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State of America's Homeland Security Address

Release Date: January 27, 2011

Washington, D.C.
George Washington University
(Remarks as Prepared)

Good afternoon, and thank you President Knapp for that kind introduction, and for the invitation to be here at George Washington University.

I'll be speaking at several colleges and universities throughout the year about different aspects of homeland security. I'm happy to kick things off here, though, with an address on the overall state of our homeland security.

So, thank you to the Homeland Security Policy Institute. And I want to especially acknowledge the Institute's founding director, Frank Cilluffo, who is a good friend of DHS. Frank is one of those who were "present at the creation" of our homeland security effort after the 9/11 attacks. And under his leadership, the Homeland Security Policy Institute has been at the vanguard of treating homeland security as its own discipline that demands serious study.

Because of this Institute, and other efforts emerging at colleges and universities across the country, homeland security is taking its place among longer-standing fields – like international affairs and criminal justice – as an area where major global challenges are being studied and addressed. For the students and young professionals here with us today, or watching online, you are the next wave of homeland security thinkers, professionals, and managers. You can – and undoubtedly will – have a significant influence on this emerging field.

I also want to take a moment to note that the very existence of the Department of Homeland Security is due, in large part, to the efforts of Senator Joe Lieberman. Senator Lieberman could not be here this afternoon. But all of us know about, and have tremendous appreciation for, his tireless, nonpartisan efforts to make our country more secure.

Two days ago, President Obama delivered to Congress and the American people his annual address on the state of our union, a tradition that goes as far back as 1790 with the namesake of this institution. Today, I'm beginning a new tradition, an annual assessment of the state of our homeland security. I want to begin by telling two stories that illustrate the breadth and the complexity of our challenge, but also the humanity of it as well.

Just a few weeks ago, I had the honor of spending New Years in Kabul, Afghanistan, with many of the men and women serving in our armed forces and our civilian mission there. I met with soldiers at the Torkham Forward Operating Base and was briefed on operations at Torkham Gate, a heavily-trafficked border crossing between Afghanistan and Pakistan. It is near Jallalabad, not far from the Khyber Pass, and it's where Afghan and U.S. officials – including border security and customs officials from the Department of Homeland Security – work side by side to provide security, while allowing legal commerce and travel to get through.

The second experience was very different, and took place a little more than a year ago at Ellis Island. I was leading a naturalization ceremony – another great honor of this job. I read the oath of allegiance to new Americans from 48 different countries, including a 95-year-old woman from the Dominican Republic. Collectively, in that room, were dozens of individuals, with very different backgrounds, who all wanted the same thing – to accept the rights, and the responsibilities, of American citizenship.

These two experiences remind us that the hard work of securing the U.S. homeland stretches from the mountains of Afghanistan and Pakistan, and other far-off places, all the way back to the Main streets of our smallest home towns. They remind us of why that hard work must be done; who we are doing it for; and how we must conduct ourselves while carrying it out. And they remind us that securing the homeland means upholding the very values on which this country was founded, and honoring the millions who passed through Ellis Island – and the ones still coming today – seeking the promise and blessings of America.

So, what, then, is the state of homeland security today? I can report that our young department has matured, building on the good work of my two predecessors, Tom Ridge and

Michael Chertoff.

I can also report that our homeland is more secure than it was ten years ago, and, indeed, more secure than it was two years ago.

If these were ordinary times, that might suffice. But these are not ordinary times. The kinds of threats we now face demonstrate that our homeland security is a shared responsibility. Only a "whole of nation approach" will bring us to the level of security and resilience we require.

So over the last two years, our approach has acknowledged that the Department of Homeland Security – indeed, the whole Federal government and the military – cannot, itself, deliver security. Real security requires the engagement of our entire society, with government, law enforcement, the private sector, and the public all playing their respective roles.

From day one, the Obama Administration has operated on the premise that security is a shared responsibility – that no matter who you are – from students and professors to first responders to everyday citizens – we all play a part.

