



# Safe at Home

*A National Security Strategy to Protect the  
American Homeland, the Real Central Front*

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**T**he Bush administration's political rhetoric that we are defeating terrorists in Baghdad so we do not have to confront them here is fiction. This is not an either-or proposition. The risk of a terrorist attack on the United States is on the rise both despite and because of what we have done over the past seven years. The United States is not as safe as it should be. We need to reorder our strategic priorities now.

The decision in 2003 to invade Iraq not only took the pressure off Al Qaeda Central, the perpetrators of the 9/11 attacks, and enabled its leaders to reconstitute. Perhaps more importantly, it spawned a new generation of adversaries who believe, rightly or wrongly, that the United States is at war with Islam. As we have seen around the world, but particularly in Europe, they tend to be inspired by Al Qaeda, but acting on their own. Plots of relatively low sophistication have been disrupted within the United States, but we can never expect law enforcement to detect every one.

Multiple factors have limited DHS' development. The lack of regulatory authority and planning capability has undercut its bureaucratic clout. Poor management systems have led to budgetary waste. The department's increasing responsibility is not matched by its capacity to conduct effective oversight. The lack of a unifying culture, ineffective leadership, and poor employee morale only exacerbate the problems. DHS today is not governed by a clear set of pri-

orities, which makes true risk management difficult to achieve. The level of resources committed to homeland security has been insufficient to promote meaningful change.

The 9/11 terrorist attacks on American soil were viewed as a failure to connect the dots, yet we still need to build an effective system to produce and share better threat information. While we add 92,000 more troops to the Army and Marine Corps, the City of New York has 5,000 fewer police officers on the beat than it did on September 11. The Coast Guard is struggling to maintain an increased tempo with aging equipment and responsibilities that exceed its force size. The National Guard no longer has enough equipment to deploy overseas, defend the United States, and support civil authorities following natural disasters all at once.

Such questionable policy priorities have been common over the past seven years. Despite Katrina, the Bush administration wants to cut grant funding to first responders. Because of the 2001 anthrax attack, while we have rightly increased investment in biodefenses, we continue to neglect public health surveillance and medical readiness that will be vital to detect, control and respond to a natural pandemic or bioterrorist attack. A nuclear weapon in the hands of a terrorist is the nightmare scenario, but our own nuclear policies push the world to build more weapons, which makes the nightmare more rather than less likely. And we have policies, including harsh interrogation techniques, detention without charge, government surveillance, and immigration that are inconsistent with our values and our long-term interest. All this in the name of something called the “war on terror.”

What is needed is a new national security strategy and a renewed commitment to homeland security, one that builds capabilities from the ground up rather than impos-

ing unfunded mandates from the top down. Adequate resources must be committed to all dimensions of national power, not just one. Investments should not just enhance our ability to counter the terrorism threat, but also promote far-reaching systemic improvements that will better position the United States to cope with a range of challenges and major disruptions regardless of the origin—terrorism, yes, but also pandemics, natural disasters, and man-made events.

This takes on special significance given Al Qaeda’s recent pattern of strikes associated with elections or political transitions. The United States faces increased risk of another attack over the next year and a half, which will make the transition to the next administration that much more important. Iraq may well be the dominant national security issue in the presidential campaign, but homeland security could well present the next president with his or her first national security challenge. This paper provides the framework for the reevaluation of our homeland security policies that the next administration should pursue as part of a balanced national security strategy to make the United States more safe at home.

## **A Strategic Reassessment**

The central front in this ongoing struggle must be the U.S. homeland. Developing the right approach requires a reassessment of fundamental judgments made immediately after 9/11. The key terrorist threat to the United States today is still Al Qaeda Central and its sympathizers, the only terrorist network that has demonstrated both the intent and capability to attack the U.S. homeland. Its core leadership now operates from a new sanctuary in Pakistan’s tribal areas.

Several attacks against the West since 9/11 have links back to Pakistan, where the



perpetrators received training or support. As a result, the next administration must reconsider the current priority given to Iraq at the expense of Afghanistan and Pakistan. Any successful attack on the United States will probably have its roots in Pakistan rather than Iraq.

Al Qaeda has a playbook. While its strategy could change over time, the parameters of the threat to the United States for the foreseeable future are well-defined. Terrorists are most likely to strike in or near world capitals and major urban centers, at well-known critical infrastructure that we rely upon every day and where large numbers of people work or gather to disrupt the national or international economy. The ultimate goal: to affect our political process.

We must be conscious of new targets, such as softer commercial sites, and new technologies, such as the use of chlorine tanker trucks as weapons in Iraq. Beyond just terrorism, national preparedness and mitigation strategies must keep pace with the full range of potential disasters and disruptions.

The paramount responsibility for homeland security belongs to the federal government. It simply cannot be outsourced to state and local governments or the private sector.

The next administration must be willing to set higher national standards and, where necessary, enact federal regulation to improve our security and preparedness, particularly during the coming period of heightened risk. There needs to be a mix of direct investment and government incentives to encourage change, particularly as we enter a period of economic uncertainty and constrained state and local budgets.

