

Post-Election Strategic Priorities for the United States

Lincoln P. Bloomfield, Jr., Assistant Secretary of State for Political-Military Affairs

Remarks at the Chatham House Conference on Matching Capabilities to Commitments – Can Europe Deliver?

London, United Kingdom

December 6, 2004

Good morning.

Lord Roper, thank you for the introduction, and for the opportunity to join your deliberations on what lies ahead for the U.K., Europe and the United States in their pursuit of security.

From an American perspective, this conference is perfectly timed during the brief moment of policy introspection between the first and second administrations of President George Bush.

I have been invited to address post-election strategic priorities of the United States. You will, I hope, understand that these priorities will be more explicit and clear once President Bush's second term cabinet is confirmed and in place.

So what follows are the thoughts of one official who has lived through the last four years of momentous events forcing a major evolution in U.S. security policy, on the basis of which I will venture to spell out strategic challenges facing the United States.

President Bush and his administration came to office in 2001 with a number of course adjustments in mind, relative to the previous administration.

There was a strong interest in advancing the missile defense program, increasing budget support to our military, and addressing forthrightly the burden of Iraq's continued non-compliance with UN resolutions, as well as the extremist activities by other countries and non-state actors.

Of course, the focus on security became a national preoccupation in the U.S., on a scale previously unknown to my generation, after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. Looking back at the intervening three years, Americans can point to tremendous, even historic strides in the scope of cooperation with our British allies and with Europe more generally:

- First, we remember the immediate and generous offers of help from Europe to the emergency efforts in New York following the collapse of the Twin Towers. We will not soon forget that NATO invoked Article 5, and our allies united in pledging support for America's actions to secure itself against the terrorists in Afghanistan who had attacked our country. Afghanistan today is NATO's top priority.
- Second, one has to cite the partnership on the battlefield between U.S. and U.K. forces, most notably in Iraq. The U.S. and U.K. each took on lead roles in Afghanistan, including the combat mission of Operation Enduring Freedom, the stabilization mission of the International Security Assistance Force, and various crucial rehabilitation and training tasks for the new Afghan Government. The U.S.-U.K. political-military partnership has produced today the closest and most capable bilateral military alliance in the world. U.S. military cooperation in the field with other European allies has generated many other successes.
- Third, perhaps reflecting the momentum of change spurred by these historic circumstances, NATO as an institution has successfully adapted and evolved in a very

short time toward a better structured, more active, more relevant and more productive alliance. NATO expansion has gone very well. The process of reforming the NATO command structure moved smoothly and with good results. The new Allied Command – Transformation in Norfolk, Virginia is, in my view, a key to ensuring that the NATO alliance will remain the essential guardian of our mutual security interests against any future threats.

The list of positive indicators could go on, but it should be enough to say here that our security foundation is in some ways strengthened, and in any case not broken.

But permit me to review another undercurrent that has shaped America's relations with Great Britain and with Europe generally these past four years. The Bush Administration brought to office a belief in the importance of clarifying and facing up to the implications of certain multilateral agreements, the negotiation of whose terms during the 1990s had strayed in important respects from what even centrist policymakers and the majority in Congress could be expected to accept as firm U.S. treaty obligations.

For example, the Rome Statute establishing the International Criminal Court, and the Ottawa Convention banning all anti-personnel landmines, had both reached final form in the late 1990s with the moral encouragement of the Clinton Administration, despite their embodying final terms that President Clinton recognized that the Senate would never accept as U.S. obligations.

I think it is worth explaining why the Bush Administration took the hard step of delineating these points of difference over the Rome Statute, the Ottawa Convention, and some other multilateral agreements. While one hopes it was well understood around the world that the U.S. cares a great deal about justice for war crimes, and safety for innocent civilians against the hazards of live landmines left in the ground after a conflict, the editorial and public reaction to these clarified U.S. positions, in Europe and even within the United States, included a perception that unilateralism was the preferred American course, and that the new administration could not be relied upon to support key goals shared by many countries around the world.

I think this reaction got it wrong, notwithstanding the odd voice in the administration's policy ranks that seemed to confirm it. What was truly different about the philosophy of the Bush Administration, compared to its predecessor, was a more deep-seated conviction that when the United States signs a treaty, it must fulfill its obligations reliably.

Just five days ago in Canada, President Bush captured both the promise and the pitfall of such negotiated approaches to international concerns when he said that "the success of multilateralism is measured not merely by following a process, but by achieving results....My country is determined to work as far as possible within the framework of international organizations, and we're hoping that other nations will work with us to make those institutions more relevant and more effective in meeting the unique threats of our time."

In each instance where President Bush braved the protests and stood up for terms of international commitment that differed from the majority of nations, he did so on the basis of sober calculations about realities in the world, not political or ideological agendas.

He did so because the price of a multilateral approach that fails to advance security is higher than the political cost of criticism for declining to lend support to that approach.

This is true whether we are talking about failure to fulfill the purpose and intent of UN Security Council Resolutions on Iraq, removing a modern self-defensive landmine munition from our arsenal without a substitute, subjecting Americans and soldiers to untested and unregulated judicial treatment by a tribunal whose jurisdiction we have not accepted, or maintaining an Anti-

Ballistic Missile treaty whose termination by the U.S. in the face of much international political resistance, quickly led to the largest reciprocal nuclear stand-down between the U.S. and Russia in a generation.