Because of the trust we have in Americans to share in our collective security, today I announce the end of the old system of color-coded alerts. In its place, we will implement a new system that is built on a clear and simple premise: When a threat develops that could impact you – the public – we will tell you. We will provide whatever information we can so you know how to protect yourselves, your families, and your communities.

Under the new, two-tiered system, DHS will coordinate with other Federal entities to issue formal, detailed alerts regarding information about a specific or credible terrorist threat. These alerts will include a clear statement that there is an "imminent threat" or "elevated threat." The alerts also will provide a concise summary of the potential threat, information about actions being taken to ensure public safety, and recommended steps that individuals and communities can take.

The new system reflects the reality that we must always be on alert and be ready. When we have information about a specific, credible threat, we will issue a formal alert providing as much information as we can. Depending on the nature of the threat, the alert may be limited to a particular audience, like law enforcement, or a segment of the private sector, like shopping malls or hotels. Or, the alert may be issued more broadly to the American people, distributed – through a statement from DHS – by the news media and social media channels.

The alerts will be specific to the threat. They may recommend certain actions, or suggest looking for specific suspicious behavior. And they will have a specified end date.

Today, we are beginning a 90-day implementation period in which Federal, state and local government, law enforcement entities, private and non-profit sector partners, airports, and other transport hubs will officially transition to the new system, which flows from evolving practice in the last few years. This means that the days are numbered for the automated recordings at airports, and announcements about a color code level that were, too often, accompanied by little practical information.

As I said, this new National Terrorism Advisory System is built on the common-sense belief that we are all in this together, and that we all have a role to play. This system was developed in that same collaborative spirit. It was largely the work of a bipartisan task force that included law enforcement, former Mayors and Governors, and members of the previous administration. Some of them are here today, and I thank them, and ask for a round of applause for their great work that led to this new tool in our homeland security arsenal.

Continuing to evolve our approach to defending the homeland remains critical because the threats we face today are real, they are persistent, and they are evolving rapidly. We know that al Qaeda, and other groups sharing their terrorist ideology, continue to target us. Increasingly, this is done through al Qaeda affiliates in places like Yemen and the Arabian Peninsula. We are also dealing with the threat from terrorists who use the Internet and social media like Facebook and YouTube to reach vulnerable individuals and inspire new recruits.

Historically, our domestic counterterrorism efforts were based on the belief that we faced the greatest risk from attacks planned, and carried out, by individuals coming from abroad. But the arrests of an increasing number of U.S. persons on terror-related charges in the last two years mean that we must move beyond this paradigm. These include Najibullah Zazi, a legal permanent resident arrested in 2009 for plotting to attack the New York City subway system; Faisal Shahzad, a naturalized U.S. citizen, who attempted to explode a car bomb in Times Square last year; as well as more recent arrests in Portland, Oregon; Dallas, Texas; and here in the Washington area.

Today, we operate under the premise that individuals prepared to carry out terrorist acts might already be in the country, and could carry out further acts of terrorist violence with little or no warning. We must all work to gain a better understanding of the behaviors, tactics, and other indicators that could point to terrorist activity.

At the same time, we face the possibility of sophisticated attacks ranging from chemical, biological, and nuclear, to attacks in cyberspace. Indeed, in just the last year, we've seen the full spectrum of cyber threats, from denial-of-service attacks and spamming to attacks with spyware.

Finally, we know that our borders and ports of entry represent potential avenues, not just for terrorist travel, but also for threats in the form of smuggling, human trafficking, and transnational crime.

So as I said earlier, our approach to confronting these threats has been to build and strengthen partnerships, and to build a shared sense of responsibility for our security by working with state, local and, tribal law enforcement, our international allies, partners in the private sector, and of course, the American people.

Despite our title, the Department of Homeland Security does not possess sole responsibility for securing the homeland within the Federal government.

Our nation's armed forces may be thousands of miles from our shores, living in Forwarding Operating Bases far from loved ones or the comforts of home, but they're every bit on the frontlines of our homeland security. They have helped to significantly degrade al Qaeda's capabilities to mount major attacks right here in the United States and elsewhere throughout the world.