In turn, it is the responsibility of state and local governments to sustain stronger baseline security and preparedness over

time. The private sector needs to place as much importance on security as it has on efficiency. Better market-based mechanisms must be created to differentiate companies willing to do the minimum from those willing to do more.

## A New Strategy

A comprehensive and balanced strategy to protect the homeland encompasses five strategic objectives: prevent terrorist attacks; reduce our vulnerability to terrorism; prepare to respond and recover from an attack or natural or man-made disasters; sustain homeland security consistent with American values; and shape the global environment to reduce the threat of terrorism. In detail, we propose to:

- **Prevent** terrorism attacks to the extent possible, refocus on Al Qaeda Central and the global movement it has inspired, reorder our overseas priorities, keep the perpetrators from employing the most dangerous technologies, and develop stronger counter-terrorism and intelligence capabilities, particularly at the local level. Specifically, we must:
  - Retire the broad concept of a “war on terror”
  - Shift forces and funding from Iraq to Afghanistan
  - Create smarter borders backed by an effective new immigration system
  - Provide more support to state and local law enforcement
  - Improve detection of and oversight over nuclear materials and biological research
- **Reduce** the overall vulnerability of our society and economy to terrorism, securing critical infrastructure that terrorists are most likely to attack while minimiz-

ing cascading effects from any major system disruption. Specifically, we must:

- Establish critical infrastructure priorities to guide policy and funding decisions
- Enact comprehensive chemical security regulation and strengthen government oversight
- Close remaining gaps in aviation security, particularly air cargo
- Internationalize supply chain security standards
- Focus greater attention on passenger rail and transit security
- Improve redundancy and resiliency of energy production and distribution

- **Prepare** the country to effectively respond to and recover from a terrorist attack or other significant disasters that will inevitably occur, and create stronger regulation and incentives for the private sector. Specifically, we must:

- Make national preparedness and disaster mitigation a more urgent priority
- Redo national planning scenarios based on real-world risk
- Change business model of the Federal Emergency Management Agency
- Invest in public health surveillance, and medical infrastructure and readiness
- Make homeland defense the National Guard's top mission
- Give the Coast Guard resources to match its responsibilities
- Use emerging private sector security audits and reporting to create market-based incentives for change

- **Sustain** stronger homeland security consistent with our values through an integrated federal effort, appropriate support to cities and states, and sufficient resources to address long-term requirements. Specifically, we must:

- Ensure a smooth presidential transition
- Develop a new integrated national security strategy
- Merge the White House national security and homeland security councils
- Increase grants to states and cities
- Build greater capacity within the Department of Homeland Security
- Update government privacy laws and oversight structure
- Restore government transparency and update government privacy laws and oversight structure
- Improve threat-based public communication

- **Shape** the global environment to reduce instability and extremism, preclude the emergence of failing states or safe havens from which violence and terrorism emerge, and restore lost American credibility and leadership around the world. Specifically, we must:

- Undertake a serious review of U.S. policies regarding the Islamic world
- Reduce our reliance on nuclear weapons and extend international non-proliferation agreements
- Prevent terrorist safe havens through improved non-military crisis intervention
- Discredit Al Qaeda's ideology and tactics
- Rebuild the strategic narrative of the United States
- Keep America's doors open

## A Rebalanced Budget

The United States cannot afford strategically, economically, or politically to stay on the offensive forever in an ill-defined and open-ended conflict in Iraq. At the current “burn rate” of more than \$15 billion per month, funding to stay on the “offensive”

has severe opportunity costs, siphoning away finite resources from dimensions of national security, including defense and deterrence.

In 2008, 20 percent of the \$740 billion “national security budget” will be spent on Iraq, twice what the federal government spends defending the homeland. We suffer from a strategic disconnect—the strategy we have places too much emphasis on military intervention and not enough on the other elements of national power that are more likely to reduce the threat of terrorism to the United States. We also suffer from a budget disconnect—our existing national security budget funds the strategy we have, not the one we need.

The United States needs a new national security strategy—and a new investment strategy. If homeland security is an imperative for the next administration, then the only viable means of funding what is required is by reducing our commitment to and the cost of operations in Iraq. The next administration will need to slow and eventually freeze the existing rate of growth in the defense budget. This means beginning a significant reduction in military forces in Iraq as soon as possible.

Reducing force levels below 100,000 in Iraq should free up between \$40 and \$60 billion

that can be applied to other national security priorities, most significantly Afghanistan but also security-related initiatives within the Departments of Homeland Security, Justice, Energy, State and Health and Human Services. These include:

- Domestic law enforcement and intelligence
- Security of dangerous nuclear and biological technologies
- Public health surveillance and intervention
- Medical readiness and hospital infrastructure
- Critical infrastructure protection, specifically chemical security
- Aviation security, specifically air cargo security
- Pre-disaster planning and mitigation
- Infrastructure redundancy and resiliency
- The National Guard and Coast Guard
- Civilian stabilization and intervention capabilities

By reordering our strategic homeland security objectives, we can make Americans safer at home and abroad. By investing wisely in a broader set of national and homeland security capabilities, we can more easily sustain an improved strategy to contain terrorism and other dangers. In the pages that follow, we will make clear these objectives are not just attainable but imperative to our national security.

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