

## **Remarks by Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff To The Heyman Fellows At Yale University On "Confronting The Threats To Our Homeland"**

Release Date: April 7, 2008

Yale University  
New Haven, Connecticut

**Secretary Chertoff:** I'd like to thank you for an introduction, the likes of which you normally don't get to hear until you're dead as part of your obituary. Also, I have to say, when I walked into the room, it being my first time in a law school classroom in many years, I felt an almost irresistible pull to go to the back -- where I spent many a day lurking during my three years at Harvard Law School. Of course I'm sure that's not true at Yale. I'm sure everybody at Yale wants to come to the front and participate in class.

I want to thank Sam and Ronnie Heyman. I think what they've done with this fellowship, and their general charitable efforts is really extraordinary and a recognition that to those to whom much is given, much should be given back. And I think that the Heymans in every way have shown a public spirit in this and a public service which is truly extraordinary and a great model for everyone.

I know in particular that having served as an Assistant U.S. Attorney, as did Sam Heyman, how meaningful that experience is. It's usually the first time that a young lawyer gets to stand up in a courtroom and talk about representing not just an individual client, but representing the United States as an Assistant U.S. Attorney. And I still remember the moments I stood up and said, "Michael Chertoff for the United States of America" as among the proudest and meaningful moments of my career, and I know that Sam feels the way.

I'm also delighted to have Andy DeFilippis here. He's an extraordinary young man; comes from New Jersey originally, which is the source of many good things. And, of course, he clerked for Judge Cabranes, a very distinguished judge on the court in the 2nd circuit, and we're delighted to have him here.\*

We are about five years from the date of the founding of the Department of Homeland Security, and a little over three years from my being sworn in as the second Secretary of Homeland Security. And in this year, it seemed like a good time to kind of look at where we've been, and where we're going, and to consider both the outstanding challenges that we face as a country in the area of homeland security, and then what we should do to confront those challenges.

And as a consequence, I've kind of concluded that I would give a series of speeches, four speeches, in which I would talk first of all about the challenges and threats that we face over the next five and ten years relating to homeland security in the broadest sense -- not just counter-terrorism, but all threats to public safety and security that are of national dimension.

Then, in the second speech, I thought I would discuss what we have done and what we need to continue to do to prevent these threats from coming to fruition to the extent we have it within our power to do so.

The third speech will talk about how we reduce our vulnerabilities in the event that a threat comes to pass, that it can't be prevented.

And finally, the fourth speech will talk about how we respond so that even if a catastrophe occurs, whether it be man-made or natural, we can reduce the negative impact on our society and our people so as to mitigate the harm that would otherwise be caused.

I think this is, in my mind, kind of the full roadmap of what Homeland Security has to be over the next ten years, as we face the transition from what has been the initial period of birth and maturation into what I think is the long-term stature and the long-term position of Homeland Security in the 21st century and at least for the next decade and perhaps the next generation.

Finally, most important, I need to talk about the importance of maintaining focus on what the challenges are. It's very easy to waiver between hysteria on the one hand and complacency on the other. And in the long run, in order to build the architecture that we need to build to protect ourselves in the next century, we need to be

in a position that is neither hysterical nor complacent.

So let me turn to the first of the speeches that I plan to give, which is to talk about the challenges and the threats that we face of national dimension in this next new century.

First, I need to emphasize that DHS is an all-hazards department. Hazards and threats do not come conveniently labeled as "man-made" or "natural" in many instances. And the consequences of these threats, whether they are man-made or natural all too often are the same. They can be devastating. So our challenge is to deal with and attempt to avert as many of these threats as possible.

And there's no question that over the last several years the focus has increasingly been upon challenges and threats that appear to be much more serious than what we faced in the latter part of the last century. In fact, it would be easy to conclude that threats of all kinds, be they natural or man-made, are occurring with much more frequency than in the past. In part I think that's an illusion. I think we always tend to measure what we're experiencing with much more weight than things that occurred historically. But I do think we need to look at a number of emerging threats of which we're either more aware, or perhaps more susceptible, as we look over the horizon of the next decade.

