

Rumsfeld told reporters:

“[T]hese strikes [in Afghanistan] are part of a much larger effort against worldwide terrorism, one that will be sustained and which is wide-ranging. It will likely be sustained for a period of years, not weeks or months. This campaign will be waged much like the Cold War.... We’ll use ... every ... resource at our command. We will not stop until the terrorist networks are destroyed. Regimes that harbor terrorists and their training camps should know that they will suffer penalties. Our goal is not one individual; it is not one group.”

I was struck by Secretary Rumsfeld’s reference to the Cold War. It was a dramatic contrast to those who suggested that “all” we had to do was to eliminate Al Qaeda in Afghanistan. As daunting as that task was—and it seemed even more formidable at the time Don Rumsfeld was speaking—it was nothing compared to the tasks that he laid out for us.

But indeed the problem does extend far beyond Afghanistan—to other states that harbor terrorists and use terrorism as an instrument of policy, to ungoverned areas where terrorists can find safe harbor and even to our own country and other free societies, where terrorists hide in plain sight.

And it extends far beyond Al Qaeda, as dangerous as that organization is. In fact, one of the lessons of 9/11 is that terrorism is something we can no longer continue to live with as an evil but inescapable fact of international life, the way we did over the previous two or three decades. We can no longer tolerate a terrorist capacity to inflict thousands of casualties in a single conventional attack or hundreds of thousands of casualties if terrorists gain access to the most terrible weapons human beings have invented. We may not be able to eliminate every individual terrorist, but we can hope to eliminate global terrorist networks and end state sponsorship of terrorism. We can hope to see the ideologies that justify terrorism discredited as thoroughly and made as disreputable as ideologies as Nazism is today. We can hope to see the bombing of churches denounced by Muslim leaders, as it was in Iraq last month, or the slaughter of schoolchildren universally condemned.

Americans have a reputation for impatience. That is a strength as well as a weakness. In this struggle, as in the Cold War, we may be impatient for results. But, looking at the stakes, we should recognize that we’re in this fight for the long haul. It’s striking in hindsight to look back at how quickly we became impatient with the situation in Europe just six months after the elation that greeted the end of the Second World War.

People were heard to say, “We’ve lost the peace.” In his speech last week, the President mentioned a New York Times article that reported in 1946 that “in every military headquarters, one meets alarmed officials doing their utmost to deal with the consequences of the occupation policy that they admit has failed.” Astonishingly, Life Magazine was able to write, also in 1946: “We have swept away Hitlerism, but a great many Europeans feel that the cure has been worse than the disease.”

Sometimes it’s hard to remember how long it took to begin to turn around the situation in Europe. A full two years after the end of the war in Europe, President Harry Truman courageously proposed the Marshall Plan. It’s purpose: to help the battered continent dig itself out of the economic catastrophe that was feeding the forces of communist totalitarianism. As late as the