

**OFFICE OF
THE DIRECTOR OF NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE**

**THE ASPEN INSTITUTE:
THE TERROR THREAT PICTURE AND COUNTERTERRORISM
STRATEGY**

**WELCOME:
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DIRECTOR, HOMELAND SECURITY PROGRAM,
THE ASPEN INSTITUTE**

**MODERATOR:
MICHAEL ISIKOFF,
CORRESPONDENT,
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**SPEAKER:
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CLARK ERVIN: Well, good morning, everyone. We'll get started. I think most of you in the audience have been with us from the beginning, but for those of you who joined us just today, I want to introduce myself. I'm Clark Ervin, the director of the Aspen Institute Homeland Security Program and the organizer of the first annual Aspen Security Forum.

The proceedings today, like yesterday, are being covered by C-SPAN for later broadcast. And I also want to welcome not just the C-SPAN viewers but also the listeners on Aspen Public Radio.

Before we get started with today's session, just two or three quick housekeeping matters. I mentioned yesterday that there is a survey, which is today on the tables. We are already hard at work planning next summer's second Aspen Security Forum, so please do complete those forms before you leave today so that we can better plan for that.

Secondly, as I did yesterday, I want to mention that a number of people who are featured throughout the forum are authors on books relating to homeland security and counterterrorism, including Mike Isikoff, and those books are available, thanks to the generosity of Explorer Bookstore, the local Aspen bookseller, right outside in the lounge. So please avail yourselves of that opportunity to read and learn more about the various issues we're discussing.

And then, third, there will be a number of schedule changes over the course of the day. I won't mention each of them now except the first one. Our featured luncheon speaker will be the ambassador of Pakistan to the United States, Ambassador Husain Haqqani, who will be in conversation with Massimo Calabresi of Time Magazine.

Now, with that let's get started today with the morning session, "The Terror Threat Picture and Counterterrorism Strategy." We all know that there are lots of vulnerabilities in this country and there are lots of threats against this country. And so, the key to protecting the nation, needless to say, is intelligence. And to talk about that issue today, I can think of no one better than our featured speaker.

To be in conversation with our featured speaker, we're delighted to have Mike Isikoff, who is well known to all of us. Mike is the national investigative correspondent for Newsweek Magazine, a long-time Newsweek correspondent, and he will soon, in two weeks he tells me, take up the very same position for NBC News.

Mike has written extensively on the United States government's war on terrorism, the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, other national issues and presidential politics. His book, "Hubris: The Inside Story of Spin, Scandal and the Selling of the Iraq War," co-written with David Corn, was an instant New York Times best-seller when it was published in September of 2006.

Since January, Mike has been a regular MSNBC contributor, making regular appearances on “The Rachel Maddow Show” and “Hardball with Chris Matthews,” and he’s also the co-author of the blog, Declassified Investigative Reporting in Real Time. Mike Isikoff.

MIKE ISIKOFF: Thank you, Clark. (Applause.) And we are really privileged to have one of the key figures in formulating U.S. government policy and implementing U.S. government policy on the very issues that are the subject of this forum. Mike Leiter is the director of the National Counterterrorism Center, which conducts strategic operational planning for counterterrorism activities.

He’s a former member of the Silberman-Robb WMD commission that looked into the errors in intelligence in the run-up to the Iraq war – a former federal prosecutor. I do notice in the little brief biography, Mike, they gave me, it left out two interesting things in your bio. Mike is one of – has a rare distinction. He’s one of only two people in the U.S. government on the national security side who has the same job in the Obama administration that he had in the Bush administration, Bob Gates being the other, Mike Leiter serving in that rare distinction.

And I also noticed they left off your academic background, which may or may not explain that Mike attended Columbia University, Harvard Law School, and then was president of the Harvard Law Review. And apparently somebody at the White House thought those were pretty impressive academic credentials.

You didn’t, before Columbia, spend any time at Occidental by any chance, did you? (Laughter.)

MIKE LEITER: No.

MR. ISIKOFF: Okay, all right.

MR. LEITER: I’d be president now if I had. (Laughter.)

MR. ISIKOFF: But just to start out, given that rare distinction you have, how is U.S. counterterrorism policy different under President Obama than it was under President Bush?

MR. LEITER: Well, first of all, let me just thank the Aspen Forum for holding this. It’s a pleasure to be here.

I actually think it is not an accident that I was asked to stay on by President Obama, and I’ll add a third name to your list, Stuart Levey, who’s the undersecretary of Treasury for terror finance.

I don’t think it’s an accident that the two of us and Secretary Gates were brought on because, frankly, although I think counterterrorism was given a very political name during the Bush administration. I would like to say that 95 percent of what I do on counterterrorism is utterly apolitical. Now, the problem is the 5 percent that people talk about takes up 95 percent of the air time.

But the vast majority of what we do in the counterterrorism community on a daily basis on the intelligence side, on the preventative side, on the protect/defend side is utterly non-controversial. So I don't think – I think Americans should take some comfort in the fact that even though we had a change of administration and I think a change in many policies, the counterterrorism policies, some of which certainly changed – clearly, President Obama made a very powerful statement, I think, in the early days of the executive order to close Guantanamo Bay, and other practices.

I hope people aren't disappointed – and I guess it depends in part on what part of the political spectrum you're on. Most of my work hasn't changed that much. Fundamentally, we are still trying to find people who are trying to hurt Americans, stop them using a variety of means, ranging from the Department of Defense overseas and the CIA to the FBI here and the Department of Homeland Security, and the nuts and bolts of that work has not changed tremendously.

I think the one area that we have tried to change very, very particularly is some of the messaging and some of the counter-radicalization programs, and I think President Obama came in early on wanting to push that piece of the counterterrorism puzzle, and I think we've had some success doing that.

MR. ISIKOFF: You have – the organizational chart for your job is a little interesting because although you are under the DNI, director of National Intelligence, you report directly to President Obama. Give us a little sense, if you can, of what's that like when you report to him about the state of the terror threat; how engaged he is, what particular things interest him that you brief him on.

MR. LEITER: I actually do have two bosses. The only thing better than one boss is having two bosses. (Laughter.) For intelligence, my boss remains the Director of National Intelligence. From my policy role it is to the president.

I can tell you, I first briefed President Obama when he was Sen. Obama and then as President-elect Obama, and I think although he was not thoroughly familiar with the workings of the counterterrorism community, from his previous roles, he has been acutely interested and involved from day one, even as a senator, on threats to the homeland.

