

March 23, 2004; 2:00pm EST
Public Testimony Before 9/11 Panel
On the Counterterrorism Policy of the United States

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. And I'd like I'd like to express my gratitude to the commission for the important work that you are undertaking. I've had the opportunity, I think, to meet with either the members and/or staff on three prior occasions. And I am happy to be here today to contribute whatever I can to the important analysis that you are undertaking. September 11th was a life-transforming event I think for all of us. It was a barbaric attack, killing some 3,000 Americans by turning airliners into cruise missiles. I think all of us have a solemn responsibility to the victims of September 11th, to the victims' families, many of whom may be here today and certainly are watching, and also to the brave men and

Let me say on a personal note, my interest in the subject of terrorism began about a quarter of a century ago. I had attended an event -- conference in Bonn, Germany. A banker by the name of Hanns-Martin Schleyer, a businessman, had been assassinated by the Red Army faction, and the Europeans were eager to explore ways in which they could combat the scourge of international terrorism. During the time I served as a member of the United States Senate and the Armed Services Committee, I saw the bombing of our embassy in Beirut, the bombing of our Marine barracks in Beirut, the bombing of Pan Am 103, the hijacking of TWA-847, the bombing of the West Berlin discotheque, the bombing of OPM-SANG and of Khobar Towers, among the many acts that were directed against the United States. As a result, during that time, I became convinced that our military was not organized to act swiftly enough in the age of what Toffler described as that of future shock. I helped to write the Goldwater-Nichols Act, establishing the power and the leadership of the joint chiefs of staff as a result of being concerned about what's taken place. That came, by the way, over the objection of the Pentagon during that time. In 1986, I authored the legislation to establish a Special Operation Command, once again, I would point out, over the objections of the Pentagon, because I felt it was important to enable us to be able to respond to the emerging threats. I wrote and I spoke about the subject on numerous occasions convinced that the threat was growing, was becoming more organized, less sporadic, and when coupled with access of weapons of mass destruction, likely to pose an existential threat to the world. I carried these convictions to the Pentagon when President Clinton asked me to serve as the secretary of defense. I found that he not only shared my views, but he was prepared to support efforts to counter these threats with dollars, with deeds, as well as with his presidential words. In my experience, the threat of international terrorism remained a top priority for all members of his national security team throughout the years I served at the Pentagon.

In my written statement, I outlined some of the major initiatives that I had the department undertake between January of '97 and 2001. They included enhancing force protection; support for covert and special operations activity; designating and organizing a National Guard to serve as the first responders in the wake of attacks against our cities; organizing a joint task force for civil support to assist the cities and states against terrorist attacks that might take place; helping to train 100 major cities in consequence management against terrorist attacks; engaging in personal diplomacy and public appearances to alert the American people to the threat posed by anthrax, ricin, VX and radiological materials, the danger of them falling into the hands of terrorist groups. These initiatives were undertaken as the department was engaged in waging war

in Kosovo; we attacked Saddam Hussein in Operation Desert Fox; as we destroyed a suspected WMD site in Sudan; as we coped with the dangers of cyber attacks against our critical infrastructure, including the unknown consequences of a critical massive cyber failure that was then known as Y2K. I believe that we devoted some \$3 billion to \$4 billion in defense spending at that time to cope with that for fear that the terrorists would try to exploit that millennium turnover. We launched an attack upon Al Qaida's training camp in Afghanistan as has been discussed earlier today. We continued efforts to capture or kill Osama bin Laden after discovering his role in the bombing of the embassies in Africa and then later with the USS Cole. And we developed new intelligence-gathering capabilities that could be directed against Osama bin Laden and others as, again, you have discussed here earlier this morning. In addition, the department also worked closely with the CIA, the FBI and other agencies, and as a result, I believe we were able to thwart a number of terrorist activities directed here against Americans and abroad. I know the commission is anxious to explore more specifically what happened or did not happen at the Defense Department. But I'd like to try and paint in the few moments I have at least a broader perspective as well. I think all of us who have held the public trust have to be accountable for what we did or did not do during our careers in the public service and holding the public trust. (APPLAUSE) But I want to put it into perspective as a former member of the Senate and a former member of the House of Representatives as well, because I think as the commission may find fault, indeed that's all -- in all probability, that might be the goal of the commission. I don't think so. But I hope you'll find the fault lines as well in our society as a whole. And if you just permit me four or five minutes to outline some of the challenges I think that all of us face, certainly while I was in the Senate, also at the Department of Defense, I'd point out that on many occasions the administration was able to secure the cooperation of Congress in the pursuit of its goals. There were a number of other occasions in which we did not.

