HON. RON PAUL OF TEXAS BEFORE THE US HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES April 22, 2004

The Lessons of 9/11

We are constantly admonished to remember the lessons of 9/11. Of course the real issue is not remembering, but rather knowing what the pertinent lesson of that sad day is.

The 9/11 Commission soon will release its report after months of fanfare by those whose reputations are at stake. The many hours and dollars spent on the investigation may well reveal little we don't already know, while ignoring the most important lessons that should be learned from this egregious attack on our homeland. Common sense already tells us the tens of billions of dollars spent by government agencies, whose job it is to provide security and intelligence for our country, failed.

A full-fledged investigation into the bureaucracy may help us in the future, but one should never pretend that government bureaucracies can be made efficient. It is the very nature of bureaucracies to be inefficient. Spending an inordinate amount of time finger pointing will distract from the real lessons of 9/11. Which agency, which department, or which individual receives the most blame should not be the main purpose of the investigation.

Despite our serious failure to prevent the attacks, it's disturbing to see how politicized the whole investigation has become. Which political party receives the greatest blame is a high stakes election-year event, and distracts from the real lessons ignored by both sides.

Everyone on the Commission assumes that 9/11 resulted from a lack of government action. No one in Washington has raised the question of whether our shortcomings, brought to light by 9/11, could have been a result of too much government. Possibly in the final report we will discuss this, but to date no one has questioned the assumption that we need more government and, of course--though elusive-- a more efficient one.

The failure to understand the nature of the enemy who attacked us on 9/11, along with a pre-determined decision to initiate a pre-emptive war against Iraq, prompted our government to deceive the people into believing that Saddam Hussein had something to do with the attacks on New York and Washington. The majority of the American people still contend the war against Iraq was justified because of the events of 9/11. These misinterpretations have led to many U.S. military deaths and casualties, prompting a growing number of Americans to question the wisdom of our presence and purpose in a strange foreign land 6,000 miles from our shores. The neo-conservative defenders of our policy in Iraq speak of the benefits that we have brought to the Iraqi people: removal of a violent dictator, liberation, democracy, and prosperity. If all this were true, the resistance against our occupation would not be growing. We ought to admit we have not been welcomed as liberators as was promised by the proponents of the war.

Though we hear much about the so-called “benefits” we have delivered to the Iraqi people and the Middle East, we hear little talk of the cost to the American people: lives lost, soldiers maimed for life, uncounted thousands sent home with diseased bodies and minds, billions of dollars consumed, and a major cloud placed over U.S. markets and the economy. Sharp political divisions, reminiscent of the 1960s, are arising at home.

Failing to understand why 9/11 happened and looking for a bureaucratic screw-up to explain the whole thing-- while using the event to start an unprovoked war unrelated to 9/11-- have dramatically compounded the problems all Americans and the world face. Evidence has shown that there was no connection between Saddam Hussein and the guerilla attacks on New York and Washington, and since no weapons of mass destruction were found, other reasons are given for invading Iraq. The real reasons are either denied or ignored: oil, neo-conservative empire building, and our support for Israel over the Palestinians.

The proponents of the Iraqi war do not hesitate to impugn the character of those who point out the shortcomings of current policy, calling them unpatriotic and appeasers of terrorism. It is said that they are responsible for the growing armed resistance, and for the killing of American soldiers. It’s conveniently ignored that if the opponents of the current policy had prevailed, not one single American would have died nor would tens of thousands of Iraqi civilians have suffered the same fate.

Al Qaeda and many new militant groups would not be enjoying a rapid growth in their ranks. By denying that our sanctions and bombs brought havoc to Iraq, it’s easy to play the patriot card and find a scapegoat to blame. We are never at fault and never responsible for bad outcomes of what many believe is, albeit well-intentioned, interference in the affairs of others 6,000 miles from our shores.

Pursuing our policy has boiled down to “testing our resolve.” It is said by many-- even some who did not support the war-- that now we have no choice but to “stay the course.” They argue that it’s a noble gesture to be courageous and continue no matter how difficult. But that should not be the issue. It is not a question of resolve, but rather a question of wise policy. If the policy is flawed and the world and our people are less safe for it, unshakable resolve is the opposite of what we need. Staying the course only makes sense when the difficult tasks are designed to protect our country and to thwart those who pose a direct threat to us. Wilsonian idealism of self-sacrifice to “make the world safe for democracy” should never be an excuse to wage preemptive war-- especially since it almost never produces the desired results. There are always too many unintended consequences.

In our effort to change the political structure of Iraq, we continue alliances with dictators and even develop new ones with countries that are anything but democracies. We have a close alliance with Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, many other Arab dictatorships, and a new one with Kadafi of Libya. This should raise questions about the credibility of our commitment to promoting democracy in Iraq-- which even our own government wouldn’t tolerate.

Show me one neo-con that would accept a national election that put the radical Shiites in charge. As Secretary Rumsfeld said, it’s not going to happen. These same people are condemning the recent democratic decisions made in Spain. We should remember that since World War II, in 35 U.S. attempts to promote democracy around the world none have succeeded.

