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# Fighting Terrorism

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# Fighting Terrorism\*

THE HONORABLE LEE H. HAMILTON\*\*

It is my pleasure to be with you today. I want to share some thoughts on the work of the 9/11 Commission and how we can pursue a more effective counterterrorism strategy.

Terrorism is the primary national security challenge confronting the United States and will be for many years. We have not been attacked, at home, since 9/11. But that does not mean the threat is fading. There have been twice as many terrorist attacks since 9/11 as in the three years prior to 9/11.

To win the war on terrorism, we must focus on five essential elements—the “five I’s”—identification, integration, international, intelligence, and implementation.

By that I mean:

- (1) identifying the threat, so that the strategy is designed to confront the enemy;
- (2) integrating all of the tools of American power, so that the strategy is comprehensive;
- (3) getting international cooperation because every single action that we take in counterterrorism is strengthened by international help;
- (4) getting better intelligence, so that we can prevent attacks; and
- (5) implementation, so that policy is effectively carried out.

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\*\*President and Director of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars; Director of the Indiana University Center on Congress, Indiana University—Bloomington; recently served as Vice Chair of the 9/11 Commission; former U.S. Representative from Indiana’s Ninth District for 34 years; Chair and Ranking Member of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs (now the Committee on International Relations); Chair of the Subcommittee on Europe and Middle Eastern Affairs; Chair and Vice Chair of the Joint Economic Committee; Chair of the Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence; Chair of the Joint Committee on the Organization of Congress; Chair of the October Surprise Task Force; Member of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security Advisory Council; J.D., Indiana University School of Law—Bloomington.

## I. IDENTIFY

First, how should we identify the threat? Who is the enemy?

It has been several years since 9/11, and it is still not clear who we are fighting. Many hard questions are not fully answered:

- Are we fighting an enemy that poses a lethal and ongoing threat to Americans? Or are we fighting a phantom enemy—a vastly overrated extremist group, mortally wounded by our assault on Afghanistan?
- Are we fighting an enemy acting out of hatred for America and our values of freedom and democracy? Or an enemy acting out of hatred for American policies: our support for Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Israel, and our invasion of Iraq?
- Are we fighting a single, global organization, uniquely powerful and coordinated by hidden leadership in Pakistan and Afghanistan? Or are we fighting countless organizations around the world—acting on their own, but drawing inspiration from Osama bin Laden?

Pick up a newspaper and you see the problem. In Iraq alone, you'll see references to terrorists, insurgents, Saddam-loyalists, al Qaeda-affiliates, Islamists, Baathists, foreign fighters, and Iraqi nationalists—just to name a few. No one can be all of those things at once. The outgoing Deputy Secretary of State, Richard Armitage, puts it bluntly: “We can’t even agree on who we are fighting.”

The same is true globally. Is somebody who blows up a nightclub in Bali trying to change something in Indonesia, or are they part of a global conspiracy against the United States? What about somebody who sets off a bomb in Pakistan, Israel, Madrid, Morocco, or Chechnya?

Getting this right is critical. We have limited resources. How we define the enemy affects how we attack the enemy. If al Qaeda is simply a group of people intent on destroying America, then we can hunt them down and capture or kill them—one by one. If al Qaeda is part of a kind of *jihadi* international—a consortium of groups with grievances against the United States that wants to drive the United States out of Islamic nations, overthrow governments, and establish fundamentalist regimes—then killing one terrorist does little good if another always rises to take his place.

We spent a lot of time looking at these questions on the 9/11 Commission. We found an enemy motivated by disagreement with specific U.S. policies, and

by the desire to create theocratic government in Islamic lands—a present day Islamic “caliphate.”

This enemy can be identified as:

- (1) al Qaeda, a stateless terrorist network, led by Osama bin Laden, that hit us on 9/11. The inner core of al Qaeda is a relatively small group of several hundred, with perhaps a cadre in the few thousands who are closely affiliated; and
- (2) a radical ideology, inspired in part by al Qaeda, that has spawned terrorist groups and attacks around the globe. These people identify with the *jihadi* cause and its ideology, and may number in the millions.

