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Basic Principles for Homeland Security

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Testimony presented before the House Appropriations Committee, Subcommittee on Homeland Security on January 30, 2007

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Basic Principles for Homeland Security

Before the Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Homeland Security
United States House of Representatives

January 30, 2007

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee, it is an honor to appear before you today to discuss the current threats we face and offer some basic principles for homeland security.

Homeland security is not a television show about mysterious government agencies, covert military units, or heroes with fantastic cell phones that summon F-16s. It is an ongoing construction project that builds upon philosophy and strategy to ensure effective organization, establish rules and procedures, deploy new technology, and educate a vast army of federal agents, local police, part-time soldiers, private security guards, first responders, medical personnel, public health officials, and individual citizens. Homeland security is about national commitment in general and the distribution of resources in particular, and therefore, it is about legislation and appropriations.

Homeland security is not over in 24 hours. Providing for the common defense and protecting the homeland—the principal tasks of government—have become the challenge of our generation. Our projects must be durable, our efforts sustainable.

Failures will be obvious, but it will be hard to know when we get it right. Villains will not visibly bite the dust by the end of each episode. Absence of a major attack does not automatically mean that security is effective, but it can tempt us into dangerous complacency.

The terrorist threat is changing. We have degraded the global operational capabilities of al Qaeda, removed some of its key planners, and kept its leadership on the run. But we have not prevented jihadist leaders from communicating, blunted their message, or effectively countered their ability to radicalize and recruit angry young men. Our attention must shift to local conspiracies, which may operate below our intelligence radar. This increases the importance of domestic intelligence-collection and the role of local police.

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The dynamic nature of the threat precludes us from ever saying, "Mission accomplished." Combating terrorism and ensuring homeland security are enduring tasks. That does not mean accepting the notion of perpetual war. It does mean formulating a sustainable strategy and implementing security regimes that are consistent with American values and traditions, that do not impede our economy, that build upon our strengths as a nation rather than magnifying our fears.

How we translate this lofty rhetoric into specific decisions about the distribution of precious resources is your task as elected officials and members of the Appropriations Committee. There are no recipes. But there are some basic principles.

- Security must be defined broadly to include all efforts to deter, detect, prevent, and impede terrorist attacks; mitigate casualties, damage and disruption; reduce alarm; and rapidly respond, repair, and recover.

- Intelligence capabilities must be improved at the local level. We are slowly moving in this direction, but local governments face competing demands and are strapped for resources. Subsidizing the construction of intelligence fusion centers does not by itself create intelligence capability. That requires manpower and training, which also require continued support, and equally important, a less bureaucratic approach to the ownership of intelligence information.

- We need to examine our legal framework for preventive action, which differs from routine reactive criminal investigation. Broad assertions of executive authority are not a long-term solution in a society of laws.

- A more proactive approach means that mistakes inevitably will be made and, therefore, must be accompanied by comprehensive oversight and the means for prompt remedy.

- We confront a wide array of potential terrorist scenarios, each one of which will be championed by a determined, well-informed, and vocal advocate with the result that all seem equally dangerous. But we must beware of unwittingly transforming vulnerabilities into imminent terrorist threats. Vulnerabilities are infinite. Choices must be made.

- Terrorists can attack anything, anywhere, any time. But we cannot protect everything, everywhere, all the time. So security will necessarily be reactive. This is not a cause for blame when an attack occurs. It does not mean we are fighting the last war when we

subsequently implement measures to prevent easy repetition of the attack. But it should not provoke overreaction.

- Allocations of resources must be based upon assessments of risk—we are moving in this direction. The choice lies between focusing on the most likely events in the lower registers of violence or on the less likely events that would have the greatest consequences. Current U.S. strategy is moving toward disaster-driven.[2]

- If we are thinking about terrorist disasters, we urgently need to address how we can do a better job of post-disaster recovery. Our terrorist foes talk about crippling our economy with devastating attacks. No enemy of the United States should think that a city or a region can be put out of business. The sad neglect of the Gulf Coast creates exactly that impression.

- Security and liberty are not exchangeable currencies. We can develop security measures that are compatible with our basic freedom. But that freedom can be imperiled by attempts to eliminate all risk.

- Prevention of all terrorist attacks is an unrealistic goal. It cannot be the criterion for assessing the effectiveness of security measures. Our goals are to deter terrorist attacks, improve our chances of detection, increase the terrorists' operational difficulties, drive them toward less lucrative targets.

- Although we do it every day, living with risk is a hard political sell, which is why our efforts should include educating the public, helping citizens realistically assess the terrorist perils and everyday dangers they face, making them savvy about how security works and its limitations. We must inculcate a security culture without creating a security-obsessed state.