First, let me deal with the issue of natural threats. We have, of course, to deal with not only things like floods and hurricanes and earthquakes, which have always been with us, but we have to deal with disease. Disease, although perhaps not different in kind than what we've faced over the last centuries, has become much more of a threat because of the globalized nature of society. The fact is that modern transportation and travel has increased mobility. That's been a good thing, but it has also enabled disease to spread much more rapidly and much more thoroughly throughout society in a way that we didn't see in past centuries. So the globalization of transportation has increased the dimension of natural threats in a way that forces us to confront a new challenge that we didn't face in past centuries.

Additionally, as we have built, as we have developed in areas that are susceptible to wildfires or earthquakes and floods, it's not that these types of natural events have occurred more frequently than in the past, but our vulnerability has increased, because we have put ourselves in positions where we can be much more readily affected by these kinds of natural disasters and catastrophes.

Now, these threats will remain; they will not be averted. We can decrease our vulnerability. We can make our response more capable, and I will address these issues in further speeches, but in the end, we're not going to stop earthquakes. We're not going to stop floods. We're not going to stop diseases - although we can try to inoculate ourselves against them.

The same is not true with respect to man-made threats. Here, of course, we can do a lot to prevent man-made threats. We are doing a lot, but there's more we can do. Terrorism, of course, is the threat that now is on everybody's mind as we enter this new 21st century. It's not that terrorism never existed before, but the scale, the dimension, the ideological foundation of terrorism is different now than when it was in the past century or in prior centuries. And even more so what is true is that the leverage modern technology gives to the small group of terrorists or the single terrorist is far beyond the leverage that a terrorist had 100 years ago or 200 years ago. Whereas 200 years ago or 100 years ago we talked about a gun or a bomb killing a small number of people, we now have capabilities in science and technology that raise the very realistic possibility that a small group of terrorists could kill not only thousands of people, as they did on September 11th, but hundreds of thousands of people. And that has changed the dimension of the threat we face.

Now, of course, this country has faced existential threats in the past. In fact, every country has faced existential threats in the past. But if you look back for much of our history, the kinds of threats we faced of a man-made nature came from nation states. They were other countries that either threatened our freedom or threatened our territorial integrity or threatened our existence. So it was that during our formative years we had to deal with the British, who were attempting to struggle to keep hold over the newly emerging American colonies. We dealt with other nation states who were attempting to either impress our seamen or to confine our ability to have freedom of the seas.

In the 20th century we faced a new set of threats that were not so much nation states acting on traditional national imperatives, but rather, states that were acting based on ideological imperatives, whether it was Hitler's Germany that was motivated by fascism, or the Soviet Union that was motivated at least initially by the ideology of communism. And so through much of the 20th century, in which many of the people here grew up, we faced a threat that was motivated by ideology but that still took the form of a traditional nation state -- with a capital, with a military force that was clearly identified, and frankly, which was capable of being deterred

because they had assets that were themselves subject to threat.

If we look back at how we dealt with man-made threats, existential threats in the 20th century, we use -- we traditionally use the power of deterrents; the concept that if we faced a threat, and our ability to respond to the threat was equal to or greater, we would prevent that threat from coming to pass. That was the very essence of the bipolar world in which we lived during the second half of the 20th century; a world in which, although the Soviet Union and the U.S. had very different ideological systems and very different goals for the world, we nevertheless were able to maintain peace through a kind of stand-off, because the nuclear power that both sides possessed was so strong that it deterred both sides from attacking the other. As a consequence, most of the conflict occurred at the margins. It occurred with guerilla wars, it occurred with rhetoric, it occurred with efforts to subvert societies, but again, avoiding a direct confrontation that would result either in the loss of life on American soil, or the loss of life on Soviet soil.

And I think that was a stable, although not an ideal world; one which we became accustomed to, until the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1990 and the collapse of the Soviet system. That was, as most people would say, the end of the Cold War. And some people, in a flush of optimism, declared it to be the end of history; the ultimate triumph of the idea of the modern enlightenment state that would triumph with concepts like democracy, freedom, and the rule of the law over totalitarian regimes and totalitarian ideologies.

