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Office of the Press Secretary

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**Remarks by Assistant to the President for Homeland Security and Counterterrorism John Brennan at CSIS***"Securing the Homeland by Renewing American Strength, Resilience and Values"*

Thank you very much John, and I would like to take a moment to express my appreciation to CSIS for inviting me back. You invited me here a little after six months after I came into this administration and I greatly appreciate the invitation to return. I also want to extend a note of appreciation to John Hamre who I think last month celebrated your tenth anniversary here at CSIS. You truly are John, one of the modern icons of public service after so many years working for the government and in addition here at CSIS. I think we all owe you a note of thanks for what you have done for the security of this country, so thank you very much John.

As I said last summer, I stood here a little over six months into President Obama's administration. At that time, I outlined the emerging contours of the President's approach to meeting two related, but distinct challenges. First, the immediate, near-term challenge of destroying al-Qaida and its extremist affiliates, and second, the longer-term challenge of confronting violent extremism generally, including the political, economic and social forces that can sometimes put individuals on the path toward militancy.

This approach is now being formalized as the President releases his National Security Strategy tomorrow. This strategy aims to renew American leadership in the 21st century by rebuilding the fundamental sources of American strength, security, prosperity, and influence in the world. It reflects the positive vision of American leadership and partnership with other nations that President Obama has consistently articulated since taking office. It provides the intellectual framework for the national security policies and programs already being implemented. And it reflects the President's vision for confronting the most daunting challenges of our time while seizing the opportunities of an increasingly globalized world.

The President's strategy is guided by national interests that are clear and enduring. First and foremost, security. The security of the United States, its citizens and U.S. allies and partners is and always will be paramount. Prosperity—a strong, innovative and growing U.S. economy in an open international economic system that promotes opportunity and prosperity is essential to our future and the future of generations yet to come. Values—respect for universal values, at home and around the world defines who we are and what we hold dear. And an international order that promotes peace, security, and opportunity through stronger cooperation as this the only path that will allow us to meet global challenges.

This strategy lays out a clear path for advancing these interests and shaping the world we seek. As the President stated this weekend at West Point, we must "build the sources of America's strength and influence" and "shape a world that's more peaceful and more prosperous."

As the president explained, this includes rebuilding the foundation of American strength and prosperity at home. It includes comprehensive engagement with the world. It includes building and integrating the capabilities we need to succeed—capabilities that span the military, diplomatic, development, intelligence, law enforcement and homeland security fronts. And it includes strengthening multilateral institutions and norms so that shared challenges can be met through collective action.

Tomorrow, Secretary of State Clinton and the President's National Security Advisor, General Jones, will discuss how this strategy will advance our interests around the world.

Today, as the President's principal advisor on homeland security and counterterrorism, I want to address how this national security strategy is guiding our efforts to secure our homeland by renewing America's strength, resilience and values.

The President's strategy is absolutely clear about the threat we face. Our enemy is not "terrorism" because terrorism is but a tactic. Our enemy is not "terror" because terror is a state of mind and as Americans we refuse to

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live in fear. Nor do we describe our enemy as "jihadists" or "Islamists" because jihad is a holy struggle, a legitimate tenant of Islam, meaning to purify oneself or one's community, and there is nothing holy or legitimate or Islamic about murdering innocent men, women and children.

Indeed, characterizing our adversaries this way would actually be counterproductive. It would play into the false perception that they are religious leaders defending a holy cause, when in fact they are nothing more than murderers, including the murder of thousands upon thousands of Muslims. This is why Muslim leaders around the world have spoken out—forcefully, and often at great risk to their own lives—to reject al Qaeda and violent extremism. And frankly, their condemnations often do not get the recognition they deserve, including from the media.

Moreover, describing our enemy in religious terms would lend credence to the lie—propagated by al Qaeda and its affiliates to justify terrorism—that the United States is somehow at war against Islam. The reality, of course, is that we never have been and will never be at war with Islam. After all, Islam, like so many faiths, is part of America.

