

SECURING THE HOME FRONT

James Jay Carafano

In matters of strategy, thought should always precede action. To its credit, the Bush administration made drafting a homeland security strategy one of its first tasks in the wake of the September 11th attacks on New York and Washington. That made a difference; history will show that this effort did as much or more to shape how the United States will face up to the challenge of transnational terrorism as the long telegram and NSC-68 told us how to fight the Cold War. The result has been a national effort that has, for the most part, neither veered into indifference nor careened into overreaction. It has also made Americans safer.

There is, however, no cause for complacency. Today, America's anti-terror strategy is under assault. In all likelihood, the Administration's tempered, risk-based approach to safeguarding the nation will win out in the end. But that is cold comfort in many ways. The temptation to substitute responding to the danger du jour, wasting taxpayer money, or demonizing security has become an increasingly irresistible Washington pastime, and will likely continue for some time.

Present at the creation

Without much pomp or fanfare, the White House released its National Strategy for Homeland Security ten months after 9/11, in July 2002. Like any good



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strategy, it included the basics of ends, ways, and means—what’s to be done; how will it be done; and what it will be done with. And, like any good strategy, it made some hard choices. For starters, it did not make comforting but empty promises like guaranteeing to stop every terrorist attack, all the time, everywhere. The strategy is more modest and realistic. All it promises is “a concerted national effort to *prevent* terrorist attacks within the United States, *reduce* America’s vulnerability to terrorism, and *minimize* the damage and recover from attacks that do occur.”¹ In doing so, the strategy acknowledges that failure is an option.

Making hard choices is not enough. Strategies also have to be appropriate for the task at hand. Long wars, whether against states or terrorists, require a special kind of strategy—one that places as much emphasis on keeping the state competitive as on getting the enemy.

The strategy was also realistic about what it would take to stop terrorists. It rightly eschews the notion that there is a single, “silver bullet” solution. Security would not be provided by any one initiative, whether strip-searching shipping containers, building walls, or denying visas to grandmothers. Rather, it would be found in the cumulative effect of all homeland security programs. For example, a terrorist might be discovered by an overseas intelligence operation while applying for a visa, during screening of an international flight manifest, during inspection at a port of entry, or during a domestic counterterrorism investigation. Like-

wise, if layers of defense don’t stop the terrorists, other initiatives would be undertaken to reduce vulnerabilities (such as beefing up security at nuclear power plants), making key targets less susceptible to attack. Finally, if these measures fail, the strategy seeks to make sure there were resources in place to adequately respond to terrorist incidents. The picture that emerges is holistic; improving security requires ensuring that each layer of the system is sufficient to do its part of the job and that efforts are complementary. Picking the best tools for each layer would be done by risk-based, cost-benefit analysis—betting on the measures that provided the most security for every buck spent.

America’s homeland security strategy also made a difficult fundamental choice about resources. Homeland security, it argued, had to be a shared responsibility. While the federal government focused on counterterrorism, state and local governments were tasked with providing for public safety within their communities. The private sector, which controls over 85 percent of the nation’s critical infrastructure (from the electrical power grid to telecommunications), also had significant responsibilities in protecting the nation from the threat of terrorism.² Everybody was responsible. Everybody should pay. Washington wouldn’t do it all—and it wouldn’t fund everything.

Sizing-up strategy

But making hard choices is not enough. Strategies also have to be appropriate for the task at hand. Long wars, whether against states or terrorists, require a special kind of strategy—one that places as much emphasis on keeping the state competitive as on getting the enemy.

