

[Cheney's grim vision: decades of war](#)

[Vice president says Bush policy aimed at long-term world threat](#)

- James Sterngold, Chronicle Staff Writer

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Los Angeles -- In a forceful preview of the Bush administration's expansionist military policies in this election year, Vice President Dick Cheney Wednesday painted a grim picture of what he said was the growing threat of a catastrophic terrorist attack in the United States and warned that the battle, like the Cold War, could last generations.

The vice president's tone, in a major address to the Los Angeles World Affairs Council, was sobering, unlike many other comments recently by senior administration officials that have stressed successes in the war on terrorism.

Cheney mentioned only in passing the administration's domestic policies, while saying President Bush would present a blueprint of his domestic goals in next Tuesday's State of the Union speech.

Cheney devoted the half-hour speech to a frightening characterization of the war on terrorism and the new kind of mobilization he said it demanded. He sounded the alarm about the increasing prospects of a major new terrorist attack and the extraordinary responses that are required. While many of his remarks echoed past comments by the president and senior officials, Cheney struck a surprisingly dour note and suggested only an administration of proven ability could manage the dramatic overhaul necessary for the nation's security apparatus.

"One of the legacies of this administration will be some of the most sweeping changes in our military, and our national security strategy as it relates to the military and force structure, and how we're based, and how we used it in the last 50 or 60 years, probably since World War II," Cheney said. "I think the changes are that dramatic."

He also said the administration was planning to expand the military into even more overseas bases so the United States could wage war quickly around the globe.

"Scattered in more than 50 nations, the al Qaeda network and other terrorist groups

constitute an enemy unlike any other that we have ever faced," he said. "And as our intelligence shows, the terrorists continue plotting to kill on an ever-larger scale, including here in the United States."

Cheney provided no details, however, of the kinds of attacks he expected.

Although the administration has been criticized by some, including most of the Democratic candidates for president, for not doing enough to eliminate known programs for developing weapons of mass destruction in such countries as North Korea, Cheney said they were a priority and confronted the United States with its gravest threat.

Again, he presented the risks of a terrorist attack involving these weapons in stark terms.

"Instead of losing thousands of lives, we might lose tens or even hundreds of thousands of lives as the result of a single attack, or a set coordinated of attacks," Cheney said.

While polls show that many Americans support the president's aggressive war on terrorism, he also has many critics for the way the battle has been waged. The president initially justified the war in Iraq by saying that Saddam Hussein had active programs to develop chemical, biological and nuclear weapons. The United States has yet to find evidence of such programs since overthrowing Hussein and installing a military occupation, prompting questions about the president's agenda and the quality of intelligence he is receiving.

In addition, an expert at the U.S. Army War College, Jeffrey Record, recently released a 62-page analysis that concluded the war in Iraq might have set back American efforts to stop terrorists by diverting precious resources to a battle that will do little to prevent new attacks.

As a result, Record concluded, the war on terrorism "lacks strategic clarity, embraces unrealistic objectives and may not be sustainable over the long haul."

But in his speech Wednesday, Cheney compared this moment to the challenges faced by President Harry Truman at the beginning of the Cold War, when there was a hot war flaring on the Korean Peninsula and a long-term nuclear standoff developing with the Soviet Union.

Cheney said Bush was establishing, as Truman had, a new structure for a new long-term war and spreading the military into new areas of the globe. "On Sept. 11, 2001, our nation made a fundamental commitment that will take many years to see through," Cheney said.

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Page A - 3

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