But it turned out that it was too soon to declare victory, and that in fact another ideological driver of conflict was, even as the wall fell, beginning to emerge in other parts of the world. And this is the ideology of extreme Islamic radicalism. Now, let me be very clear: Extreme Islamic radicalism is not the same as Islam. It is not the Muslim religion. It is a cult, or a sect, that seeks to use the language and the rhetoric of Islam to justify an extreme, violent world view that believes it will culminate in the domination of significant parts of the world -- certainly, parts of the Middle East and South Asia, if not in other areas.

Like the ideology of communism, which began again as an ideology without a state background but ultimately came to power in the Soviet Union and in Cuba and in other parts of the world, this radical Islamic extremism seeks to find a host state, or at least part of a host state, in which it can flourish, in which it can train, in which it can plan, in which it can inculcate its ideology, and which it can use as a platform to launch against other countries in the region and in the world.

Like communism, which originally found root in the Soviet Union, or like fascism, which found root in Nazi Germany, the followers of this extreme ideology have a non-negotiable goal of actual domination among nations in which they would have the ability to prescribe a rule of law that would be intolerant of other views and that would subordinate the right of the individual to the right of the ideologue.

In July 2006 Ayman al Zawahiri, who, as you probably know is bin Laden's deputy and perhaps his chief ideologue, was quoted on an extremist website, making crystal clear what the ideology of bin Laden and his allies is, and saying that the whole world is an open field for us. He made it, again, totally lucid and clear that the aim of bin Laden and his allies was to create a rule in countries occupied by those who are not viewed as sufficiently pure, whether those were Muslims or whether those were individuals who followed other faiths.

And in terms of the tactics and techniques that bin Laden and others who believe in this ideology want to pursue, again the al Qaeda charter and manuals leave you with no mistake about their intent - using the phrase, quote, "We will not meet the enemy halfway, and there will be no more for dialogue with them. Rather, it'll be the dialogue of bullets, the ideals of assassination, bombing and destruction, and the diplomacy of the cannon and the machine gun."

Now, was this merely a fanciful view of what might happen; kind of the dream of a disturbed group of individuals? Well, if we look back less than a decade ago at what the condition of Afghanistan was, we have a vision of the world in which bin Laden and those who have a similar philosophy had. It was a world in which women were denied an education, or any possibility of pursuing individual achievement. It was a world in which those who disagreed with the dominant religious ideology could be physically punished for what they believed in and what they practiced. And it was only through the overthrow of that regime that rights were restored to the women and the other people of Afghanistan.

So we've at least had a vision of what this ideology would lead to and where this ideology would take us. Now, as we stand here in the wake of activities in Afghanistan, what is the current threat that we face with terrorism? Well, let me begin with al Qaeda. Al Qaeda was not destroyed by being thrown out of Afghanistan. Al Qaeda retreated to other parts of the world. It retreated to parts of Pakistan, the frontier areas where currently, although not without some pressure, they are capable of training, they are capable of planning, they are

capable of experimenting, and as Mike Hayden, the Director of the CIA recently said, where they are maintaining a pipeline of operatives who they can use to launch attacks against the West.

They retreated to the Maghreb, North Africa, where al Qaeda in the Maghreb has now affiliated itself with the original al Qaeda movement, and has carried out attacks against UN facilities, against courts, and against schoolchildren in order to propagate the ideology that bin Laden and others believe in. They retreated to parts of Somalia where they were able again to try to take a state that is very unstable and attempt to turn it into a platform for further attacks or for further development and planning. And here, again, because we're dealing with an unstable circumstance where there's a struggle for control of the territory of Somalia, we face a danger zone, because should they be able to take root in Somalia in the way they've taken place -- taken root in the frontier areas of Pakistan or the Maghreb, we would find ourselves facing this ideology married with an increased capability and a more powerful platform to launch against the West.

What is the ultimate strategy of al Qaeda using these platforms? It is a strategy to continue to drive against those regimes in the Middle East that do not subscribe to its point of view and its ideology, and to continue to drive against the West which personifies an ideology that is directly opposed to the intolerance of al Qaeda. And although they've made some steps forward in their strategy, I think there's also some good news too, because they have also begun to alienate the very pool of people they seek to convert to their ideology.

