



**Remarks by the Honorable Michael E. Leiter
Director of the National Counterterrorism Center**

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CLARK ERVIN: Thank you all very much for coming. As you know, probably, I'm Clark Ervin, the director of the Homeland Security Program here at the Aspen Institute. I see many familiar faces and a few new faces, so for people in both categories, welcome – delighted that you're here.

Before we get started, one word of advertisement. As a number you know, I've been doing a series of roundtables around the country, thanks to a very generous grant from the Ford Foundation, to look at various cities' preparations for terrorism and for natural disasters, the cities being New York and Los Angeles, Chicago, Houston and New Orleans, and the report from the New York Roundtable, which we had a while ago now, is just out. Here is a copy hot off the presses. All of you obviously are on my mailing list so you'll be getting a PDF copy of this, and if anybody would like a hard copy, just let me know. It's an example of the work we do in the – please, absolutely – (laughter) – the work that we do in the Homeland Security, but it's intended for policy-makers like the director of the National Counterterrorism Center.

And with that, by way of segue let me now introduce the director of the National Counterterrorism Center, Mike Leiter. I think you all got copies of the bio in the back so I won't take time from his presentation to go over it extensively, but I just want to highlight the fact that for such a young man – for anybody, Mr. Leiter's accomplishments are incredibly impressive, but especially so for someone so young. He was the principal deputy director of the NCTC before becoming the director, as you see here, and before that the deputy chief of staff for the Office of the DNI, and was instrumental in the establishment of the Office of the DNI. Before that, the deputy general counsel and assistant director of the popularly named Robb-Silberman Commission, before that an assistant United States attorney.

And, for an old lawyer like me, I'm particularly impressed by his academic background: Columbia for undergraduate school, Harvard Law School magna cum laude, the 113th, I think it was, president of the Harvard Law Review – rather reminiscent of the principal client of the director. And speaking of the principal client of the director, the present president of the United States, I think it is a testament to his mastery of the issues and his facility for communicating them that, like Bob Gates, Mr. Leiter was retained by the Obama administration, having first been the director during the Bush administration.

So with that by way of introduction, it's my pleasure to introduce Mike Leiter, the director of the National Counterterrorism Center.

MICHAEL LEITER: Thank you very much, Clark. It's nice to see so many familiar faces and some new faces as well. I normally start by saying, oh, I'm so pleased to be here, and to tell you the truth I'm only sort of pleased to be here. (Laughter.) When Clark asked me to speak at the Aspen Institute, I of course jumped at the opportunity, and then the invitation came and it was in Washington and not Aspen.

(Laughter.)

MR. ERVIN: We can fix that.

MR. LEITER: But it's nice to see you folks anyway. I will go off script for just a minute and say one of the – the second or third time I met President Obama I told him – and this is an absolutely true story – I said, Mr. President, thank you. It's an honor to stay on and serve you. Thank you for asking me to do so, but I want to tell you, you're causing a little bit of trouble in my family because I got a call from my wonderful Jewish mother the other day and she said, so, you went to Columbia, you went to Harvard Law School, you were president of the Harvard Law Review; he's president. You've got nothing. (Laughter.) So, many people know mothers are both the greatest supporters and the biggest critics. (Laughter.)

It is very nice to be here today, and I want to split my talk – which I've been assigned 15 to 20 minutes and I will really try to honor that. It's in three parts. Very, very quickly I do want to give an overview of what I do at NCTC because although we've been around now for coming up on five years – not yet five years – I think it's important to remind people what we do because frankly, even the people with whom I work on a daily basis aren't always sure. Second, I want to focus most of my comments on the terrorism threat that I see today – how it's changed, how it's morphed, and what we're facing I think into the future. And finally I want to at least touch on some of the challenges that I think we see in the coming years and how I think that the new administration is relatively well-postured to respond to those. And I think that will also be a good starting point for the questions, and I'm sure some folks especially, like Pam and Eric on my left have for me today.

But first NCTC, and I'm going to start with the requisite mission statement. And I'm going to start there because in this case I think it's a lot more useful than the rather convoluted language of the Intelligence Reform Act. So NCTC's mission statement that we just rewrote not long ago is, "Lead our nation's effort to combat terrorism at home and abroad by analyzing the threat, sharing that information with our partners, and integrating all instruments of national power to ensure unity of effort." There are four points I want to hit there.