Beyond these groups there are 1.3 billion Muslims around the world, many of whom may be empathetic to the *jihadi* agenda, even if they disagree with their violent methods.

The 9/11 Commission learned a lot about the first enemy—al Qaeda. It is a lethal and creative organization with the ability to recruit, train, inspire, finance, and move men. Since 9/11, al Qaeda’s Afghan sanctuary has been largely eliminated, much of its infrastructure has been destroyed, and many of its operatives have been killed or captured.

Al Qaeda’s strength is also in the network it has with other *jihadi* groups. That, in part, is why al Qaeda remains vibrant and dangerous. Terrorist attacks have occurred in more than ten nations in four continents in the last five years. Meanwhile, the United States faces tenacious resistance in parts of Afghanistan and Iraq; many Americans feel threatened at home.

That is why the second enemy—the *ideology* of radical Islam—is so dangerous. It poses a grave and gathering threat. It will menace Americans long after bin Laden and his cohorts are killed or captured. This ideology joins anti-American political grievances with a radical strain of Islam. Sadly, this ideology reaches many Muslims: those who are hopeless or unsettled by modernity; people who hate America and their own repressive governments.

Bin Laden is probably hiding somewhere in Pakistan, in the rugged tribal lands along the Afghan border. But he and his lieutenants don’t need command and control—they aren’t picking up a phone to order attacks in Bali or Madrid. Their ideology fuels terrorism beyond al Qaeda’s direct control. That is why the threat is bigger than one group named “al Qaeda.”

We should not underestimate bin Laden and the terrorists because we

loathe them. They seek more than death and destruction. They seek clear goals: to kill Americans; to cripple the American economy; to get American forces and influence out of the Islamic world; and to revolutionize society and government in Muslim countries.

We underestimated radical Islam before 9/11; we must not do so again. We must dismantle and destroy the existing al Qaeda network; prevail over the ideology that gives rise to Islamist terrorism; and protect against, and prepare for, terrorist attacks.

## II. INTEGRATION

There is no silver bullet that can defeat the terrorist movement. We need a comprehensive strategy that balances and integrates all elements of American power. A comprehensive strategy means:

- killing or capturing terrorists abroad;
- preventing the collapse of states, which allows terrorists to establish sanctuaries;
- helping to reverse the causes of terrorism by promoting social and political rights, and the rule of law in repressive societies;
- working to reduce the poverty and unemployment that create an opening for terrorist recruitment;
- promoting education abroad, so young Muslims have alternatives to radical and hate-filled teachings;
- controlling dangerous materials—like radioactive sources—so terrorists cannot get their hands on catastrophic weapons;
- screening shipping containers and air cargo for explosives and weapons of mass destruction; and
- protecting civil liberties and opposing torture at home and abroad. We need to offer the world a beacon of hope, not a recruiting poster for terrorists.

The list goes on. How do you accomplish such a diverse set of goals? You draw upon all elements of American national power:

- military power, to kill or capture terrorists;
- diplomacy, to build a coalition of nations;
- law enforcement, to track down and prosecute terrorists;
- covert action, to disrupt and dismantle terrorist networks;

- public diplomacy, to explain our policies and promote our ideals;
- foreign aid, to bring hope into hopeless societies;
- economic policy, to spread opportunity and prosperity;
- financial action, to track or disrupt terrorist funding;
- border security, to intercept the terrorists in transit; and
- homeland security, to secure transportation, protect infrastructure, and train first-responders.

Integration is key. That is why the 9/11 Commission recommended a strong National Counterterrorism Center to integrate all aspects of American power to develop operational plans and to fight terrorism.

We cannot have border agents who do not know whom they are looking to stop; first-responders who do not know what attacks might come; aid workers who do not know our diplomatic strategy; or law enforcement officials who do not know what intelligence is reporting.

