"New American Strategies for Security and Peace"
Remarks by John D. Podesta
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Good afternoon, everyone. I'm John Podesta, from the Center for American Progress. First, let me join Dick and Bob in welcoming you here for what promises to be two days of important discussion and debate.

Let me thank in advance all the speakers and panelists who are participating. I also want to recognize Strobe Talbott, Jim Steinberg and the Brookings Institution and John Hamre, Kurt Campbell and the Center for Strategic and International Studies for generously allowing so many of their scholars to join us. I want also to recognize Ambassador Marc Ginsberg and the many members of the Alliance for American Leadership who are here. I would also call your attention to a fine set of papers on terrorism, control of weapons of mass destruction, and other key topics put together by a national security working group under the leadership of Secretary Bill Perry included in your conference materials.

As you look around, you'll also notice that there are some young faces in our audience – students studying national security affairs and international relations at American University, Georgetown, George Washington, Howard and Johns Hopkins.
One of the missions of the Center for American Progress is to draw more young people into the national debate on critical issues and we're glad that they're here with us today.

As many of you know, this conference is something of a debut for the Center for American Progress and we are pleased to have been able to work with the American Prospect and the Century Foundation to put together such a distinguished list of scholars and thinkers in the national security arena. As a nonpartisan research and educational institute, our mission is to find progressive and pragmatic solutions to significant domestic and international problems.

Over the next two days, you're going to hear a lot about the state of our nation's security and the course of our foreign policy. You'll hear from Democrats, Independents and Republicans alike. You're going to hear some agreement and, I assume, some disagreement. And what we hope you'll take away from here is a strong sense that there are serious people who have concrete, and we believe, better ideas about how to protect Americans and advance our national interests than the ideology which propels our foreign policy today. As Dick mentioned in his opening remarks, in the aftermath of the tragedy of September 11, the whole nation and nearly the entire civilized world rallied

behind our President and our country. And the first results – in Afghanistan and in taking on terrorists across the globe – were promising.

But a little more than two years later, having pursued a course of unprecedented unilateralism, our fight to rid the world of terrorism is stalling, our young men and women in Iraq are in grave danger every day, our allies are frustrated, and our enemies are more determined than ever.

I am not one who subscribes to the John Ashcroft theory of political dialogue. I do not question the patriotism of Administration officials, nor their commitment to protecting the American people. I believe that we are right to target the deadly combination of terrorists armed with weapons of mass destruction. But when I examine the record of those now in power, I cannot help but question the assumptions that guide their decisions.

It has become abundantly clear that while we had a brilliant plan to win a war against Saddam Hussein and the Iraqi army, we do not know how to win the peace. Everyday in Iraq, we are incurring the costs – both human and financial – of a policy built on deception in Iraq and myth about the imminence of the threat and the cost and scope of rebuilding.

First, we were told mission accomplished. Then we were told that the media was missing the good news. Now we are told that the bad news is the good news.

The singular focus on Iraq and lack of planning for winning the peace has damaged other critical U.S. foreign policy goals. It has diverted attention from serious threats, including proliferation of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction, and has led the Administration to downplay very real dangers in Korea, Iran, and inside Saudi Arabia. Afghanistan is still dangerously unstable. Osama bin Laden is still at large. And two years after 9/11, we remain too vulnerable at home to those who seek to do us harm.

That is, in brief, where we stand. Now where should we go? What should the elements of a new and different strategy be?

First, America has to make clear its diplomatic and military priorities. Even with the mightiest army, our influence is built on collaboration and consent, not just on arms. We need to make strategic choices. If we are serious about spreading the ideals of free, market-based democracy, we cannot unilaterally remake other nations nor disrespect a pluralistic world.

Second, it's time to re-focus our attention to the war on global terrorism, rebuilding the coalition that we started to assemble after 9/11 and then all but abandoned, and increasing the number and effectiveness of the tools at our disposal.

Third, we need to enlist the world's other nations to end proliferation of nuclear weapons as well as chemical and biological arsenals. Instead, the Administration is flirting with dangerous doctrine and developing new weapons that threaten to spark a new arms race.

Fourth, we must rebuild alliances and collaboration with international institutions. Dismissing our NATO allies as "Old Europe" does not help us confront the transnational challenges that we cannot take on singlehandedly. We must remember that the U.N. was the product of U.S. leadership and can be an effective instrument for our foreign policy.

Finally, we must set the right priorities for domestic preparedness. Police and fire units in adjoining towns still cannot communicate. Airport and port security and improved chemical plant security are off track or behind schedule. Furthermore, we are sacrificing our own civil liberties by harassing broad groups of citizens without finding ways to better identify targets and narrow searches.

Overall, the test of our policy is not whether a nation as powerful as the United States can eventually impose its will. The test is whether the result is durable, and whether the cost makes sense relative to the gain. In a democracy, open debate is the best route to smart and sustainable policies. This conference will challenge the present strategy, and offer pragmatic alternatives to protect Americans and advance our national interests.

We thank you for being here. After lunch, we'll here from Ted Sorenson and General Wesley Clark.