- Given the great uncertainty about the terrorist threat, which we cannot abolish, we should favor those projects that offer dual or collateral benefits. Improving our crisis-management capabilities and strengthening our public-health infrastructure are examples. Investments then will not be wasted even if no terrorist attack occurs.[3]

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[2] The challenge of matching allocations of resources to risk has been addressed by RAND researchers. See Henry H. Willis et al, *Estimating Terrorism Risk*, RAND Corporation, 2005.
[3] The barriers to improving public-health preparedness are examined in Jeffrey Wasserman et al, *Organizing State and Local Health Departments for Public Health Preparedness*, RAND Corporation, 2006.

- Where feasible, the emphasis should be on the development of capability at the local level rather than the expansion of federal programs. Obviously, this will not be appropriate for the security of our national borders, airlines, or nuclear facilities, or for other large tasks, which must remain federal responsibilities.

- New initiatives should offer a net security benefit—that is, any measure proposed should do more than merely displace the risk from one target set to another, unless the second-choice targets are less lucrative.

- Strict cost-benefit analysis will not work. Terrorist attacks are infrequent but potentially disastrous events, and while direct security costs can be readily calculated, the consequences of a large-scale terrorist attack—those beyond casualties and damage—cannot so easily be quantified.

- Security must be both effective and efficient. We have already seen that security measures can have insidious effects on the economy. New security proposals should be accompanied by some estimate of long-term costs, impact on the basic function of what is being protected, effect on civil liberties, and other collateral effects.[4]

- We are a nation of inventors. Technology can increase the effectiveness of security measures and streamline security procedures. Creativity should be encouraged—that means risking some research failures. New systems should be rapidly deployed for testing in the field, with successful systems disseminated nationwide. This dynamic process depends on defining the capabilities we want to achieve within certain time limits, not on national uniformity of devices or machines. We should not wait for a silver bullet.

- The ability of technology to reduce manpower requirements is less certain. New systems require trained human operators and continued quality control and testing, something we often overlook in budgeting. For the next ten to fifteen years, security, like intelligence, will remain manpower- intensive. There are no "hands-free" security solutions.

- Homeland security can be a basis for rebuilding America's aging infrastructure. We can build things that are more robust—inherently hard targets—build in redundancies to mitigate the consequences of failure, design for resiliency and rapid recovery. It means not

[4] An example of estimating long-term costs can be found in James S. Chow et al, *Protecting Commercial Aviation Against the Shoulder-Fired Missile Threat*, RAND Corporation, 2005.

isolating security concerns from functional considerations. There may be ways to improve security without increasing long-term security costs.

- In order to focus limited security resources, we must be able to employ selective methods: systems that fast-track identified travelers, the latest versions of computer-assisted passenger screening, selective searches based upon observed behavior. Since this runs contrary to the public's preference for security that is passive and egalitarian, it must be accompanied by public education. Success depends on cooperation in an environment of trust, which, frankly, has been eroded by government overreach and cavalier dismissal of traditional guarantees.[5]

- Homeland security must aim to counter both the terrorists and the terror they hope to create—the event and its psychological impact. We can achieve this by increasing public education and participation. This is far more than reminding people to be vigilant. Individual, family, and community preparedness should be a national goal, with everyone playing a part. Knowledge and specific responsibilities are the most effective shields against terror. Here, participation, not effectiveness, is the objective. I might add here that if the American people believe this struggle requires no sacrifice from them and will not support leaders who acknowledge this need, then we have a very big problem. I am optimistic, but I don't have to run for office every two years.

- We are a nation of volunteers and should build on that tradition. Legislation has been introduced to create a Civilian Reserve Corps. The President mentioned it in his recent State of the Union message. It is a good idea, but why confine the idea to American nation-building efforts abroad. A domestic Civilian Reserve Corps could be a way of matching skills volunteered with skills needed in case of natural or man-made disaster. The readiness of citizens to help one another in times of danger and crisis remains one of the great untapped strengths of this nation of 300 million people.

In the final analysis, homeland security is not guaranteed by concrete barriers or more guards. As I have written in my recent book, *Unconquerable Nation*, I believe that this nation will remain unconquerable as long as we adhere to our basic values—our love of liberty and justice, our strong sense of community, our courage, our self-confidence, our tradition of self-reliance. These are the foundation of our security.

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[5] The difficult challenge of applying security measures selectively is addressed by Brian Michael Jenkins and Bruce Butterworth in *Selective Screening of Rail Passengers*, Mineta Transportation Institute, forthcoming March 2007.