Every action that we take must buttress our other actions. This takes time and resources. Terrorism is like a spreading cancer—we cannot treat this cancer by removing one leader, overthrowing one government, or attacking one symptom.

The United States must increase its will to fight terrorism. To get tougher on the terrorists, we have to fight them with guns and spies, but we also need to fight them with ideas, schools, markets, and values. To get tougher on the terrorists, we have to confront them with every tool in our arsenal—and those tools must work together.

### III. INTERNATIONAL

Just as we integrate efforts at home, so too must we integrate efforts internationally.

We face an enemy in the cities of Europe; the deserts of Africa; the mountains of Afghanistan and Pakistan; and the islands of Southeast Asia. We cannot root out this enemy alone:

- you cannot secure your own skies without securing international aviation;
- you cannot track down terrorist financing without working with foreign banks;
- you cannot get the best intelligence on terrorists in Europe, the Middle East, Africa, and Asia without intelligence reporting from international partners;

- you cannot prosecute terrorists in Europe without law enforcement cooperation;
- you cannot secure borders without international standards for travel documents;
- you cannot spread markets and prosperity without international aid partners;
- you cannot build secular schools in Pakistan without working with Pakistanis; and
- you cannot build peace in a place like Afghanistan without allies sharing the burden.

We need a counterterrorism coalition on all these issues—bilaterally and through international institutions. Working with partners is not a luxury, it is a necessity.

We also need to reach out to the world's 1.3 billion Muslims, stretching from Morocco to Indonesia; and from European cities to American suburbs. Right now, millions of Muslims grow up lacking political freedom, economic opportunity, and hope:

- a vacuum in education can mean the only option is a *madrassa* that preaches radical Islam and hatred of the United States;
- the unemployment rate in some Muslim countries is 50 percent;
- the governments of many Muslim countries, including U.S. allies, repress their populations and deny them political participation.

We cannot wage an effective war on terror if we do not help this huge population have a better future. That is why the 9/11 Commission highlights the need for robust engagement in the battle of ideas. We cannot cede ground to the terrorists. We do not want our children to live in a world where Osama bin Laden's ideas are embraced by huge swaths of people.

Where terrorists offer death, destruction, and regression, the United States and our allies must stand for life, progress, and hope. We need to vigorously explain our intentions and ideals. And we need an agenda of opportunity for the Islamic world that focuses on economic openness and development; pragmatic political reform that supports tolerance, participation, and the rule of law; and better schooling.

Principal responsibility must fall on Muslim governments to improve the lives of their people. But we need to show these people that we are on their

side—that the future we stand for is better than the future Osama bin Laden stands for.

Don't expect quick fixes. This is a long-term project for American policy—a generational challenge. We must have the will to continue this struggle for many years. And we must have the help of allies if we are to prevail.

#### IV. INTELLIGENCE

Let me now say a few words about intelligence—the single most important tool that we have in preventing terrorist attacks.

The U.S. intelligence community has extraordinarily talented and committed people. We also have extraordinary capabilities that permit us to collect millions of bits of data every hour.

The tragic 9/11 story is one of a failure to pull all of this intelligence on terrorism together. We failed to coordinate, share, analyze, and act on information. Agencies did not act jointly. People did not have clear direction. Throughout our investigation, we often asked: “Who is in charge?” Too often, the answer was: “no one.”

There were bits and pieces of the 9/11 plot scattered across government. Moussaoui had been arrested in Minnesota, described as interested in flight training for the purpose of using an airplane in a terrorist attack; two of the hijackers who were known to the CIA turned up in San Diego; all of the threat reporting in the summer of 2001 pointed to a major attack.

Nobody put this together. Information was not shared among agencies or within agencies. The FBI Director did not find out about Moussaoui until after 9/11, even though the CIA Director knew about it; the CIA never told the FBI that one of the future hijackers had acquired a U.S. visa; indications of an impending attack were not connected to Moussaoui's interest in flying, or the known presence of al Qaeda operatives in the U.S.