Instead, the President's strategy is clear and precise. Our enemy is al Qaeda and its terrorist affiliates. For it was al Qaeda who attacked us so viciously on 9/11 and whose desire to attack the United States, our allies, and our partners remains undiminished. And is- and it is its affiliates who have taken up al Qaeda's call to arms against the United States in other parts of the world.

The President's strategy is unequivocal with regard to our posture. The United States of America is at war. We are at war against al Qaeda and its terrorist affiliates. That is why the President is responsibly ending the war in Iraq, which had nothing to do with 9/11, and why he has refocused our efforts on Afghanistan, where al Qaeda continues to plot from the tribal regions along the border with Pakistan and inside of Pakistan.

We have a clear mission. We will not simply degrade al Qaeda's capabilities or simply prevent terrorist attacks against our country or citizens. We will not merely respond after the fact—after an attack has been attempted. Instead, the United States will disrupt, dismantle, and ensure a lasting defeat of al Qaeda and violent extremist affiliates.

And the president's strategy outlines how we will achieve this mission and keep Americans safe. We will deny al Qaeda and its affiliates safe haven. We will secure the world's most dangerous weapons—especially the nuclear materials that al Qaeda seeks and would surely use against us. We will build positive partnerships with Muslim communities around the world. And most importantly, we will protect our homeland.

The President's strategy describes how this effort will require a broad, sustained, and integrated campaign that harnesses every tool of American power—military and civilian, kinetic and diplomatic, and, indeed, the value- the power of our values and partnerships with other nations and institutions. In other words, this is a multi-departmental, multinational—and indeed, a multi-generational—effort.

To deny al Qaeda and its affiliates safe haven, we will take the fight to al Qaeda and its extremist affiliates wherever they plot and train. In Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen, Somalia, and beyond, we are not only delivering severe blows against the leadership of al Qaeda and its affiliates, we are helping these governments build their capacity to provide for their own security—to help them root out the al Qaeda cancer that has manifested itself within their borders and to help them prevent it from returning.

In all our efforts, we will exercise force prudently, recognizing that we often need to use a scalpel, not a hammer. When we know of terrorists who are plotting attacks against us, we have a responsibility to take action to defend ourselves—and we will do so. At the same time, an action that eliminates a single terrorist, but causes civilian casualties, can, in fact, inflame local populations and create far more problems—a tactical success, but a strategic failure. So we need to ensure that our actions are more precise and more accurate than ever before. This is something the President not only expects, but demands.

Moreover, we know that al-Qaida seeks to overextend the United States and drain us militarily, financially and psychologically. I have seen this through my own experience covering al-Qaida and terrorism over the past two decades. But we will not let that happen. We will always carefully weigh the costs and risks of action against the costs and risks of inaction. And whenever possible, we will join with allies and partners to share the burdens of our collective security. As a result of our actions, we have subjected the core of al-Qaida, led by Osama bin Laden, to unprecedented pressure. In the last 16 months alone, hundreds of al-Qaida fighters and affiliates, including many senior leaders, have been captured or killed. We have inflicted significant damage on their capabilities.

Today, it is harder than ever for this network to move, raise funds, recruit, train and plot attacks, all of which makes the American people safer. These successes, though, have not come easily. They are a result of the service and sacrifices of men and women who risk their lives to protect ours in our intelligence, military, law enforcement, first responder and homeland security communities.

On many occasions, they have made the ultimate sacrifice, such as those seven CIA officers who gave their lives at a remote outpost in Afghanistan last December and all those brave servicemen and women who give their lives on a daily basis in Afghanistan. So as a nation, let us always debate our counterterrorism efforts, but let us never forget or fail to support the extraordinary men and women who serve to keep us safe.

The president's national security strategy also outlines how we will strengthen other tools of American power which will help us meet many challenges. This includes addressing the political, economic and social forces that can make some people fall victim to the cancer of violent extremism. Through a renewed commitment to diplomacy and in contrast to terrorists who offer the false hope of change through violence, we seek to show that legitimate grievances can be resolved peacefully through democratic institutions and dialogue, whether in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan or between Israelis and Palestinians, where the continuing conflict undermines moderates and strengthens extremists across the region.

