

KATRINA VANDEN HEUVEL
Editor, The Nation

Take Back America Conference
Campaign for America's Future / Institute for America's Future

Security in a Changed World
Thursday, June 5, 2003
Washington, DC

PREPARED REMARKS

This administration is very adept at saying one thing and doing something else. We all agree on that. This administration says its security policies are making America safer. Do you feel safer? I don't. Maybe one democratic tag line for 2004 should be --are you safer now than you were four years ago?

I do begin with a respect and understanding that most Americans feel unsafe, want to be secure and after 9-11 they feel more vulnerable. I for one live in a building which lost one resident to the attacks on the WTC towers; and I now own a small supply of potassium iodide in the event that the Indian Point nuclear plant in NY and which the 9-11 planes flew over on their way down to the WTC, has a catastrophic failure or suffers an attack.

That said, this administration is very astute in playing on peoples' fears --as E.J. Dionne wrote the other day, "a cynic might say that the only thing republicans have to fear is the end of fear itself." And have you seen the new Doonesbury riff, where Ari Fleischer announces to assembled press corps that the answer to every question between now and November 2004 is going to be "9-11"?

I'm not a cynic, but I believe that day in and day out this administration has manipulated the truth about the dangers we face--whether hyping alerts of all shades or fabricating evidence about the imminent danger we faced from Iraq's weapons of mass destruction --so as to mislead the country into war. This kind of deceit is a betrayal of the precious trust in a democracy between the government and its citizens on the most vital of issues. As Paul Krugman wrote in the *New York Times* the other day, "the selling of this war is arguably the worst scandal in American political history--worse than Watergate, worse than Iran-Contra". There should be a wide-ranging independent investigation -- not one by a Republican-controlled Congress, intent on protecting this administration.

This is an issue that should concern not only progressives but all concerned citizens -- and true conservatives-- who believe in the strength and credibility of our democratic institutions. That is why we are hearing from former CIA analysts and agents, from

members of something called Veteran Intelligence Professionals For Sanity, members of the uniformed military, and the professional Foreign Service. These concerned citizens have been speaking out in impressive numbers --via leaks and resignations-- against the blatant manipulation and distortion being conducted by the Rumsfeld/ Ashcroft/ Cheney axis.

The Bush administration's security doctrine of preemptive war, its relentless unilateralism and its rule-breaking stance toward the international order are reckless policies that make us less secure. We need to replace these policies with an alternative security policy that is sane, tough, responsible and fair--and one that addresses peoples' real and legitimate security concerns.

At long last, Democrats seem to understand that they just can't avoid the security issue by changing the topic to the economy. Democrats make a mistake to cede security to this administration --particularly, because there are openings to be seized. On a pragmatic, political level, failing to address the issue will demobilize the thousands of citizens in the peace & justice movement who have mobilized in effective ways these past months. In the next year, coordinated peace groups plan to do education and registration work in many of the 13 or so swing states. There are also 42 "cities for Peace" in the swing states--so you'd tap into the support of local elected officials, and effective grassroots and web-based networks. These are potential troops who will work hard to defeat Bush. They will work even harder if they hear democrats laying out alternative security policies.

Every day the polls bring us word that there is strong support for Bush's foreign policy --for the war, but what is underreported --and important to recognize --is that there is a constituency for a new security policy, one that counters this administration's unilateralism with a pragmatic internationalism. One that stands up for America's role in the world, and does so by using America's power constructively, intelligently--not by overturning over 50 years of bipartisan foreign policy in pursuit of a neo-conservative extremist agendanot by abandoning or trashing every international effort that might engage the U.S. in using its power and wealth to make the world better, more prosperous, more democratic. At a time when we need real global alliances in the fight against stateless terrorism, this administration is isolating the U.S. in the world--making a country that has been a beacon of hope, a source of resentment.

But don't take my word for the existence of this constituency. For all you polling junkies out there --get a copy of an April poll by the University of Maryland's program on international policy attitudes. It is the most comprehensive poll to date on this issue and it found that strong majorities reject Bush's unilateralist /military-oriented "global cop" role. Instead, the poll shows overwhelming support for a more multilateral foreign policy with a strengthened and central role for the United Nations.