He's incredibly focused on that. And we continue to do, and in fact it's been expanded since the Bush administration, every Tuesday – generally Tuesdays – we meet with the president. He calls in his entire counterterrorism team. That's John Brennan, his counterterrorism advisor, Secretary Gates, Secretary Clinton, Leon Panetta, Bob Mueller, me. And we lead all of those sessions off with an overview of all the threats that we see, with a particular focus of those on the homeland.

And, from moment one – and this goes well before 12/25 – the focus on the homeland from the president and the rest of the team has been quite intent. And these are usually about hour-long sessions and, again, they begin with the intelligence briefing and then they go into

broader policy issues. And he pushes us quite hard and I think he's only pushed us harder since 12/25, for obvious reasons.

MR. ISIKOFF: President Bush famously used to keep a list of top al-Qaida leaders on his desk at the Oval Office, and he would click off – check off when we nailed one and stayed focused on the ones we hadn't. Does President Obama have the same sort of intense interest in the individuals that we are going after with al-Qaida in the terrorism world or is it more policy-focused?

MR. LEITER: Well, you won't be surprised to see I'm a little hesitant to get too deep into exactly what each of the presidents think. I'm hoping to still have a job when I return to Washington. (Laughter.)

I think everyone has – everyone focuses on their job differently. Some are more on detail, some are on broader policy. And I have to tell you that I don't think it matters all that much, from my perspective. Our team – I think our team's job at NCTC, in working with FBI and CIA, is to focus on those details. I mean, that's what we have to be there for.

In different cases, President Bush, President Obama are interested in a different level of detail. My job is to tell him what detail matters to him and not force him to have to figure out when a detail matters and when it doesn't.

MR. ISIKOFF: Let's get a sense of what the overall threat picture looks like right now. Ambassador Holbrook said the other day that al-Qaida has been severely degraded. Rahm Emanuel, appearing a couple of weeks ago on "This Week" said about half of al-Qaida has been eliminated in the last 18 months, and yet, during that same time period, we have seen a rather dramatic increase in attacks on the U.S. homeland, including a number of individuals like Zazi and Shahzad and Abdulmutallab, who had been abroad and received training or encouragement.

Are we better off, safer, more secure that half of al-Qaida has been eliminated, if that's indeed true, or is the terrorism threat picture more perilous today than it was before?

MR. LEITER: I'm not saying this because I'm a lawyer, but it depends, and it's not simple. And simply saying we've killed a certain number, that is an important piece of the story. And with respect to al-Qaida's – traditional al-Qaida senior leadership in Pakistan, we have had some really incredible success, especially over the past 18 months.

And I think from our – it's our assessment that al-Qaida senior leadership in Pakistan is weaker today than it has been since 2001. Now, weaker doesn't mean harmless. Although they might not be as able to formulate extremely sophisticated and big plots, they clearly are, as illustrated by one of your examples, Najibullah Zazi, the individual who was driving from Denver to New York to work with some others, we assessed, to use IEDs on the New York City subway system.

It is still a meaningful and dangerous force. At the same time, what we have seen, which is, I think, most problematic to me and most difficult for the counterterrorism community, is a diversification of that threat.

We not only face al-Qaida senior leadership, we do face a troubling alignment of al-Qaida with some more traditional Pakistani militant groups in Pakistan, and, as is well known to this group and most Americans, the threat of Abdulmutallab that has highlighted the threat we see from al-Qaida in Yemen, the ongoing threat that we see from al-Qaida elements in East Africa, the threat –

So some of the most formal, organized threat from al-Qaida I think has, in fact, been diminished quite successfully. There has been a diversification of the threat and a move towards simpler, smaller efforts to attack the United States, which don't have quite the same level of threat in terms of the damage it might cause, but in the multiplicity of the threats, I think it is more challenging today.

And, I'm sorry, I've got to add one more thing and then I'll let you ask another question. We can't forget Fort Hood, which represents yet another angle of this, which is the homegrown extremist who might have contact with people abroad but is in the United States, has not traveled overseas. And that, again, is just another element of a very difficult picture we face.

MR. ISIKOFF: I want to get to all of that but I just want to drill down on one point, Rahm Emanuel's statement that about half of al-Qaida has been eliminated. How many people is that and how many are left in the other half? (Laughter.)

MR. LEITER: How many halves do we have? (Laughter.)

MR. ISIKOFF: Two.

MR. LEITER: I think Leon Panetta said on Sunday – and I agree with him – that in Afghanistan you have a certain number of relatively small number of al-Qaida, 50 to 100. I think we have, in Pakistan, a larger number. I think –

MR. ISIKOFF: About how many?

MR. LEITER: Upwards – more than 300, I would say. And I think the key has been not going after every foot soldier, although that can be very important. And as al-Qaida assists other groups like the Haqqani group and others to attack U.S. troops in Afghanistan, going against some of those foot soldiers can be very important.

But, most critically, from a defending-the-homeland perspective, obviously, is trying to decimate al-Qaida's leadership ranks. I think we've had a lot of success there. Clearly the death of al-Qaida's number three not long ago, Sheikh Saeed, is meaningful, but this is not going to be – I readily admit that this is not going to be a war won through body counts.

Body counts and taking out leadership are a part of it, but there are many, many other elements of this, ranging from effective aviation screening to equally, if not more important, trying to counter the ideology that is spawning this.

MR. ISIKOFF: That's interesting because the questions that I'm raising and others are discussing in this context are not new. Secretary Don Rumsfeld, when he was in office, wrote a very famous memo in October of 2003 about the global war on terrorism, posing the questions, are we winning or losing? And I pulled it out the other day in preparation for this and read – I wanted to ask you about a couple of points that Rumsfeld made.

“Today we are having mixed results with al-Qaida. Although we have put considerable pressure on them, nonetheless a great many remain at large. Today we lack metrics to know if we are winning or losing the global war on terror. Are we capturing, killing or deterring and dissuading more terrorists every day than the madrasahs and the radical clerics are recruiting, training and deploying against us?” What's the answer to that question seven years later?

MR. LEITER: I think on some fronts we're actually doing better, certainly better than we were in 2003. In 2003, we still saw some really worrying signs of the receptivity in many majority Muslim nations to al-Qaida's ideology, measured in part by the attraction of bin Laden as an individual and some of the tactics that were being used.

If we look at the polling hg public polling and other polling that we have over the past several years, in fact, the receptivity to those messages has in fact been declining. So I think, to some extent, globally al-Qaida's ideology is becoming less attractive.