According to the National Counter-terrorism Center, in the suicide bombings committed by al Qaeda and similar groups in Iraq and around the world, literally thousands of people have been killed over the last few years, and many of them have been innocent Muslims. This has caused a revulsion, even in the community in which this group seeks to recruit, against the tactics and the strategies undertaken by al Qaeda. For example, two and half years ago in Amman, Jordan, a groom, his bride, and the father of both newlyweds and as many as ten other relatives were among dozens of Muslims slaughtered in the middle of a wedding celebration by a triple suicide bombing. This could not be justified under any theory of justice under Islam. It was wanton murder of innocent Muslims. And it had a very negative effect on the reputation of al Qaeda in the region. It caused a revulsion on the part of many Jordanians who saw the carnage and understood this could not be justified under any reasonable interpretation of religious doctrine.

In February of this year in Peshawar, Pakistan, 40 innocent people, Muslims, were killed when a suicide bomber blew himself up at a funeral for a slain police officer. And around the same time in Rawalpindi near Pakistan's capitol, a suicide bombing killed that country's surgeon general. And, of course, most notoriously, in the last couple of months, there was the assassination of Benazir Bhutto by militants allied with al Qaeda, again seeking to strike at a woman who was attempting to pursue democratic -- a democratic election in Pakistan itself.

What this has demonstrated, and what this has called forth among clerics in the Middle East and other Muslim leaders around the world is the beginning of a dialogue in which the theory of violence is being emphatically rejected, and in which people who are potential recruits are beginning to learn that those who would recruit them to violence are taking them down a false path. This is a positive demonstration. This is a positive move in the direction of dealing with this threat. It doesn't mean that the threat of radical Islamic extremism is over. It doesn't mean that al Qaeda will not continue to pursue platforms, opportunities to recruit, opportunities to train, laboratories in which to experiment with weapons. But it does mean that in the struggle for hearts and minds, which is ultimately the place in which this battle will be won, there is now a counter-force; a counter-force that comes not from government officials in the West who don't really have standing to deal with these issues, but a counter-force that is coming from within the Muslim community itself that is rejecting this highjacking of the religion by people who are seeking to promote an ideology for their own purposes.

And perhaps one of the best proofs of this is the demise, or the near demise, of al Qaeda in Iraq. You'll remember a couple of years ago, al Qaeda in Iraq was on the rise. They were increasing the tempo of their suicide bombs under the direction of Zarqawi; they had bombed the Shiite mosque in the Samarra, the Golden Mosque in Samarra -- all of which was designed to intimidate those who opposed al Qaeda in Iraq and to convince the population of the area, particularly the Sunni population, that the momentum was with al Qaeda, that the wind was at their back, that God was at their side and that it was time to enlist in the cause of Zarqawi and bin Laden, or be left at the side.

But what we've seen in the last couple years is in fact movement in the other direction. We've seen the communities in the Sunni areas rejecting and acting with revulsion against these foreign fighters who came into Iraq and attempted to highjack that country for its own ideology. We have seen these Sunni religious leaders and these Sunni tribal leaders taking up arms to free themselves and to drive al Qaeda in Iraq into

retreat. Again, they have not succeeded in eliminating it in Iraq, but they have struck a serious blow against that sense of momentum and inevitability, which al Qaeda in Iraq hoped to foster a couple of years ago.

For those of you who wonder whether al Qaeda in Iraq and al Qaeda in general now sees itself as engaged in a struggle for hearts and minds, and whether they are beginning to worry about it, simply look at Ayman al Zawahiri's recent statements online. He actually got into a chatroom and he started to dialogue with people who asked him questions. Some of those questions were penetrating questions, asking him how could he justify killing schoolchildren in the Maghreb, how could he justify killing innocent people in Jordan. And he became defensive. And he began to say, well, it wasn't us who killed the innocent people, it was other people; or they were being used as shields; or innocent people who get in the way of operations, we're entitled to kill them. If you read the tone of his comments, if you read other statements made by bin Laden and Zawahiri in the last six months as they attempt to discredit religious leaders who are now coming out to speak against violence, you will begin to sense the first crack in the façade of self-confidence which has been the hallmark of al Qaeda over the last few years.