For example, some in Congress, the media and the policy community accused those of us who were focused on the terrorist threat of being alarmists, of exaggerating the threat in order to boost our budgets. And countering this threat of terrorism was, quote, the latest gravy train, according to one expert who was quoted in U.S. News World Report. And the belief that we were somehow indulging in a cynical hyperbole I think resulted in a number of legislative reactions. There were tens of millions of dollars cut out of the Cooperative Threat Reduction Program, in the so-called Nunn-Lugar program, which I believe was one of the most important programs we could have passed, and that was to help reduce the accumulation of weapons of mass destruction, nuclear materials and others in the possession of the former Soviet Union. Tens of millions of dollars were cut from that program, I think posing a greater risk to us. We had to spend a significant amount of time trying to lobby to restore funds in that regard. Congress blocked the cooperation with countries whose support was critical to the counterterrorism efforts, such as banning military cooperation with Indonesia, by way of example, the world's largest Muslim country that is a key battleground in the campaign against Islamic extremists and banning any meaningful cooperation with Pakistan, the front line state in the global war on terrorism. There were reasons for this, but nonetheless, that was the reality. We had a program called IMET which was designed to put our military into contact with the militaries of other countries to help educate them in the way that a civilized country and democracy is able to subordinate the military civilian rule and to pursue democratic values. Well, the program was terminated based on activities that took place in that country and elsewhere. We had congressional committees who rejected requests for legislative authority to the department to provide certain support to

domestic activity or agencies to prevent or respond to terrorist actions in the United States. It was with this in mind that I tried to combat this complacency and cynicism that I helped to create -- not to create, but I filled the membership of a commission that was led by former Senators Rudman and Hart, including the vice chairman of this commission and former Speaker Gingrich, along with senior retired military commanders and others. In releasing the commission's first report long before September 11, Vice Chairman Hamilton stated the fundamental issue. He said, What comes across to me in this report more than any other single fact is that the commission believes that Americans are going to be less secure than they believe themselves to be, and so I think what we're trying to say in this report is we've lived in a very secure time, we're very fortunate for that, but we're going to be confronted with a lot of challenges to our national security that Americans do not believe we're going to be subject to, and that's really what comes out of this report for me more than any other single thing. Well, I'll tell you, his remarks really resonated with me, because I recall at my very first press conference as secretary of defense back in 1997, I was asked, Mr. Secretary, what is your greatest concern as you look toward the future?

And I'd like to just read my response. My greatest concern is that we're able to persuade the American people that having a viable, sustainable national security policy is important even when there's no clearly identifiable enemy on the horizon. We still live in a very dangerous, disorderly world. And in many cases, we face dangers that are comparable to those we've faced from the past, namely the proliferation of missile technology, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and the spread of terrorism. I believe that we have been complacent as a society. I think that we have failed to fully comprehend the gathering storm. Even now, after September 11th, I think it's far from clear that our society truly understands the gravity of a threat that we face or is yet willing to do what I believe is going to be necessary to counter it. Even after September 11th, after the anthrax and the ricin attacks in the United States, I remain concerned that the controversy over not finding Iraq's weapons of mass destruction will lead to the erroneous assumption that all this talk about the dangers of WMD is just another exercise in the cynical exploitation of fear. After all, it's commonly noted -- it was noted here again this morning -- there were no attacks since September 11th. I think this is a dangerous delusion. The enemy is not only coming, he has been here. He will continue to try to examine our weaknesses and exploit the crevices in our security and destroy our way of living as well as our lives. Mr. Chairman, I'll conclude here. I think you can deduce from my written statement, I believe that the Clinton administration, far more than any previous administration prior to September 11th, understood the threat that terrorism poses to our country. I think it took far greater and more comprehensive action to counter it than previous administration did by virtue of the growing threat. But in spite of all of this, the United States was hit in a devastating way. Even today, with the global war on terrorism being waged, I believe we need to do far more to prevent the spread of virulent Islamic extremism and to prevent terrorism from reaching our shores. I don't pretend to hold the keys to the kingdom of wisdom and what needs to be done in the future. But I think, as I said before, we all must stand accountable for our actions. It's my hope that the commission, again, will focus on the fault lines that run through our democratic system as we struggle to cope with the challenges of unprecedented proportions. I've outlined just a couple of items which I think should be considered for the future. I think we have to develop an in-depth public discussion among our citizens, as well as among elected officials, regarding the compromises on privacy that we're willing to accept in order to remain free and safe. The current debate over access to personal data for aviation security purposes, I don't think is encouraging. We have to elevate the

public discussion on these matters and do our best to remove from them electoral manipulation at least until we truly understand the issues and choices.

We have to reconcile the role technology's going to play in our lives, for good and ill, and try to maintain and ensure that it remains our master and that we don't remain its slave. I don't think it's going to be an easy balance to strike, but I think it has to be done. I think we have to consider establishing a domestic intelligence organization distinct from law enforcement and subject to appropriate control and regulation and oversight. I think we have to secure and eliminate, on an accelerated basis, fissile nuclear materials and chemical and biological weapon agents that pose a risk of diversion. This is going to require a much more cooperative relationship with Russia than we currently have. And I think we have to re-energize America's engagement in the Middle East. I believe that the road to peace in the Middle East runs through Baghdad. And success in Baghdad may very well run through Jerusalem. The unabated violence can only serve, in my judgment, to remain a breeding ground for even more savagery and nihilism in the future. And this effort should not await the counting of ballots in November. And finally, I think we need to persuade the free people of the world that the war on terror cannot be waged by America alone. As recent events demonstrate, religious extremists and fanatics don't recognize geographic boundaries. There are no rear lines. There are no pockets of tranquility. There are no safe harbors for innocent civilians. Every one of us is one the front lines today. A virus or bomb, born in a distant laboratory or a factory, is but a plane ride away from any place on this planet. So it's time for sober reflection and the charting of a responsible course of action. And to the extent I can contribute to this, Mr. Chairman, I'm prepared to answer your questions.