Through new partnerships to promote development in places like Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen and Somalia, we are working to foster good governance, reduce corruption and improve education, health and basic services, all of which helps undermine the forces that can put the disillusioned and disposed on the path to militancy.

And in all our efforts, the president's national security strategy makes clear that we must demonstrate and communicate America's vision of opportunity and progress in contrast with the bankrupt and evil ideology of violent extremists who exploit the people they purport to serve. Communicating America's vision is what the president did in his speech nearly one year ago in Cairo, which has inspired new partnerships between the United States and Muslim communities around the world in development, education, health and science, and technology.

And to secure our homeland, we will continue the never-ending work of strengthening our defenses here at home. In light of the failed attacks over Detroit and in Times Square, it is easy to forget, but it bears repeating. Since 9/11, we have made enormous progress as a nation in securing our homeland.

And under President Obama, we have built upon the work of the previous administration and have accelerated efforts in many areas. We have improved security at our borders, airports and other ports of entry. We have strengthened intelligence, information sharing and cooperation at all levels, federal, state and local and timely analysis of threat information, even as events over the past year highlight the need to do better.

Today, our defenses are stronger and the United States presents a much less hospitable environment for terrorists to carry out their cowardly attacks than ever before. Indeed, since January of last year, more than 20 individuals in the United States have been arrested and charged with terrorism crimes, their plans and plots disrupted. This includes Najibullah Zazi, who planned to attack the New York subway system in what could have been the worst terrorist attack on our soil since 9/11. Each of these arrests represents the coordinated work of countless intelligence, homeland security and law enforcement personnel who have saved countless American lives.

But these successes notwithstanding, indeed, perhaps because of them, it is clear that we are now facing a new phase of the terrorist threat. We have long recognized that al-Qaida, its affiliates and those who subscribe to its murderous ideology are a resilient, resourceful and determined enemy. We have made it harder for them to recruit and train so they are increasingly relying on recruits with little training. We have strengthened our defenses against massive, sophisticated attacks on our homeland, so they are attempting attacks with little sophistication, but with very lethal intent.

They are seeking foot soldiers who might slip past our defenses by defying the traditional profile of a terrorist like Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, the Nigerian behind the failed attack over Detroit. Knowing that the United States and our allies have strengthened aviation screening in recent years, they equipped Abdulmutallab with explosives sewn into his clothes that were less likely to be detected by a traditional metal detector. Knowing that it is harder to penetrate America's defenses, the likes of al-Qaida's Adam Gadahan and Anwar al-Awlaki in Yemen, American citizens who understand our society, our strengths as well as our vulnerabilities, not only plan attacks, they use the Internet and extremist websites to exhort people already living in the United States to take up arms and launch terrorist attacks from within.

Indeed, we have seen an increasing number of individuals here in the United States become captivated by extremist ideologies or causes. Somali Americans from Minnesota traveling to fight in Somalia, the five Virginia men who went to Pakistan seeking terrorist training, David Headley, the Chicago man charged with helping to plan the Mumbai attacks, the Pennsylvania woman, Jihad Jane, charged with conspiring to murder a Danish cartoonist. The president's national security strategy explicitly recognizes the threat to the United States posed by individuals radicalized here at home.

We have seen individuals, including U.S. citizens, armed with their U.S. passports, travel easily to extremist safe havens and return to America, their deadly plans disrupted by coordinated intelligence and law enforcement. Daniel Patrick Boyd of North Carolina, who with others, conspired to murder U.S. military personnel and Najibullah Zazi, who received his instruction in bomb making in Pakistan. Unfortunately, we were unable to thwart Faisal Shahzad, accused of attempting to set off the car bomb in Times Square.