The Director of National Intelligence, the CIA, and the entire Intelligence Community, of which DHS is a member, is producing more and better streams of intelligence than at any time in the past. The National Counterterrorism Center has made critical improvements to our federal watchlisting systems and to the coordination of our counterterrorism efforts.

And of course, the Federal homeland security enterprise includes our strong partners at the Department of Justice and the FBI, whose work has led to the arrest of more than two-dozen Americans on terrorism-related charges since 2009.

At the Department of Homeland Security over the last two years, we've seen some extraordinary progress and hard work pay off. But that could not have happened without the dedicated, professional men and women of this great Department, like the nearly 50,000 Transportation Security Officers who work tirelessly, and often thanklessly, to deter and prevent terrorist attacks on passenger planes; the more than 20,000 Border Patrol agents who put their lives on the line to protect our borders; the more than 10,000 officers and investigators who enforce our immigration laws, and bring to justice those who seek to traffic drugs, arms and people; the more than 40,000 men and women who serve in the United States Coast Guard protecting our maritime borders; or the thousands of scientists and engineers working on the next generation of security technology; the security guards at government buildings; the trainers of our law enforcement professionals; or the intelligence analysts working around the clock to stay ahead of emerging threats.

But the homeland security enterprise extends far beyond DHS and the federal government. As I said, it requires not just a "whole of government," but a "whole of nation" approach. In some respects, local law enforcement, community groups, citizens, and the private sector play as much of a role in homeland security as the federal government. That is why I like to say that "homeland security starts with hometown security."

For example, we know that communities can play a vital security role when they forge strong partnerships with local law enforcement. In fact, this is something of an old story in our nation's history. Americans have long helped to secure their hometowns, as well as their homeland, from our tradition of civil defense, to more recent efforts like neighborhood watches and community-oriented policing initiatives.

A study just last year study found that, between 1999 and 2009, more than 80 percent of foiled terrorist plots in the United States were thwarted because of observations from law enforcement or the general public.

At DHS, we also work closely with a diverse array of religious, ethnic, and community organizations and leaders. Members of these communities have, in fact, been critical in thwarting violence. And, like all Americans, they play very positive roles in enriching our national life.

And so, every day at DHS, we are doing everything we can to get more information, more tools, and more resources *out of* Washington, DC, and *into* the hands of the men and women on the front lines.

That is why we launched the national "If You See Something, Say Something" campaign last year to raise awareness of potential terrorist tactics, and emphasize the importance of reporting suspicious activity to law enforcement. You've no doubt heard this campaign if you've ridden on Metro or Amtrak. And we have continued to expand this effort across the country in partnership with professional and collegiate sports, shopping centers – like the Mall of America – and retailers – like Wal-Mart.

We also see this effort as a partnership between citizens and local police. Therefore, we've worked closely with the Department of Justice to expand the Nationwide Suspicious Activity Reporting, or SAR, initiative. Currently active in over two dozen states and cities, and soon to be utilized by fusion centers, transit police, and other groups across the country, the SAR initiative creates a standard process for law enforcement to identify and report suspicious activity so it can be shared nationally and analyzed for broader trends.

I want to pause here to make an important point. Both the "If You See Something, Say Something" and SAR initiatives have been designed, and tested, with civil liberties and privacy in mind. Both are aimed at identifying suspicious behaviors and increasing our shared ability to protect the country.

Today, we're also premiering several additional resources to better connect citizens and communities with the kinds of information and tools that DHS offers. I urge you to visit our new "Hometown Security" resource page on DHS.gov, and to stay connected via the Department's new Facebook page as well.

To give you a better sense of how our partnership approach looks, and – to borrow a sports metaphor – how we're fielding a bigger, better-trained team, I'd like to discuss four areas of focus for us in the coming year.

Counterterrorism

Our most fundamental responsibility remains preventing terrorist attacks on the homeland. And to support this critical mission we have worked very hard to strengthen and build our domestic information-sharing architecture by increasing the capacity of state and major-area fusion centers to serve as centers of analytic excellence.

