

**J. Brian Atwood Keynote Speech**  
**University of Vermont**  
**November 4, 2004**

I want to thank the University of Vermont, President Fogel and Provost Bramly for inviting me to your beautiful campus. A special thanks to my good friends Fran Carr and Ned McMahon for hosting me and my family here in Burlington. The University is very fortunate to have this very talented couple.

Well the election is finally over! This election was supposed to have been the first referendum on American foreign policy in 40 years. Our choice seemed to be a clear one: international cooperation or unilateral, pre-emptive action. The candidates tried to blur these distinctions, driven by the dynamics of an American electoral campaign. The focus of attention became the undecided voter who wanted it all: better relations with our allies and pre-emptive unilateral action if our security is threatened. So the candidates had to explain that they could do it all, and do it better than the other guy. In the end, the choice for many of us was clear, but did this campaign produce a new national security paradigm? Frankly, I hope not. Did it even produce a foreign policy mandate for the winner? Again, I hope not. If the Bush Administration takes their election as a mandate for more Iraqs, they are badly misreading the American people.

My hope is that the convergence that the campaign produced will be the basis for a less divisive approach to national security. That is my hope.

On the issue of terrorism, both candidates came perilously close to committing the truth. President Bush at one point said we couldn't win the war against terrorism, per se. At another point, Senator Kerry said the best we could do was to turn the threat into a "nuisance". Both were correct and both were then put on the defensive for telling us the truth.

Campaigns often produce more heat than light. That is the nature of the beast. However, that does not relieve the enlightened citizen from his or her obligation to think more deeply about today's dangerous world and our nation's place in it.

I have some thoughts about that which I would like to share with you.

First, I and many other have long argued for a broader definition of national security. Our nation is no longer threatened by a common enemy called communism. The East-West struggle is over; we have emerged as the only superpower. Yet, today we face the threat of terrorism, a threat that has dominated our collective psyche since 9/11. Terrorism so preoccupies us that our recent presidential election virtually ignored the threats of an expanding global population, the dangers of new infectious diseases, the impact of climate change and the growing gap between rich and poor. I have no doubt that the two candidates have some thoughts on these issues, but neither the press nor we citizens seemed interested in hearing them.

I would suggest that, particularly in this time of transition – and there will be a transition from W-1 to W-2! – we should demand that our government examine these threats and the ways in which they

are linked. If we expect government to protect us against terrorism, we must demand that terrorism be viewed in the context of related and reinforcing international dangers.

Those who have tried to expand our definition of national security have confronted strong opposition – sometimes derision – from more traditional analysts, especially from the so-called foreign policy “realists”. Two arguments are used most often: 1) that it is not conditions that create threats, it is bad people; and 2) that these conditions can never rise to the level of a “strategic” threat to the United States.

I suggest that it is this narrow thinking that has blinded us to the challenges we face and constrained our thinking with respect to the tactics we could employ in our own defense. Narrow thinking has produced huge defense budgets and few resources to prevent or manage security threats before they require the use of the U.S. military.

Let me give you an illustration of how the arguments go. Early in the Clinton Administration, I wrote an opinion piece in the Washington Post describing an emerging threat to U.S. interests as the general condition of “chaos”. I said that “disintegrating societies and failed states ... have emerged as the greatest menace to global stability and should be seen as a strategic threat.”

A few weeks later I was attacked on the same Post Op-Ed pages for “splitting the Clinton team” and having introduced a “new doctrine that undervalues moral accountability.” The writer, Jeremy Rosner who later joined the Clinton Administration, asked, “What, after the Cold War, is the overarching threat to America’s national security – chaos or malice?”

Well, I was both flattered and bemused. I had never before been accused of creating something as profound as a “doctrine”! And I was amazed that someone could see this as an either-or proposition. In my view, chaos was related directly to malicious intent in that conditions of anarchy and poverty both *produce* malice and are exploited by those with malicious intent.

I have thought long and hard about this debate in the ensuing years. To some extent, I would welcome a return to the “realist” versus “internationalist” debates of a decade ago. Today, the neo-cons and their infatuation with unilateral power have overshadowed the differences between the more mainstream schools of thought, though these may well have re-emerged if the Democrats had been elected.

I would suggest that it is time for realists and internationalists to merge their thinking – and not just because of our common opposition to the neo-cons. Let me describe the rationale for a new realistic internationalism.

First, I would accept the proposition that the escalation of global conflict, including terrorism, is related to the many factors realists cite: the breakdown of Soviet-communist hegemony; ethnic tensions; weak governance; and the rise of religious extremism. There are malicious people and movements out there. There are a few rogue states left. I would in turn ask realists to accept that there is a link between poverty and violent conflict. Let me present some evidence of that connection.

