

Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates said Tuesday that the United States would hold “fully accountable” any country or group that helped terrorists to acquire or use nuclear, chemical or biological weapons.

The statement was the Bush administration’s most expansive yet in trying to articulate a vision of deterrence for the post-Sept. 11 world. It went beyond the cold war notion that a president could respond with overwhelming force against a country that directly attacked the United States or its allies with unconventional weapons.

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