Promoters of war too often fail to contemplate the unintended consequences of an aggressive foreign policy. So far, the anti-war forces have not been surprised with the chaos that has now become Iraq, or Iran’s participation-- but even they cannot know all the long-term shortcomings of such a policy.

In an eagerness to march on Baghdad, the neo-cons gloated-- and I heard them-- of the “shock and awe” that was about to hit the Iraqi people. It turns out that the real shock and awe is that we’re further from peace in Iraq than we were a year ago-- and Secretary Rumsfeld admits his own surprise.

The only policy now offered is to escalate the war and avenge the deaths of American soldiers—if they kill 10 of our troops, we’ll kill 100 of theirs. Up until now, announcing the number of Iraqi deaths has been avoided purposely, but the new policy announces our success

by the number of Iraqis killed. But the more we kill, the greater the incitement of the radical Islamic militants. The harder we try to impose our will on them, the greater the resistance becomes.

Amazingly, our occupation has done what was at one time thought to be impossible—it has united the Sunnis and Shiites against our presence. Although this is probably temporary, it is real and has deepened our problems in securing Iraq. The results are an escalation of the conflict and the requirement for more troops. This acceleration of the killing is called "pacification"—a bit of 1984 newspeak.

The removal of Saddam Hussein has created a stark irony. The willingness and intensity of the Iraqi people to fight for their homeland has increased many times over. Under Saddam Hussein, essentially no resistance occurred. Instead of jubilation and parades for the liberators, we face much greater and unified efforts to throw out all foreigners than when Saddam Hussein was in charge.

It's not whether the Commission investigation of the causes of 9/11 is unwarranted; since the Commissioners are looking in the wrong places for answers, it's whether much will be achieved.

I'm sure we will hear that the bureaucracy failed, whether it was the FBI, the CIA, the NSC, or all of them for failure to communicate with each other. This will not answer the question of why we were attacked and why our defenses were so poor. Even though 40 billion dollars are spent on intelligence gathering each year, the process failed us. It's likely to be said that what we need is more money and more efficiency. Yet, that approach fails to recognize that depending on government agencies to be efficient is a risky assumption. We should support efforts to make the intelligence agencies more effective, but one thing is certain: more money won't help. Of the 40 billion dollars spent annually for intelligence, too much is spent on nation building and activities unrelated to justified surveillance.

There are two other lessons that must be learned if we hope to benefit by studying and trying to explain the disaster that hit us on 9/11. If we fail to learn them, we cannot be made safer and the opposite is more likely to occur.

The first point is to understand who assumes most of the responsibility for the security of our

homes and businesses in a free society. It's not the police. There are too few of them, and it's not their job to stand guard outside our houses or places of business. More crime occurs in the inner city, where there are not only more police, but more restrictions on property owners' rights to bear and use weapons if invaded by hoodlums. In safer rural areas, where every home has a gun and someone in it who is willing to use it is, there is no false dependency on the police protecting them, but full reliance on the owner's responsibility to deal with any property violators. This understanding works rather well—at least better than in the inner cities where the understanding is totally different.

How does this apply to the 9/11 tragedies? The airline owners accepted the rules of the inner city rather than those of rural America. They all assumed that the government was in charge of airline security—and unfortunately, by law, it was. Not only were the airlines complacent about security, but the FAA dictated all the rules relating to potential hijacking. Chemical plants or armored truck companies that carry money make the opposite assumption, and private guns do a reasonably good job in providing security. Evidently we think more of our money and chemical plants than we do our passengers on airplanes.

The complacency of the airlines is one thing, but the intrusiveness of the FAA is another. Two specific regulations proved to be disastrous for dealing with the thugs who, without even a single gun, took over four airliners and created the havoc of 9/11. Both the prohibition against guns in cockpits and precise instructions that crews not resist hijackers contributed immensely to the horrors of 9/11.

Instead of immediately legalizing a natural right of personal self-defense guaranteed by an explicit Second Amendment freedom, we still do not have armed pilots in the sky. Instead of more responsibility being given to the airlines, the government has taken over the entire process. This has been encouraged by the airline owners, who seek subsidies and insurance protection. Of course, the nonsense of never resisting has been forever vetoed by all passengers.

Unfortunately, the biggest failure of our government will be ignored. I'm sure the Commission will not connect our foreign policy of interventionism—practiced by both major parties for over a hundred years—as an important reason 9/11 occurred. Instead, the claims will stand that the motivation behind 9/11 was our freedom, prosperity, and way of life. If this error persists, all the tinkering and money to improve the intelligence agencies will bear little fruit.

Over the years the entire psychology of national defense has been completely twisted. Very little attention had been directed toward protecting our national borders and providing homeland security.

Our attention, all too often, was and still is directed outward toward distant lands. Now a significant number of our troops are engaged in Afghanistan and Iraq. We've kept troops in Korea for over 50 years, and thousands of troops remain in Europe and in over 130 other countries. This twisted philosophy of ignoring national borders while pursuing an empire created a situation where Seoul, Korea, was better protected than Washington, DC, on 9/11. These priorities must change, but I'm certain the 9/11 Commission will not address this issue.

