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Australia's Continuing Role in the War on Terrorism

The Honorable Michael Thawley

Thank you very much for honoring Australia and our contribution to the fight against terrorism. I want to make four key points about the terrorist threat we face from al-Qaeda and the fundamentalist Islamic groups associated with it.

A Fight to the Death

First, we need to understand that this is not an issue that is amenable to the normal compromises we are used to making in societies like the United States and Australia. The terrorists have told us that it is a fight to the death. "You love life, we love death" was one chilling statement after the Madrid bombing. We had better believe them. And we had better not forget it—because the battle against terrorism may well last for decades.

Good works will improve the political, social, and economic conditions in those Muslim, Western, and Asian societies where the groups find havens. They will help those countries build alternative futures for their people. Hence, the importance of success in rebuilding Afghanistan and Iraq and fostering progress in many other societies.

But we cannot afford to forget that the terrorist groups themselves actually care nothing about social progress, or economic development or political freedoms—or, for that matter, Palestinians. They are inspired by an absolutist ideology and rabid convictions: that the world is dominated by a Zionist-Christian conspiracy, that Muslim countries should be run according to al-Qaeda's fanatical view of the Koran as practiced by the Taliban, and that Western democracies

Talking Points

- The attacks against New York and Washington on September 11 galvanized the United States and the rest of the world in a way previous attacks had not. Americans bore the brunt of the pain, but citizens from many countries were fellow victims.
- There is a lot of hindsight being exercised about the then-available intelligence and how it was interpreted, but there is no doubt that Saddam was retaining the capability to develop WMD. Dealing with this situation was essential for credible efforts to prevent proliferation anywhere.
- Success in building on the opportunity for a new future that we have given both countries will depend on sustained U.S. commitment.
- Defeating terrorism is a collective good, and therefore it should be a collective responsibility. Great progress has been made, and international cooperation has dramatically improved; but more needs to be done, and any complacency is bound to be rewarded with another attack.

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(202) 546-4400 heritage.org

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stand in the way of implementing their vision.

The reality is that the threat is even more mortal for predominantly Muslim societies than it is for our own. We have seen Muslim countries come to understand that and begin with differing success to come to terms with the threat.

The Global Battleground

Second, the terrorists have chosen the battleground: It is global, and it is predominantly civilian. Awful attacks have been carried out around the globe—in Muslim and in Asian countries as well as in the West. The most recent was in Madrid, but we have seen attacks in places such as Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Morocco, Kenya, Yemen, Indonesia, Tanzania, and the Philippines as well as in the United States.

The attacks against New York and Washington on September 11, though, galvanized the United States and the rest of the world in a way previous attacks had not. The location and scale of the attacks and the great wave of international sympathy for a bereaved America partly explain this. In the September 11 attacks, Americans bore the brunt of the pain, but citizens from many countries were fellow victims.

Societies around the world realized that such an attack could just as well happen at home and that their own citizens could well be victims wherever an attack might take place. Just over a year later, Australians were killed in large numbers, along with many Indonesians and others at a nightclub in Bali.

As in Bali, the victims of terrorism are overwhelmingly ordinary citizens: innocents, we often say, but it is the wrong word. Not because the victims are not innocent, but because use of this word logically implies that we might imagine there could be some justification for terrorist attacks. It suggests that, somehow or other, it is less bad if terrorists kill Iraqi citizens and security forces, or the citizens or soldiers of countries in Iraq who were involved in removing Saddam Hussein from power.

The implication that any attacks are somehow more understandable reflects muddled thinking. It suggests we might be safer if we kept quiet, stayed out of the battle against terrorism, stayed away from Iraq, and distanced ourselves from the great Satan, the United States.

What else might we have to do? How could we be safe this way? Australia will not go down this track.

Countering Weapons of Mass Destruction

Third, weapons of mass destruction would be the terrorists' perfect instrument and so preventing terrorists from getting their hands on them is vital. After September 11, it was inconceivable that we could allow Saddam Hussein, who for 12 years had defied the international community's demands to destroy his arsenals and programs, to continue to get away with this.