First of all, it's combating terrorism at home and abroad, and although virtually every other piece of the federal counterterrorism bureaucracy does something at home and abroad, NCTC is the one component that, really, borders don't make any difference at all. Of course, the CIA works mostly overseas but has a U.S. presence. FBI works largely domestically but has a similar overseas presence, and I could go on down the line. But NCTC really is unique in that in my job

it makes no difference to me whatsoever, other than in critical protection of civil liberties and the like and different legal standards, it makes no difference to me where the threat is, where it's emanating from. We analyze it. We're trying to warn people about it, whether or not, again Peshawar or Philadelphia or anywhere in between, and I think that's an important thing to note because I do think that out of 9/11, that was one of the real weaknesses of the U.S. federal system, and it's one that I hope that we've tried to solve.

Now, analyzing the threat, we do this in a number of ways. We do it in the traditional ones, of course – you know, watching the daily threats streams as they come up, trying to monitor threats, trying to provide warning about those threats. But I want to also note that that's really only one part of what we're doing. The area that I've grown most over the past two years actually involves deeper causes and root causes of radicalization and terrorism, so it's radicalization, extremist messaging, putting resources into it, understanding through a variety of different lenses where the threat is coming from and how we counter that threat before people actually want to become suicide bombers or attackers of some sort. Also, very focused efforts on combating terrorist acquisition – chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear weapons. There is a lot of fear about that and we have, I think, brought together probably the single-best focus in the U.S. government on that topic.

And, finally, looking at things which aren't quite as sexy – if there's anything sexy about counterterrorism at all – sexy as tracking a current plot, and that's looking at how terrorists move – how they move their money, but how they move as people, how they communicate, how they go from country to country with documents and the like in trying to help frame organizations like DHS, protective measures in the United States and abroad to address that. So that's the analyzing of threat.

The third point is the sharing of the information because it obviously doesn't do anyone any good if we get all this information and we analyze it and we don't share it. Now, the most tangible illustration of how we share that information is three times a day, every day of the year – thankfully I'm not at all of them – but we hold a secure video teleconference with fundamentally the entire U.S. government that deals with counterterrorism. So of course you have the CIA and you have the FBI. Those are the standard groups, but you also have, newly added to that, Health and Human Services. You have the Department of Transportation. You have the Transportation Security Administration, and so on down the line. So we're now up to close to 20 organizations who, every day of the year, three times a day, are sitting and saying, what are you seeing, why do you think it's important, why do you think it's not important, and what should we do about it?

Now, we also have slightly less tangible but equally important ways of getting out information. So we have the classic secure Web sites we now call our NCTC Current. But just to give you a sense of the scope of that, when we write a piece of analysis, say on a current threat from Hezbollah or al Qaeda, it is now accessible to over 17,000 users within the federal government, and many state and local customers. So the expanse of pushing information out there is rather vast. And of course we have some more targeted mechanisms for information sharing as well with state and local officials, and I'm sure we can talk about that more later.

Finally, the most revolutionary piece of that mission statement is integrating all elements of national power. Everything I've talked about so far to – my boss is now Denny Blair, the Director of National Intelligence. My other boss, who I think I should probably mention first, is President Obama, because I'm responsible to him and to the National and the Homeland Security Councils, to the extent both still exist, in integrating and ensuring that all instruments of national power are integrated in the fight against terrorism. So that means when the White House has its strategy, they then hand it to me and say, okay, make sure this is happening. And we do that in terms of long-term planning, budgetary planning, and targeted elements like ensuring that current defenses are well positioned to address current threats, and if the threat gets worse, to make sure that the U.S. government is responding an integrated way to elevating those defenses. So it's not just, frankly, changing the color of a threat set by the Department of Homeland Security, but it is carefully tweaking different defenses in the United States and overseas to address the current threats.

So that's what I do. In the next 10 minutes I'm going to tell you what the problems are that we face, and part of this is driven – rather than coming up with my own set of priorities I'm going to try to address specifically what Clark promised me you were all interested in, so if you aren't interested in it, blame Clark and not me.