Typically, in long wars, as states become desperate to win, they pull power to the center, centralize decision-making, increase taxation, and limit liberties. Ironically, as they become garrison states, the effort to mobilize power makes them less powerful. Less innovative, less productive, and less free, their wars become wars of attrition where the states find themselves prostrate at the end of the struggle—even if they are the winners. One of the notable exceptions to this trend was the Cold War, in which the United States and its allies emerged from the conflict stronger, more independent, and more free than when the contest started.³

The reason America weathered the Cold War so well was that it followed the tenets of good long war strategy.⁴ This included:

- *Providing security.* It was important to take the initiative away from the enemy and to protect American citizens. Therefore, the nation needed a strong mix of both offense and defense. Nothing was to be gained by seeming weak and vulnerable in the eyes of the enemy.
- *Building a strong economy.* Americans realized early on that economic power would be the taproot of strength, the source of power that would enable the nation to compete over the long term and would better the lives of its citizens. Maintaining a robust economy was a priority.
- *Protecting civil liberties.* Preserving a vibrant civil society and avoiding “the greatest danger”—the threat of sacrificing civil liberties in the name of security—was critical as well. Only a strong civil

society gives the nation the will to persevere during the difficult days of a long war.

- *Winning the battle of ideas.* From the beginning, Americans believed that in the end, victory could be achieved because the enemy would abandon a corrupt, vacuous ideology that was destined to fail its people. In contrast, the West had a legitimate and credible alternative to offer. All America needed to do was face its detractors with courage and self-confidence.

The key to success was carrying out all four of these tasks with equal vigor, while resisting the temptation to trade freedom for security or truth for prosperity.

The United States could do worse than follow the principles of good protracted war strategy that it practiced in the decades-long stand-off with the Soviet Union. And all the signs suggest that is exactly what is happening. There are more fundamental similarities than differences between Cold War and War on Terror strategy—and that is a good thing. It means that despite the trauma of a terrifying terrorist attack that killed over 3,000 people on U.S. soil, America is resisting the self-destructive impulse to seek security at the expense of all else.

By the numbers

America’s homeland security strategy is not only sound; there is some evidence it is working. The number of terrorist attacks and the time between them do not of course tell the whole story. After all, it took five years to plan 9/11, and three years to set up the Madrid railroad bombings. Still, the numbers must

be telling us something. Since 9/11, there have been only a handful of deaths in the Western Hemisphere as the result of terrorism, none the product of al-Qaeda and its ilk. In addition, according to the U.S. Justice Department, at least 15 terrorist plots have been thwarted in North America during that time, and many of those were not methodically planned but almost “Keystone Cops”-type operations.

What the numbers suggest is that the West is not an easy target. Instead, transnational groups are turning to what terrorists have historically done: attacking the weak and avoiding the strong. And the weak are in the terrorists’ own backyard. The Memorial Institute for the Prevention of Terrorism in Oklahoma City estimates that since 9/11 there have been 8,491 terrorist attacks in the Middle East and 16,269 fatalities—numbers that far exceed the losses in any other part of the planet.⁵ In 2005 alone, the government’s National Counterterrorism Center counted 8,223 victims of terrorism, including 2,627 deaths. South Asia, another region with large Islamic populations, runs second on the list with 5,401 total victims. In contrast, Western Europe suffered 339 victims and North America eight.⁶

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And it is not just the physical losses. By virtually every index, many countries that are losing ground in the march to peace, prosperity and

justice are Muslim. Terrorism is a key reason why. According to The Heritage Foundation’s *Index of Economic Freedom*, for example, Lebanon and Malaysia scored lower in 2005 than they did in 2004.⁷ Countries such as Afghanistan and Somalia were so chaotic they couldn’t even be scored. Other surveys tell a similar story. According to the rankings of the non-partisan Freedom House, in 2005 only one country out of 18 in the Middle East was graded as “free” (Israel). The region trails all others in Freedom House rankings, and although modest gains were recorded in 2005 (most notably in Lebanon), even those have probably been wiped out now.⁸

Turned back by Western security measures, the terrorists have turned on the world of Islam, with terrible results. The numbers suggest that the West’s defenses are working. They also argue that offensive measures need to do much better, not to save the rest of the world from the Islamic world, but to help the Islamic world save itself.

