September 11th - the day I was originally scheduled to deliver this address - was a calamity of many parts. It was an attack on one country - the United States -- that wounded an entire world. It may have been a failure of intelligence or security. And yet - in a very real though indirect way -- September 11th marked a failure of prevention.

There is a clear, if complicated, trail from the absence of engagement with Afghanistan in the 1990s to the creation of a terrorist haven there to the attacks on the World Trade Center. Today -- in a time and a city still darkened by the memory of September 11th - it is surely beyond question that ignoring or neglecting prevention is a recipe for disaster.

In the case of September 11th, it was a disaster for the people of the United States. But as we meet today, there are other disasters looming, perhaps not for the United States, but for other, much weaker, peoples fighting lonely battles against poverty, instability and illegitimate governments.

Tragically, in those cases, a grim and sometimes bloody future is all too easy to predict -- unless we as an international community begin to take seriously the rhetoric of conflict prevention, and act where only action can make the difference between war and peace.

That is why I am particularly pleased to join you today for a discussion of conflict prevention and preventive action. There is no cause more central to the work of the United Nations, no mission whose success is more important to fulfilling the vision of our Charter.
To have the Council on Foreign Relations make it a priority as well -- by creating the Center for Preventive Action under the leadership of General Nash and bringing your expertise and resources to bear in this essential effort -- is encouraging indeed. It reflects the wisdom not only of your present leadership, but also that of our friend Cyrus Vance whose memory we honor tonight. As statesman, diplomat, humanitarian and true citizen of a world of laws, Cyrus Vance did as much as anyone to help lay the foundations for effective conflict prevention by promoting democracy and the rule of law within and among states.

Through his humanity and profound decency, Cy Vance exemplified, as few others, the principles of cooperation, dialogue and negotiation that I believe must form the core of successful relations between states and peoples.

Since I became Secretary-General, I have made great efforts to focus the attention of Member States on the importance of prevention of armed conflict. Two years ago I chose it as the theme for my annual report, and called for the United Nations to move “from a culture of reaction to a culture of prevention.” And, more recently, I issued a report on conflict prevention to the Security Council.

It had the explicit aim of recommending new ways of enhancing the Organization’s work in preventing armed conflict. This report, I believe, is available here this evening, and I hope you will draw on its ideas and suggestions.

Friends,

Before looking more closely at the challenges of effective conflict prevention, I should say that the Security Council has responded very positively to the recommendations in my report -- both in terms of strengthening its own role and that of the Secretary-General in this field.

As an Organization, we are determined to focus much more on preventive action. There will be:

- **Frequent Security Council visits to areas of potential armed conflict** -- One example is the Security Council mission to Eritrea/Ethiopia ahead of the results of the boundary commission report expected at the end of March.

- **Increased use of UN Fact Finding and Confidence building Missions** - One example here was the UN system-wide fact-finding mission to West Africa that took place last year.

- **More frequent reports to the Security Council on potential conflict situations** - Here I would mention the Secretariat’s recent briefings on the situations in Liberia and Madagascar, alerting the Council to rising tensions in those two countries.
• Referral to the Security Council, in the context of prevention, information from the UN system on cases of serious human rights violations and on potential conflict situations arising from ethnic, religious and territorial disputes, poverty and lack of development.

• And development of UN Regional Prevention Strategies that seek to address the long term structural root causes of conflicts.

I am encouraged that the Security Council responded to my request with a resolution that strengthened the message of my report and emphasized the commitment of the Council to conflict prevention.

Significantly, this commitment includes an expression of the Council’s readiness to address potential armed conflicts resulting from violations of human rights and humanitarian law. The resolution also recognized the need to give early attention to regional dimensions of incipient armed conflicts and to devise appropriate responses.

Whether these kinds of measures are implemented will depend on two critical factors:

First, political will – in this case, the determination to invest political capital today in order to prevent the crises of tomorrow.

Effective conflict prevention requires states to rethink the ways in which they define their national interest in any given crisis. As the world has changed in profound ways since the end of the Cold War, our conceptions of national interest have failed to follow suit.

A new, more broadly defined concept of national interest would make it easier for states to come together in the cause of preventing conflict among and within states. The fact is that in confronting a growing number of challenges facing humanity, the collective interest is the national interest, and collective action is often the only viable option.

The second thing that is needed is resources. This means that there must be appropriate resources for the complex tasks prevention entails. Just as importantly, however, it means strengthening those regional institutions which often can play a more effective, and less threatening, role in bringing parties back from the brink of conflict and toward a peaceful resolution of their disputes.