Studies conducted on poverty both here and abroad have concluded that the absence of wealth alone is not a sufficient condition to create conflict. Yet, these studies show that there is a strong correlation between “resource deprivation” and the likelihood of violence.

Sampson, Laudenbush and Earls, in their 1997 study of poor neighborhoods in Chicago, concluded that poverty denied these micro-societies “collective efficacy”, or social cohesion among neighbors. They found that “... alienation, exploitation, and dependency wrought by resource deprivation acts as a centrifugal force that stymies collective efficacy.” The greater the effect of what the authors called “concentrated disadvantage”, the stronger the correlation to the level of violence.

The 1998 Report of the UN Commission on Global Governance offered the same conclusion with respect to poor societies in the developing world. It stated that “poverty provides scant basis either for the maintenance of traditional society or for any further development of participation in civic life and governance ...unfair in themselves, poverty and extreme disparities of income fuel both guilt and envy when made more visible by global [communications].”

The World Bank report entitled “Breaking the Conflict Trap” argues that an unequal distribution of wealth exacerbates societal tensions and “increases the perception of relative deprivation....” This, in turn, leads to “perceived grievances and potential strife.”

Few of the leaders of terrorist organizations are poor, but they have successfully exploited the conditions of poverty to expand their political appeal, to recruit their foot soldiers and to find safe harbors. No viable anti-terrorist strategy can ignore these realities.

Conditions do matter. When the gap between rich and poor widens, as it has, to more than ten to one, and when nearly half the world’s population lives below the poverty line, anger and alienation are the byproducts. When 30,000 children die each day of diseases that are curable in the West, envy, guilt and desperation are the byproducts.

It may be true that not many of the poor are terrorists – and not all terrorists are poor – but we should understand that poverty does produce malice. Poverty when combined with malicious intent is an enemy of the United States.

In the next 15 years another billion people will join the world’s population. Ninety-five percent will be born in the developing world as our western populations age and contract. How many of these people will become workers and consumers? How many will choose the short life of a terrorist?

Let us assume for a moment that the president has just won a mandate from the American people to pursue development as part of a toolkit for combating terrorism and conflict. What would he do with that mandate? Let me suggest some initial steps.

First, he would request additional resources from Congress to enhance the role development cooperation can play in preventing or mitigating the conditions of poverty that create opportunities for terrorists or violent conflict. The Development Assistance Committee of the OECD issued a report in October 2003 entitled “A Development Cooperation Lens on Terrorism Prevention.” This report observed that “many conditions that allow terrorists to be politically successful, build and expand constituencies, find recruits, establish and finance terrorist organizations, and secure safe-havens, fall within the realm and primary concerns of development cooperation.”

The specific interventions recommended by the DAC Report are revealing in that they attempt to ameliorate the conditions of “concentrated disadvantage” that the Sampson study suggests contribute most to the unraveling of “social cohesion.” Among the interventions designed to “dissuade disaffected groups from embracing terrorism and other forms of violent conflict” were the following:

- “Support community-driven development to build the capacity of communities to resist extreme religious and political ideologies based on violence. Encourage intra- and inter-faith exchanges... (This is a “faith-based initiative” worth supporting!)
- “Help build effective and responsible media and public information strategies as powerful tools to prevent violence. (In other words, promote the flow of information that encourages reconciliation among ethnic and religious groups as opposed to propaganda to sell U.S. policy.)
- “Give greater attention in donor programming to young people’s job opportunities and education to prevent the emergence of fragile, disenfranchised youth. (The fact that 60% of the population in developing countries is under the age of 25 speaks for itself.)
- “Support democratization and modernization from within local value systems in a way that reconfirms and builds on the beliefs of different societies. (In other words, nurture democratic movements and help them, don’t impose democracy at the end of a gun.)
- “Stay engaged and work in fragile, conflict-prone societies no matter how difficult the partnership may become (This means investing in high-risk nations to prevent conflict and to set the stage for development.)
- “Strive to make globalization an inclusive process, which will help reduce support for terrorism. This requires an increased aid effort as well as greater policy coherence (This means that we should stop imposing discipline that we do not impose on ourselves that inhibits rather than supports development and economic growth.)”

Thus, the president’s special development fund would be targeted for selected countries where a potential threat has been identified. Some of these relatively weak states might not otherwise be eligible for assistance programs.

Second, the president should ask the intelligence community to include an explicit assessment of areas of underdevelopment in nations vulnerable to crisis. Often, traditional risk analyses ignore factors that are likely to create social tension and conflict. Development experts should be consulted for they are more likely to consider these issues than are traditional intelligence analysis.