The challenge is to make these opinions salient politically, and that's where leadership from democratic presidential candidates will be essential. There are many folks who are profoundly uneasy with Bush's extremist approach, but do want something done about

tyrants and terrorists, not to mention weapons of mass destruction. We need a "tough love" Democrat who says, yes, if you attack America, you will pay a price. We will use force against you, and you will regret the day you killed innocent Americans. But, but we will use force in keeping with international law. And we will not abandon --indeed we will value --all the other tools in the foreign policy tool box -- diplomatic, economic, law enforcement, and so forth. American power needs to be applied much more intelligently and cooperatively, in ways that strengthen international treaties like the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, instead of undermining them; build up the capacities of the U.N. to prevent and contain conflict; and make a positive contribution to fighting threats to humanity, from terrorism to the scourges of AIDS, illiteracy and malnutrition.

Yes, the U.S. is the strongest military power in the history of the world; but as *Nation* columnist Jonathan Schell has masterfully demonstrated in his new book, the war system has reached a point that using war as the primary tool to resolve differences does as much harm to those that employ force as it does to those on the receiving end. It's just common sense to admit that there are limits to what military power can do, in a vulnerable, interconnected world. We desperately need a new definition of security. Overwhelming military power is ill suited to dealing with the central challenges of our time: stateless terrorism with global reach, the worst pandemic in human history (AIDS), the degradation of our common environment, genocidal conflict and hunger afflicting Africa, human rights and human wrongs, unprecedented global economic crises and a global economy that is generating greater instability and inequality. These are problems That no one country, however powerful, can solve on its own--even a country as powerful as the U.S.

Yet, this administration has made unilateral military action the defining response to September 11th and to threats of WMD. And are we any more secure? --Al-Qaeda and the Taliban are regrouping, the proliferation of WMD continues--worsened by this administration's reckless decision to move ahead with a revived nuclear weapons program; there is lawlessness in Iraq; growing anti-Americanism around the world, and a stalled middle east peace process. And, of course, we are witnessing the gutting of effective funding of domestic security programs in favor of outrageous tax cuts for the rich. Where is the money for securing our ports, nuclear reactors, and our bridges --the infrastructure of a strong and protected America?

The President may have elaborate plans to build schools, and roads, and housing, and to bring books -- to Iraq; I have yet to see a similar plan for America. A campaign that said security begins at home -- as Eisenhower said in the 1950s, as even the conference board has emphasized in the wake of 9/11 -- would be a way of highlighting Bush's neglect of the home front. Even as he attempts to use my city, New York, as a photo op during the 2004 convention, his budget will be causing mass layoffs of cops, and firefighters, and public health workers, and teachers -- of many of the very personnel who will be needed if there is another terrorist attack, and who should be part of the early warning system to prevent another attack.

This approach has to go deeper than "fund homeland security, not war without end." It has to be security as defined by a Democratic, accountable process -- the kind of process that would have demanded a non-partisan, well-funded investigation of what went wrong in the run-up to 9/11, not an investigation that as of now is funded at just \$15 million, less than one-fourth of what the Republican-led Congress authorized for the Monica Lewinsky investigation. It has to be security that acknowledges that an accountable democracy is a safer place than a police state where people are spirited away because of who they are, as has been done to far too many Arab Americans; or where people who question the government are smeared by the government and their right-wing echo chamber in the media --these practices aren't just anti-democratic. They also undermine our security by setting the government and large parts of the citizenry off chasing imaginary monsters instead of looking squarely at the very real threats we face.

In history and politics, there are always alternatives. It is understandably harder to see them today--confronted as we are by the most extremist administration in modern history; with a country made vulnerable by 9-11 ;and with an administration determined to keep fear, not hope, alive.

But, with a measure of leadership and courage, and with an understanding that there is a real constituency for reform of our security policy, there is an opening to move beyond the self-defeating "me-too" politics of national security --toward a real democratic (small and big "d") agenda that is tough and smart, in which U.S. power is exercised responsibly, in which our leadership brings respect, and we meet the new challenges that threaten global security, peace and development.

That means unprecedented unity among progressive forces towards one goal-- non-violent, democratic regime change in Washington November 2004.