We have also seen individuals, including American citizens, apparently inspired by al-Qaida's ideology, take matters into their own hands. Again, we have disrupted a number of these plots, including individuals in Texas and Illinois charged with planning to blow up buildings. Tragically, we were unable to prevent others. The murder of the military recruiter in Arkansas last year and the senseless slaughter of 13 innocent Americans at Fort Hood. I would note that it is telling that many of these individuals felt the need to hide their activities from their families and communities, likely because they knew they would be condemned by those very same communities.

Indeed, in a number of these cases, it has been families and communities concerned for their loved ones who have

brought these individuals to the attention of law enforcement. This is a new phase to the terrorist threat, no longer limited to coordinated, sophisticated, 9/11-style attacks, but expanding to single individuals attempting to carry out relatively unsophisticated attacks. As our enemy adapts and evolves their tactics, so must we constantly adapt and evolve ours, not in a mad rush driven by fear, but in a thoughtful and reasoned way that enhances our security and further delegitimizes the actions of our enemy. To this end, a key theme of the president's national security strategy is how we will remain a strong and resilient nation here at home.

As a strong and resilient nation, we will adapt. This is the first national security strategy of any president that integrates homeland security as part of a broader national security strategy. At the White House, we have already merged the staffs of the National Security Council, Homeland Security Council and parts of the National Economic Council into a single, integrated national security staff that includes new offices, including cybersecurity. This has fostered a more rapid, coordinated and effective federal response to the range of challenges we face, from the failed attacks in Detroit and Times Square to H1N1, to the earthquake in Haiti and to the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. To ensure we are constantly adapting and improving and to address any deficiencies or weaknesses in the system, the president has ordered immediate reviews and corrective actions in the immediate aftermath of attempted attacks.

Since the attack at Fort Hood, we have taken numerous steps, including improving communication between the Department of Defense and Justice regarding disaffected individuals in our armed forces. Following the failed attack over Detroit, we have strengthened the analysis and integration of intelligence and have enhanced aviation security, including a new, real-time, threat-based screening policy for all international flights to the United States. And as the investigation into the Times Square plot continues, so will our constant effort to assess and bolster our defenses.

As a strong and resilient nation, we will prepare. Building on the unprecedented investments we have already made in homeland security, we will continue to reduce our vulnerabilities. We will work with allies and partners to constantly enhance security at our borders, airports and ports. We will move forward with our new initiative to respond faster to bioterrorism. We will work with the private sector to enhance the security of our critical infrastructure, including cyberspace, which underpins our economy, our society and our security.

Even as we do everything in our government to prevent attacks, we recognize the indispensable role played by ordinary citizens. We have seen this before in the heroic passengers aboard Flight 93 on 9/11, who saved countless lives on the ground in Washington, the response personnel who prevented even more lives from being lost at Fort Hood, the passengers who restrained Abdulmutallab on Flight 253 over Detroit and the street vendors in Times Square who alerted the police when they saw something suspicious. This is the kind of vigilance that can keep us safe.

As a strong and resilient nation, we will strengthen our ability to withstand any disruption, whatever the cause. For even as we put unrelenting pressure on the enemy, even as we strive to thwart 100 percent of the plots against us, we know that terrorists are striving to succeed only once. And we must be honest with ourselves. No nation, no matter how powerful, can prevent every threat from coming to fruition. And in America, a free and open society of 300 million people, the task becomes even more difficult as our adversaries increasingly rely on individual terrorists and lone individuals inspired by al-Qaida's hateful ideology.

But rather than a reason to fear, this must be a catalyst for action. Instead of simply resigning ourselves to what appears to some to be the inevitable, we must improve our preparedness and plan for all contingencies. Instead of simply building defensive walls, we must bolster our ability at all levels, federal, state, local and the private sector to withstand disruptions, maintain operations and recover quickly.

Instead of giving into fear and paralysis, which is the goal of terrorists, we must resolve, as a nation, as a people, that we will go forward with confidence, that we will resist succumbing to overreaction, especially to failed attacks and not magnify these perpetrators beyond the despicable miscreants that they are, that as a proud and strong nation, we will not cower in the face of a small band of cowards who hide in the shadows and send others to their slaughter and to slaughter the innocents. As the president said at West Point, we must remember who we are. We are Americans who have overcome great challenges before and will do so again and again and again.