The first is the basic question: What is the trajectory of al Qaeda's threat to the United States – heightening, receding? And before I get into the substance there I want to note, this is a very tricky line, I think, for people like me and for other U.S. government officials to address. Why? Because we have to be very careful in avoiding two things: one, underplaying threats because the threat I think does continue. At the same time, we would very much want to be sure that we are not accused of fear mongering. And hitting that right note of trying to explain to people what we do is a very real threat and at the same time not being accused of, oh, here come the counterterrorism folks again, trying to get more money, trying to scare people, trying to make excuses for violations of civil liberties, real or otherwise. It's not easy. So I'm going to try to provide you with as sober an assessment as I can – again, both not underplaying but also not moving into what some view as fear-mongering.

So I'll tell you that if I had been here a year ago today, I would have told you that the threat that al Qaeda poses to the United States, emanating out of the Pakistan-Afghanistan region, familiarly known as the FATA, was as bad as we have seen it. I can tell you today that that's not the case, and because of a series of, I think, successful endeavors, core al Qaeda and its ability to project threats to Western Europe and the United States is much lower than it was last year, and I think in many ways lower than it has been for quite some time.

Now, I want to stress, the fact that it is lower does not mean the threat is not still there. We still see al Qaeda today, senior leadership, plotting, recruiting, training individuals in the FATA and in other areas of the world with the clear goal of attacking the United States and our allies. But because of U.S. government efforts and other efforts of other partner nations, al Qaeda's core leadership, the depth of their experience along a number of fronts operationally and elsewhere, and their ability to train and deploy recruits has certainly been seriously diminished over the past year.

Now, I do want to throw in some troubling caveats there, and exceptions. First of all, as I think the president has made quite clear – and a position I heartily agree with, and I would agree with regardless of whether or not he was my boss – that the dangers that we see from al Qaeda and associated militant groups in Pakistan and Afghanistan itself is probably as bad as we have ever seen. The threat and the desire of these militant groups that have aligned themselves to a greater or lesser extent with al Qaeda, to the stability of Pakistan and the region are very significant, and you need look no farther than the attacks on the police facility in Lahore several weeks ago to know that there are individuals aligned with al Qaeda’s goals who are very much still aiming to undermine the democratically elected government within Pakistan and engage U.S. and coalition NATO troops within Afghanistan. This is troubling.

Second, we have seen over the past six months to a year a resurgence of al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula which is quite worrisome, most notably al Qaeda elements in Yemen, who have increased significantly their output of propaganda; have engaged in a series of operations against the United States and Western allies or Westerners within Yemen, most notably last fall, reasonably sophisticated attack on the U.S. embassy, more recently the killing of Japanese tourists and targeting officials – I’m sorry, South Korean tourists – pardon me – just in the last several months; and a stated desire in their propaganda to expand their reach beyond Yemen into the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and elsewhere. And this is more problematic than we have seen in quite some time.

Finally, a piece which is impossible to ignore, for a variety of reasons, and that’s Somalia. Somalia remains a largely ungoverned area with obviously some growing strength in the governments in Somaliland and Puntland, but the very nascent transnational federal government faces serious challenges, both from elements of al Qaeda and also of Al-Shabaab, and we remain very concerned about the threats that they pose to U.S. facilities in the region, in the Horn of Africa, and potentially to the U.S. homeland.

Now, with that I’m going to make a transition to the homeland and comment quickly on some of the homeland threats we see. Before I do that, I do want to talk about how this threat might manifest itself. Clearly over the past several years we’ve been mostly focused on suicide bombers and explosive attacks. We have seen, since the attacks in Mumbai, a desire and a willingness to change some of these tactics, and we are concerned about the change of these tactics, both in the Pakistan-Afghanistan-Indian region, but also beyond that, and the potential for that to manifest itself in the United States or elsewhere. Certainly the events of Mumbai reminded us that old-school terrorist tactics of AK-47 can be extremely valuable to the terrorist organizations. We saw that again with the attack on the police facility in Lahore, and they’re extremely easy to perpetrate in many ways.

The other thing I would highlight that I think is important for us to remember is terrorism is not just about the direct innocent victims that are killed or injured in a terrorist attack. Terrorism can also be – and we must also think about the repercussions terrorism has on broader geopolitical issues, and for that I would point again to Mumbai and the threat of extremists in India and the ability for small numbers of extremists and terrorists to cause great instability within larger geopolitical relationships.