As for the role of the Secretary-General, my own efforts have focused on third-party mediation in disputes that have yet to become conflicts, and on personal diplomacy -- aimed at persuading political leaders to seek compromise over conflict, and ensuring that all the representatives of the international community involved in a particular conflict present a unified position to the parties.
Friends,

The victims of today’s conflicts and acts of violence - whether at the World Trade Center, in the Sudan or anywhere else in the world -- are increasingly to be found among unarmed civilians, with a high proportion of women and children. All too often they are not just the victims but the targets of violence. Failing to prevent such wars and such behavior should be morally and politically unacceptable to an enlightened international community. And yet I must tell you frankly that the biggest obstacle to effective prevention is the attitudes and priorities of States.

States threatened by conflict frequently refuse to admit that they have a problem, or to accept external assistance. And many states which would be well placed to assist are reluctant to intervene. Those in the first group fail to see the problem and are offended by offers of help. Those in the second either do not see the danger that problems afflicting their neighbour might also spread to them, or are unwilling to confront their neighbour with unwelcome but necessary pressure and advice.

If we are to establish a true culture of prevention we need to cultivate a sense of community across borders – a real international community -- that would overcome both these sources of reluctance.

A significant conceptual innovation in this regard was presented in the recently published Responsibility to Protect Report drafted by the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty. There, the authors suggest a constructive shift in the debate on intervention away from the “duty to intervene” toward the “responsibility to protect.”

The difficult reality is that political leaders have found it very hard to sell prevention policies abroad to their publics at home, because their costs are palpable and immediate, while the benefits – usually an undesirable or tragic event that does not occur – are more difficult to convey. Political leadership, therefore, is a key condition for successful prevention.

The other main lesson I want to emphasize is that effective conflict prevention is a long-term investment. While the proximate cause of conflict may be an outbreak of public disorder or a protest over a particular incident, the root causes are more likely to be found in illegitimate governance, socio-economic inequities, systematic ethnic discrimination, denial of human rights, disputes over political participation, or long-standing grievances over the allocation of land, water and other resources.

Addressing these root causes requires a comprehensive approach that encompasses both short-term and long-term political, developmental, humanitarian and human rights programmes.

Conflict prevention and sustainable development reinforce each other. An investment in prevention should be seen as a simultaneous investment in sustainable
development, since it is obvious that the latter is more likely to happen in a peaceful environment.

One does not have to accept – and I certainly do not – that terrorism and poverty are necessarily linked. The poor have enough burdens without being considered likely terrorists simply as a result of their poverty. Still, it is essential to understand that “draining the swamp” of terrorism, as some have called it, requires more than attacking its sources of funding and support.

It requires addressing those grievances which terrorists find useful to exploit for their own ends.

Where massive and systematic political, economic and social inequalities are found, and where no legitimate means of addressing them exist, an environment is created in which peaceful solutions all too often lose out against extreme and violent alternatives.

If we are to be successful at preventing deadly conflicts, we must have a clear understanding of their causes. Not all conflicts or sources of violence are alike, and no single strategy is likely to provide all the solutions.

Several of the wars of the 1990s were characterized by the exploitation of different ethnic, cultural and religious identities by political leaders intent upon expelling or exterminating an entire people. The solution in every one of these cases is clear, if often difficult to achieve in practice: to promote human rights, to protect minority rights and to institute legitimate and representative political arrangements under the rule of law. To do so, however, states in peril need the help of an international community that recognizes that the benefits of preventing disaster in one country can extend to all.

The fact is that every step taken toward reducing poverty and achieving broad-based economic growth – whether through development assistance or private sector investment -- is a step towards conflict prevention. Every step taken to shore up a nation-building effort -- such as the one undertaken in East Timor by the United Nations in partnership with many NGOs -- is a step towards conflict prevention. Every step taken towards restoring security in post-conflict societies is a step towards preventing conflict.

This is most urgently the case in Afghanistan, where we are trying to ensure that the international community stays fully engaged. Prevention, in this case, means ensuring that security is provided throughout the country, and not just in Kabul. Otherwise we risk a return to violence and conflict.

Dear Friends,

The policies of conflict prevention that I have outlined today will succeed only if the root causes of conflict are addressed as well – and not just by Governments or the UN, but also by civil society, the private sector, and institutions such as this Council.
As an independent organization devoted to foreign policy, you have a unique ability to step outside the role of protagonist or government agency. You can offer candid warnings about escalating tensions in a region or country, and candid suggestions about how to prevent them from escalating into full-scale war.

You can help us convince the parties of the folly of conflict, and deepen the work of prevention by supporting local, civil society prevention programmes, which are often more effective – and more acutely needed – than government initiatives.

These are areas where NGOs and private groups are playing increasingly important roles, and the Council is very well-positioned to be a leader in this kind of preventive action.

Under the distinguished and energetic leadership of General Nash, I have no doubt that you will indeed play such a role, and I look forward to working with you in this vital aspect of our work for peace and prosperity.

Thank you.