This leads to the final way we can remain a strong and resilient nation, by staying true to who we are a people, including the values that remain one of the greatest sources of our strength at home and abroad. The president's national security strategy speaks to this directly. More than any other action we have taken, the power of America's example has spread freedom and democracy worldwide. That is why we must always seek to uphold these values, not just when it is easy but also when it is hard.

Indeed, fidelity to our values and to end practices that were counterproductive to our counterterrorism efforts is why the president banned brutal methods of interrogation. Fidelity to our values and to deny violent extremists one of their most potent recruitment tools is why the president ordered that the prison at Guantanamo Bay be closed and that we bring detainees to justice. As we work to close that prison, including any transfers or release of detainees, we will be guided by one priority above all others, the security of the American people. And we must not forget what military leaders and national security experts from across the political spectrum have said for years, that the detention facility at Guantanamo has served as a powerful recruiting tool for our enemies and must be closed.

Going forward, our challenge is to find policies that are consistent with both the rule of law and our values as a nation that allow us to optimize both our security and our liberties, that give us the maximum flexibility to collect

intelligence and protect the American people and keep us one step ahead of the involving threats to our nation.

Fortunately, we can do all this because we have the strongest, most effective legal system in the world. Nonetheless, we are constantly working to strengthen existing tools and capabilities to develop new ones consistent with our constitutional and legal obligations that will further empower our counterterrorism professionals to protect the American people. For example, we have created an interagency team called the High Value Detainee Interrogation Group that we deploy overseas as well as domestically to gather valuable intelligence from terrorist suspects like Zazi, Abdulmutallab and Shahzad. We do this as rapidly as possible and in accordance with the law.

We're also working to develop an effective and durable legal framework for the war against al-Qaida. Effective by providing our counterterrorism professionals with the tools they need to prevent terrorist suspects from threatening us again and durable, able to withstand legal challenge in our courts as well as to have the support of both political parties so that it can be sustained in future administrations. We continue to work with the Congress on such a framework, but its broad elements are clear, as is the need for flexibility so we can apply the right tools in the right circumstances.

Such a framework must include, perhaps, our single most effective tool for prosecuting, convicting and sentencing suspected terrorists, our Article III courts. Since 9/11, prosecutions in our federal courts have resulted in hundreds of convictions of terrorists, including life sentences for the likes of Zakarias Moussaoui, the so-called 20th 9/11 hijacker, as well as the shoe bomber, Richard Reid. In addition, the federal criminal justice system has enabled us to disrupt ongoing plots. And as recent cases have demonstrated, prosecuting suspects in federal courts does not impede intelligence collection. To the contrary, our federal criminal justice system has proven to be an effective intelligence collection tool, helping the government to obtain information about the plans, intentions, tactics, recruitment, training and organizational structures of terrorist organization, including al-Qaida and its affiliates.

Just as we cannot cast aside our federal courts because we are at war, we must also recognize that there are other options for bringing terrorists to justice, including military commissions. Last year, we worked with Congress to reform and strengthen these commissions, restoring their legitimacy as an appropriate venue for trying terrorist suspects and turning those commissions into an effective tool. We have announced plans to try several individuals by these reformed commissions, even as we remain mindful that commissions are not without limitations that circumscribe the instances in which they cannot be used. As such, commissions should remain one of the tools of any framework, but is to be used as needed and as appropriate.

A durable and effective legal framework must also recognize that some detainees currently in our custody at Guantanamo cannot be released because they pose a grave threat to the United States. But, for a variety of reasons, they also cannot be prosecuted. This is, as the president has said, the toughest issue we face. So we continue to work to ensure that any prolonged detention includes fair procedures, periodic review, and is subject to constitutional checks and balances.

