



United States Senate

Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs

Chairman Joseph I. Lieberman, ID-Conn.

Ten Years After 9/11: Are We Safer?

Chairman Joe Lieberman

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AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY

Good morning, the hearing will come to order. I want to welcome our distinguished panel of witnesses, Secretary Napolitano, Director Mueller and Director Olsen, testifying for the first time since his confirmation.

This past weekend, in ceremonies and vigils across the nation, we stopped to remember the nearly 3,000 people who were killed ten years ago in the attacks of September 11, 2001 and to appreciate the acts of heroism and service by countless Americans on that day and every day since to protect our homeland and defeat the violent Islamist extremists who attacked us on 9/11.

The 9th anniversary of 9/11 last year didn't get the same degree of attention. And neither will the 11th anniversary next year. And in some sense that's why we're here this morning. This annual hearing on the status of the threat against our homeland with the heads of these three critically important agencies has become a tradition. And Senator Collins and I very much wanted to hold it after 9/11 to look back a little bit, but really to look forward and make the point that our work goes on.

Even though we had fresh warnings that alerted us over the past few days, there's already evidence that, in a quite natural reaction, Americans are beginning to forget how real the threat of violent Islamist extremism continues to be. There was a Gallup poll taken last year that showed terrorism ranked at the bottom of six concerns that people had -- probably because of the intensity of economic problems -- behind the economy, jobs, government corruption, federal spending, and health care. And just last week a study published by the Cato Institute called for abolishing the Department of Homeland Security -- which essentially would return us to where we were pre 9/11.

In some ways we may be the victims of our own success in protecting the homeland since there has not been another mass-casualty terrorist attack on American soil since 9/11 -- a reality that, ten years ago, no one would have dared to predict.

Some have taken this lack of another large-scale attack as further evidence that the U.S. government exaggerated the danger posed by Islamist extremism and "overreacted" in the wake of 9/11.

I believe this is a profoundly mistaken and ultimately irresponsible conclusion. We have weakened our enemies and protected our homeland but our enemies are not vanquished. That's why our vigilance must be constant and not limited to the attention for a particular anniversary.

As the Senate Committee on Homeland Security, it's our responsibility to make sure the national focus is not distracted from the threat. For our witnesses and the tens of thousands of people who work with them, it is their constant responsibility to protect our homeland. So we welcome them to this annual threat hearing and thank them for the service and for all that their respective agencies have done to ensure that we have not had another terrorist attack in the next ten years.

But the violent Islamist extremism ideology that inspired the attacks of 9/11 remains a potent force, though weakened throughout the world, and has had an effect in the radicalization of homegrown terrorists. Today we've asked our three witnesses to help us answer at least three big questions.

One is to take a look back at what the U.S. government and their agencies have done since 9/11. Two, the focus of this hearing is to discuss the status of the current threat of Islamist terrorism to our homeland. The third is to discuss what our government currently is doing to counter that threat.

So for me, the question today is not 'are we safer than we were on 9/11?' I think it's self-evidently clear that we are safer. The question is 'what are we doing and what should we be doing to ensure that safety continues to be what it is and is strengthened in the face of the challenges we face?'

The ten year anniversary of 9/11 has passed, the media and public attention will naturally fade, but this congress and future congresses, and this administration and future administrations, must stay focused on the threat and its ever-evolving tactics until the ideology is truly vanquished and gone.

Senator Collins?