

INTRODUCTION

THE FORGOTTEN HOMELAND

The destruction of New Orleans and subsequent degradation of its population shocked the conscience of America. We saw in it evidence that we cannot count on the national government to perform one of its most basic missions: preventing, mitigating, and responding to disaster. The image of Louisiana National Guardsmen in Iraq as the people of Louisiana went without protection and support seemed incongruous and, at some level, wrong.

Hurricane Katrina seemed to come so soon after our country had suffered from September 11. Yet, despite the vivid images still fresh in our minds, that terrorist attack occurred over four years ago. Much can be done in four years. What has been called the “Greatest Generation” of Americans defeated Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan in four years. The Manhattan Project took a physics concept to a deployed nuclear weapon in four years. The entire presidencies of Jimmy Carter and George H. W. Bush each lasted four years. Four years is the entire length of an undergraduate college experience. Over that time span a baby goes from birth, to walking, then talking, and attending pre-school.

Americans understood that, since the tragedy of September 11, billions of tax dollars had been spent creating a new capability to deal with crises in the United States. A large, new federal department was created. Increased funding was made available to emergency responders. Exercises were held across the country to prepare for mass casualty events. Then, with Katrina, when the nation was tested by tragedy at home again, it seemed that we were less capable than we had been before all of this supposed strengthening of our homeland security capabilities.

The cognitive dissonance between what most Americans thought had been done to address homeland issues and the pathetic performance they witnessed after Katrina caused many in Congress and the media to reassess what actually has been accomplished since September 11 to

protect our homeland. The former members of the 9/11 Commission also issued a final, and failing, report card on what had been done to prevent another major terrorist attack and what could be done to respond should one occur. What the evidence reveals is a long list of initiatives and few accomplishments, a full agenda of needs and no apparent plan to address them.

In 2006, emergency responders are still unable to communicate reliably or securely across jurisdictions or in large buildings and tunnels. Chemical plants in major metropolitan areas continue to pose an unmitigated risk. Americans ride commuter rail and subway systems that are vulnerable to the kinds of attack that have already happened in Paris, Moscow, Madrid, Tokyo, and London. Few cities are prepared to deal with the mass casualties that would accompany a pandemic or a biological attack. Radiological materials are poorly accounted for and secured, making a “dirty bomb” that would contaminate large parts of a city a very real possibility. The agency charged with finding terrorists in the United States is unable to deploy a modern information technology system and the intelligence community remains incapable of translating the material it collects. Funds to address homeland security have not been allocated on the basis of security needs or as part of a multi-year plan to achieve a specific level of risk and capability. Block grants for homeland security in many places have been squandered, allocated to regions facing little risk or spent without any goal or overall risk mitigation strategy.

After all of the publicity given homeland security, we in fact have no idea how secure the nation really is, how much more secure those funds have made us, or what it would take to achieve an adequate level of risk management. Nor can the president, Congress, or the voters make informed tradeoffs between risk mitigation at home and alternative spending priorities, such as traditional military defense against attack by foreign powers.

How can we have allowed this level of mismanagement while the crumbling towers of the World Trade Center still burn in our memory? The presence of the Louisiana National Guardsmen in Iraq is a metaphor for the problem. America chose to respond in large part to the terrorist attacks in New York and Washington by waging overseas wars. The president repeatedly recited a policy to “fight them over there, rather than here.” That policy, alas, is logically fallacious and misleading in its presumption that we can control the venue of terrorist attacks. While it

would be clearly preferable not to engage terrorists in the United States, fighting some terrorists overseas does not in any way preclude others from coming to the United States. Indeed, the analysis of many terrorism experts in and out of government is quite the opposite: By fighting in Iraq, the United States has increased the motivation of many potential terrorists to attack Americans at home. They also note that the Iraq experience has increased the skills of many terrorists, some of whom may use those skills elsewhere, including in the United States.

Nonetheless, our post-September 11 response undeniably has had an overseas emphasis. Of the incremental dollars appropriated to address security after September 11, more have been spent in Iraq than in the United States, despite unmet security and preparedness needs at home. Senior-level government officials in both the executive and legislative branches also seem to have spent more time and attention on Iraq and overseas operations than on domestic security and preparedness. Thus, in some ways, America has become the forgotten homeland.