Now, I said I was going to go to the homegrown, and I will, and frankly this is an area that my talk hasn't changed all that much in the last year. In fact, it really hasn't changed all that much in the last two or three years, so feel free to get some coffee if you've heard any of those talks. (Laughter.)

The fact is the United States is still, for a variety of reasons – we have seen – we have tended to be less susceptible to serious homegrown extremism than some of our partner nations like the United Kingdom, and I can give you the quick reasons for that. There is a – our Muslim community in the United States tends to be much more integrated, much more – much better off financially, much more engaged in the U.S. political system, much less isolated in pockets and, say, in countries like the United Kingdom, and that's the good news. And where we have seen homegrown plots, they have tended to be far less sophisticated than those that have been hatched overseas. So what I have said often and I'll continue to say it is although I think an attack from homegrown terrorists may be the most likely terrorist event that the U.S. experiences in the future, it is also still unlikely to be as sophisticated as what we see coming from core al Qaeda, with the serious caveat of I expect that homegrown extremists will catch up. They will catch up through interactions with extremists overseas or through the Internet or through other means.

Now, the one troubling exception that we've talked a significant amount about publicly, and we certainly look at it very closely in the intelligence community – and I have to begin this with another big caveat. It involves the Somali-American community. And I want to start with the huge caveat that we have, in the United States, upwards of 150 (thousand) to 200,000 individuals of Somali descent in the United States. The vast, vast, vast, vast majority of those are law-abiding, incredibly hard-working people who are trying to make a better life for themselves and their families here in the United States.

We have seen a very, very small percentage, that's still a number that is sufficiently troubling – and I'll talk about it here – of individuals of Somali descent and some who are not of Somali descent who will have come to identify with extremists in Somalia, be they Al-Shabaab or potentially elements of al Qaeda. Now, there are, I think, many reasons for this. In part, the Somali-American community has been less successful financially than many other Muslim-Americans; they have tended to be slightly more isolated than some communities; and they haven't, to some extent, identified with international issues, most notably the Ethiopian invasion of Somalia that just has diminished somewhat with the Ethiopian withdrawal from Somalia in 2009. They have tended to identify with this to an extent greater than some of our other communities in the United States have identified with issues like fights regarding Kashmir.

So this has caused us to at least be concerned about some possibility of radicalization in this community, highlighted of course with the death of an American citizen in Somaliland last year as a suicide bomber, and we continue to track, very closely, individuals and reports of individuals who are Americans who have traveled to Somalia. What I want to stress here is, again, the relatively small number and the lack of any current intelligence that indicates these individuals are looking to come back to the United States and perpetrate terrorist attacks here. As a general matter the focus has remained in Somalia, but I am not in a business where I am willing to bet the farm that it will remain that way.

Now, since I'm running short on time I'm not going to address right now why the U.S. hasn't been attacked in the past eight years. It's clearly only because of me. (Laughter.) I'm happy to talk about it. I mean, it's a complicated question and I think it's worth addressing because it's important for looking ahead. Let me quickly hit on the four challenges and then I'll open it up to Clark and the rest of the group.

First, the challenge – I'm going to look at the enemy, and that's al Qaeda. Al Qaeda will, I think, over time, continue to disperse and splinter. I think it is likely that we will continue to make gains against al Qaeda senior leadership, but, as I've noted, whether it's Somalia, whether it's Yemen, or whether it's other elements of al Qaeda and elsewhere in the world, that threat, that organization, and certainly their vision of a broader global jihad, will not go away with what I hope is the eventual destruction of al Qaeda senior leadership in Pakistan and Afghanistan.

The U.S. government has largely – not completely but largely – focused its counterterrorism efforts on what the enemy looks like today, and we think about what the enemy looks like tomorrow. But as al Qaeda changes, we as a U.S. government will also have to shift – shift our focus, shift our tools, to ensure that we're addressing that dispersed al Qaeda and their dispersed view of global jihad, in a way, which leads to my second point, which is we continue to face lots of challenges organizing the U.S. government. Again, I apologize to those who have heard me say this before, but I think to me it is worth echoing over and over and over again: The U.S. government is still not organized, as a government either in the executive branch or the judicial branch, to address a mission like counterterrorism, or frankly a mission like counterproliferation or any other list of missions.