An example of this type of analysis was contained in a study requested by the intelligence community entitled, “The Report on State Failure”. This study, which examined the correlation between several development factors and the failure of state institutions, was prepared by development experts and scholars under the auspices of the University of Maryland. They found that such failure correlated most strongly with three factors: infant mortality rates; the fragility of democratic institutions; and an excessive dependency on imports. Each of these factors can be further examined to reveal the

connections between weak or non-existent development and opportunities for exploitation by terrorist organizations or those prone to violent conflict.

Third, the president should acknowledge that the U.S. Government's assistance programs are uncoordinated and, as such, as currently composed, they are incapable of achieving a strategic impact in themselves and in working with and leveraging other bilateral or multilateral donors. He should announce the creation of a new cabinet-level Department of International Development Cooperation that would pull together the U.S. effort and coordinate U.S. contributions to the UN voluntary agencies and the International Financial Institutions – the World Bank and the regional banks.

Fourth, our current approach to poverty reduction in the developing world is both contradictory and incoherent. The new president should order a study of trade and finance policies to identify these inconsistencies. He should then ask the Treasury and Commerce Departments to work with the new Department for International Development to devise realistic legislative strategies to bring these policies in line.

The Commission on Weak States and U.S. National Security, on which I served, has recommended “an enhanced set of benefits to the three most prominent groupings of poor countries – heavily indebted poor countries, least developed countries, and sub-Saharan African countries.” This list of 64 countries has a population of approximately 1 billion people, some 70 percent of whom live in poverty. The Commission recommends that Congress pass an improved and more liberal African Growth and Opportunity Act and an enhanced Generalized System of [trade] Preferences program for these countries. This, combined with more liberal debt relief measures, can do much to help poor countries achieve economic growth, particularly when combined with donor assistance that helps them create micro-economic systems, democratic institutions and human capacity.

We must also examine our subsidies for agricultural products. The United States spends over \$300 billion a year on export and production subsidies, a figure that dwarfs the \$55 billion all donor countries combined spend on official development assistance. Subsidies like this make it difficult for poor countries to compete in global markets. The World Bank has estimated that the elimination of these subsidies would create \$100 billion of agriculture-sector growth in the developing world.

Fifth, the Commission on Weak States and U.S. National Security has also recommended that the State Department and the new development department jointly develop a global strategy that allocates funds from a separate budget line for democracy assistance. These resources would be devoted to support for ongoing democratic transitions and for positive pressure for reform on recalcitrant governments.

A new president should recognize the conflict-prevention qualities of democracy development initiatives *when they are fully funded*. We should no longer advocate for democratic change and then leave new democracies in a fragile state. The president should order a study of opportunities to pursue democratization strategies on a multilateral basis. This study would emphasize the preventative nature of the programs and serve to justify a separate democracy account.

Sixth, my final point, the president, unencumbered by his need to appeal to his right wing, should signal to the American people and to the world that he wishes to work with the Secretary General of

the United Nations and with the Security Council to reform and strengthen the UN system. His first priority should be in the field of peace operations. The UN should have a permanent institutional capacity to manage peacekeeping and peacebuilding operations. This was recommended by the Secretary General's Panel on Peace Operations on which I served. This report, called the "Brahimi Report," after our chairman, was endorsed by the United States. However, we have failed to provide the resources to enable the changes recommended.

We should also study the UN assistance delivery systems and provide support for a better-coordinated, more strategic approach. If these voluntary agencies can demonstrate a more effective approach, they should receive additional resources from the United States.

Finally, it is long past time to change the make-up of the permanent membership of the Security Council. Japan and Germany should be added and we should find ways to involve the leading emerging nations including possibly India, Brazil and other Group of 77 leaders.

Ladies and gentlemen, many of you have been working very hard to make this election come out the way you felt would best serve the interests of the United States and world peace. Elections give us a wonderful opportunity to start anew – even when incumbents are re-elected. Many of us have been deeply disturbed over the approach we have taken in the past four years. The United States has become isolated and less effective as a world leader. We know that we cannot prevent a world of chaos and defeat terrorism by continuing to flaunt our power. We are paying a heavy price for that approach.

The United States has a very special leadership role to play in this world. More than ever, the world needs our sense of optimism and our can-do attitude. It also needs a better-coordinated U.S. Government and more coherent policies, especially vis a vis the developing nations. Perhaps, through a reformed United Nations, we can even reshape the international system and make it the instrument of peace that its creators envisioned.

To do this we will have to begin to lead by employing our best values: the diversity of our populace; our commitment to the rule of law both for our own citizens and the world's citizens; our opposition to religious extremism both at home and abroad; our belief that the rich have an obligation to help the poor; and our natural American sense of optimism. For too long now we have been driven by fear and the belief that the example of our power is superior to the power of our example. The President no longer has to run for office. Perhaps we can now make that right. Thank you.