Refocused on our domestic preparedness by Katrina and the 9/11 Commission's final grades, what should we now do? What should be our priorities? What resources do we need and where will we get them? What are the roles of the federal government, of states and cities, and of corporate America?

The Century Foundation asked us to address those questions. To do so, we have called upon nearly two dozen experts to help us define the problem, identify the priorities, and draft an agenda of recommendations.

THE THREAT

Jihadism—the notion that Muslims and their faith are under assault and that it is the duty of able-bodied Muslims to defend themselves—is now more widespread than ever. The result has been the emergence of self-starter terrorist groups, such as the Madrid and London attackers, clusters of (mostly) young men that form spontaneously and move quickly to fulfill their perceived obligation. These are often individuals with no criminal records or reputations as firebrands. They have had little or no prior contact with individuals known to be connected to terrorist organizations. They are, in a British police phrase, “clean skins.” Because

these groups coalesce in coffeehouses, on cricket pitches, in paintball games, or in neighborhood mosques, and because they lack criminal records, law enforcement has no reason to observe them.

The Internet has played a dramatic role in enabling and accelerating these self-starters, enabling groups to simultaneously recruit, indoctrinate, train, and link together individuals attracted to jihad. Ironically, the Internet has made the American right-wing fanatics' dream of a sinuous, elusive "leaderless resistance" a reality for aggrieved Muslims. For these individuals, their local environments are rich in potential targets, as the Madrid and London attacks show. Murders, such as the killing of Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh by an Islamic militant in Amsterdam, demonstrate that targets include individuals as well as infrastructure. For more adventurous souls, there are the ratlines that will take them to Iraq, where there is an ample range of targets and opportunities for martyrdom.

At the same time, the bureaucratic terrorist infrastructure that spawned the global jihad still exists. For this cadre, striking the United States at home remains the gold standard of jihadist success. The imperative of hitting Americans at home stems from several potent impulses, first and foremost the desire for revenge. From the jihadists' standpoint, the United States and its allies, principally Israel, have been on a rampage in the Muslim world for decades and are responsible in one way or another for millions of Muslim deaths. Religion and honor demand that these deaths be avenged, and, as al Qaeda's spokesman put it, that America drink from the same bitter cup from which the Muslims have drunk. Children are not just legitimate targets in this context, they are desirable ones.

The second impulse derives from the jihadists' interpretation of the wartime law of necessity. Scattered, unable to challenge their adversaries on the battlefield, lacking the protection of a government, and without armor, aircraft, or heavy weapons, jihadists argue that they have no choice but to attack soft targets. Thus, while they may prefer to destroy our armies, they have no choice but to engage in terrorism. Killing civilians is amply justified, in their view, by the fact that we are a democracy. According to this interpretation of our political structure, all Americans are implicated in the crimes of their government, since the administration necessarily reflects the "will of the people."

The third impulse is strategic. The jihadists believe that we are sensitive to costs and that Americans cannot tolerate casualties. Thus, the

best way to prod the United States to withdraw its abusive presence from the Muslim and, more specifically, Arab world, while pulling the rug from under the autocratic regimes that suppress Islamists, is to kill Americans on their own soil.

Finally, American foreign policy, especially since September 11, is widely seen in the Muslim world as confirming the al Qaeda narrative. From this perspective, the United States has unleashed a broad and ferocious assault on the Muslim world, with the aim of disarming and dismantling the only Arab country that challenged American power—Iraq—and of stealing Muslim oil resources. Widely distributed photos, both real and fabricated, of American excesses at Abu Ghraib reinforce perceptions of a predatory America.

Against this background, we can expect al Qaeda or its sympathizers to try to draw blood within our borders. Unfortunately, jihadists are rapidly gaining experience in urban warfare, especially in Iraq, but also in Europe. If the cities are to become the battlefields of the new jihad, our defenses must be extremely robust. Urban environments confer important advantages on terrorists. Cities offer anonymity, accessibility, the shelter of immigrant communities, and a huge array of killing opportunities.

The questions are whether jihadists from outside this country can establish cells here, whether Muslim residents will help them, and whether new cells might form spontaneously, as one did in Falls Church, Virginia. In short, will the United States face the serious intercommunal problems that afflict Europe?