I think counterterrorism has made vast improvements since 9/11. I do think NCTC is part of that vast improvement. But the U.S. government budgets, plans, programs, people is still organized along department and agency lines. The fact that I have 18 or 20 different departments and agencies in my secure video-teleconference every day shows what a team sport this is, but the structures are still not perfectly organized to support that team sport.

Third, I think that President Obama has made quite clear – and I want to make quite clear, as a senior counterterrorism official, what an enthusiastic supporter I am of this view. Counterterrorism is part of larger U.S. policy. Counterterrorism rarely, if ever, should be the lead in that policy. The challenges we face – the terrorism challenges we face are different in different regions of the world and are interconnected to broader U.S. policy interests. Counterterrorism should be, in most cases, the tail, and we should not wag the broader policy dog. I think it is important for me to say that because I want to make clear that the counterterrorism community understands its role. We should be influencing a lot of policy, we should be informing a lot of policy, but ultimately there are broader issues here. Whether or not it's in Pakistan and Afghanistan or Somalia, counterterrorism is not the only interest the U.S. government has.

Finally, I think perhaps our greatest challenge is – I'll approach this a little bit differently. One of the reasons I think the U.S. counterterrorism community has done a reasonably good job since 9/11 is when I walk down the street or I go to a dinner party or anywhere else, there are fewer people who spend their days – non-counterterrorism people – there are fewer people who spend

their days worrying about terrorism than there were two or three or four or five or six years ago. That's a good thing. My job is to worry about terrorism every day. It's to sleep with a BlackBerry and a secure phone next to my bed and get the calls in the middle of the night and respond and make sure the U.S. government is responding. My job is also to make sure that Americans and people outside of the United States who are the victims of terrorism are living a life where they don't obsess about terrorism every day. And I think we've had some success there.

There is a flip side to that, though, which is harder, which is while you don't want the entire world to worry about terrorism every day, you still have to maintain the focus on terrorism and you still have to maintain the policies and the resources on terrorism to ensure that you don't have another attack, small or large, and innocent people are killed or injured. And maintaining that focus is my job and it's one of the reasons that I come and speak to groups like this, to make clear that the fight is not over. You can call it a war, you can call it a struggle, but the fact is al Qaeda is still out there, allies of al Qaeda are still out there, and they want to kill people, and they want to kill people like you and me, and frankly, the people they're mostly going to kill are innocent Muslims in countries like Yemen and Somalia and elsewhere.

So we have to maintain that focus, and every day that we get farther from 9/11, that becomes a little bit more difficult. Part of that is good. Part of that is a challenge that I think we have to continue to address.

That is, oh, 22 minutes, which, for a lawyer is 15 or 20 minutes.

(Laughter.)

MR. ERVIN: Thank you very much. Well, of course I had a million questions before you arrived and I knew that your remarks would prompt a million more, but I'm going discipline myself and limit myself to one or two quick ones. But let me start here. I wanted to talk about the very point that you ended on, and that is, as you say, that the flip side of having the average person not be preoccupied by terrorism makes your job and the job of your partners in the counterterrorism community all the harder.

And when your boss – or one of your bosses, the DNI, says in his testimony of the threat picture that, at least in the near to short term, the economic crisis is a greater threat than terrorism. When Secretary Napolitano, in her first congressional appearance, doesn't use the word "terrorism," is the government, other elements of the United States government, arguably sending the wrong message to the public about the primacy, or at least the preeminence of terrorism in terms of the overall threat picture to the United States?

MR. LEITER: I think that's a fair question. Having worked very closely with both Director Blair and reasonably closely over the past – how many days is it now – 70 or so days, with Secretary Napolitano, I can tell you that, again, regardless of exactly what language they use, regardless of what they list out in their list of threats, there is no lack of focus, on either of their parts or their departments and agencies, on terrorism. I think – I don't want to parse exactly what Director Blair said. I think clearly the global economic crisis poses a wealth of problems to

people, not just monetary but political stability and the chance for violence coming out of politically unstable areas.