Now, that being said, again, I think Fort Hood illustrates – in the case of Faisal Shahzad, the Times Square bomber – illustrates that the ideology clearly hasn't been defeated and it's made some movements into some other areas that we didn't see in 2003.

And although this violent al-Qaida ideology is still not attractive to the vast, vast majority of Muslims worldwide and certainly not the vast, vast majority of Muslims within the United States, it is attractive to a very, very small percentage, and that very, very small percentage can still have enormous repercussions if they chose to actually pursue violent means.

MR. ISIKOFF: Right, and isn't it true that in almost every one of the big cases where there's been attacks, attempted attacks on the U.S., the individuals involved – Shahzad, Hasan, Zazi – have said they were motivated to go abroad and learn how to attack the United States by the actions we are taking now in Afghanistan and in Pakistan to try to defeat al-Qaida there?

MR. LEITER: Well, I certainly will not try to argue that some of our actions have not led to some people being radicalized. I think that's a given, and in fact that's something we have to keep in mind to try to mitigate the negative effects of that.

But, all that being said, I also think that, at least from my perspective, it was a given that post-9/11 it was absolutely an imperative for the United States to invade Afghanistan and try to root out al-Qaida.

Now, again, we have to recognize that those sorts of actions can have negative effects globally here within the United States in terms of radicalization. That doesn't mean you don't do it. It means that you craft a fuller strategy to explain why you're doing that and try to minimize the likelihood that individuals are going to be radicalized.

MR. ISIKOFF: I think that if the average American who doesn't live this world were here today –

MR. LEITER: I wish I were them. (Chuckles.)

MR. ISIKOFF: – their first question would be about the guy you mentioned before, Osama bin Laden. CIA Director Panetta was on “This Week” the other day and said, we haven't had any good intelligence on the whereabouts of Osama bin Laden since the early 2000s, since effectively he fled Tora Bora in late 2001.

But then he went on to say, “All I can tell you is that he's in the tribal areas. That's all we know, that he's located in that vicinity.” If we haven't had any good intelligence in seven years on his whereabouts, how do we know he's in the tribal areas of Pakistan?

MR. LEITER: In intelligence, if you know something for sure, it's probably not very meaningful intelligence because everybody knows it. What you do is try to piece together bits of information to answer hard problems that are mysteries and unknowns.

In the case of bin Laden, I would defer to Leon on his assessment and his description. I would say that you can have indicators of where someone is without knowing exactly where he is, and I think that is perfectly consistent with Leon's statements.

MR. ISIKOFF: But is it possible he's someplace else?

MR. LEITER: It is possible he is somewhere else. I think all the indicators are he is in the tribal region.

MR. ISIKOFF: And not in a city in Pakistan or outside of Pakistan in, say, Yemen?

MR. LEITER: Our assessment is it's most likely that he's in the tribal areas of Pakistan.

MR. ISIKOFF: And why is it, given all the resources that the United States government has at its command and all the years you and others have spent trying to find him, we essentially have no clue where he is?

MR. LEITER: Well, I think saying he's in the tribal areas suggests that we do have some clue. (Laughter.)

MR. ISIKOFF: A clue, right.

MR. LEITER: But nice try. (Laughter.)

MR. ISIKOFF: Or that we can't figure out where in the tribal areas he is.

MR. LEITER: Now, this sounds really silly and I don't mean to make light of this – finding him I think is a national security imperative, but he's hiding, and he's hiding in an area of the world that is unbelievably difficult for the U.S. and for the government of Pakistan to operate.

If you look at the Olympic Park Bomber, who hid in the mountains of Appalachia for many years, it took us a long time to find him as well. The world is an awfully big place and unfortunately, thanks to many movies like "Enemy of the State" and the like, frankly Americans imagine that we have far greater capabilities to zoom in on any geographic coordinates anywhere in the world and simply find an individual. If it were, my job would be a whole lot easier.

MR. ISIKOFF: Let me switch gears a little bit. We have a lot to cover – Afghanistan. President Bush used to say that Iraq is the central front in the war on terror. Is Afghanistan the central front in the war on terror?

MR. LEITER: I think against al-Qaida senior leadership, Afghanistan and Pakistan – and I'm going to not use them interchangeably but they're such an interconnected front that that is the central front against al-Qaida senior leadership. I think there are other fronts that are very, very important as well.

MR. ISIKOFF: Even though there are maybe perhaps less than 50 al-Qaida operatives in Afghanistan?

MR. LEITER: As I said, I include Afghanistan and Pakistan in the same breath because if you look at that tribal region, that boundary between Afghanistan and Pakistan is not particularly meaningful.

MR. ISIKOFF: What are the operational ties between the Taliban that we're fighting in Afghanistan and al-Qaida leadership in Pakistan?

MR. LEITER: That's a very fair question, and the ties are fluid and changing. As a general matter, as you know, the Afghan Taliban obviously did provide comfort, support and a safe haven for al-Qaida pre-9/11. So historically there are those linkages.

As al-Qaida senior leadership moved into Pakistan, the nature of those relationships may have changed to some extent, but we still see al-Qaida as being deeply entwined with a number of groups to include the Afghan Taliban, the Pakistani Taliban and other networks in those tribal regions. They're not the same but they are closely related and rely on one another.

MR. ISIKOFF: Obviously there is a great deal of debate about U.S. government policy in Afghanistan right now and a lot of uncertainty about where things are going to be in July 11 when the president has said we will begin to withdraw troops.

Adm. Mullen, when he was here the other night, said, how many and from where will depend entirely on conditions on the ground, and made it clear that this is a policy that is going to be reassessed continually.

If the reassessment determines that we are not making progress in defeating the Taliban and the strategy just isn't working, how big of a setback would it be for your efforts against al-Qaida and terrorism and its associates if the United States began a substantial withdrawal from Afghanistan?

MR. LEITER: Well, I have to – I can really only answer part of that question. I know you try to phrase it focusing on the counterterrorism mission, but I do want to start with afghan policy. You had the right person up here a couple of days ago with Chairman Mullen –

MR. ISIKOFF: Right.

MR. LEITER: – speaking to that. And I want to be very careful because I don't have a full window, because it's not part of my mission, into all of the decisions and discussions that go on with respect to troops and the overall war effort in Afghanistan.

From a counterterrorism perspective, it is clear that al-Qaida senior leadership wants a safe haven and needs a safe haven. It needs that to recruit individuals. It needs it to train them. It needs it to organize and it needs it to deploy them. That's what they did in the case of Najibullah Zazi. He went to Pakistan. He trained with them. He deployed and tried to attack the United States.