On the home front

Nor has the effort to protect the West against the threat of terrorism been an unbearable burden. In economic terms, the United States spends about one-half of one percent of GDP on homeland security. That is a pretty reasonable insurance policy. Homeland security spending by Washington represents about an eighth of what Americans spend on litigation every year. Nor is homeland security a significant drag on the economy; since 9/11, the United States has weathered a mild recession, recovered from the effects of one of the greatest natural disasters in its history (Hurricane Katrina—which by many estimates resulted in more than double the economic dis-

ruption caused by 9/11), watched the price of oil skyrocket, and borne the brunt of a costly war in Iraq. Yet, the U.S. economy is growing, inflation is low, and employment is high.

Where implementation of the strategy animates most critics is on issues of civil liberties. Since 9/11, there have been hysterical claims that every advance in security has come at the sacrifice of liberty. There are three factors animating fears about anti-terrorism campaigns. First, critics frequently decry the expansion of executive authority in its own right. They generically equate the potential for abuse of executive branch authority with the existence of actual abuse. They argue that the growth in presidential power is a threat, irrespective of whether the power has, in fact, been misused. These critics come from a long tradition of limited government, which fears any expansion of executive authority.

The second kind of criticism is stimulated by the “Luddite response”—a fear of technology. As the government begins to explore ways of taking advantage of the information age’s superior capacity to manage data through new information technologies, there are rising concerns that it will use these means to dig into our personal lives. Information, the thinking goes, equals power. With great efficiency comes more effective use of power. And with more power comes more abuse.

A third theme underlying criticism is more blatantly political. Take, for example, the passage of the first major post-9/11 anti-terrorism law in the United States, popularly called the Patriot Act. Regardless of its true merits or laws, the Act has become a *cause célèbre* for raising money and energizing constituencies that are predisposed to be critical of the

Administration’s response to terrorism. Brand labeling has become a part of the political process.⁹

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By and large, these fears are overblown. Criticisms of the government’s new anti-terrorism practices miss important distinctions and often blur potential and actuality. To be sure, many aspects of the Patriot Act (and other governmental initiatives) expand the power of the government to act. Americans should and have been rightly cautious about any expansion of government power. Yet, by and large, the potential for abuse of new executive powers has proven to be far less of a real danger than critics have presumed. In 2004, for example, the Department of Justice’s Inspector General (an independent investigative arm within the department) reported that there as yet had been no instances in which the Patriot Act has been used to infringe civil rights or liberties.¹⁰

Where opponents of the Patriot Act were equally wrongheaded was that their belief in the potential for abuse stems from a misunderstanding of the new powers that the government has been given by Congress to combat terrorists. In many cases, provisions of the Patriot Act simply apply tools we have used to combat other crimes, such as drug trafficking, to fighting terrorism.

More fundamentally, those who fear the expansion of executive power in the war on terrorism offer a bad alternative: prohibition. While we could afford that solution in the face

of traditional criminal conduct (allowing a thousand guilty men to go free to ensure that just one innocent person is not persecuted), we cannot accept that answer in combating terrorism. There is a better way. Vigilance and oversight (enforced through legal, organizational, and technical means) are the answer to deterring or preventing abuse. A watchful eye is necessary to control the risk of excessive encroachment. Paying attention to the problem is the best way of preventing the erosion of civil liberties. And that is a cornerstone of U.S. strategy.

The answer to fighting terrorists while preserving civil liberties and human rights is simple. It is not debating which is more important: It is simply doing both—and Americans have made a sincere effort to do just that.

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Shooting straight

The other most often-heard criticisms concerning implementation of the strategy are equally vacuous. Foremost among these is that the establishment of the Department of Homeland Security, the principal instrument created after 9/11 to implement the strategy, has resulted in a disorganized, ineffectual mess—the gang that couldn't shoot straight.

