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Association of American Universities (Washington, D.C.)

As Delivered by Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates, Washington D.C., Monday, April 14, 2008

Thank you, David, for that introduction. I'd also thank Bob Berdahl for all of his work, and Graham Spanier for his leadership of both AAU's executive committee and the National Security Higher Education Advisory Board. It is a pleasure to attend this meeting. And it is a nice change of pace to receive such a warm welcome. Usually, my speaking engagements here in Washington start with someone asking me to raise my right hand and promise to tell the truth.

When I was president of Texas A&M University, I used to wonder whether it was scarier to be responsible for a vast, global network of spies as I had been at CIA – or be responsible for some 45,000 students between the ages of 18 and 25. Well, now I'm responsible for more than two million men and women in uniform, most of college age – and all armed.

The topic of this session is "National Security: What New Expertise is Needed?" The Defense Department and AAU have been having a conversation about this subject during the last several months, and today I want to discuss some new initiatives. I also want to offer a few thoughts about the relationship between the military and institutions of higher education – both the positives, as well as some of the areas where together we ought to be able to forge a stronger relationship.

I'd like to start with a little bit of history.

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the landmark National Defense Education Act, the bill that greatly increased the federal government's role in funding education at every level. What spurred government action was Sputnik's launching a year earlier – an event that galvanized our nation's leaders to ensure that we would not fall behind the Soviet Union in math and science. Sounds like a familiar subject.

Educators led the charge. Some called the conflict a "competition in brains." The historian Arthur Schlesinger Jr. said more colorfully that the United States "must return to the acceptance of eggheads and ideas if it is to meet the Russian challenge." And indeed, the years proved him right. Throughout the Cold War, universities were vital centers of new research

– often funded by the government – and also new ideas and even new fields of study such as game theory and Kremlinology. Federally funded low-cost loans and fellowships made graduate school broadly available for students like me. As was the case at that time, the country is again trying to come to terms with new threats to national security. Rather than one, single entity – the Soviet Union – and one, single animating ideology – communism – we are instead facing challenges from multiple sources: a new, more malignant form of terrorism inspired by jihadist extremism, ethnic strife, disease, poverty, climate change, failed and failing states, resurgent powers, and so on. The contours of the international arena are much more complex than at any time during the Cold War. This stark reality – driven home in the years since September 11th – has led to a renewed focus on the overall structure and readiness of our government to deal with the threats of the 21st century.

Last November, I spoke at Kansas State about the overall state of our national security apparatus, and how we as a nation must devote more resources to what has been called “soft power,” the elements of national power beyond the guns and steel of the military – from diplomacy to economic development and assistance, institution-building, strategic communications, and more.

One of the keys to this effort, I believe and also as I mentioned at K-State, is to find untapped resources outside of government – resources like those our universities can offer.

To be sure, there is already a strong relationship between the government and the Department of Defense in particular, and our universities. I have requested an increase in the Department’s basic research budget in the coming years. This year’s request for FY 09 includes \$1.7 billion for basic research initiatives, a \$273 million increase over last year. And I have directed a further increase of about \$1 billion over the next five years for fundamental, peer-reviewed basic research – a two percent increase in real annual growth. The Defense Department is also strongly supportive of initiatives to improve math and science education – such as those recommended in the “Gathering Storm” report. You can see the effect of my prior occupations in some of these things. I am also working on a program to improve the language skills of the military through ROTC. Currently, language training, when it occurs, generally requires that we send troops to specialized schools – in effect, pulling them off the line for a period of time. It seems to me it would be preferable to integrate this training earlier, and so we have been looking at financial incentives for ROTC cadets to take language classes while undergraduates. Some languages are not offered at all schools, and so we are looking also at ways to award grants to schools to expand their language and cultural offerings to cadets. And obviously other students would benefit as well.

While these are certainly important avenues for addressing a number of national-security issues, more needs to be done to meet the international and global challenge we face. I’m sure most of you have heard, in some form or another, about the proposed Minerva Consortia project being put together at the Pentagon. Bob Berdahl and I have exchanged ideas about specifics, and he has met with some of the Department’s top policy advisors. So for the next few minutes I want to give you some more detail on what we have in mind –

though I do so with the caveat that the project is still in the conceptual phase. What we are considering is based to some degree on the success we had in the Cold War. During that period, we built up the Department of Defense's – and the nation's – intellectual capital with new research centers such as RAND and new mechanisms like, as I mentioned, the National Defense Education Act.

With the Minerva initiative, we envision a consortia of universities that will promote research in specific areas. These consortia could also be repositories of open-source documentary archives. The Department of Defense, perhaps in conjunction with other government agencies, could provide the funding for these projects.

To give a better idea of what we have in mind, and some of the mechanics that need to be worked out, let me discuss a few of the projects the Department might be able to support.