This doesn't mean to say that the threat is over or will be over in the short term. It means to say that the threat is one which is not insurmountable, it need not be with us forever, and that if we continue to maintain our resolution, both in our short-term tactical defense against terrorism, but also in fostering a more longer-term struggle for hearts and minds, we can see a day in which al Qaeda actually will be rejected by the vast majority of people to whom it seeks to appeal.

Now, of course, if al Qaeda was the only threat we have to worry about I could stop my speech here. But part of what I want to do is I want to step back and look even beyond what we have been mostly preoccupied with over the last several years, and take an even broader view of some of the other man-made threats we face in a 21st century global environment.

Those of you who follow the history of struggles against terrorism will be familiar with the organization known as Hezbollah, a term which means the "Party of God." Richard Armitage, who used to be the Deputy Secretary of State, once called Hezbollah the "A-team of terrorists." It has a history that goes back over many decades, roots in Iraq - I'm sorry, Iran - and roots in Lebanon as well. Since its formation as a pro-Iranian militia back in the 1980s, it has become a well-disciplined paramilitary force with capabilities about which al Qaeda can only dream, including missiles, very sophisticated explosives, and very sophisticated operatives who are capable of functioning around the world and who, among other things, some years back, detonated bombs against a synagogue in Buenos Aires.

Hezbollah is in fact a vision of what an ideologically motivated terrorist organization will become when it finally evolves to become literally an army and a political party and to gain a serious embedded degree of control in a state. And to witness this, you simply have to look at the position it occupies in Lebanon. Hezbollah is more than a year older than al Qaeda. Long before al Qaeda was formed it had pioneered suicide bombing, including the 1983 bombing of our Marine peacekeepers in Lebanon and, in 1996, the bombing of the Khobar Towers in Saudi Arabia.

In the most recent couple of years, this ideological force has become powerful enough to have a serious role to play in the politics of Lebanon, to engage in a war with Israel, and to continue to expand its tentacles literally around the region. This gives you a vision of a terrorist organization that has graduated from the first stage of what al Qaeda was into a more mature stage where it actually has the prospect of dominating stable nation states.

Now it may interest you to learn that Hezbollah's interests are not simply confined to the Middle East. Hezbollah has developed a South American presence. And there we have to worry, as we look down the road at some of the threats we may face, about the possibility of a convergence of interests between a group like Hezbollah and some of the terrorist groups that have been at work in South America over the last several years.

The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, or FARC, to use its Spanish name, took up arms against the government of Colombia in the 1960s. It has literally been at war with that government for about 40 years. It began as a Marxist guerilla group, but then it became a criminal group as well. It fostered illegal narcotics trafficking; it engages in kidnapping; and it follows a host of criminal activities, which it uses to enable its ideological efforts and its war against the legitimate authority of Colombia. The FARC is present in about 20 percent of Colombia, and again it is organized along military lines.

In many ways it replicates, in the parts of South America that it controls, the parts of Colombia that it controls,

what we've seen, for example, Hezbollah having in parts of Lebanon or what al Qaeda used to have in Afghanistan. Like other terrorist organizations, it needs money, and therefore it raises money through extortion and kidnapping as well as the drug trade. And as you probably know, it currently still holds many hostages, which it uses as political leverage. Like al Qaeda and Hezbollah, FARC is listed by the State Department, as well as by Canada and the EU, as a foreign terrorist group.

Now, here again we're facing a 21st century challenge in which the combination of criminality, terrorism and globalization enables an organization that is driven by an ideology to actually take possession of elements of a territory, to operate with relative impunity in those elements, and then to conduct and wage war against the legitimate authority not only in the country it seeks to overthrow but in other countries, including, with respect with to American citizens as well.