At this point, Muslims in the United States bear little resemblance to their coreligionists in Europe. They are, on the whole, more prosperous, better educated, and better integrated. American Muslims experienced the same horror and distress on September 11 as Americans of every other religious or ethnic stripe. Many joined the military. Yet many American Muslims feel that their country's foreign policy is too dismissive of their concerns and think that the War on Terrorism has turned into a war against Islam, despite the administration's careful language on this score. Many have also been adversely affected by the implementation of the Patriot Act and believe that they have been stigmatized. Ill-judged remarks emerging from some evangelical Protestant leaders about Islam have contributed to a sense of being beleaguered.

Thus far, the posture of the American-Muslim community has been notably restrained. Unlike their European counterparts, especially in the

United Kingdom, American Muslims have no overarching, authoritative leadership that can represent their interests to the government or can marshal a single Muslim position on policy issues. Notwithstanding these leadership issues and the provocations many Muslims have perceived since September 11, there is no evidence that American Muslims seek the kind of confrontational relationship that exists between Muslim and non-Muslim European communities. There is also no evidence that Muslim militants from outside the country have found haven with American Muslims.

The same media-borne mix of inflammatory images and language that has radicalized European Muslims, however, is available to anyone in this country capable of surfing the Internet. On campuses, these influences may be having an effect, especially against the background of widespread unhappiness with the war in Iraq. The use of immigration law in lieu of intelligence as a way of disrupting terrorist cells has dragged large numbers of people into a law enforcement net with awful results for the “usual suspects,” but no successful prosecutions for terrorist activity. These roundups tend to underscore the belief that Muslims are being singled out for punishment. Adding to a combustible mix is the presence of large numbers of Muslim converts in some American prisons. In the New York State corrections system, as many as one out of five inmates is thought to be Muslim.

It is essential therefore that the process of integration and equal treatment that characterized the situation of Muslims in the United States before September 11 be sustained. American Muslims are not only fellow citizens, but they also are indispensable allies in the war against terrorism and our first line of defense against infiltrators from outside the United States.

The growth of self-starters; the ubiquity of tactical guidance on the Web; the determination of al Qaeda to hit us at home; increasing experience in urban combat; and al Qaeda’s desire to recruit aggrieved American Muslims demand that we tend to our defenses.

The task force report proceeds in three parts. Part I, “The Governments Nearest the People,” addresses what local governments can do. Most previous analyses have been “top down” and have placed primary responsibility for homeland security at the federal level. The task force believes that, with regard to disaster mitigation and response, the leading level of government is the metropolitan area. Governments at

that level can also have a major responsibility for prevention of terrorist attacks. The task force examines what resources metropolitan-area governments need to perform these missions.

Next, in Part II, “The Corporation, Responsibility, and Risk Management,” the task force examines what has been done and what is yet to be achieved in securing assets owned and operated by the private sector. What private sector assets really matter and why? What are the roles of public-private partnerships, of regulation, and of insurance?

Only then does the task force examine, in Part III, “What Washington Can Do.” The task force sought to avoid “move-the-boxes around” organizational solutions and instead focused on ways to improve the federal government’s performance in inherently national missions like intelligence collection and aviation and maritime security. The central issue at the federal level is resources: establishing a system to decide how much is enough and determining relevant tradeoffs within the overall realm of security. Following Katrina, questions arose regarding response to calamities (situations worse than disasters) and the role of the military. The task force analyzes those questions and proposes a framework for future responses.

Many of the recommendations can be carried out by Congress. Homeland security will be an issue in the 2006 congressional elections. In 2003, bipartisan action in Congress forced the administration to create the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). Subsequently, Congress as a whole largely has stepped away from a role in shaping the nation’s response to the challenges of security at home. Despite the creation of permanent committees on homeland security in both houses of Congress, leadership stubbornly refuses to consolidate all oversight of the department (six committees claim responsibility for some aspect of oversight of the Department of Homeland Security).

Before the next calamitous hurricane or earthquake, before a deadly pandemic, before the next major terrorist attack at home, America needs to do much more to reduce its domestic risks. We offer this volume and these recommendations to ask questions, stimulate debate, and suggest our idea of possible solutions. We do so cognizant of the belief of the former chairman of the 9/11 Commission “that the next attack is a question of when, not if.”

When that next attack comes, America’s citizens will not understand why so little was done to reduce our vulnerabilities and risks here at

home in the years since September 11. They will want to know who did not rise to the challenge, and they will want to know why there was such mismanagement and nonfeasance. Before that happens, let us start anew to protect the people and the land we love.

We offer this volume as a small contribution to that goal.