Finally, remaining faithful to our values requires something else – that we never surrender the diversity and tolerance and openness to different cultures and faiths that define us as Americans. Several months ago, I had the opportunity to speak at NYU, where I was hosted by the university's Islamic center and the Islamic Law Students Association. The audience included people of many faiths – Muslim, Christian, Jew, Hindu and Sikh. I was there to have a dialogue on how, as Americans, we can all work together to keep our country safe from the terrorists who seek to drive us apart.

After I was finished speaking, person after person stood up to share their perspective and to ask their questions. Mothers and fathers, religious leaders and students, recent immigrants and American citizens by birth. One after another, they spoke of how they love this country and of all the opportunities it has afforded them and their families. But they also spoke of their concerns, that their fellow Americans, and at times, their own government, may see them as a threat to American security, rather than a part of the American family. One man, a father, explained that his 21-year-old son, an American born and raised, who was subjected to extra security every time he boards a plane, now feels disenfranchised in his own country.

This is the challenge we face. Even more than the attacks al-Qaida and its violent affiliates unleash or the blood they spill, they seek to strike at the very essence of who we are as Americans by replacing our hard-won confidence with fear and replacing our tolerance with suspicion; by turning our great diversity from a source of strength into a source of division; by causing us to undermine the laws and values that have been a source of our strength and our influence throughout the world; by turning a nation whose global leadership has meant greater security and prosperity for people in every corner of the globe into a nation that retreats from the world stage and abandons allies and partners.

That is what al-Qaida and its allies want – to achieve their goals by turning us into something we are not. But that is something they can never achieve, because only the people of America can change who we are as a nation. Al-Qaida can sew explosives into their clothes or park an SUV with explosives on a busy street. But it is our choice to react with panic or resolve. They can seek to recruit people already living among us, but it is our choice to subject entire communities to suspicion, or to support those communities in reaching the disaffected before they turn to violence. Terrorists may try to bring death to our cities, but it is our choice to either uphold the rule of law or chip away at it. They may strike our communities, but it is our choice to either respond wisely and effectively or lash out in ways that inflame entire regions and stoke the fires of the violent extremism.

That is our choice. And with the strategy we are releasing tomorrow, President Obama and the administration offers our answer. We will defeat al-Qaida and its affiliates; we will build a strong and resilient nation; and we will remain faithful to our values that make us Americans. That is how we will prevail in this fight. That is how we will keep our country safe. And I want to thank you for the opportunity to talk to you this morning.

Thank you.

#### Issues

Civil Rights  
 Defense  
 Disabilities  
 Economy  
 Education  
 Energy & Environment  
 Ethics  
 Family  
 Fiscal Responsibility  
 Foreign Policy  
 Health Care  
 Homeland Security  
 Immigration  
 Poverty  
 Rural  
 Seniors & Social Security  
 Service  
 Taxes  
 Technology  
 Urban Policy  
 Veterans  
 Women  
 Additional Issues

#### The Administration

President Barack Obama  
 Vice President Joe Biden  
 First Lady Michelle Obama  
 Dr. Jill Biden  
 The Cabinet  
 White House Staff  
 Executive Office of the President  
 Other Advisory Boards

#### About the White House

History  
 Presidents  
 First Ladies  
 The Oval Office  
 The Vice President's Residence & Office  
 Eisenhower Executive Office Building  
 Camp David  
 Air Force One  
 White House Fellows  
 White House Internships  
 White House 101  
 Tours & Events

#### Our Government

The Executive Branch  
 The Legislative Branch  
 The Judicial Branch  
 The Constitution  
 Federal Agencies & Commissions  
 Elections & Voting  
 State & Local Government  
 Resources

#### Home

#### The White House Blog

#### Photos & Videos

Photo Galleries  
 Video  
 Live Streams  
 Podcasts

#### Briefing Room

Your Weekly Address  
 Speeches & Remarks  
 Press Briefings  
 Statements & Releases  
 Presidential Actions  
 Featured Legislation  
 Nominations & Appointments  
 Disclosures

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