No one connected the dots. No one took charge. Could we have prevented 9/11? It is impossible to say. If we had better information-sharing, if agencies worked together, if someone managed the case, perhaps we would have taken precautions: hardened cockpit doors, checked airline passengers against terrorist watch lists, or issued a public warning.

These problems persist to this day. We need to collect better information. We need to make sure that the right information gets to the right people at the right time. We need to give our intelligence agencies a better chance to prevent attacks.



That is why the Commission recommended major changes, the President supported our plan, and the Congress took action. With the recent intelligence reform passed by Congress and signed by the President, the United States will have:

- **A Director of National Intelligence.** We need Ambassador Negroponte to have:
  - real control over the budget, including the ability to transfer money among agencies;
  - real control over personnel, including the ability to hire and fire his top people;
  - real control over information-sharing, so he can smash the stovepipes and force agencies to share information; and
  - real control over tasking, so he can make sure priorities are being pursued.
- **A National Counterterrorism Center.** We need one center in the government where:
  - all intelligence on terrorism is pooled, analyzed, and acted upon;
  - all of the agencies that work on counterterrorism—FBI, CIA, Homeland Security, Treasury, and the others—come together; and
  - operations are planned jointly, just like the military services do.
- **New systems of information-sharing.** We want information shared vertically within an organization, and horizontally across the agencies of the intelligence community. It will take new rules and new technologies so that our analysts can work from the full set of facts—from all sources, foreign and domestic—to uncover future 9/11 plots.
- **A stronger national security workforce at the FBI.** The Bureau is on the frontline of defense; it must continue to reorient itself to the mission of preventing attacks.

Good intelligence alone cannot make us safe, but it supports every step that we take toward that goal.

## V. IMPLEMENTATION

Intelligence reform legislation moves us in the right direction, but it is not sufficient. No law is self-executing; the key will be implementation. Now it is up to the President and the Congress to make sure that these reforms are carried out:

- that Ambassador Negroponte is empowered to do his job;
- that the National Counterterrorism Center becomes the hub for analysis and operational planning on terrorism; and
- that information is shared and stovepipes smashed.

With every reorganization, people lose turf and resist change. It will take presidential leadership, resources, and vigorous congressional oversight to make this work.

#### *A. Congressional Oversight*

Unfortunately, congressional oversight on intelligence and homeland security has been dysfunctional. Congress has not yet shown that it is up to its constitutional task of being a coequal branch when it comes to national security oversight.

Congress did make some changes in response to our recommendations:

- the Senate added the name “Homeland Security” to the Government Affairs Committee, and somewhat expanded its jurisdiction;
- the House created a permanent Homeland Security Committee; and
- the Senate and House Intelligence Committees created subcommittees on oversight.

But these changes don’t go far enough. We need powerful Intelligence and Homeland Security Committees—with sufficient staff, strong powers of investigation, and exclusive jurisdiction. Turf considerations should not get in the way of tough oversight of intelligence and homeland security. How are you going to get that oversight if you don’t have committees with real oversight authority?

The American people will not be as safe as they could be unless Congress gets its house in order. We need a Congress that asks tough questions, tracks progress, authorizes budgets, works through problems, and enforces accountability.

We cannot have huge institutional changes like the Department of Homeland Security or intelligence reform without a commitment to implement those changes effectively. The President and his top people must remain engaged; Congress must take its seat at the table.

*B. Are the American People Safer?*

Let me conclude by addressing the question on many people's minds: are we safer than on 9/11? On the 9/11 Commission, we concluded that we are safer, but we are not safe.