We have made historic strides in aviation security - accelerating the deployment of new security equipment at our domestic airports, and launching an international initiative that, in October of last year, produced a first-of-its-kind global agreement by 190 nations to increase aviation security standards worldwide. During the coming year, we will continue, and hopefully complete, negotiations with the European Union on strengthening information sharing in the aviation environment, and extend such information sharing to other continents as well.

We will build on these efforts by leading an international effort to strengthen the security of the global supply chain, which brings goods and commodities to our shores, and across our borders. This includes an initiative called Project Global Shield that we have launched with the World Customs Organization, or WCO, and 60 other countries to prevent the theft or diversion of precursor chemicals that can be used by terrorists to make improvised explosive devices. It also includes a new initiative with the International Civil Aviation Organization, the WCO, and other international partners, to identify and protect the most critical elements of our supply chain from attack or disruption, including key transportation hubs. Together with other Federal departments and agencies, we're seeking to bolster the resiliency of the global supply chain so that if a terrorist attack or natural disaster does occur, the supply chain can recover quickly, and any disruption can be minimized.

As Tom Ridge liked to say when he was Secretary, the physical borders of the United States should be the last line of defense, not the first. Our goal, quite simply, is to ensure the safety of all travelers and cargo as they travel across the globe.

Border Security and Immigration

A second major set of initiatives involves border security and immigration enforcement. On these two fronts, this Department has, over the last two years, been both relentless and effective.

2010 was a historic year when it comes to securing and managing our borders and enforcing our immigration laws. There are now more resources on the southwest border – in terms of personnel, technology, and infrastructure – than ever before in American history. And we continue to see progress on every metric. The numbers that are supposed to go up have gone up, and the numbers that are supposed to go down have gone down.

The number of illegal crossings – the best indicator of illegal traffic – is now at less than half its all-time high. At the same time, in the past two years, we have seized more contraband across the board – illegal bulk cash, weapons, and drugs – than we've seen in recent years.

But we won't stop there. Our priority continues to be the removal of criminal aliens who pose a danger to public safety and national security.

Because of the dedicated work of our ICE personnel, in the past fiscal year more illegal aliens with criminal records were deported from the U.S. than ever before, a 70 percent increase

from two years ago. An agreement known as Secure Communities, which uses biometrics to identify and remove criminal aliens in state prisons and local jails, has expanded from 14 jurisdictions in 2008 to more than 1000 by the end of this month. It will be in every jail and prison by 2013.

I recognize, too, that illegal immigration is driven in large part by the demand for illegal labor. As our economy grows, that demand may grow as well. That is why we're working to make E-Verify all that it can be to help businesses ensure a legal workforce. We must instill a culture of compliance among employers. And we'll continue to conduct audits to ensure all businesses are following the law.

We are also focused on improving and strengthening the legal immigration system, including formalizing a policy that expedites citizenship for non-citizens serving our country in the military overseas. And we continue to grant citizenship to record numbers of military service members.

DHS will also develop an automated vetting capability for immigration benefit processing that will enable us to immediately address national security risks. We will roll out the E-Verify "Self Check," which will enable prospective workers to check their employment authorization status. And, we will begin transitioning from a paper-based system to a new customer-focused, centralized, electronic case management system for immigration benefits.

Cybersecurity, Science, and Technology

While immigration and border enforcement have been longstanding challenges to our security, we also face new and emerging ones.

Over the past two years, we've increased our capacity to fight cyber crimes and cyber terrorism, opening a new 24/7 watch and warning center, and testing our country's first national-level cyber incident response plan, while increasing our stable of cyber experts by some 500 percent.

We entered into a historic agreement with the Department of Defense and National Security Agency to detail the division of labor among our organizations. We have also worked closely with the private sector to protect our nation's critical infrastructure, including new funding for port security and communication systems, as well as new standards for building and securing Federal facilities.

This year, we will complete the deployment of the Einstein 2 threat detection system across the Federal space, and we will continue to develop, and begin deployment, of Einstein 3, which will provide DHS with the ability to automatically detect and disrupt malicious cyber activity. And we will work through our Science and Technology directorate, our dozen academic "Centers of Excellence," and our many partners in the Federal government, on technological advances. For example, to develop the secure and efficient airport checkpoints of tomorrow; design the materials that will make our infrastructure more resilient to an attack or natural disaster; and devise the screening and detection capabilities that will keep us ahead of threats from nuclear and radiological materials.