Were Afghanistan to allow – whatever the government was in Afghanistan – were the government to allow – or even if they didn't allow; if they had no ability to control that safe haven and allow al-Qaida to come into Afghanistan, that clearly gives al-Qaida a freedom of movement that would be extremely problematic from a counterterrorism perspective.

MR. ISIKOFF: And if al-Qaida operatives began, in any substantial number, to return to Afghanistan, crossing that huge border, with all the drone technology and surveillance technology that we've been using to make pinpoint strikes against them in Pakistan, wouldn't we be able to catch them as they begin to return to Afghanistan and pick them off as we do, rather – at least prevent them from creating the same sort of – or having the same sort of safe haven that they did before?

MR. LEITER: I think it's fair to argue that for them to recreate the safe haven they had before 9/11 would be difficult. The question becomes whether or not they would still be able to recreate some sort of safe haven that was still meaningful to their operations against the West.

And I think what Adm. Mullen would say, and it's certainly my view, having boots on the ground vastly, vastly advances your ability to disrupt terrorist networks. And the fact is that having boots on the ground in Afghanistan today makes Afghanistan a far less attractive safe haven than are the tribal areas of Pakistan.

MR. ISIKOFF: Christmas Day. Obviously you were in the middle of a great deal of political debate about the failures of intelligence that allowed Abdulmutallab to almost set off the bomb on the plane to Detroit. The Senate Intelligence Committee recently did a report reviewing what happened there and they found that there were systemic failures across the intelligence community which contributed to the failure to identify the threat posed by Abdulmutallab.

Specifically, the NCTC, your organization, was not organized adequately to fulfill its mission. Your organization, they point out, was set up as the primary organization in the U.S. government for analyzing and integrating all intelligence. And it says, NCTC's directorate of intelligence failed to connect the reporting on Abdulmutallab. What went wrong?

MR. LEITER: We clearly didn't perform the way we wanted to and we hoped to. And there has been an incredible amount of not just soul-searching but effort to change the things that went wrong since then. Now, I'll note as a bit of bureaucratic self-protection, the Senate Committee actually found 14 mistakes that occurred. Two of those 14 were NCTC and 12 others.

And I think what it meant – my interpretation of systemic – I think there are two ways of looking at systemic; one, that everything broke or that pieces across the system broke, which meant the system as a whole didn't work, and I believe it was the latter. There were a series of discrete errors that made it less likely – and in fact, we didn't stop Abdulmutallab from getting on that plane.

But I have to say, it is not just an intelligence challenge, as I think the forum talked about yesterday. Intelligence can do so much. We also have real shortcomings and areas that we have to improve on – aircraft screening and the like.

The bottom line was that although we had identified Abdulmutallab as a known or suspected terrorist, we didn't connect all the information about Abdulmutallab to get him to a level where he wouldn't be allowed to board an airplane. That is in part an intelligence failure. It is part driven by the pre-12/25 policy decisions about how we should or should not affect people's civil liberties in terms of boarding an aircraft based on how much intelligence we have or don't have about –

MR. ISIKOFF: Explain that. What policy decisions are you referring to?

MR. LEITER: Sure. The policy decisions – and this actually – this is not meant to bash either administration because, frankly, it involved both President Bush and President Obama's administration – we knew before 12/25 that Abdulmutallab was a known or suspected terrorist. His name was entered into a database that NCTC has called a Terrorist Identities Datamart Environment.

What did not occur was – again, not all of the intelligence was connected regarding him, so he was not placed in no-fly status, which means he checks in and the airline person says, sorry, you can't get on the plane.

The policy decision underlying that was the degree of intelligence required to put someone on the no-fly list and the standards that we had set up previous to 12/25 were such that more intelligence was required than I think we now, looking back on it, think is appropriate to keep the American people safe.

So he was not put on the no-fly list. And, frankly, even had we connected all the intelligence, it's not clear he ever would have been put on the no-fly list. And that's one of the policies that have changed subsequent to 12/25.

MR. ISIKOFF: And so what is the threshold now for getting on the no-fly list?

MR. LEITER: The threshold is not an entirely public one, so I can't discuss it, but I'll say that it is a lower threshold with fewer indicia of involvement in terrorist organizations required to keep someone or get someone on the no-fly list today.

MR. ISIKOFF: There's a lot of discussion at this forum about information sharing, and Fran Townsend, who was homeland security advisor under President Bush, said it was pretty shocking to her to discover that the same sort of mistakes in lack of information sharing that everybody focused on after 9/11 were still occurring in the run-up to Christmas Day, and that agencies were still reluctant to share information. They were still holding back. How is that possible, and can you assure everybody here that it isn't still continuing?

MR. LEITER: Frankly, I'm sorry Fran said that because I think she's wrong. And I have utmost respect for Fran. She's a close friend. And if she's out there, we can talk about it later. But the fact is the information sharing challenges we saw on 9/11 are not the same information sharing challenges we had with Abdulmutallab.

Previous to 9/11 we had a set of rules which prohibited certain sharing between the FBI and CIA. We had a reluctance on the part of CIA to share with FBI and vice-versa. We had a series of databases that were not interconnected, so when the CIA knew about operatives overseas, that information did not get to the State Department, did not get to the FBI.

These were, if you go back to the 9/11 Commission report – which, believe me, I've done since 12/25 – those were the failings we saw. That is simply not the case in 12/25. Those are not the failings we saw.

In fact, that Abdulmutallab was a known or suspected terrorist was available on a database created post-9/11 that was available to more than 10,000 people in the U.S. government. That information was available to the State Department, the FBI, the CIA, the National Security Agency. Across the U.S. government knew that he was a known or suspected terrorist. It was in that database created to solve some of the 9/11 problems.

Although there were some failings in individual agencies providing bits of data to other agencies, first of all, they're of mixed material value. But, second, those mistakes were very different from 9/11. They were not policy choices that things shouldn't be shared. They were

literally silly technical glitches that the wrong address was on something, and that's very different. That is a failure of omission versus a failure of commission.

Now, you can have the same tragic consequences but you have to understand the difference in those because they demand different responses after the fact. So I flatly reject the view that these are the same problems. There are still problems and there are still challenges to information sharing, but we have come a long way and we have to look at these things very precisely to get the right solutions now.

MR. ISIKOFF: The Christmas Day incident brought a lot of attention on a Yemeni cleric, Anwar al-Awlaki, who was said to have encouraged and inspired Abdulmutallab in his attempted attack. He had also had communications with Hasan, the Fort Hood shooter.