There is a lot of hindsight being exercised now about the then-available intelligence and how it was interpreted, but there is no doubt that Saddam was retaining the capability to develop WMD. Who exactly was going to provide the guarantee that Saddam would not relaunch his programs, use WMD again, or allow them to get into the hands of terrorists? And what was the world's continuing inaction saying about our commitment to enforcing the global non-proliferation regime? Dealing with this situation was essential for credible efforts to prevent proliferation anywhere.

Need for a Sustained U.S. Commitment

Fourth, continued leadership and sustained commitment from the United States are essential if we are to defeat terrorism. No other country has the global reach required—whether we are talking about military capability, intelligence capability, or the skills and resources to help other countries improve their own capabilities to deal with terrorism and to cooperate internationally.

Equally, no other country has a greater degree of national interest than the United States in winning this battle and helping others with it—because of the range of your economic and political interests and the spread of your citizens around the globe.

Afghanistan—removing the safe haven that al-Qaeda had built there—was a case where we had to take the war to the terrorists before they brought war again to our streets. Similarly, dealing with Saddam Hussein was essential. Both were military tasks and ones where the United States had to lead. But in both cases, they were tasks in which the United States could not succeed alone. Support from many countries in many different ways was essential.

Likewise, success in building on the opportunity for a new future that we have given both countries will depend on sustained U.S. commitment. A lot of good things have happened in both Iraq and Afghanistan since the previous regimes were overthrown, but the problems ahead are colossal, and the road will be rocky.

Again, the United States will not be able to do it alone. Moreover, nor should it be expected to. The responsibility for taking advantage of the opportunity rests in the first place on the shoulders of the citizens of Iraq and Afghanistan, but the rest of us also have an obligation to help. Many have responded. There are over 30 countries involved in the coalition in Iraq and over 60 in Afghanistan. Now is not the time to give up.

The establishment of a viable pluralistic state in Iraq which uses its resources for the benefit of all its people would be a mighty blow against Islamic terrorism. The terrorists know that our failure in those countries will be a huge victory for them.

As Australia's Prime Minister, John Howard, said last week in *The Wall Street Journal*:

global commentary [on the Madrid attacks] seems as much focused on the political implications for Western governments as on the perpetrators. It will be doubly tragic if mass murder is rewarded with even the perception that our resolve has weakened. . . . Now is not the time to be diverted from this global mission.

Our Collective Responsibility

Defeating terrorism is a collective good, and therefore it should be a collective responsibility—in all the various elements that go into winning the battle and include military, law enforcement, intelligence, denying finance to terrorists, preventing proliferation of WMD, improving our own border controls, domestic security, transport security, and so on. Great progress

has been made in these areas, and international cooperation has dramatically improved; but more needs to be done, and any complacency is bound to be rewarded with another attack.

For our part, Australia has been prepared to stand up and be counted in all these areas. And I appreciate your gesture today in acknowledging that. We were one of the first countries with troops on the ground in Afghanistan and one of four countries to contribute forces to Operation Iraqi Freedom. We are making a major aid contribution in Afghanistan and still have military operating in specialist roles in Iraq.

Living where we do, we have some special concerns and special responsibilities. We are in a part of the world, unlike Europe, where the strategic balance is still evolving. We live near countries where terrorist groups linked with al-Qaeda have found haven—as we learned to our grief in Bali.

So we have made a special effort to assist Southeast Asian and Pacific countries to develop capabilities in the many areas necessary to withstand and defeat terrorism. We have worked very closely with Indonesia, building on our support for the successful investigation of the Bali attack, which resulted in 33 convictions. We have jointly chaired with Indonesia conferences to promote regional cooperation in counter-terrorism.

The risks are still high. Jema'ah Islamiyah is still active in Indonesia and has links with al-Qaeda and other groups in countries such as the Philippines. We remain determined about combating terrorism, and we remain determined to stand together with the United States in defeating it.

—*The Honorable Michael Thawley is Ambassador to the United States from Australia. His remarks were delivered at an event, "Honoring Australia," sponsored by The Heritage Foundation and the Global Women's Summit on International and Homeland Security on March 31, 2004.*