And this struggle may continue to broaden. As you know, the Colombian military has taken military action against FARC. And in recent months, FARC has suffered reverses, losing some of its leadership. But when you put FARC into South America, when you put Hezbollah into South America, we have the potential - not the reality - the potential for a tinderbox of additional threats to the security of the region and ultimately, therefore, to the security of the United States. And that's of course compounded to the extent that we see recent news reporting suggesting that the Venezuelan government has attempted to enable the FARC to carry out some of its activities against its Colombian neighbor.

Finally, as we talk about the kinds of man-made threats we face to our homeland security in this coming century, let me broaden the discussion further even beyond ideological - current ideological - groups into organized transnational criminal groups, because globalization, in addition to enabling the spread of dangerous ideologies, has also empowered criminal organizations to be better at trafficking in drugs, in human beings, and in other kinds of violent, anti-social activities.

In our own hemisphere, we have the rise of MS-13, a gang that was founded in the early 1980s by immigrants in Los Angeles, some of whom were former guerilla fighters in El Salvador. It began as a street gang, selling illegal narcotics, committing violent crimes and fighting turf wars with other criminal organizations and gangs. But over time, MS-13 spread across other major cities and, worse yet, back into Central America, engaging in assassinations-for-hire, assaults on law enforcement officials, and other kinds of criminal activity; the kind of activities that not only threaten the peace and well-being in the societies in which they operate, but even threaten the governance of some of the Central American countries which have difficulty dealing with substantial, powerful armed forces within their very midst.

In January of this year an FBI threat assessment noted that MS-13 is present in at least 42 of our 50 states, with 6,000 to 10,000 members nationwide. In Honduras in 1997 MS-13 kidnapped and murdered the son of the President, Richard Maduro. In 2002 in a Honduran city, MS-13 members boarded a bus, executed 28 people, including seven small children, and left a handwritten message taunting the government. And two years later, the President of Guatemala, Oscar Berger, received a message tied to the body of a dismembered man, warning of more killings to come.

This is not yet an ideological organization, but it is an organization which has the capability to do an enormous amount of damage and to disrupt the governmental structures of many of our allies in Central America. And so, as we look down the road, we try to envision what lies on the horizon in terms of man-made threats to the good order of our hemisphere. The possibility of a convergence of this kind of criminal organization with an ideological organization, certainly ought to give us pause and ought to force us to consider what steps we need to take to make sure we avert that threat from coming to fruition.

I've laid out what some of you may think is a grim scenario about what we face in the world. On the one hand, the Cold War is gone; we don't have to worry about a Soviet Union with whom we are eyeball-to-eyeball, poised with weapons of mass destruction. On the other hand, we have a much more disorderly set of threats, much more networked, much more widely distributed, much more difficult to deter and, unfortunately, much better enabled to carry out acts of violence because of what modern technology affords in terms of weapons, in terms of the ability to operate over the Internet, and in terms of the means of travel around the globe and communication around the globe, literally in real time or less.

And so what do we do to deal with this issue? Well, I will lay this out, I think, a strategy out, in my next speech, but let me give you some ideas of what I think we need to do in order to minimize, if not avert, some of these threats in the decade to come.

First, we need to turn global tools exploited by terrorists into global tools that we can use to preserve the

security of our people in a way that allows free travel and trade for those who are innocent, but impedes the movement of people who are out to commit acts of violence against us. Some of this involves the collection of information that allows us to identify who among the many of innocent travelers are people who warrant a closer look.

Some of the measures we need to do involve using biometrics to assure that we can identify who's who and to prevent people from impersonating innocents.

Third, the use of secure travel documentation, again, is something which allows us to have a better handle on who we and freely admit to the country in safety and who we need to be concerned about.

But beyond these immediate tactical measures that will make us better able to assure that we can regulate who exploits global tools in order to carry out acts of violence or destruction, we have to engage at the level of the ideology itself. We have to enable those who struggle against dangerous ideologies to have a voice. We have to encourage the communities that are communities of moderation and belief in the rule of law to get out there and get into the battlefield of ideas, because if we cede the battlefield of ideas only to those who are extremists, then we are giving them the most powerful weapon to recruit the next generation of terrorists.