There is much that we have done since 9/11. We have:

- killed or captured many al Qaeda leaders and eliminated al Qaeda's Afghan sanctuary;
- passed the USA PATRIOT Act, knocking down the wall separating law enforcement and intelligence activities, and expanding legal authority for our government to take action against suspected terrorists;
- reformed the FBI, to make counterterrorism the top priority;
- created the Department of Homeland Security, to coordinate the activities of twenty-two federal agencies, and cooperation between federal, state, and local authorities;
- tightened passenger airline security under the new Transportation Security Administration;
- established a border screening system, to make sure that people crossing our borders are who they say they are;
- reformed our intelligence community, creating a new management structure, a national counterterrorism center, and new modes of information-sharing; and
- invested billions of dollars at the federal, state, local, and private level to protect ourselves and our infrastructure.

But there is much that we still have to do:

- Congress needs to reform its oversight of intelligence and homeland security.
- We need to do better at sharing information, and coordinating our intelligence, law enforcement, and homeland security action.
- Our "watch lists" of suspected terrorists must get to all relevant authorities. Let's get these databases up to date and interoperable from agency to agency.
- Homeland security funds should be appropriated based on risk—not politics—with funding going to the areas that face the greatest threat. We have to prioritize what infrastructure we want to protect, and what terrorist tactics to prepare for.

- Emergency responders need to be better equipped and trained. They need communications systems that are interoperable with sufficient access to the radio spectrum. This is a difficult political issue but powerful broadcasters should not get in the way of ensuring that an analog spectrum is available for public safety purposes.
- We need a vast improvement in our public health services so we can rebound from an attack, including an attack with biological or radiological weapons. Lethal pathogens are too often stored in insecure laboratories.
- Eight percent of our transportation security funding now goes to passenger aviation; we need to allocate resources more evenly to protect our rail systems, air cargo, and our 360 seaports that receive shipping containers.
- Private sector owners should be required to enhance security at chemical plants.
- Military special operations forces for counterterrorism should be greatly expanded, with an emphasis on small-unit Special Forces, and covert operations capabilities.
- Although the probability of nuclear terrorism is not high, the consequences of failing to prevent it are catastrophic. Much more needs to be done:
  - (1) identify and secure nuclear material;
  - (2) account for loose nuclear weapons in the former Soviet Union;
  - (3) obtain international guarantees of nuclear energy supplies for governments that terminate nuclear activity; and
  - (4) secure nuclear power plants in this country.
- Steps must be taken, over time, to reduce our dependence on oil and natural gas, so we are not bound to unstable regions like the Persian Gulf.
- We need to press ahead for a peace settlement between the Israelis and Palestinians.
- We must engage in a robust battle of ideas. Hatred of America is at an all-time high, particularly among Muslims. We must appeal to Muslim nations to reject intolerance and violence in the name of Islam; stress our common values; and use our influence to encourage governments to eliminate the causes of political unrest.
- We need to kill or capture Osama bin Laden and his top deputy, who remain at large, issuing audio and videotaped guidance to their followers.
- And we need to find a way toward a more peaceful and stable Iraq.

## CONCLUSION

We have succeeded in the most important measure: there has not been a terrorist attack in the United States since 9/11. But we should not take false comfort. The first attack on the World Trade Center was in 1993. It was eight years until the next attack. The planning for 9/11 took three years.

It is not likely that we will ever eliminate terrorism. Terrorism is, after all, any action that causes death or harm to civilians for the purpose of intimidating people or governments. People will always commit acts of violence; someone will always want to do us harm.

What we can do is reduce the risk. It will require removing the hard-core terrorists, improving our relations with the Islamic world, and reducing our vulnerabilities to terrorism at home and abroad.

On the 9/11 Commission, we felt the weight of 9/11 on the country. In all that we do, we remember that day. And we seek to prevent more days like it. Terrorism will challenge Americans for years. It is, ultimately, about more than any one battle, administration, or policy. It is about what kind of America and what kind of world we want to live in.

You and I seek a world where our children are safer, and where the children of the world are less likely to grow up to become terrorists. Achieving that world will require us to draw deeply from the reservoir of American power, American ideals, and American resilience.