I mention these admittedly delicate issues to make a point: our friends in Europe are likely to see transatlantic security policy differences with Washington continue to be portrayed in the European media as evidence of a contrarian American condition, an affliction of ideological zealotry among Republican politicians that is out of step with the high principles representing the aspirations of Europe's peoples.

I think this is not only too simple, but wrong. And if this is the expectation, then many in Europe will misread President Bush's clear intention to reach out, solidify alliance relations, and address our common security challenges together.

Indeed, I would suggest that in preparing for the next four years of security relations with the United States, Europeans take a look at the questions that go unasked and unexamined when the accepted explanation of all differences is American wrong-headedness.

It is appropriate, by way of preface, to point out that Prime Minister Blair and his government have shown a real grasp of this perspective.

Let's start with Iraq. After more than a decade of a tattered and ineffectual UN sanctions regime, when exactly were the pilots patrolling the dangerous no-fly zones, and the sailors interdicting oil smugglers in the Gulf, supposed to stand down? Was a heavy, costly, and predominantly American military posture in the Arabian Peninsula to contain Saddam Hussein's regime ever going to be relieved of this mission? Was the long list of unmet Security Council obligations to be considered a satisfactory state of affairs indefinitely?

As President Bush said in Nova Scotia last week, "the objective of the UN and other institutions must be collective security."

Indeed, as one looks back at the Bush Administration's experience, it is undeniable that the United States is, itself, taking on an ever-greater role in providing security for itself and others. With the latest expansion of NATO, the United States is formally committed to come to the mutual defense of over 50 countries in Europe, Asia and our own western hemisphere – never mind the Middle East and Central Asia.

U.S. spending on R&D, weapons, training, and a high operational tempo of deployed forces including National Guard and reservists, is a high price, but one Americans are prepared to bear even as it works against our economic recovery, our effort to control deficit spending, and our plans to invest in social programs. The obvious question in Washington is, 'if we do not fulfill these security roles, who will?'

In many respects, as I said a moment ago, the U.K. has answered this question rather resoundingly, extending its military capacity and its political and intellectual support very forthrightly in the face of clear dangers from the al-Qaeda terrorist network and its ilk.

Others in Europe have similarly taken political risks and sent forces into harm's way, braving real dangers and suffering losses in Iraq and Afghanistan. So there is a basis in Europe for answering the American demand for credible responses to undeniable dangers.

The issue is whether transatlantic cooperation is likely to move in a strategically satisfactory direction in the next four years.

America's security priorities for President Bush's second term are not hard to imagine or predict:

- Prevent further terror attacks on the United States;
- Disrupt and defeat the international terror threat; and
- Fulfill other basic commitments to allies and friends around the world.

But here is the part to focus upon: the strategic success of these endeavors will be measured by whether they are carried out in partnership with, and with strong roles and contributions by, America's allies – foremost in Europe.

Why does the U.S. measure success by the amount of shared burden and sacrifice among allies in facing the new security challenge?

We do this for two reasons:

First, as I have said, the expenditure of American blood and treasure is high, and we need the help and partnership of all the countries waging the war on terrorism,

And second, it is unhealthy for the U.S. and other countries to see the world through very different lenses. This undermines solidarity at the political level.

So let me ask: does it matter to Europeans what Americans see when they look across the Atlantic?

I began my remarks by citing the good news. But I think we all know that European willingness to carry a greater share of the defense burden has been a question at the heart of alliance politics for a number of years. It was Lord Robertson's greatest concern as NATO Secretary General.

One noted U.S. academic has summarized mutual alliance perceptions as follows: "until Europeans feel threatened, they will under-invest in defense and over-complain about Americans. As long as Americans harbor illusions about the closeness of interests shared with Europeans, they will be angered by the indifference, even contempt, shown by Europeans toward American security concerns and military sacrifice."

Those of us in policy roles of the allied governments operate from a more optimistic vision that this. We promote very positive military collaboration in Afghanistan and Iraq. We advance new and better concepts for information sharing and defense industrial cooperation – particularly between the U.S. and U.K. We work well together on many, many issues.

But then we see European policies that give credence, from an American perspective, to the darker, less optimistic vision of this alliance.

Example one: the U.S., following the advice of European governments a few years back, has pursued bilateral agreements around the world to ensure that the U.S. Government will have a say before one of our citizens or soldiers is turned over to the new International Criminal Court.

Nearly 100 countries have signed an agreement with us and most have ratified. Yet the Europeans have held out as a bloc, warning fellow neighbors not to sign and lobbying against our negotiating effort even outside of Europe.

Example two: the European Union has been contemplating the lifting of its Arms Embargo on China as an apparent gesture of improving relations. The U.S. has sent briefing teams across Europe to explain the sensitive military balance that could implicate our own forces in the Taiwan straits.

Separately, Japan has appealed to European governments not to perturb the Pacific Rim security equation. The EU-PRC Summit is this week.

And so I leave you with a question. It is not enough to speculate on whether President Bush will, in his second term, be more given to unilateral or multilateral solutions. He is clear in preferring the latter so long as the solutions are commensurate to the challenges.

No, the more salient question, I submit, is whether Europe will take its full share of ownership of the global problem manifested by terror and extremism. Will Europe, like the Americans, embrace the necessity of achieving strategic success, or will it confirm the lesser predictions of skeptics?

Answer that, and you will know what to expect in the coming years of alliance relations.

Thank you.

[This document is available at: <http://www.state.gov/t/pm/rls/rm/39737.htm>]