent and experience in this area.

Our future will depend on success in the area of public opinion every bit as much as it will on the battlefield.

The American military today cannot lose on the battlefield. But Americans can and will lose in the battlefield of ideas if we fail to engage and succeed in that battle.

These are some of the reforms that we might consider at home.

But, consider the existing international institutions. Many of the problems we face today -- including counterproliferation, terrorism, trafficking in human beings, drug trafficking -- are global in scope. No one nation can deal with those problems alone. It's simply not possible. These require effective and sustained cooperation among a great many nations if we're going to be successful.

The United Nations has its purposes. But the U.N., by some outdated rule, accords equal status in the General Assembly to both dictatorships and democracies. As such, the U.N. may not be capable of dealing with problems that require a rapid and decisive response.

The good news is that some smart folks from across the political spectrum have been thinking hard about these new approaches and -- for international security.

For example, one university study co-chaired by my friend, former Secretary of State George Shultz, recently recommended a "Concert of Democracies" -- a self-selected forum that would allow the world's free and responsible nations to authorize collective action -- to include the use of force.

Short of forming a new organization, we might consider better ways to work more effectively with existing institutions. With strong backing from the U.S. government, NATO -- the alliance which helped win the Cold War -- has deployed thousands of troops outside of its NATO treaty area and outside of Europe for the first time in the history of that organization with the mission it's executing in Afghanistan. It is an enormous decision on the part of that organization to do that.

One possible next step for NATO might be an expanded partnership, not unlike NATO's Partnership for Peace, which we currently have with the former Soviet republics. We have key allies who share our goals and our values that are not in Europe and that are not former Soviet republics. Countries such as Australia, Japan, South Korea would be logical participants with some arrangement with NATO to their benefit and to the benefit of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

Second, the world would benefit greatly from a capable, ready, standing corps of trained peacekeepers -- in considerably larger numbers than exist today -- peacekeepers who are ready to respond quickly to emerging situations before they spin out of control. That sort of effective, institutionalized capability would have been useful in Haiti, in Liberia, and perhaps in Sudan.

Also important is the need for a deployable capability available to help strengthen the ministries in countries like Afghanistan or Iraq, and to provide services to populations before extremists can successfully disrupt progress towards a better future.

Such initiatives require change. And as we know, change is hard and change is resisted. Change is uncomfortable for people, and I suppose that's understandable. It upsets constituencies; it upsets interests at home; it upsets interests abroad. But our time requires boldness and vision if we're to strengthen or replace the more familiar, but antiquated, institutions today.

Over the decades, boldness and vision have not been in short supply in America.

We're a nation that, after all, dared to believe that governments should be responsible to the people, and not the other way around.

Ours is a country that Frank and I were talking about earlier this evening that freed slaves. Ours is a country that liberated concentration camps and reached for the moon, and gave hope to thousands of dissidents locked away in Soviet gulags.

Yes, we've heard it said by some that the American success story is over, that it's bogged down by setbacks and unrealistic, idealistic dreams. President Reagan heard that, in one form or another. So did Presidents Truman and Eisenhower, so did Abraham Lincoln.

How will this generation answer?

Well, we can say what Ronald Reagan did. When he talked about the challenge posed by the Soviet Union, he said, "My theory of the Cold War is this: we win, they lose." (Laughter, applause.)

And we can remind people, as Eisenhower reminded your organization back in 1962; he said:

[Quote]"In every hour when the voices of fear and despair cry loud of defeat and doom, the history of the American epic provides for our people the surest guide to the goal of the continual progress and achievement." [Unquote]

We can say what Lincoln did, that "The world's fate is tied to our young republic's fate," what he called "the last, best hope of Earth." It is still true today.

You, the members of this venerable organization, know better than most that America is a nation of unlimited possibilities. Ours is a nation that heads confidently into the future; we did not rush towards the exits when the going got tough.

That sentiment led to the founding of the Union League so many decades ago, during the most difficult moments of our still then-young republic's life.

Today America remains a force for good in the world. I believed that when I joined the Navy more than 50 years ago. I believe it even more strongly today. The great sweep of human history is for freedom -- and America is on freedom's side.

And -- the men and women in uniform here today, who we're delighted to welcome -- and thank you for your service -- volunteers all. (Applause.) You're on freedom's side, just as America is, and God bless you for it.

As I come to the end of this second tour as Secretary of Defense, I've been asked what I've taken away from public life over the past 50-plus years. Well, what I feel most is gratitude -- gratitude to the amazing men and women in uniform who've been an inspiration to me, gratitude to the American people who continue to serve as a guide for the dreams and the aspirations of millions of people all across this globe. I'm not one of those people who wakes up every morning thinking that America's what's wrong with the world. We're not. And I know that all of you know that as well. So I leave public life as I entered it: proud of our heritage, optimistic about our future, confident in our nation's mission.

I thank you, may God bless you, and may God bless our wonderful country. (Applause.)