

**Opening Statement of Chairman Joseph Lieberman
Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee Hearing
“Confronting the Terrorist Threat to the Homeland: Six Years After 9/11.”
Washington, DC
September 10, 2007**

Tomorrow – September 11, 2007 – people across the nation, and in many places around the world, will pause to mourn and reflect on the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001.

Today we rededicate ourselves to the memories of those lost – and the families and nation that grieve for them.

Today we take time to assess the Islamist terrorist threat to America and what our government is doing to protect the American people from an attack like the one that occurred six years ago.

Today we ask: What lessons were learned? Where do we stand in our ability to detect and deter the next attack that we know is being plotted? And is our government ready to respond effectively to mitigate the damage to our citizens and our way of life should another attack be carried out.

The National Intelligence Council’s “Estimate on the Terrorist Threat to the Homeland,” issued in July, makes the continuing dangers clear, and I quote:

“We assess that al-Qaeda’s homeland plotting is likely to continue to focus on prominent political, economic and infrastructure targets with the goal of producing mass casualties, visually dramatic destruction, significant economic aftershocks, and/or fear in the U.S. population.”

While the core of the 9/11/01 al-Qaeda is weaker and no longer operates under the cover of the Taliban government of Afghanistan - and its forces in Iraq are now on the run - its leadership has regenerated itself and its hateful ideology is metastasizing across the Internet.

In his tape posted over the weekend, Osama bin Laden sounds like a rambling political candidate of the internet fringe, railing against American business, coming out for lower taxes, talking about high mortgage interest rates, and how democratic societies and free-markets must be replaced by conversion to Islam and the rule of Mullahs, rather than the rule of law.

Taken by itself, this statement seems like the rants of an irrational street person.

But the fact is, bin Laden is a mass murderer who has the blood of tens of thousands of people on his hands.

And I’m speaking not just the more than 3,000 Americans who died on 9/11, or in other terrorists attacks against the West, but also in the murder of thousands and thousands of his fellow Muslims – men, women and children – innocents upon whom al Qaeda has rained indiscriminate death in Iraq, Afghanistan and throughout the world.

Bin Laden’s tape is another shot across our bow. It is the sound of another alarm which calls us to alertness and duty and tells us that bin Laden and his ilk are out there, and so long as they are, the life of every American is endangered. It is another alarm that reminds us al Qaeda is out there, and so long as it is, it endangers the life of every American.

Consider the most recent plot broken up in Germany, which German officials have said was professionally organized mostly by native Germans who were radicalized in Germany and then traveled to al Qaeda camps in Waziristan for training.

And then remember the actual and foiled attacks in England, Scotland, Spain, Algeria and Denmark – all also locally plotted – some aimed at America and/or American targets.

And then come home and focus on the Fort Dix and JFK Airport plots, which demonstrated beyond any doubt that there are people right here in America who have swallowed the jihadist ideology and are prepared to kill innocent Americans.

These are the evils and dangers of our age that we must live with and defend again.

We are grateful to have as witnesses today the four men most responsible for the protection of the American people from Islamist terrorism.

As I look at the four of you, it is striking to me that three of you lead federal departments or offices that did not exist on September 11, 2001, and were created in legislation that was in part initiated in this Committee, passed by Congress with the support of members of both parties, and signed by the President to provide better protection to the American people than they were getting from their government on this day six years ago.

Let me say clearly that the agencies you four administer, the federal employees that you lead, and the work you have done together have made our country a lot safer than it was on September 11, 2001. And, of course, although they are not here, I would add the Departments of Defense and State.

There is undoubtedly some luck in the fact that America – contrary to all expectations on 9-11 – has not suffered another terrorist attack in the last six years.

But it is no mere accident and it is not just luck.

It is in good measure, I believe, because of the smart, hard work you and your agencies have done that we have not been attacked again here at home.

I say this with gratitude, but with no sense of comfort or triumph. You and I know there is more your agencies must do – and do better – and that the enemy remains strong, agile and eager to attack us again.

But on the eve of the sixth anniversary of 9/11 – one of the darkest days in our history - it is also appropriate that we stop and say thank you for all that you have done in the last six years to protect us and the homeland.

When we created the DHS, the DNI, and the NCTC, and supported the transformation of the FBI, we never intended them to be static offices or organizations.

We wanted them to be not just strong and capable, but as agile, flexible, and fast moving as our enemies.

We are still in the early days of what will be a long war against Islamist extremists. Today we want to consider what we have done and still must do together to secure our homeland and win this war.

Senator Collins.