



2011-09

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Monterey, California. Naval Postgraduate School

Homeland Security Affairs (September 2011), v.7 no.2



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Progress Toward a More Secure and Resilient Nation

Janet Napolitano

A decade has now passed since the tragic attacks of 9/11, when terrorists exploited our nation's aviation system to kill nearly 3,000 innocent men, women, and children, including citizens of more than 90 countries.

Today, as we approach the tenth anniversary of 9/11, there is no question that America is stronger and more secure than we were a decade ago. We have bounced back from the worst attacks ever on our soil, and have made progress on every front to protect ourselves.

In late July, I released a report outlining the significant progress the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and our many partners have made in fulfilling specific recommendations by the 9/11 Commission to make our nation stronger, safer, and more resilient.¹

The report details the great strides we have made over the last decade to secure our nation against a terrorist attack or other disaster, to protect our critical infrastructure and cyber networks, and to engage a broader range of Americans in the shared responsibility for our security.

Our experience these past ten years also has made us smarter about the kind of threats we face, and how best to deal with them. We have used this knowledge to make our nation and communities more resilient, not only to terrorist attacks, but also to threats and disasters of all kinds, while safeguarding the fundamental rights of all Americans.

But there should be no doubt: serious threats from terrorism remain. Terrorism did not begin on 9/11, nor did it end with the death of Osama bin Laden. Today's terrorist threats are real and rapidly evolving. They demand our constant vigilance. And they demand our willingness to learn and adapt.

While defending against this evolving threat is the founding mission of DHS, no federal agency – or any part of government – can, by itself, deliver security. Perhaps more than at any point in our nation's history, we share in this responsibility. And this has

broad implications for how we will continue to work with our partners to keep our country safe and secure.

EVOLVING THREATS

The terrorist threats facing the United States have evolved significantly over the last decade, and continue to evolve. In addition to the direct threats from al Qaeda, we also face growing threats from other foreign-based terrorist groups that are inspired by al Qaeda's ideology, but that have few operational connections to the core al Qaeda group.

We face a threat environment where violent extremism is neither constrained by international borders nor limited to any single ideology. Indeed, one of the most striking elements of today's threat picture is that plots to attack America increasingly involve American residents and citizens, including individuals who may be in the United States and are prepared to carry out terrorist attacks with little or no warning.

Over the past two years, we have seen al Qaeda-inspired terrorist groups seek to recruit individuals who are either Westerners, or have connections to the West, and who are unknown to authorities. The increasingly savvy use of the Internet, mainstream and social media, and information technology by these groups adds an additional layer of complexity.

The fact that these new kinds of threats can come from any direction, and with little or no warning, changes much of our thinking about terrorism prevention. Of course, we need a strong military and top-notch intelligence to fight terrorism abroad; the operation that led to Osama bin Laden's death clearly demonstrates this.

This essential international dimension to "homeland" security ranges from aviation and supply chain security, to information sharing about the latest terrorist travel routes, tactics, and technologies. Indeed, the importance of international partnerships is

why DHS has a significant international presence – in seventy-five different countries, the third largest international footprint of any US government agency.

We also, however, face threats from within our own borders. As a result, our state, local, and tribal law enforcement officers, our first responders, and individual citizens are often the first to notice signs of potential terrorist activity in their communities. And that means we need every part of our society to be cognizant of the kinds of threats that exist, and knowledgeable about common sense steps to counter them.

BUILDING THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY HOMELAND SECURITY ENTERPRISE

For the past several years, DHS and our partners have worked to develop and strengthen the homeland security enterprise to better mitigate and defend against dynamic threats, minimize risks, and maximize the ability to respond to and recover from attacks and disasters of all kinds.

This approach is based on the simple but powerful premise that homeland security begins with *hometown* security.² We are all now stakeholders in the effort to keep our families and communities, our businesses, our social networks, and our places of meeting and worship secure and resilient.

These insights have driven our effort to build critical features that did not exist on 9/11, and which address key recommendations of the 9/11 Commission. For example, we understand the critical importance of analyzing threat information at the local level, and then sharing that information wherever it may be relevant. That is why today we have seventy-two recognized state and major-urban-area fusion centers throughout the country.

These fusion centers serve as focal points where information about threats can be gathered, analyzed, and shared among federal, state, local, tribal, territorial, and private sector partners. Fusion centers also support and interact regularly with FBI-led Joint Terrorism Task Forces (JTTF), which coordinate resources and expertise from

across the federal government to investigate terrorism cases.

We also have greatly expanded and enhanced the Nationwide Suspicious Activity Reporting Initiative, which trains state and local law enforcement to recognize behaviors and indicators related to terrorism, crime, and other threats, and standardizes how those observations are documented, analyzed, and shared with the FBI, other law enforcement, and communities throughout the country.

We launched the new National Terrorism Advisory System in April 2011, replacing the outdated color-coded system of alerts. This new system delivers timely, detailed information about terrorist threats to the public, government agencies, first responders, transportation hubs, and the private sector.