This misdirected policy has prompted the current protracted war in Iraq, which has gone on for 13 years with no end in sight. The al Qaeda attacks should not be used to justify more intervention; instead they should be seen as a guerilla attacks against us for what the Arabs and Muslim world see as our invasion and interference in their homelands. This cycle of escalation is rapidly spreading the confrontation worldwide between the Christian West and the Muslim East. With each escalation, the world becomes more dangerous. It is especially made worse when we retaliate against Muslims and Arabs who had nothing to do with 9/11—as we have in Iraq—further confirming the suspicions of the Muslim masses that our goals are more about oil and occupation than they are about punishing those responsible for 9/11.

Those who claim that Iraq is another Vietnam are wrong. They can't be the same. There are too many differences in time, place, and circumstance. But that doesn't mean the Iraqi conflict cannot last longer, spread throughout the region and throughout the world—making it potentially much worse than what we suffered in Vietnam. In the first 6 years we were in Vietnam, we lost less than 500 troops. Over 700 have been killed in Iraq in just over a year. Our failure to pursue al Qaeda and bin Laden in Pakistan and Afghanistan-- and diverting resources to Iraq-- have seriously compromised our ability to maintain a favorable world opinion of support and cooperation in this effort.

Instead, we have chaos in Iraq while the Islamists are being financed by a booming drug business from U.S.-occupied Afghanistan. Continuing to deny that the attacks against us are related to our overall policy of foreign meddling through many years and many administrations, makes a victory over our enemies nearly impossible. Not understanding the true nature and motivation of those who have and will commit deadly attacks against us prevents a sensible policy from being pursued. Guerilla warriors, who are willing to risk and sacrifice everything as part of a war they see as defensive, are a far cry, philosophically, from a band of renegades who out of unprovoked hate seek to destroy us and kill themselves in the process. How we

fight back depends on understanding these differences. Of course, changing our foreign policy to one of no pre-emptive war, no nation building, no entangling alliances, no interference in the internal affairs of other nations, and trade and friendship with all who seek it, is no easy task.

The real obstacle, though, is to understand the motives behind our current policy of perpetual meddling in the affairs of others for more than a hundred years.

Understanding why both political parties agree on the principle of continuous foreign intervention is crucial. Those reasons are multiple and varied. They range from the persistent Wilsonian idealism of making the world safe for democracy to the belief that we must protect "our" oil. Also contributing to this bi-partisan, foreign policy view is the notion that promoting world government is worthwhile. This involves support for the United Nations, NATO, control of the world's resources through the IMF, the World Bank, the WTO, NAFTA, FTAA, and the Law of the Sea Treaty—all of which gain the support of those sympathetic to the poor and socialism, while too often the benefits accrue to the well-connected international corporations and bankers sympathetic to economic fascism. Sadly, in the process the people are forgotten, especially those who pay the taxes, those whose lives are sacrificed in no-win undeclared wars, and the unemployed and poor as the economic consequences of financing our foreign entanglements evolve. Regardless of one's enthusiasm or lack thereof for the war and the general policy of maintaining American troops in more than 130 countries, one cold fact soon must be recognized by all of us in Congress. The American people cannot afford it, and when the market finally recognizes the over commitment we've made, the results will not be pleasing to anyone. A "guns and butter" policy was flawed in the 60s, and gave us interest rates of 21% in the 70s with high inflation rates. The current "guns and butter" policy is even more intense, and our economic infrastructure is more fragile than it was back then. These facts dictate our inability to continue this policy both internationally and domestically. It is true, an unshakable resolve to stay the course in Iraq, or any other hot spot, can be pursued for years. But when a country is adding to its future indebtedness by over 700 billion dollars per year it can only be done with great economic harm to all our citizens. Huge deficits, financed by borrowing and Federal Reserve monetization, are an unsustainable policy and always lead to higher price inflation, higher interest rates, a continued erosion of the dollar's value, and a faltering economy. Economic law dictates that the standard of living then must go down for all Americans—except for the privileged few who have an inside track on government largess—if this policy of profligate spending continues. Ultimately, the American people, especially the younger generation, will have to decide whether to languish with current policy or reject the notion that perpetual warfare and continued growth in entitlements should be pursued indefinitely.

Conclusion

I’m sure the Commission will not deal with the flaw in the foreign policy endorsed by both parties for these many decades. I hope the Commission tells us why members of the bin Laden family were permitted, immediately after 9/11, to leave the United States without interrogation, when no other commercial or private flights were allowed. That event should have been thoroughly studied and explained to the American people. We actually had a lot more reason to invade Saudi Arabia than we did Iraq in connection with 9/11, but that country, obviously no friend of democracy, remains an unchallenged ally of the United States with few questions asked. I’m afraid the Commission will answer only a few questions while raising many new ones. Overall though, the Commission has been beneficial and provides some reassurance to those who believe we operate in a much too closed society. Fortunately, any administration, under the current system, still must respond to reasonable inquiries.