Indictments of the department are most unfair where they are based on unrealistic expectations. It is incredibly unreasonable to expect that a new federal organization could

be thrown together and at the outset get everything right. History argues for patience. The National Security Act of 1947 created America's premier Cold War weapons: what eventually became the Department of Defense and the Central Intelligence Agency. Yet it still took about a decade to figure out how best to fight the Russian bear and develop instruments like NATO, nuclear deterrence, and international military assistance, as well as the right concepts to guide how those instruments would be used. It required years of trial and error, experimentation, and bitter lessons to get it right. Arguably, the Department of Homeland Security is further along in getting its act together than the Pentagon was at a similar point in its history.

The two major black eyes the department has received, in fact, have very little to do with its efforts to combat terrorism. One of the most public censures was the withering criticism heaped on the department after an Arab-owned conglomerate announced it was buying a company that operated some port facilities in the United States. The sale of a British-based company which controlled cargo handling operations at a number of U.S. facilities—including six major U.S. ports—to Dubai Ports World, a government-owned company in the United Arab Emirates, raised many concerns, including nearly-hysterical rants from opportunistic members of Congress. The department was castigated for letting the deal go through. A review of the facts, however, suggested there were no serious security issues at stake.¹¹ Not only did DHS do nothing wrong, in a supreme act of irony they are now piloting a new security screening program at ports overseas (a program mandated by Congress) and

one of their chief partners is none other than Dubai Ports World.

The Dubai Ports World scandal might have been written off as just a bad “PR day” if it had not followed on the heels of another major blow to the department’s credibility: the federal response to Hurricane Katrina. President Bush was absolutely correct when he labeled the national response “inadequate.” When national catastrophes occur, the resources of the nation have to be mobilized to respond immediately. Equally important, Americans must remain confident that their leaders, at all levels of government, are in charge and doing the right things to make them safer. On both counts, after Katrina made landfall, the nation fell short. Heaping all the blame on Homeland Security and the department’s leadership, however, missed the real lessons to be learned from the disaster.

First of all, the disaster response was hardly the disaster its critics make it out to be. Recognizing all the limitations of the national capacity to meet the challenges of catastrophic disaster, it is equally important to focus on the incredible achievements of America’s responders. Several hundred thousand were successfully evacuated before the storm. If they not been, the death toll would have been unimaginable. Tens of thousands were rescued during and after the storm under harrowing conditions, including over 33,000 by the U.S. Coast Guard. Tens of thousands more, including those at the Superdome and Convention Center, were evacuated before they succumbed to dehydration, hunger, exposure, or disease. In the wake of the storm, many hundreds of thousands are being safely quartered by communities around the country. Likewise, media reports that New Orleans had

collapsed into a living hell of chaos and murder, proved, on further investigation, to be wildly inaccurate.¹²

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In comparison to the devastation reaped by the tsunami in Southeast Asia, the U.S. capacity to save lives in a similar disaster proved unparalleled. This didn’t just happen; it resulted from the decisions of government leaders, volunteer groups, private sector initiatives, and the selfless actions of communities and individuals.

It wasn’t all good news, however. Without question, Katrina also revealed the flaws in the department’s ability to organize a federal response to a major catastrophe. That should have come as a surprise to no one. Following 9/11, the federal government invested only a modicum of effort in preparing for catastrophic disaster. The federal government was required to dole out grants at the state and local level, with scant regard to national priorities. Katrina showed the limitations of that approach. In the wake of the storm, all the fire and police stations in New Orleans lay under water, as did much of the equipment bought with federal dollars. Only a national system—capable of mustering the whole nation—can respond to catastrophic disasters.

To his credit, after his appointment as Secretary of Homeland Security, Michael Chertoff understood

the problem and had a plan to fix it. Shortly after taking office, he initiated a department-wide Second Stage Review of DHS missions, resources, and organizations. The review recognized that the department had to place a lot more emphasis on preparing for catastrophic disasters, and that Secretary Chertoff's proposed reorganization would address many of the department's shortfalls. The plan, unfortunately, was released in July 2005, less than a month before the storm hit, and was overtaken by events before the department had any real opportunity to act on it. If not for Katrina, Chertoff might never have had to bear the criticism of one of the department's significant flaws.