We are expanding the “If You See Something, Say Something™” campaign. It is a simple and effective program, first implemented by New York City’s Metropolitan Transportation Authority, to raise public awareness of indicators of terrorism, crime, and other threats, and to emphasize the importance of reporting suspicious activity to the proper law enforcement authorities – from federal buildings to transit systems to major sports and entertainment venues.

In addition to these measures, we have taken very significant steps to facilitate the exchange of information about terrorists and criminals with international partners; strengthen airline passenger pre-screening; enhance screening for explosives; protect cyber networks and critical infrastructure; bolster security of our air, land, and sea borders and identification documents; and ensure robust privacy and civil liberties safeguards.

Additionally, to help counter the threat of violent extremism in our communities, DHS has trained more than 46,000 front-line law enforcement professionals, and has worked with hundreds of communities and local organizations over the last eighteen months to implement community-oriented policing strategies that have been successful in other crime-reduction efforts, such as combating gang violence in places like Los Angeles.³

HOMETOWN SECURITY: A ROLE FOR ALL OF US

The elements of this new homeland security enterprise are designed to support and complement one another, and to protect privacy, civil rights, and civil liberties. They reflect the emerging reality that more and more often, state, local, and tribal law enforcement officers – and their community partners – are best positioned to uncover the first signs of terrorist activity. Therefore, DHS has made a priority of getting information, tools, and resources *out* of Washington, DC, and *into* the hands of those on the front lines of keeping their communities safe.

And growing evidence shows the tremendous role the public can play in homeland security. According to one recent outside analysis, from 1999 through 2009 a total of eighty-six terrorist plots against Americans were foiled. These were motivated by a range of ideologies, with those linked to al Qaeda or their affiliates only representing about half.

What is most critical to note, and which often does not get the attention it deserves, is that information that originated with the public is credited with stopping almost one third of these plots. When you add federal, state, local, and tribal law enforcement, more than 80 percent of foiled plots came from a combination of old fashioned vigilance and cooperation, information sharing, community-oriented policing, and citizen awareness.⁴

In many ways, this is not really a new story. America has a long history of communities playing an active role in their own security, and of responding to new threats by adopting new precautions. For decades, we looked to civil defense and neighborhood watch programs as elements of our own protection. And in the early years of the Cold War, Americans all knew where the closest fallout shelter was, and we kept children indoors when polio outbreaks were the biggest threat to public health.

The threats we have seen emerging over the last few years require us to be nimble and forward leaning. We ought to be alert, not alarmed, and that requires us to engage in regular discussion about preparedness and

response to the threats a particular community may face. Building secure hometowns across the country requires each of us as individuals – and also as parents, business owners, or community leaders – to play a role.

Indeed, all of us can learn more about the signs or indicators of potential criminal or terrorist planning, and say something to the proper authorities if we see something out of place. It was a street vendor who tipped off police to the Times Square bombing attempt in 2010. In January 2011, alert city workers in Spokane, Washington reported a suspicious backpack and, in doing so, thwarted what almost certainly would have been a deadly bombing along the Martin Luther King Day parade route.

We can practice safe cyber habits whenever we are online, and also share and teach them to our children. This is especially relevant in the wake of several major breaches and phishing attacks that have targeted consumers and the public.

And we can all take the basic steps to be ready for an emergency, including making a plan for reuniting with family in a crisis. We need only look at the deadly tornadoes, and the flooding and wildfires many communities have endured this year to understand the value of preparedness.

Today, hometowns across the country are working together, building a strong foundation for a secure and resilient homeland. Because of these efforts, and those of our men and women on the front lines and our dedicated counterterrorism and emergency management professionals, we are stronger than we were on 9/11.

We will never be able to seal our country under a glass dome to prevent future terrorist attacks or disasters. But we can continue to do everything possible to minimize the possibility that such an attack will succeed, and maximize our ability to respond effectively. Protecting the nation is a shared responsibility and we all have an important role to play.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Secretary Janet Napolitano has led the US Department of Homeland Security since 2009. Prior to this appointment, Secretary

Napolitano was serving her second term as governor of Arizona and was recognized as a national leader in homeland security, border security, and immigration.

¹ Department of Homeland Security, *Implementing 9/11 Commission Recommendations, Progress Report 2011* (Washington, D.C., 2011), <http://www.dhs.gov/files/publications/implementing-9-11-commission-recommendations.shtm>.

² See description of “Hometown Security” concept at <http://www.dhs.gov/files/programs/hometown.shtm>.

³ See DHS factsheet, “How DHS is Countering Violent Extremism,” <http://blog.dhs.gov/2011/08/how-dhs-is-countering-violent-extremism.html>.

⁴ Kevin Strom, et al., *Building on Clues: Examining Successes and Failures in Detecting U.S. Terrorist Plots, 1999-2009* (Institute for Homeland Security Solutions, 2010), www.ihsnc.org/portals/o/Building_on_Clues_Strom.pdf.



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