


April 12, 2001 10:22 AM

TO: President George W. Bush

CC: Vice President Richard B. Cheney
Honorable Condoleezza Rice

FROM: Donald Rumsfeld 

SUBJECT: Predicting the Future

You will recall that we had Andy Marshall come over, and we briefly discussed the defense strategy review and what the future might hold.

I ran across this piece on the difficulty of predicting the future, written by one of the folks here at the Pentagon, Lin Wells. I thought you might find it interesting.

Respectfully,

Attach.

Lin Wells: "Thoughts for the 2001 Quadrennial Defense Review"

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Thoughts for the 2001 Quadrennial Defense Review

Lin Wells

CF: Amdm

- If you had been a security policy-maker in the world's greatest power in 1900, you would have been a Brit, looking warily at your age-old enemy, France.
- By 1910, you would be allied with France and your enemy would be Germany.
- By 1920, World War I would have been fought and won, and you'd be engaged in a naval arms race with your erstwhile allies, the U.S. and Japan.
- By 1930, naval arms limitation treaties were in effect, the Great Depression was underway, and the defense planning standard said "no war for ten years."
- Nine years later World War II had begun.
- By 1950, Britain no longer was the world's greatest power, the Atomic Age had dawned, and a "police action" was underway in Korea.
- Ten years later the political focus was on the "missile gap," the strategic paradigm was shifting from massive retaliation to flexible response, and few people had heard of Vietnam.
- By 1970, the peak of our involvement in Vietnam had come and gone, we were beginning détente with the Soviets, and we were anointing the Shah as our protégé in the Gulf region.
- By 1980, the Soviets were in Afghanistan, Iran was in the throes of revolution, there was talk of our "hollow forces" and a "window of vulnerability," and the U.S. was the greatest creditor nation the world had ever seen.
- By 1990, the Soviet Union was within a year of dissolution, American forces in the Desert were on the verge of showing they were anything but hollow, the U.S. had become the greatest debtor nation the world had ever known, and almost no one had heard of the internet.
- Ten years later, Warsaw was the capital of a NATO nation, asymmetric threats transcended geography, and the parallel revolutions of information, biotechnology, robotics, nanotechnology, and high density energy sources foreshadowed changes almost beyond forecasting.
- All of which is to say that I'm not sure what 2010 will look like, but I'm sure that it will be very little like we expect, so we should plan accordingly.