First of all, how much of an operational role did Awlaki play in that attempted attack, and how much of an operational role does he play today in al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula?

MR. LEITER: You referred to two. Which one was –

MR. ISIKOFF: I'm sorry, al-Awlaki.

MR. LEITER: Hasan or Abdulmutallab?

MR. ISIKOFF: Abdulmutallab.

MR. LEITER: Abdulmutallab.

MR. ISIKOFF: Yeah.

MR. LEITER: We assess that Awlaki had a direct operational role.

MR. ISIKOFF: Directed him to blow up the airplane?

MR. LEITER: I'm not going to go into greater detail. He had a direct operational role.

MR. ISIKOFF: It has been widely reported that Awlaki is on the CIA's hit list. CIA Director Panetta all but confirmed that when asked on "This Week." He said, he's a terrorist we're going to consider and we're going to treat him as a terrorist.

He's also a U.S. citizen. Does it give anybody pause in the upper ranks of the Obama administration that we are targeting U.S. citizens for murder, especially when, as in Awlaki's case, he hasn't even been charged with a crime?

MR. LEITER: Well, you threw in a lot of words – and I put my legal hat on for a second – which I think are flatly wrong words.

MR. ISIKOFF: Which ones?

MR. LEITER: “Murder” is a wrong word.

MR. ISIKOFF: Okay.

MR. LEITER: There’s killing and there’s murder and the two are not interchangeable.

MR. ISIKOFF: Fair enough.

MR. LEITER: I think – without speaking directly to the case of Awlaki, I think it certainly gives me pause. I think it gives – I know it gives Leon pause. I am quite confident it gives President Obama pause, it gives Secretary Gates pause.

Anyone who is involved in life and death decisions, it gives them pause in issuing orders or directives to go out and end an individual’s life, U.S. citizen or not. These are the greatest of decisions that the president, secretary of defense, Leon Panetta have to make, and to which NCTC’s intelligence contributes.

I think the issue of a U.S. person certainly adds additional complexities to that decision-making process, but I don’t believe that being a U.S. person is dispositive of what the U.S. government should do in terms of self-defense.

MR. ISIKOFF: But what is the standard that you use for targeting the U.S. citizen, and what is the decision-making process for deciding somebody who, again, hasn’t been indicted in the United States, hasn’t been charged with any crime, there’s no public evidence that’s been laid out against them, what is the standard, what’s the process for targeting that individual?

MR. LEITER: Well, just to be clear, the U.S. government, through the Department of Defense, goes out and attempts to target and kill people, a lot of people who haven’t been indicted. So again, I don’t think that’s –

MR. ISIKOFF: But you point out he’s a U.S. person.

MR. LEITER: Sure. I don’t think it’s dispositive. I think it may be meaningful whether or not someone has been indicted but it doesn’t decide the issue.

I think Harold Koh – who, last I checked, was not generally viewed as a far-rightwing nut in the legal community, former dean of Yale Law School, currently the legal advisor to the Department of State – gave a talk several months ago now, talking about the legality of U.S. operations targeting individuals in the name of self-defense.

I think that gave a cogent, convincing argument from an individual again who does not have a long history of being known as someone who is willy-nilly about targeting individuals, including U.S. persons.

MR. ISIKOFF: But I should say, just to continue one more beat on this, when –

MR. LEITER: Keep going. (Laughter.)

MR. ISIKOFF: Right. When the Bush administration declared Jose Padilla, a U.S. citizen, an enemy combatant, stripped him of all his legal rights and threw him in a military brig, there was an enormous outcry from the civil liberties community – from civil liberty groups and others – about that action and, essentially, the executive branch of the government declaring an American citizen an un-person.

Here, the Obama administration is going one better than that. They're saying, we can kill this guy. We can take him out, which is, arguably, a more extreme action than what was done to Jose Padilla. And there has been very little public debate about how that decision was made. Doesn't the government at least owe a more fulsome explanation of how it's reaching these decisions?

MR. LEITER: You misused "fulsome" but I'll answer that question anyway.

MR. ISIKOFF: Okay – fuller. (Laughter.)

MR. LEITER: I've got to get a few counterpunches back here.

MR. ISIKOFF: Go ahead.

MR. LEITER: Listen, I absolutely agree with you. These are tough issues that require a full and open debate. Now, that may not mean that there's a full and open debate about an individual and what goes on with that individual because there are sensitive sources and methods involved. But certainly the policy decisions about the ways in which we should or we should not use force demand a full and open discussion.

And, again, I think it's part of my appearance here. I'm trying to answer the questions –

MR. ISIKOFF: Right.

MR. LEITER: – to the extent I can. I think it's part of the reason that Harold Koh when out and gave his talk to begin a discussion on the legal side of this about why this is not contrary to international law. These are big decisions and they're weighty.

But, we have to – I'm not asking people to accept as a given, but I will tell you, from my perspective as the director of the National Counterterrorism Center, if someone like Anwar al-Awlaki is responsible for part of an operation to try to kill more than 300 people over the city of Detroit, I think it would be wholly irresponsible for individuals like me, for Leon Panetta, for Secretary Gates and ultimately the president not to at least think about and potentially direct all the elements of national power to try to defend the American people.

I think that's what the American people expect. I think you have to have a process and a level of trustworthiness in that process that people are going to do that thoughtfully and within

the bounds of the laws and constitutional principles. But ultimately for us not to have that discussion and not ultimately, if we have to make that decision, for me would be reprehensible.

MR. ISIKOFF: There were riots last year among the Uighurs in China. A hundred-fifty-six people were killed. The Chinese government said that these riots were inspired and encouraged by Rebiya Kadeer, a Uighur dissident who lives in Northern Virginia. They called Kadeer a terrorist and say she is leading to violence and murder of its citizens.

If the Chinese government were to apply the same logic and lodge a missile strike against Rebiya Kadeer in Northern Virginia, what would the United States government reaction be, and how would we distinguish that act from what we are doing in targeting individuals in the drone campaign?

MR. LEITER: I think there are many ways to distinguish it. In part, it deals with the relations that we have with the host government, and I think that without getting into some very sensitive operations, the U.S. government continues to go out and target individuals that we think are actively plotting.

Individuals aren't targeted because they have bad ideas. Individuals aren't targeted because they inspire others to do things. Individuals are targeted because they are involved in operations targeting the United States and our homeland.

MR. ISIKOFF: Last question. As a journalist, I have good days when I break a story and beat my competition. I have bad days when I get beaten on a story. As the director of the National Counterterrorism Center, tell us, what's a good day for you? (Laughter.) When do you drive home at night saying, god, I really accomplished something today; I feel good about what I did? And give us a couple of examples. (Laughter.)