But I'll tell you, I talk with Director Blair on a regular if not daily basis about issues of terrorism and the threat of terrorism, and there is a thorough understanding of what those risks are. I think Secretary Napolitano is – again, I don't want to parse what she said in the language. I think part of this is – it is the evolution of the U.S. government's understanding of terrorism, and there are different times and – you know, immediately after an attack and eight years later – about how we talk about terrorism. It is, I think, impossible immediately after 9/11 to think about this in any terms other than a war. Think about how much changed here in Washington and New York and elsewhere with the presence of National Guard troops and surface to air missiles in places that you never would have imagined. I mean, it feels, was a war. And there are elements of this which remain a war. There are elements in Afghanistan and Pakistan which, if it's not a war, I'm not sure what is.

There are a lot of other pieces of this where that terminology is counterproductive. I do not think that the U.S. government should approach working with Somali-American community leaders as a war. This has nothing to do with the adversarial violent nature of a war when we're talking to community leaders in Minneapolis who are wholly supportive of trying to ensure that their 18-, 19-, 20-year-old kids don't go to Somalia.

So I think as our understanding of the threat has evolved, as the threat itself has evolved, we should chose our language carefully and we should use terms that encompass all the pieces of the fight against terrorism, or the campaign against terrorism, and some of that is very warfare like, some of that is law enforcement, some of that is intelligence, some of that is community engagement, some of that is foreign aid – all of those pieces. So if I were Secretary Napolitano, that's what I think I was trying to get across.

MR. ERVIN: One final question for me and then I'll open it up to the floor. I want to take up your invitation to ask you this question.

(Laughter.)

MR. LEITER: I thought it was to take me to Aspen.

(Laughter.)

MR. ERVIN: I'm going to do that, I promise you. You raised the issue of why we haven't been attacked, and so I know you could go on for hours about that but could you just give us your quick assessment of that? And I want to twin that question with this one. You know, the Bush administration boasted that there wasn't an attack after 9/11 on their watch, and of course we're all grateful for that, needless to say, and they regard that as the success of their counterterrorism efforts. Of course, the implicit corollary of that is had there been an attack that would have been a failure of the Bush administration's counterterrorism efforts, and were there to be an attack today that would be a failure of the Obama administration's efforts. I'm not going to ask you to comment on the Bush administration and the Obama administration of course, but my question is

– and I think it’s related to the former one – is, is the absence or the effect of an attack the right metric by which to judge the efficacy of counterterrorism efforts?

MR. LEITER: Fantastic question, in Aspen or here. (Laughter.) First, there is little that, frankly, gets me more angry than people saying it was an accident – it has been an accident that we weren’t attacked over the past eight years. I think that is flatly and completely false. We have disrupted plots, we have watched people, we have put things in place which make it less likely that we will be attacked today than we were on 9/11. Now, I phrased that rather carefully. We have put things in place to make it less likely that we will be attacked – not that we won’t be attacked, but we’ve increased the odds in our favor and against the terrorists.

So, is it a success story that we haven’t been attacked? I think absolutely. If we are attacked, will it be a failure? Well, in some absolute sense it will absolutely be a failure. I mean, will I feel a personal sense of failure if innocent people are killed by terrorists? I absolutely will. I do when it happens anywhere. But intelligence is a very imperfect business. Go back to Roberta Wohlstetter’s fabulous piece on Pearl Harbor and the warning going out to Pearl Harbor to know that this isn’t anything new, whether or not it’s trying to figure out what the Japanese are going to do or today understand what al Qaeda is going to do. It is an imperfect business. So it does not mean necessarily that the system failed if there is an attack. It means we had a failure but it doesn’t mean the system is a failure.

So, is it a good metric of success? I think – I actually do think it is a relevant metric, but there should be a range of other metrics. We’ve got to look at how – whether or not youth in Cairo and Amman and somewhere in the United States identify more with American values or with Osama bin Laden, whether or not individuals are willing to use biological expertise to assist terrorists or whether or not they are working with state and nongovernmental actors to ensure that sensitive information about microbiology is not getting to terrorists. There are a range of factors which should be part of our judgment about whether or not we have succeeded. Whether or not there has been an attack is a very, very crude metric, although I think it would be utterly silly for us to think that it’s not a metric which is most meaningful to most Americans, and in that sense I think it’s something that we have to and should consider.

