

Prepared Remarks by Secretary Napolitano at Harvard University's John F. Kennedy Jr. Forum

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SECRETARY NAPOLITANO: Good evening and thank you. It's an honor to be here at the Kennedy School Forum. I know it's become something of a rite of passage for officials to come here to express their views, and then engage in a famously tough round of questioning. But as a person who answers to more than 80 different Congressional committees and subcommittees, I think I'm ready.

I have a real appreciation for the Kennedy School, especially because I have some key staff who were educated here. Some are here tonight, so if you don't agree with something, I'll let you take it up with them directly.

For me, being here carries a special weight. Leaders have come to Harvard for many, many years to frame the significant issues our nation and our world faces. Perhaps most famously, George Marshall addressed Harvard graduates in 1947 as Secretary of State, and described for them the colossal challenge of rebuilding a world torn apart by war. Marshall described the scale of devastation after WWII, and told the students,

"the problem is one of such enormous complexity that the very mass of facts presented to the public by press and radio make it exceedingly difficult for the man in the street to reach a clear appraisal of the situation."

Today, America's challenges are quite different. And in our information age, so too are the ways the person in the street gets their information. But George Marshall's central point still rings true. And, arguably, it's more important than ever that our citizens have a clear understanding of today's security challenges.

Tonight, I want to share that "clear appraisal of the situation" because I believe the American people want, and deserve, candor about what we face. I will talk about the threats we're seeing at the Department of Homeland Security [DHS], what we're doing to confront them, and what I think every American can do to help.

I should say that despite the sweeping name of my Department, the responsibility within the federal government to keep our homeland secure does not lie solely with us. The United States military, and the men and women who wear our country's uniform, play an absolutely vital role. So do the nation's intelligence agents, law enforcement officers, and our diplomats around the

world. It is truly a "whole of government" effort, involving many Departments and Agencies coordinating their roles.

The New Threat Picture

My department was created after September 11th, 2001. And today, our first priority remains protecting against, and preventing, another terrorist attack on America. At DHS, we are constantly looking for ways to make it harder for terrorists to strike us, and to bounce back quickly if they do.

Our Department, and our government, has substantially re-aligned itself so that we're confronting threats before they fully emerge. And over the past year, DHS has organized itself to confront four categories of threats.

First, we all recognize the desire of foreign terrorists to strike here at home. The attempt to blow up an American airliner on December 25th was a stark reminder of how terrorists adapt their tactics to get around our security measures, and kill citizens from around the world.

It's not just keeping these people off planes. It's also preventing terrorists from entering through our air, sea, and land ports of entry, or along our thousands of miles of border and coastline. And it's detecting the presence of any chemical, biological, radiological, or nuclear weapon being smuggled into the country.

Second, we are confronting a variety of domestic threats. You have all read about recent cases of "home-based" terrorism, where men and women, who often grew up here, have become violent extremists, often following an interaction with a charismatic radicalizer online, or in terrorist training camps abroad. Some of these individuals have ties to al Qaeda or other terror groups—like David Headley, who just pled guilty for his role in the 2008 Mumbai terrorist attacks, and Najibullah Zazi, who recently pled guilty to plotting to bomb the New York Subway.

Domestically, we are also dealing with "lone wolf" violence, individuals not connected to a terror cell or larger group, but who commit acts of public violence, often on behalf of a grievance. We're on guard against dangerous individuals or groups who would use employment to gain access to public places like airports, malls, and train stations, or sensitive infrastructure like water treatment, chemical, or energy plants. And we're staying vigilant for possible spillover violence along our Southwest border where we are a strong partner with Mexico in taking the fight to the drug cartels in that area.

A third category of threats are those from cyberspace. Here, DHS is responsible for safeguarding our government's civilian computer networks against crime and attacks. But this isn't some future threat. It's here now. We're confronting it every day. And the implications not just for government, but for all of us, are enormous.