A victim of its own success

So, the good news is that Washington is not doing too badly. But that is also the bad news. The fact that America has actually done a fair job protecting itself from terrorists has actually made the politics of homeland security worse. Many in Congress feel that the homeland security effort is a "free lunch" to push their personal agenda. As a result, in the last few years Congress has increasingly haunted the homeland security effort with all kinds of measures detrimental to real security. They include:

- *Checkbook security*—simply authorizing more homeland security spending on programs does not necessarily make Americans much safer. That is particularly true for measures intended to protect infrastructure like bridges, trains, and tunnels. Terrorists thrive on attacking vulnerabilities, looking for the weakest link. The United States is a nation of

virtually infinite vulnerabilities, from high schools to shopping malls. Pouring billions of federal tax dollars into protecting any of them may please some constituents and vested interests, but it will not do much to stop terrorists, who will just move on to another "soft" target. The far better investment of federal dollars is on counterterrorism programs that break up terror cells and thwart attacks before they occur.

- *"Feel good" security*—these proposals sound compelling, but on closer scrutiny make no sense. Inspecting every container shipped from overseas is a case in point. There is no evidence that this would be a more cost-effective means to deter threats than the current cargo screening system. On the contrary, screening everything would be extremely expensive, and the technology is not very effective. But even if the available screening technologies were cheap, fast, and accurate, they would produce so much data (from peeking into the tens of thousands of containers bound for U.S. ports every day) that the information could not be checked before the containers' contents arrived in stores. Tax dollars should not be spent on what makes for the best election-year bumper sticker, but on initiatives that offer the most security for the dollar spent.
- *Checklist security*—legislation that simply demands more reports, adds more mandates, and sets more unrealistic deadlines might check the box that America has an activist Congress, but it would achieve little else. Any proposed

new security measures should be backed up by credible analyses of how they would diminish the threat of transnational terrorism, the likely costs of implementing them, and their suitability and feasibility. Few measures proposed in Congress these days pass muster.

- *False security*—clothing any political agenda that pleases stakeholders or promotes agendas under the false claim that these measures advance national security should be rejected outright. Unfortunately, these days they usually they are not.

Hijacking homeland security, in other words, is becoming more common. And it is becoming a bipartisan sport. In the last Congress, for example, members of both political parties pressed for building a wall on America's southern border, a simplistic solution that has little prospect for improving border security.¹³ The 110th Congress started out with a bipartisan bill approved in the House that purported to further implement the recommendations made by the 9/11 Commission. It did anything but, and included measures to revise Transportation Security Administration (TSA) work rules and other provisions that had little to do with the Commission's report.

Efforts to hijack homeland security might be less worrisome if they were not impeding the capabilities of the Department of Homeland Security. Frequently, however, they do. In the wake of Katrina, for example, Congress mandated all kinds of changes in how the department organizes to respond to disasters. Many of them actually undermined reforms that Secretary Chertoff already had under

way. Likewise, Congress has done much to stymie the department's effort to make homeland security grants more effective and efficient.¹⁴ Indeed, many of the department's most serious challenges can be traced to unrealistic mandates and requirements imposed by Congress.

A war to be won

Meddling in homeland security should come as no surprise. It is part of how democracies fight wars. Americans will debate and question the value of what is being done before a war, during wartime, and for decades after. The odds are, however, that despite the distractions of Washington politics, the United States will stick to the fundamentals of good long war strategy, just as it did during the Cold War. After all, Winston Churchill was right: Americans always do the right thing—after they have exhausted every other option. In the War on Terror, the United States gives every indication of continuing this tradition.