MR. ERVIN: Well said. All right, we’ll now open up to the floor. Please make it a question rather than a comment, and please keep your question as brief as possible so that we can get in as many as possible. If you’d just raise your tent card, that would be great. And I’ll start, since I happen to be sitting next to him, with Marcos.

QUESTION: Obviously international collaboration and cooperation play a key role in the success we’ve had for the last seven years. Could you point to any degree the single greatest challenge and greatest achievement – whether institutional or political – that you had – (inaudible) – specific issues in terms of trying to – the struggle that we are pursuing right now?

MR. LEITER: Sure. I’d be happy to. First – and, actually, these tend to be the same issues that we face domestically as well in what the United States should do, and we often have to remember that we can’t have a double standard for things; we often want to ask our allies to do things that we ourselves could not or would not or should not do. But I think we have ongoing

challenges with a variety of partners of striking the privacy/civil liberties counterterrorism balance, and we continue to work very closely with countries within the European Union to ensure that the U.S. counterterrorism community and the Department of Homeland Security elsewhere all across the U.S. government can have access to key data which helps you identify people who may be traveling for reasons other than the family vacation. And we continue to face some obstacles in getting access to that information because of concerns regarding civil liberties. Now, again, that's no different than the same concerns we have here within the United States.

Second, I think we will see many challenges in the future about what the long-term solution for some of our detention of individuals are, and obviously the president made, I think, an extremely strong statement to the world in closing Guantanamo, or issuing the executive order to close Guantanamo, the facility, but we will continue to have real challenges in figuring out what the long-term solution then is for some of these detainees.

And this is something that we're going to have to work very, very closely with our foreign partners on. And then we're going to have to continue to develop plans for what happens with these people regardless of where they are. What are we going to try to do to ensure that there isn't a serious recidivism problem beyond what we wanted to see?

So I would highlight those as two issues where I think we have continuing challenges.

MR. ERVIN: B.J.?

QUESTION: (Inaudible.) Two years ago, after Madrid, London, et cetera, it was understandable there was probably a concern about both an extremist threat to Europe and an extremist threat emanating from Europe. Now, two years later, how do you assess the counter-radicalization efforts that the British and others have done? Do you still think that threat is there, unchanged, diminished?

MR. LEITER: We really did see, beginning in 2006 and running through 2007, an influx of Westerners who were being trained by al Qaeda in Pakistan, which was then linking back to many of the communities within European nations that was causing the challenge that you identified. I think, like our own government, the British have been extremely good in recognizing how their counter-radicalization, in their terms, "Prevents" piece of their strategy should be applied. Many of you may have seen that Her Majesty's government released a new "Contest 2" strategy there, a national strategy to combat terrorism, now about two or three weeks ago, and a very significant portion of that is dedicated to what, again, we would term counter-radicalization efforts.

I think the British are more advanced than any other European partner, frankly, for good reason, probably more advanced than we are. We work extremely closely with them both to learn their lessons and also to make sure that we're not misapplying their model to the United States because our two communities are very different.

So I think the British are farthest down. I think many of the other countries that have seen the threat have vastly improved their law enforcement and intelligence fronts but have done less in preventing that next generation from occurring. I think the Germans had done an admiral job of coordinating their government in a way in response to the threat they saw from the Islamic Jihad Union, the IJU. I think they probably move more slowly than governments like the British have. I think it's still too early to tell, also, how well those programs will work. We know some of these programs will work but we don't have a long history. In the world of social science, we're sort of operating on two or three years of data at most, and I would be hesitant to draw too many conclusions based on that.

MR. ERVIN: I'm going to get to everybody, but just so as to skip around a little bit. Lisa?

QUESTION: Yeah, my question deals specifically with Pakistan and Afghanistan. You talked about the success against al Qaeda. I'm wondering if you could indicate how much of that success you would attribute to U.S. actions alone, to Pakistani actions, or really coordinating the U.S. and Pakistani actions, giving a percentage of the three.

(Laughter.)

MR. LEITER: If you could give me a percentage that would be great too.

(Laughter.)

QUESTION: I asked a similar question of an official about a month ago on our lack of success, particularly in Afghanistan, and how much of that could be attributed to Pakistan's dual policies towards militants, and while I didn't get a specific figure, he implied it was rather high.

MR. LEITER: Who was it?

(Laughter, cross talk.)

