Wednesday, August 30, 2006

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

SALT LAKE CITY – "Defense Secretary Rumsfeld said yesterday the world faces 'a new type of fascism' and likened critics of the U.S. war strategy to those who tried to appease the Nazis."
Associated Press, August 30, 2006

Dear Mr. Secretary:

I read your quote in the Associated Press dispatch. Respectfully, I believe you are right about one thing, wrong about another, and misdirected on a third.

As you know, I am a Member of the House Armed Services Committee. You have testified before me many times. I have met with you, and your staff, frequently. I have supported every single military appropriation and authorization. I proudly call myself a "Harry Truman Democrat." I believe the world presents many threats and we need a robust military to deter or defeat those challenges.

• Here is how I believe you are misdirected, Mr. Secretary:

Instead of giving a speech condemning the individuals who criticized your past strategies, wouldn't it be better for us all if you gave a speech outlining how we're going to get it right in Iraq? I think the American people have had enough name-calling, blame-laying and finger-pointing. They would prefer to hear specific, responsible solutions that enable us to redeploy our forces without leaving Iraq in worse condition than when we entered it. And they need more than sound bytes. Banalities such as "We will stay until the mission is accomplished" and "For every Iraqi soldier that stands up, an American will come home" are getting as stale as an old commercial for cereal. It's the political equivalent of the "Happy Face."

• Here is how I agree with you:

I believe you are correct when you say the world faces "a new type of fascism." The spread of violent extremism is a generational threat comparable to World War II, the Cold War, the Civil War and the many other grave crises that have confronted our nation. Fanatical elements of Islam want to liquidate democracy, subjugate women, and propagate a hateful world-view. They believe in beheadings rather than ballots; they teach their children how to blow things up rather than how to put things together. And they will stop at nothing to achieve this goal.

• And this is how I disagree with you.

I disagree with your statement comparing critics of your strategies to appeasers of the Nazis:

Since you raised the comparison, Mr. Secretary, let me pursue it.

It is precisely because I believe that Islamic terrorism is just as grave a threat as the Nazi's that I have an obligation to criticize strategies that are not defeating terrorism

I can't imagine President Roosevelt embarking upon World War II with the strategies you employed to confront terrorism. I can't fathom that he would tell the American people that we could build our arsenals, defeat Nazism and fascism, win World War II and remake the world – all on the cheap. I can't picture him addressing Congress after Pearl Harbor and proclaiming, "With courage and determination, with unbounding confidence in our Armed Forces, we will gain the inevitable triumph. . . and if you're in the upper 1 percent of wage earners, you're also gaining a huge tax cut." No, in order to defeat Nazism we all sacrificed to ensure that our troops had the equipment, the supplies, and the support necessary to triumph. Contrast that, Mr. Secretary, to the recent Armed Services Committee hearing where I castigated the Department of Defense for failing to provide our soldiers with sufficient life-saving coagulant bandages.

Mr. Secretary, I can't imagine the Secretaries of Defense of the 1940s disregarding the multitude of plans that were developed to ensure that we won the war and kept the peace. I don't recall hearing of anyone in the Roosevelt or Truman Administration suggesting that a single battle would be easy or quick; or browbeating their generals to slash troop levels and weapons systems; or disregarding postwar planning. Indeed, after President Truman used the zenith of hard power – the Atom Bomb – we were ready to implement the ultimate in soft power-- the Marshall Plan. I believe in hard power, Mr. Secretary. But what is the Marshall Plan for the Middle East, where seventy percent of the population is under the age of twenty-five and most have no jobs, no future and no hope. Why is Hezbollah, the very group of thugs that held the Lebanese people at gunpoint, now gaining their support by leading efforts to rebuild their lives?

Nor can I imagine that the leaders of World War II would ignore recommendations to improve our domestic security. Is it "appeasing" our enemies to criticize you for failing to implement the policies of the bipartisan 9-11 Commission?

Finally, Mr. Secretary, may I suggest what is even worse than appeasement?

The Administration's energy policies have deepened our reliance on foreign oil, raised gas prices, and helped send a tidy profit to the very oil suppliers who threaten us. How do these oil-countries spend their profits, Mr. Secretary? Iran invests it in their nuclear program, or spends it on equipment and training for terrorist groups such as Hezbollah. Saudi Arabia donates it to build Madrasas that teach a virulent strain of Islam. As a result of your oil policies, your own Department was forced to spend $10.6 billion on basic energy costs. The Air Force spent about half of it ($4.7 billion) on one thing: buying fuel for its planes. And every $10 increase in a barrel of oil adds $600 million to your overall costs – forcing you to reduce weapons procurement funds to pay the oil bill.

Here is what is worse than appeasement: we're making interest payments to China to borrow their money to fund our military to buy oil from Persian Gulf countries to fuel our Air Force to protect us from China and Persian Gulf countries.

Mr. Secretary, I close with two thoughts.

First, I believe we will defeat our enemies, wherever they are. But the current strategies are not working. And when strategies don't work, silence in asking for better strategies risks defeat, and appeases our enemies.

Second, the only thing I can think of that is worse that appeasing our enemies is subsidizing them to threaten us.

I hope that your future speeches will focus less time on historical parallels and criticizing criticisms, and more time on a strategy for success. The core of that strategy must be an energy initiative that stops us from subsidizing and enriching our true enemies in the world. I hope you will ask your staff to read my Next Generation Energy Security Initiative (it's on my web site www.house.gov/israel). I'm ready to work closely with you – as long as it's a discussion of the future and not a debate about the past.

Posted by: SI