Combating the cyber threat is going to require a partnership among government, academia, and the private sector as ambitious and sustained as any our nation has seen before. And I should say

to the bright students here that DHS wants the best minds coming out of our universities to come join us in this effort.

Finally, I would add a fourth kind of concern we're trying to counteract—and that's the threat of complacency and of unrealistic expectations. Since I became Secretary more than a year ago, I've emphasized that the American people need to be prepared, not scared.

But rejecting the politics of fear doesn't mean the threats are any less real, or that we shouldn't consider what they mean for our families and our communities. In a world of fast-changing threats, we simply must resist the urge to become complacent or cynical about what's before us. We must not leave ourselves, our families, and our communities less than fully prepared.

What We're Doing About the Threats

When I spoke about the threats from terrorism in remarks last year at the Council on Foreign Relations, I argued that our adversaries were every bit as "networked" as the society around us. The very same networks the vast majority of us use to connect and to build, those small few use to recruit and destroy.

And amid the social media revolution that we're steeped in, violent extremists have also harnessed the power of YouTube, MySpace, and Twitter to target vulnerable individuals. When Facebook was invented in a dormitory here on the Harvard campus, could anyone imagine that just five years later, among its 400 million worldwide users, would be extremists calling for violence against America from half a world away?

You're all aware how online education has flourished. Well, the Internet has become a powerful distance-learning tool for would-be terrorists, as well. And just like the Internet itself, the new terrorist threats are diffuse, they are versatile, and they are constantly evolving.

Securing America against these threats—while simultaneously expediting the legal flow of people and commerce, and staying true to the values and rights that define our nation—is the essence of the 21st century enterprise we call homeland security. To succeed, we need to be fast, flexible, and creative.

So, how is the Department of Homeland Security countering these types of threats? First, keeping terrorists and other criminals out of the country is a fundamental responsibility for DHS. Right now, we are pursuing an historic international aviation security initiative to strengthen a system that has been an engine for growth and prosperity, both here and abroad.

This is a system on which we all rely. But it has weak links. And, therefore, all nations share the threats to that system, as well as the responsibility for safeguarding it. If you've flown lately, you may have noticed a heightened law enforcement presence, and some new screening procedures around the country. That will continue...and will continue to evolve to stay ahead of new threats.

But the U.S. government doesn't conduct screening abroad. So we're working closely with our international partners to make sure that we address any weak links ... so that a terrorist can't

exploit a security gap in one country to gain access to the entire global aviation network. In fact, just this month we instituted a new, real-time, threat-based screening policy for all air carriers with international flights to the United States, which supersedes the emergency measures put in place after December 25th.

We're also working to secure strong international agreements so that all of our allies and international partners can benefit from one another's intelligence about known terror suspects. This goes beyond aviation security as well. We're using the logic of information-sharing and threat-based protocols to implement a smart, strategic approach to passenger and cargo screening at our sea and land ports as well.

Second, we are also working to better understand and counter the threat from individuals who are already in the country. We primarily do that by ensuring that state, local and tribal law enforcement have access to information and intelligence about the threats we face so they can confront them on the frontlines.

By sharing information with them, we are enlisting them in our terrorism prevention efforts. And by receiving information from them, and sharing it with our federal partners, we are maximizing the chance for success at each level. And as DHS increases the capacity of our law enforcement partners to understand and analyze local trends, we are becoming a more valuable resource for communities themselves.

Indeed, we're working hard to build trust, to learn from, and to share our resources and experience with communities to help them combat violent extremists – here or abroad – that target vulnerable individuals. As President Obama's counterterrorism advisor, John Brennan, recently said, "keeping our country safe and protecting our sons and daughters from hateful ideologies demands trust and cooperation."

Of course, science and technology also play an indispensable role in all the domains where we work. Confronting emerging threats requires anticipating them, and then getting out in front of them. For that reason, we're investing heavily in research and development – with a strong focus on the chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear threats that have the potential to cause the greatest harm.