Resilience and Response

Through the hard work of FEMA, our National Protection and Programs directorate, and others across DHS, working with our many federal, state, local, and private sector partners, we've increased our preparedness for disasters of all kinds, and strengthened the resilience of our most vulnerable critical infrastructure.

As the President announced in his State of the Union, the so-called "D Block" of communications spectrum will be set aside for public safety, so we will work with first responders on the standards and requirements for interoperability of vital communications equipment during times of crisis.

We will continue to improve and expand the disaster exercises so critical to disaster response. This year, FEMA will lead the largest exercise ever of its kind, testing our ability to respond to a major earthquake along the New Madrid fault line that runs through the midsection of the country.

To augment our global supply chain security effort, we will work with the private sector and international partners to expand and integrate "trusted traveler" and "trusted shipper" programs that facilitate legitimate travel and trade while enhancing security.

We'll launch the Chemical Facility Anti-Terrorism Standards Personnel Surety Program, requiring high-risk chemical facilities to vet individuals with access against the Terrorist Screening Database.

And we will expand the Transportation Worker Identification Credential, or TWIC, program to ensure that only authorized maritime workers can access secure areas of regulated vessels.

Recruitment

Let me say something directly to the students in the room, because part of why I wanted to give this speech – this first annual State of Homeland Security speech – here at George Washington was because I want to make a special appeal to you.

I know you are not old enough to remember, but I bet you've seen images of the iconic posters of Uncle Sam, with his index finger pointed out, with the caption that read, "I Want You." Those recruitment posters encouraged a generation of Americans to enlist in the U.S. Army.

Now, I have always had deep respect for the military. As Governor of Arizona I was Commander-in-Chief of the Arizona National Guard. The Coast Guard is in the Department of Homeland Security, and I have had the honor not only of visiting troops in places like Afghanistan, Europe, and the Persian Gulf, but also talking to wounded warriors at Walter Reed Hospital. My Department today employs over 48,000 veterans, and through partnerships with the Department of Defense, and organizations like the American Legion, we'll be over 50,000 by the end of next year.

So, it is with the greatest respect that I say it's time for a new recruitment poster. Today, DHS wants you. We want a new generation of Americans to join the fight against the new generation of threats to our homeland.

DHS offers exciting careers in areas spanning law enforcement, intelligence, and counterterrorism, like intelligence analysts, policy experts, and international affairs specialists who help negotiate global agreements; Secret Service agents and investigators who are protecting our leaders, thwarting terror plots, fighting transnational crime, and breaking up human trafficking rings. We offer many opportunities for internships, and our various fellowship and scholarship programs attract top students from top academic programs across the country.

All of these positions – all of them – come with the opportunity not only to do great work in this exciting field, but to serve your nation as well.

I am often asked what I lose sleep about as homeland security secretary. Common sense would say that in an open society with 8,000 miles of land borders, and 95,000 miles of coastline, a terrorist could get through, or a homegrown one could succeed. A novel weapon could be deployed. A community could be temporarily overwhelmed. I'm concerned about all of those things.

But I want Americans to know what I do not lose sleep over. I do not worry about the core values that have guided our country for more than two centuries – the same values that the new citizens I naturalize are seeking to uphold: freedom, hard work, shared responsibility.

Even if our enemies were to succeed in pulling off an attack on the homeland, they will never succeed in undermining those enduring values.

In Afghanistan, there's a plaque that hangs in the residence of the American Ambassador. On it is a quote from President Woodrow Wilson that reads: "Let us set for ourselves a standard so high that it will be a glory to live up to it ...and then let us live up to it...and add a new laurel to the crown of America."

So, let us set a standard that high for homeland security. Let us strive for more partnerships; a bigger team; and an even greater willingness from our citizens to share responsibility for our collective security. And let us then meet that standard, and add a new laurel to the crown of America.

Thank you.

This page was last reviewed/modified on January 27, 2011.

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