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U.S. Response: Rumsfeld Urges Consideration of Pre-Emptive Action

By Mike Nartker
Global Security Newswire

WASHINGTON — The United States should consider using pre-emptive action against rogue states seeking to obtain weapons of mass destruction, Defense Secretary **Donald Rumsfeld** said yesterday (see [GSN](#), July 15).

“It seems to me, [pre-emptive action] is an issue that ought to be discussed,” he said during a Pentagon [press briefing](#). “It ought to be considered. It ought to be elevated ... it is a serious, important concept that ... our country ought to consider.”

The United States and its allies today face a much more dangerous threat from the spread of biological, chemical and nuclear weapons than from the proliferation of conventional weapons, Rumsfeld said, declining to specify any country that poses significant risk.

“During the 20th century, we were dealing for the most part with conventional weapons, and they tended to kill hundreds or thousands of people. In the 21st century, we’re dealing with weapons of mass destruction ... that can kill not just hundreds or thousands, but they can kill hundreds of thousands or millions of people,” he said. “In the 20th century, our margin for error had a penalty of X. In the 21st century, the margin for error or penalty has a penalty that is many, many multiples of X.”

The United States should not wait for a surprise attack before taking steps to reduce the threat of rogue states and terrorist groups attempting to build WMD arsenals, Rumsfeld said.

“We have to say to ourselves, on the one hand, ... ‘Is it incumbent upon us to wait until there is a Pearl Harbor — wait until there is an attack that has killed several thousand people or — and risk not several thousand but several hundreds of thousands of people or millions? Is that — is that the responsibility of free people today in the 21st century?’” he said.

“Or conversely,” he added, “is it the responsibility of free people to look at the world and take people at their word and watch the progress of the acquisition of weapons of mass destruction and see the risk that poses to hundreds of thousands of people or potentially millions of people ... and take a step that would prevent that in your own self-defense?”

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