MR. LEITER: I have to admit, a day in Aspen is definitely way at the top of the list. (Laughter, applause).

Listen, there are a couple of different levels to that. Absolutely first and foremost – and this maybe sounds the most pat but it really is the deepest answer – a good day is there is no attack. You know, no innocent person gets killed by a terrorist plot. That's a good day. That's ultimately why we're there.

Now, you're going to have a lot of bad days too. You're not always going to have a bad day that culminates in an attack but you're going to have a lot of bad days where you just don't know what's going on. You're looking at all the intelligence, you're trying to figure it out, and you know something is going on but you don't know what it is, ranging from where bin Laden is to where the next attack is coming from – Anwar Awlaki in Yemen or al-Qaida senior leadership.

So the good days are those where you feel like you have suddenly made a leap forward, either within the bureaucracy or breaking something on the intelligence front that is really meaningful. A couple of examples:

After 12/25, which was a really tough day for me and obviously for the American people and for our organization because we felt like we had failed. We had failed. We really looked deep, as I mentioned before, about what could we do to reduce the likelihood of that happening in the future. Accepting that we're never going to be perfect, what could we do?

And we created these teams that are now dedicated to diving into the most granular of intelligence. And I'll tell you that since those teams were created back in, I guess, February – this doesn't sound exciting or sexy, but time after time I've had the 27-year-old analyst find a piece of data in the CIA database and a piece of data in the FBI data and a piece of data in the DHS data and say, look, this guy, who we never thought of as being important at all, we need to investigate him because he was talking to him and he traveled there, et cetera, et cetera.

And then handing that off to the FBI or the CIA to pursue an investigation, that's a good day. It's a day that I know, without NCTC, there is a better chance that that person might have been able to kill an innocent person later on. That's a really good day.

I'll give you one other thing that is a good day. When people come to the National Counterterrorism Center and say, can you help us with X and Y? People don't say that all the time? Five years ago people almost never said that. Five years ago when the NCTC was created, people said, who, why? We don't need that. We don't need to help them.

And what I've seen more and more over the past four years – almost four years that I've been in NCTC, and especially in the past six months, which I hope people take some comfort from, is more and more, people are coming to us, whether it's the FBI or CIA or NSA, Department of Defense or Homeland Security or State, and saying, can you help us with X, or can you help us work with that agency over there more effectively because we're not having much luck, that to me is a great day because it is that sort of cooperation, which we absolutely need.

Those 14 failings in Abdulmutallab's case, as I said, two are us. The others – all the other three-letter agencies that sit in Washington, D.C., without us working together, especially with the evolution of this threat, as I said, to a more diverse threat, Internet-based threat, homegrown extremism; without these agencies cooperating, it's not going to happen and we're not going to be successful.

And we've got a long way to go but I truly believe that people asking us and others for help is the most telling sign that folks are really committed to this mission and not to protecting their bureaucratic turf. And to me – now you get a sense of how depressing my days are – that's a really good day. (Laughter.)

MR. ISIKOFF: Thank you. That's interesting. We have some time for questions from the many experts in the audience. Catherine, start off.

Q: Catherine Herridge, FOXNews. I want to pick up on your point. You said that yourself, the CIA director want to use all of the tools at your disposal to, you know, get on the case of Anwar al-Awlaki in Yemen.

We've just finished a long investigation, and one of the things we found in our reporting is that when Awlaki lived here in the United States, he was picked up three times for soliciting prostitutes and he was also picked up for loitering around a school in San Diego.

And I don't understand why the U.S. government is not more active putting out this information to discredit him and also making the booking photos of him available because I think this would do a great deal to undermine him with his supporters.

MR. LEITER: Well, Catherine, you're doing a good enough job of it already. We don't need to. (Laughter.) Well, that's only partially a joke. The U.S. government clearly has a challenge in terms of messaging. We didn't talk about it. I mentioned it up front.

Again, the single biggest change to me from the Obama administration – from the Bush administration and the Obama administration, is a greater focus, still not perfect but a greater focus on counter-radicalization and messaging rather than the hard elements of national power, the softer elements of national power; on the high level, the Cairo speech and the like.

But we have a challenge and that challenge is the credibility of the U.S. government in many circles might not be perfect, and that's just here in Aspen. (Laughter.) Globally, I think we are – I think President Obama is rebuilding part of that credibility but we still have a long way to go.

So frankly, we want to be very careful about putting out information which I think might sway some people's views because we shouldn't – I don't think we want the U.S. government to sort of be in an open slander campaign against someone.

I think it's relevant information that you're getting out there. I'm pleased that it's public because it is describing an individual like Awlaki who I think is farthest as someone can be from the genuine, peaceful and very meaningful and important tenets of the Koran and Islam. So I think it's good.

But, fundamentally, I want Anwar Awlaki stopped, not because he solicited prostitutes or anything else. I want him stopped because he's involved in operations of trying to kill Americans, and that's the message that I think, from a U.S. government perspective, is most important even though others are relevant and meaningful.

MR. ISIKOFF: Over here, in the middle. Yes, ma'am. No; you, sir. Microphone, middle.

Q: Bill Gatus (ph), Areté Associates. Michael, first and foremost, heartfelt thanks – I mean that – for all that you do.

A question: Just a few years ago the former DNI, if you will, the DCI, George Tenet, referred to Hezbollah as the A team of terrorists. In the two days we've been here, we've heard nothing mentioned about them, and I was wondering if you could share, at this level, your assessment of where Hezbollah is at and what we may face in the future. Thanks.

MR. LEITER: Hezbollah – we still do spend time on Hezbollah, so the fact that we haven't discussed it, I do want to make clear that the U.S. government and NCTC spend a significant amount of time and manpower looking at it and studying it, because, as you know well, Bill, Hezbollah has killed more Americans than any other terrorist group other than al-Qaida.

Hezbollah really has evolved over the past several years as it has taken a greater role in Lebanese politics. Its calculus in terms of pursuing terrorist activities I think has changed significantly. So although, I think – I would still agree with George that in terms of its capabilities for surveillance and operations and weapons and all those things, it is far, far more sophisticated than al-Qaida, and in that sense far more able.

Frankly, it doesn't prioritize and hasn't chosen to attack the U.S. and the homeland in the same way that al-Qaida has. So I'm pretty confident that if Hezbollah set its mind to it, it could do something much more complex than Faisal Shahzad in Times Square, but because of its competing interests and its priorities, that is not what Hezbollah has chosen to do, and in that sense it remains an important priority for me but not my number-one priority, which is stopping attacks here.