First, Chinese Military and Technology Studies. The Chinese government publishes a tremendous amount of information about military and technological developments on an open-source basis. However, it is often inconvenient, if not impossible, for American researchers to get access to this material since it is often available only in China. A real – or virtual – archive of documents acquired by researchers and others abroad would help us track Chinese military and technological developments.

Faculty members at the Naval War College have already instituted a smaller version of this idea focusing on the Chinese Navy. If other colleges and universities were to specialize in other areas, then a consortium – with a common “card catalogue” and interlibrary loan – would allow scholars and schools to pool resources. Further, by holding conferences and sponsoring research, such a consortium would make a very real contribution to our understanding of the intentions of an important world power and military power – an understanding that would have real impact on public policy.

Second, the Iraqi and Terrorist Perspectives Projects. The Institute for Defense Analyses, a federally-funded DOD research center, has produced a number of volumes using primary sources that have been captured in recent years – official government documents in Iraq as well as a large collection of documents related to the workings of terrorist networks.

To date, only a small number of documents have been exploited. In its breadth and potential value, this collection can only be compared to the Smolensk archives on which Soviet scholars like Merle Fainsod based much of their work. Further research could yield unprecedented insight into the workings of dictatorial third-world regimes.

A few documents have some immediate tactical value and would be kept within government channels. But most items, however, contain strategic, ideological, and practical considerations – and day-to-day debate – that I think would be of great interest to scholars.

We cannot realize the full value of these resources unless we find some way of making them widely available. Currently we are funding an effort to open a Conflict Records Research Center at the National Defense University. We would, however, prefer that the center's permanent home be a consortium of

universities. We welcome any thoughts on how best to accomplish this goal. Third, Religious and Ideological Studies. There is little doubt that eventual success in the conflict against jihadist extremism will depend less on the results of individual military engagements and more on the overall ideological climate within the world of Islam. Understanding how this climate is likely to evolve over time, and what factors – including U.S. actions – will affect it thus becomes one of the most significant intellectual challenge we face.

It has been a long time since religious issues have had to be addressed in a strategic context. A research program along these lines could be an important contribution to the intellectual foundation on which we base a national strategy in coming years and decades.

Finally, there is the New Disciplines Project. Earlier I mentioned game theory and Kremlinology, two fields developed during the Cold War. In the last few years, we have learned that the challenges facing the world require a much broader conception and application of national power than just military prowess. The government and the Department of Defense need to engage additional intellectual disciplines – such as history, anthropology, sociology, and evolutionary psychology.

These are just a few of the ideas for the Minerva Consortia, and I imagine that there are many more that we would be willing to entertain. The key as we move forward is to be candid with one another. The relationship between DOD and the social sciences – humanities in particular – for decades has covered the spectrum from cooperative to hostile. Bob and I have already discussed some of the thornier issues, such as how to deal with sensitivities like those surrounding the military's relationship with anthropologists in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Let me be clear that the key principle of all components of the Minerva Consortia will be complete openness and rigid adherence to academic freedom and integrity. There will be no room for “sensitive but unclassified,” or other such restrictions in this project. We are interested in furthering our knowledge of these issues and in soliciting diverse points of view – regardless of whether those views are critical of the Department's efforts. Too many mistakes have been made over the years because our government and military did not understand – or even seek to understand – the countries or cultures we were dealing with.

As Schlesinger said, we must again embrace eggheads and ideas – and the Minerva Consortia can move us in that direction.

The final topic I want to discuss briefly is a related one: the state of relations between the Department of Defense and academia. While there is a very strong relationship built upon past and present research – especially in the hard sciences – I worry that in the public sphere there is often the view that we are at loggerheads.

The questions surrounding the use of anthropologists in Afghanistan and Iraq – what we call Human Terrain Teams – highlight my point. The military seems to have been pitted against the Ivory Tower and vice versa – even though the range of opinions covers the spectrum, both within the military and academia. Part of the blame rests clearly on the Department of Defense, since we do not

always do a great job of explaining what we are doing in ways that are accessible to the uninitiated. Like academia, the Pentagon has its own, shall we say, unique approach to the English language.

At times, the lexicon we come up with for new programs appears almost designed to induce maximum paranoia. In that vein, “Human Terrain Teams” follows in the proud tradition of initiatives like:

- The Office of Special Plans;
- TALON Reporting System; and
- Total Information Awareness.

In reality, there is a long history of cooperation – as well as controversy – between the U.S. government and anthropology. Understanding the traditions, motivations, and languages of other parts of the world has not always been a strong suit of the United States. It was a problem during the Cold War, and remains a problem.

In Iraq and Afghanistan, the heroic efforts and best intentions of our men and women in uniform have at times been undercut by a lack of knowledge of the culture and people they are dealing with everyday – societies organized by networks of kin and tribe, where ancient codes of shame and honor often mean a good deal more than “hearts and minds.”