1. *National Strategy for Homeland Security*, White House, Office of Homeland Security, July 2002, 2, http://www.whitehouse.gov/homeland/book/nat_strat_hls.pdf (emphasis added).
2. *Ibid.*, 63–65.
3. See, for example, Aaron L. Friedberg, *In the Shadow of the Garrison State: America's Anti-Statism and Its Cold War Strategy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).
4. Described in James Jay Carafano and Paul Rosenzweig, *Winning the Long War: Lessons from the Cold War for Defeating Terrorism and Preserving Freedom* (Washington, DC: The Heritage Foundation, 2005).
5. Information derived from the Memorial Institute for the Prevention of Terrorism's *Terrorism Knowledge Base*, <http://www.tkb.org/Category.jsp?catID=318>.
6. National Counterterrorism Center, *Report of Incidents of Terrorism 2005*, April 11, 2006,

- <http://wits.nctc.gov/reports/crot2005nct-cannexfinal.pdf>.
7. Marc A. Miles et al., *2006 Index of Economic Freedom* (Washington, DC: The Heritage Foundation and the *Wall Street Journal*, 2006).
 8. Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2006*, n.d., <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=15&year=2006>.
 9. In the run-up to the 2004 presidential election, for example, the [moveon.org](http://www.moveon.org) website offered a full-page ad reprinting excerpts of speeches by former Vice President Al Gore. It is no coincidence that many Democratic presidential aspirants garnered great applause with the “novel” suggestion that, if elected, they would fire Attorney General John Ashcroft. See Carl Matzelle, “Gephardt Talks the Talk Steelworkers Want to Hear,” *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, December 7, 2003, A24, and Greg Pierce, “Inside Politics,” *Washington Times*, September 23, 2003, A6. To the extent that criticism of the Patriot Act and related activities is purely political, the debate about these truly difficult questions is diminished. Thoughtful criticism recognizes both the new realities of the post-9/11 world and the potential for benefit and abuse in governmental activity.
 10. See *Report to Congress on Implementation of Section 1001 of the USA Patriot Act*, U.S. Department of Justice, Office of the Inspector General, January 27, 2004, www.usdoj.gov/oig/special/0401a/index.htm; see also “Report Finds No Abuses of Patriot Act,” *Washington Post*, January 28, 2004, A2. This is consistent with the conclusions of others. For example, at a Senate Judiciary Committee hearing about the Patriot Act, Senator Joseph Biden (D-DE) said that “some measure of the criticism [of the Patriot Act] is both misinformed and overblown.” His colleague, Senator Dianne Feinstein (D-CA), concurred: “I have never had a single abuse of the Patriot Act reported to me. My staff... asked [the ACLU] for instances of actual abuses. They... said they had none.” Even the lone Senator to vote against the Patriot Act, Russ Feingold (D-WI), said that he “supported 90 percent of the Patriot Act” and that there is “too much confusion and misinformation” about the Act. See “Efforts to Prevent Terrorism in the United States,” Hearing before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, October 21, 2003, feingold.senate.gov/~feingold/statement/03/10/2003A22748.html. These views, from Senators outside of the Bush administration and from an internal watchdog, are at odds with the fears often expressed by the public.
 11. James Jay Carafano and Alane Kochems, “Security and the Sale of Port Facilities: Facts and Recommendations,” Heritage Foundation *WebMemo* no. 997, February 22, 2006, <http://www.heritage.org/Research/HomelandDefense/wm997.cfm>.
 12. For examples, see Marvin Olasky, *The Politics of Disaster: Katrina, Big Government, and a New Strategy for Future Crises* (Nashville: W Publishing Group, 2006).
 13. James Jay Carafano et al., “Better, Faster, and Cheaper Border Security,” Heritage Foundation *Backgrounder* no. 1967, September 6, 2006, <http://www.heritage.org/Research/Immigration/bg1967.cfm>.
 14. James Jay Carafano and Jamie Metzler, “Homeland Security Grant Reform: Congressional Inaction Must End,” Heritage Foundation *Backgrounder* no. 1971, September 15, 2006, <http://www.heritage.org/Research/HomelandDefense/bg1971.cfm>.