MR. ISIKOFF: David?

Q: Thank you. David Sanger from The New York Times.

Back in the pre-9/11 days we saw a fair bit of interest that al-Qaida had in obtaining weapons of mass destruction. There's the famous stories of the Pakistani scientists who went up to go visit the leadership.

It seemed to have been a pretty disorganized effort on the part of al-Qaida at that time, and since that moment they've been under greater pressure, but they've also had a lot of time to think about this. What's your current assessment about both their interest and their abilities, and the same for their associates?

MR. LEITER: A very good question, David. I hate to ever do a talk on terrorism threats and not at least touch on weapons of mass destruction.

First of all, I guess I disagree a little bit with some of your characterization of their pre-9/11 efforts. In fact, I think their efforts to obtain anthrax were not really pedestrian. They were moving in a direction that I think ultimately might well have been successful.

One of the really important pieces about the pressure that we had put on al-Qaida senior leadership in Pakistan, in my view, is that they have been unable, or we assessed they have been

unable, to have a formal, concerted effort to develop weapons of mass destruction. So although, again, they remain a threat, like Najibullah Zazi that we saw last summer, their ability to develop a sophisticated weapon of mass destruction I think has been greatly diminished because of our actions in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

All that being said, I think we still see within al-Qaida and within al-Qaida affiliates elsewhere in the world, a continued interest in at least small-scale kind of cruder weapons of mass destruction, potentially chemical weapons but also simple biological weapons – ricin and the like.

So that interest is still there. I think the level of sophistication with which the organizations are pursuing it has diminished in large part because of our action in Pakistan.

Q: (Off mike.)

MR. LEITER: Is that a permitted follow-up? (Laughter.)

On the nuclear side, again, I think on the formal nuclear front, we have diminished their ability to do that because it requires some infrastructure, although less than we might imagine. Certainly on the radiological dispersal device – something that disperses radiological material without producing yield, that's a pretty simple tool. And I think in that sense I'm not just worried about al-Qaida and Pakistan or Yemen developing that capability. That's obviously a concern I have among homegrown terrorists.

MR. ISIKOFF: Over here, front row.

Q: Bushinsky (ph), AGT Technologies. I was wondering, what is the current situation as far as the Syrian border and it hubbing, at least in the past, al-Qaida operatives? And second question concerning Sheikh Mohammed's upcoming trial, how do you view it is a platform for exposing ideology and maybe operations of al-Qaida?

MR. LEITER: With respect to the Syrian border, I think another front that we have made incredible success on – I mean, the fact that we barely even mentioned it other than one of your questions – Iraq. There was a time when al-Qaida in Iraq was a really potent force.

Now, there are still huge challenges, and Iraq has a long way to go before it can secure its own borders, and there is still the potential for threats from those borders emanating out, but we're in a vastly different place and a far more positive place than we were in 2005, 2006.

Now, that obviously relates to the Syrian border and the role Syria has played. I think Syria continues to play a very problematic role with respect to Hezbollah, that Bill Gattius asked about, and I think Syria itself sees the threat of Sunni extremism and al-Qaida-associated elements in a way that at least internally it is interested in trying to defeat that threat or minimize that threat.

With respect to the trial of Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, I think this will be an important opportunity. However the trial is held, wherever the trial is held – I'm not touching that one – (laughter) – it is going to be a particularly important time to show the completely utter vapid nature of al-Qaida's ideology, with no positive outcome for Muslims in the traditional caliphate or anywhere else in the world.

I think we'll be quite clear that it is an ideology which is pursuing death and destruction and very little of anything positive, and I hope that the trial exposes that. And I think we are absolutely a strong enough democracy that whatever vituperative drivel comes out of his mouth, that the truth will actually win out.

MR. ISIKOFF: The decision on this has been delayed repeatedly. Are we going to get one? And where and when do you expect the trial to finally take place?

MR. LEITER: Is there a question from the audience? (Laughter.) You can't just jump back in. (Laughter.)

MR. ISIKOFF: I'm taking the moderator's prerogative.

MR. LEITER: I don't know and I defer to the Department of Justice.

MR. ISIKOFF: Right here.

Q: Hi. Dave Trulio, Raytheon Company. Industry is very well represented here today with an eye towards how we in industry can better support you going forward. I was hoping you could briefly share with us what's worked, what hasn't worked, what some of your needs are going forward, particularly in light of post-Christmas Day needs. Thank you.

MR. LEITER: Sure. I think it's a great question, and industry is a huge part of solving some of our toughest challenges. The single-toughest challenge we have is I have more data than I know what to do with. Everyone talks about Abdulmutallab and, hey, Director Leiter, how could you not have you hair on fire that the father walked into the embassy and said his son might be an extremist? I mean, isn't that front and center on your desk?

Well, I don't know if this will depress you or not, but as I have told the U.S. Congress, that wouldn't rise to the top 1,000 things I see in a month. Why? Every day, routine day – today, tomorrow, every day thereafter – the National Counterterrorism Center receives between 8 (thousand) and 10,000 pieces of counterterrorism information a day – between 8 (thousand) and 10,000 individual reports.

Within those 8 (thousand) and 10,000 individual reports are roughly 10,000 names a day – 10,000 names every day. Every day we put between 300 and 400 people on the watchlist every day, and every day we see upwards of 40-plus specific threats and plots, not my son's an extremist but specific plots – bombs are going to go off here, today, tomorrow, whenever it is – and that does not include Iraq and Afghanistan.

So I give that to you because it gives some context to try and define the meaningful pieces of data that are buried within thousands and thousands, millions of pieces of other data. And people like to say it's like finding a needle in a haystack. I disagree. I think it's trying to find a needle in a pile of needles covered by a haystack. It's not easy.

We need industry – and we have some great industry partners already but also working with organizations like the National Labs and other real experts within government, think tanks, to help us use all of that data in a meaningful way. As I would describe it, help the data find the data.

If I'm an analyst sitting at NCTC and someone says, hey, there's a Nigerian named Umar Farouk who is coming tomorrow to bomb the United States in an airplane, it's not that hard. I type in "Umar Farouk, airplane" and I'm going to get some intelligence. That's a relatively easy case. The hard case is when you have no idea. But there are disparate pieces of information in different databases, and we have to let that data find the data so then the human eyes, the human brain can be alerted about that's where you should be looking.