And some of what we can do to do that enabling is to continue to encourage people from around the world to come to the United States - not in a way that compromises our security, but in a way that allows them to travel freely and readily. Some of what we can do is send our people abroad, and send our aid abroad. Secretary Gates has observed that one of most powerful weapons we have in fighting against terrorism is our foreign aid. And when we go into Africa and we fight against malaria or HIV/AIDS, we're actually striking a positive blow for the kind of ideology that we believe in, in the West, which is an ideology of toleration, which is an ideology that values human life and values human freedom.

So these are all the tools that we ought to use as we confront these threats of the 21st century. I don't think we can afford to give any of them up, and I think we need to be vigorous in employing all of them in every corner of the globe.

Finally, I guess I would say this. It's easy in the six years that have passed after September 11th to begin to regard the question of terrorism and these dangerous ideologies as if they're somehow a one-time artifact that we ought to put behind us, to view the discussion of these issues, as some people describe it, as "fear mongering." Well, I guess fear mongering to me means talking about something that's really not a realistic fear; you know, the old story about communists under every bed that we've come to realize was not really an accurate picture of what we faced in the 1950s.

So let's ask whether it's fear mongering to talk about the threat of terrorism. If you open your newspapers - if you've opened them over this past week, if you open them over the next month - what you're going to see, maybe not on the front page, but maybe buried somewhere in the middle of the newspaper, is the description of an ongoing trial that is now taking place in a courtroom in the city of London. The defendants are individuals who are accused of planning to blow up airliners coming from the United Kingdom to a number of cities in North America, including New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, Washington, Montreal and Toronto.

As laid out in the prosecution case that's being presented to the court and a jury, the individuals who hatched this plot wanted to cause as much destruction as possible, so here's what they did. They took sports bottles, things like Gatorade or the equivalent that people bring on airplanes, or used to bring on airplanes all the time. They didn't break the seals of the bottles. Instead, they took syringes and they took liquid explosives and they injected them into the bottles and then sealed the bottom up with glue. That way, when they came through with the bottle and the inspector at the screening check point looked at it, it would appear to be just an ordinary drink, unopened, that you purchased in a store.

They then brought the elements of the detonators on to the planes with them; the plan was to bring them on to the planes with them. The plan then was to take the detonators and the bottles, at some point, as these planes were over the middle of the Atlantic Ocean, and go into the bathroom and assemble these into bombs which would then be detonated while these planes were at the midpoint, roughly, between the United Kingdom and the United States.

Why did they want to detonate the bombs at that particular location? Because they realized that if they detonated the first bomb and the plane went down, there would not be enough time for the other planes to return to safety on land before those bombs blew up as well. To me, what that means is that these plotters conceived of - had the following vision in their minds as they conceived of the plot; that after the first bomb

went off on the airplane, and as word filtered back to the second plane, the third plane, the fourth plane, that there might be other bombs on those planes as well that the crews and maybe even the passengers would realize that there wouldn't be enough time to get back to safety; that in all likelihood, they were spending their final moments on airplanes before they perished to a watery grave.

These were people who, remember, were summer vacationers: families, parents with children. And these plotters cold-bloodedly and calculatedly determined that they wanted to kill them in the most horrific way possible, fully cognizant of the fact that they were visiting the kind of mental torture that no sane human being should want to visit on a parent sitting with children on an airplane flying across the ocean.

I encourage you to read that - those accounts of this trial as the evidence comes in over the next month. It will tell you, for example, why it is you can't get on an airplane in the United States now with liquids in a container that's more than three ounces. But beyond that it will tell you something else: that sometimes the things we're afraid about are unpleasant to talk about. Sometimes what we need to do to address those fears are difficult and challenging. And it's fair to debate the right way to address these problems. But what doesn't make sense is to close your eyes to them because they're too hard to think about.

These problems will not go away by themselves. And only if we have an open, robust, and accurate discussion of what the challenges are and what our responses are can we come to deal with this issue and this set of issues in a place, as I've said, somewhere between hysteria and complacency, which is what I would say is a reasonable response. Thank you very much.

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\* Replaced the word I with he.

This page was last reviewed/modified on April 17, 2008.