The U.S. military has therefore combined hard earned trial and error with the assistance of anthropologists and other experts to get a better sense of the cultures in which they’re operating. The Human Terrain program – which also includes economists, historians, and sociologists – is still in its infancy and has attendant growing pains. But early results indicate that it is leading to alternative thinking – coming up with job-training programs for widows, or inviting local powerbrokers to bless a mosque restored with coalition funds. These kinds of actions are the key to long-term success, but they are not always intuitive in a military establishment that has long put a premium on firepower and technology. In fact, the net effect of these efforts is often *less* violence across the board, with fewer hardships and casualties among civilians as a result. One commander in Afghanistan said last year that after working with a Human Terrain Team, the number of armed strikes he had to make declined more than 60 percent.

Despite successes in the past and present, it is an unfortunate reality that many people believe there is this sharp divide between academia and the military – that each continues to look on the other with a jaundiced eye. These feelings are rooted in history – academics who felt used and disenfranchised after Vietnam, and troops who felt abandoned and unfairly criticized by academia during the same time. And who often feel that academia today does not support them or their efforts.

These feelings – regardless of whether they are based in reality – are not good for our men and women in uniform, for our universities, or for our country.

To be sure, there has been positive movement in recent years – movement that has so far averted what followed Vietnam. The American Council on Education, in conjunction with Dartmouth president James Wright, has initiated a program to encourage injured veterans to apply to college and counsel them

as they go through the process. While these are often non-traditional applicants, with low GPAs from years earlier, they greatly enrich the campus and by most accounts are excellent students.

I strongly encourage you to follow the examples of Dartmouth, the University of Kansas, and others to engage with programs of this type and to emphasize to your admissions officers that these students should be looked at holistically, and not judged by the person they were years earlier, before they entered the service.

I also encourage you to seek out more ways that higher education can be supportive to our men and women in uniform. Let me mention a few examples:

- The small number of universities that do not permit ROTC programs tend to be higher-profile, and thus receive a disproportionate amount of attention whenever the issue of the military on campus comes up. We must move past whatever antagonism to ROTC still exists and demonstrate respect at the highest levels for those who choose to serve – whether that is by attending ROTC commissioning ceremonies, actively promoting the military as a career option, or giving full support to military recruiters on campus regardless of whether that access is tied to federal funding.

- During and after World War II, many universities gave course credit for time served in the military – for the skills and experiences that in many cases exceeded by far what could be taught in the classroom. Universities should consider similar wide-ranging initiatives to recognize veterans for the knowledge they have, or to recognize ROTC candidates for the knowledge they are gaining. In some instances, this may be just a case of systematizing what is currently a complex and ad hoc process.

- Perhaps more online courses could be offered to troops at home or in combat zones. There could be an added value if the focus were on courses immediately relevant – the history of the Middle East, anthropology classes on tribal culture, and so on. As a way of offering incentives, universities could together set standards and agree to count these classes for credit should troops matriculate at participating universities. Currently, the Department of Defense funds a consortium of this type called the Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges – but only about a quarter of AAU member universities participate. If AAU members wanted to join or initiate a consortium of their own, the Department could offer logistical advice.

- A number of private organizations have set up scholarships for service men and women – as well as for their families. University-sponsored scholarships could encourage more veterans and former active-duty service members to pursue higher education. This would honor them for their service to our nation in a time of war while increasing diversity on campus. The GI Bill is badly out of date, but there are efforts in Congress to increase benefits and also to figure out ways in which the government might be able to match financial contributions by private schools whose tuitions exceed the GI Bill's established limits.

- Government benefits for veterans – whether for injuries suffered or from the GI Bill – often take time to kick in. Many schools offer deferred payments or promissory notes to bridge the gap. All schools should have this

as an option.

· Where alternative payment options do exist, often veterans don't know about them – which brings me to the final recommendation. When the American Council on Education asks veterans what schools could do for them, they say all they want is a dedicated webpage for veterans on each school's site – to tell them about course-credit policies, payment options, veterans' groups on campus, relevant admissions policies for non-traditional students, points of contact, and anything else veteran-specific.

I would echo the call that Charlie Reed, the chancellor of the California State University system, made this year when he asked college and university presidents to go back to their campus, seek out veterans, and ask what more their institutions can do. I would also note that the American Council on Education is holding a summit in early June at Georgetown to discuss these issues. They will have a number of student veteran representatives, and I understand that all university presidents and representatives are invited. Looking back, the years following World War II proved to be transformational for our society – in large part due to the GI Bill and its effect on educational and social standing of a whole generation. Today we have a new generation of war veterans – more than a million and a half of them – and we should all hope that the government and our nation's universities can work together to afford them the same opportunities.

A final thought. All of us agree that the Academy is one of the most important institutions in our nation – as a place to forge engaged and responsible citizens, and as a place to pursue knowledge freely and openly. Our universities remain our most vital and vibrant source for new thinking and research on issues large and small. Just as we have done in the past, we must today find new ways for this pillar of American society to serve our citizens, our nation, and the world.

Thanks again for having me here today. I'd be happy to take questions.