And what I really need from industry is not just help in solving that data correlation problem, but I need help from industry so that I can do it in a way that the American people feel like their fundamental privacy and civil liberties are still being protected. That's the challenge.

I think American people want me to do this, but I think they want me to do it in a way that they don't feel like every bit of their personal data every time they use their credit card is getting checked on by someone at NCTC or CIA or elsewhere. So I need industry to think hard and I need industry to work with organizations that focus on civil liberties and the protection of those civil liberties to come up with solutions to get both of those missions accomplished simultaneously.

MR. ISIKOFF: David.

Q: David Ignatius from the Washington Post. A few years ago I can remember officials from your agency and the FBI saying that the U.S. was fortunate compared to, say, Britain or European countries in that our homegrown, our domestic Muslim populations were generally well-assimilated, comfortable here, didn't pose the kind of threat that was seen in Britain and Europe.

That seems to be changing some, when you look at the Nidal Hasan case and a series of others, and I would ask you to speak to that question, whether we have a homegrown problem of growing dimension and what you're doing about that in terms of messaging and policy.

MR. LEITER: Great question, David. Thank you. I think it is changing but I'd stick by those statements from two or three years ago still that we don't have the same scale of problem as do some of our European allies, in particular the United Kingdom, but it has gotten worse.

First of all, our Muslim populations remain very different from, say, the Muslim populations in the United Kingdom. They remain far better integrated, far more successful

socioeconomically, far less isolated, far more involved in U.S. politics, far less concerned with overseas politics.

That being said, we have some worrying signs in some communities and then independent of individual communities. The community challenge – and I want to stress in this point, the vast majority of Somali-Americans are absolutely the most wonderful, loyal, hard-working Americans that you could ever imagine. I can't stress that enough.

But there is a very, very, very small subsection of that population which tends to be isolated, not as advanced socioeconomically, and we have seen signs within that community of some radicalization challenges. And, as you know well, David, we have, in the dozens of Americans, many of them Somali-Americans, who have returned to East Africa to fight in Somalia.

So that community is problematic. Let me rephrase that. I'm sorry I said that. Small segments of that community are worrisome. The community is not problematic. The community, in fact, is part of the solution.

The second, more difficult and troubling sign but which I think is still different from what we've seen in the U.K., is some homegrown radicalization which is not easily categorized or classified by ethnic group or background or even age, you know, from "Jihad Jane" to Nidal Hasan, and they tend to be fairly isolated. They tend not to grow out of mosques or splinter mosques. They tend to be often flying solo, or at least a very small group.

But what has enabled that, to a great extent, is the evolution of the Internet over the past several years. And the interactive nature of the Internet has provided a social structure and a social environment for these individuals where they can become radicalized even though they don't have a mass of like-minded-thinking individuals around them in their community because they can find that community, as Nidal Husan and others have, online. And that, to me, is what has changed.

And what are we doing about it? This does require a totally different set of tools than what most, quote, unquote, "counterterrorism" folks think about. There has been some great outreach, I think, over the past five or six years by, in part, the FBI, but that can only get you so far because the FBI ultimately is a law enforcement intelligence organization, and that's not where outreach really has to come from.

There has been some very good outreach from organizations like the civil rights/civil liberties office of DHS, but in my view what we need – and I think I know President Obama believes this; we talked about this the very first time I briefed him – is a firm commitment to a far broader set of programs that are engaging with these communities.

And we're not engaging with these communities because they're terrorists; we're engaging with these communities with a set of social programs to make them feel a true part of American society. So their communities can make sure that they are not victimized by the likes of Anwar Awlaki online and their kids don't end up in Yemen, Pakistan or Somalia, because I

guarantee you, that family that fled fighting in Mogadishu in the '90s, the last thing they were hoping for in the American dream was their 18-year-old son returning to die a suicide bomber in Somalia.

So what we have to do is have a level of engagement with these communities far beyond the traditional counterterrorism community – the Department of Education, Health and Human Services and the like – and we have to do some of this online as well to engage those communities and help them solve what is really a threat to their American dream.

MR. ISIKOFF: We have time for one more. This woman right here.

Q: I'm Zeda Fader (sp). I'm a U.S. citizen and a card-carrying member of ACLU. I'm concerned about the potential for abuse of targeting U.S. citizens. A policeman needs a court order to enter a house. Is there any – does the U.S. government, if they decide somebody is a threat, need any kind of involvement of the courts in order to go after that person?

MR. LEITER: Thanks for the question. A couple of points. A police officer absolutely does, in most cases, need a court order to go into a house. A police officer doesn't need a court order to defend himself if a person he pulls over pulls out a gun. He has a right of self-defense.

And in the same regard, the U.S. government, I believe, has that same right of self-defense internationally. But, there is a series – there are a series of oversight mechanisms, which I hope give you some greater comfort that there isn't abuse in the system. But I understand, and I think it's totally appropriate for you to be dubious and ask these questions.

First, for much of what we do – in fact, almost all of what we do in terms of electronic surveillance involving U.S. citizens and the like, there is in fact a court, the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court, that was created out of the Church and Pike commissions of the '70s that regulates that.

So for the FBI or the CIA or the NSA to go look at your e-mail or your phone calls, before they do that they go to a judge, an Article III judge and say, here is a pile of paper explaining why we think this person is associated with a terrorist organization and why we need to look at their e-mail or listen to their phones. So in fact, there is a judge wearing a robe doing just that.

Now, similarly, I think – I hope you look to your members of Congress to provide meaningful oversight of what I do. Now, you're not going to hear about every detail because if you did hear about every detail, I could never get my job done. Part of what I do in counterterrorism and intelligence has to stay secret because the bad guys listen to what we say.

But, both the Senate Intelligence Committee and the House Intelligence Committee, which conduct extensive hearings, investigations, as Mike quoted from, have the responsibility, as your representatives, to make sure I'm not doing things wrong.

Now, again, you're not going to get a transcript of everything they say and do, but I hope you have members of Congress that you trust enough – and it's fine for you to trust them more than you trust me – so that you feel like someone is watching me, making sure I am not abusing my authority or violating your rights in an inappropriate way.

All that being said, I want to protect all of your rights, including your right to life. And there are some things, like checking you in an airport and looking at some people's e-mails, that are going to be necessary for me to do that. And I, again, asked for you to approach this with an open mind, putting in place oversight that is necessary but allowing me some flexibility to do what we think we need to do to protect you, whether you're on a train or a plane or just walking down the streets of New York City.

MR. ISIKOFF: Mike, thank you very much for a great discussion. (Applause.)

(END)