What does this look like? It means we are accelerating the deployment of new explosive detection equipment, advanced imaging technology, and canine teams at our airports; supporting research to better understand and detect suspicious behavior, as well as chemical and biological agents; partnering with universities and private industry to study threats to agriculture, critical infrastructure, and the food supply; and working with law enforcement and the private sector to counter the threat of improvised explosive devices.

Next, to combat the rapidly evolving threats from cyberspace, we're moving quickly on two fronts: to secure our government's civilian computer networks against attack; and to work with the private sector and public to increase the overall level of security in cyberspace. One very important piece of this is educating and informing Americans. And so last month I announced a competition using what we call a "wisdom of crowds" approach to increasing our cyberliteracy.

Our "National Cybersecurity Awareness Campaign Challenge" is open to experts and non-experts alike, and rewards innovative ways of spreading the word about how the public can help secure the country simply by making their own online habits more secure. The challenge is open until April 30th and I invite you to join it at www.DHS.gov.

And lastly, to fight against complacency, and make our nation more ready and resilient, we're working to engage and empower the public to take the most basic steps: to get an emergency kit, make an emergency plan, and be informed. Are we there yet? The short answer is no. We need all families, all communities, all of our businesses, to be talking about their plans, and thinking about how to get smarter and better equipped to deal with a range of potential emergencies.

How do we get there? Well, the government certainly has a role, and part of that role is being straight about the nature of the threats we face. And part of it is continuing to work day and night, and constantly ask ourselves if we're doing everything we can to prevent another terrorist attack. But making a habit out of preparedness...making it part of our culture...will ultimately draw on the innovation and civic spirit of the American people. And our nation has never lacked for that.

The Role of Resilience

In the past, we've heard some argue that to defeat terrorism, the government has to be right 100 percent of the time, while the terrorists only have to be right once. I reject that premise. We can't put a dome over our country. We can't guarantee there won't be another attack. No one can.

But we are a strong, resilient country. And we must resolve that even a successful attack will not be a defeat for our way of life. We can target our resources against emerging threats and evolving risks. We can better empower the American public, and draw on what President Obama has called our greatest national security asset: our values.

Indeed, it is those values that define us as a nation. And those values will always be a force more powerful than the murderous ideology of a tiny few. So let's be clear about what victory against terrorism and violent extremism actually means. Democracy and freedom have stood the test of time. They are superior in every way to the perverse narrative of killers and criminals...which is what terrorists really are.

We must then leverage the shared American values that have led us to victory before. Every single one of us can become smarter, can become better informed, and better prepared. But that becomes possible when the "man on the street" knows and understand the kinds of threats I've described tonight.

On a concrete level, Americans have to work to build preparedness—to ensure that our communities are prepared to address any danger that comes their way, from terrorist threats to natural disasters. On a more abstract level, Americans also must work to build resilience—the ability to get up and come back stronger if we get hit.

That doesn't come from a set of government programs. That comes from the heart of the American people. It knows no ethnic, religious, racial, or other boundaries. And no violent fringe can take it away. We will need that resilience to fight today's emerging threats, just as we did in the days after Pearl Harbor and after 9/11.

Our nation has faced down violent radical movements before. We've witnessed terrorism, at home and abroad, and could witness it again some day. In big ways and small, that resilience has been a pillar of our security. We saw it in the passengers who took matters into their own hands on September 11th, and indeed again on December 25th. Or the security personnel who saved lives at Ft. Hood last year, or at the Pentagon just last month.

All these examples could have ended differently. But the resilience, the decency, and the sense of shared responsibility that kicked in each time took them in another direction. Terrorism is a tactic designed not just to kill, but to make us feel powerless. But we are never powerless. We control the way we prepare ourselves, the way we anticipate and combat the threats, and the way we respond if something does happen.

America is a strong nation. We are a resilient nation. And as we confront these new threats, we will use our values and our way of life as the most powerful source of our strength. For now, and for years to come. Thank you.

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