QUESTION: And then the second part of my question is, is this success sustainable? Of course, a lot of Pakistani officials argue to me that while the drone attacks that have taken out maybe 13 of the top leaders, these leaders are easily replaced, and that drone attacks have fueled recruitment in these regions. So I was just wondering – I recognize the success of the drone attacks thus far, but is there a danger of relying too much on this strategy and is there a chance of backfiring?

MR. LEITER: I'll take those in reverse order, if you don't mind.

To begin, I think it's – I'll be one of the first to admit that there are – there have been some negative repercussions of targeted efforts against al Qaeda senior leadership in Pakistan. It's just not an absolute good. But in this work we have to consider both the short term and the long term. I mean, I talk a lot about the U.S. government being more focused on the short term than the long term ultimately, and I think it's important that we shift to hearts and minds, countering

violent extremism, et cetera. That being said, there are current threats, there are current plots and there are current al Qaeda leaders.

We have to find the right balance. Eliminating that current threat, trying to minimize the negative effects of the steps that you have to take, and deciding exactly how much you want to do of one versus the other because, I tell you, that if we ignore that short term just in favor of winning the hearts and minds, we're going to face what I think are some unacceptable risks towards U.S. interest overseas and within the United States. So I'm not here to say that it's all good, but I think we're, I hope, striking a reasonable balance.

Now, what I would add to that is that although leaders can be replaced, and especially when you have one or two leaders killed a year, they are relatively easily replaced. I'll analogize it to a U.S. transition – presidential transition, which I enjoyed watching. (Laughter.) You have an assistant secretary or deputy secretary step down – when Michael Jackson from Homeland Security stepped down and Paul Schneider took his place, part of Homeland Security probably lost a few steps for a while but then it crawled back up, doing things differently, better, or whatever it was.

If you take out all of the political leadership of the Department of Homeland Security – in a peaceful way, I want to say – (laughter) – or all of the political appointees across the U.S. government, it takes a while to get back on its feet. It is not something that – (inaudible). It is no different from al Qaeda. You take out the deputy director or the head of office one year, somebody else is out there and they're back up and running eventually. When you start to get loss of leadership at the pace and the gravity and the depth that we've seen over the past year, it becomes much more difficult for an organization to move ahead with the drive that it wants to have. And the people who do come into replace will not generally have the same personal relationships, experience and ties to other individuals that the last group did.

So in terms of, so what do I attribute the successes of the U.S. versus joint versus Pakistani, I don't think it's any surprise to anyone that there are many times that the U.S. government wished the Pakistan government intelligence and military services had greater willingness and capability to do some of the things that need to be done. It's no surprise – I know that will not be Eric's headline tomorrow.

MR. ERVIN: And speaking of Eric, next Eric. I'm going to take two in each quadrant.

QUESTION: Thanks, Clark. Mike, is there any connection or nexus now between the pirates we've seen off the Somalia Coast and Al-Shabaab or some other groups (inaudible) – or do you see them as separate?

MR. LEITER: Not speaking, obviously, directly to the current situation with the American ship, I don't know. Someone probably does know exactly who these folks are. What we've actually seen is quite interesting. Al-Shabaab has actually made statements in the past, being critical of the piracy. I don't want to take them completely at their word on that, but there are aspects of it which are probably contrary to its vision of how Somalia should be governed, in a way. I take it as also impossible for me to say that some of the money involved in piracy could not make its

way to extremists somehow or other. Somalia is a complicated world with few government structures at all, a clan-based society at this point that – the ability for someone to get money from piracy and potentially move it toward organizations that are engaged in an armed insurgency against TFG or attacking UNOSOM, I certainly would not put that out of the realm of possibility.

QUESTION: But you don't see any direct, under the radar Al-Shabaab taxing them on some kind of arrangement for security?

MR. LEITER: I don't, but, again, I'm not going to say it's not there.

MR. ERVIN: Camille and then Randy.

QUESTION: Thanks for that presentation. (Inaudible) – between terrorism and – (inaudible)?

MR. LEITER: I'll speak first to al Qaeda and then Hezbollah because I think they're different, and we could also touch on the FARC. The distinction there between terrorism and organized narco-trafficking has been obliterated over the years.

In terms of al Qaeda, I would say the closest connection we see is certainly the heroin trade coming out of Afghanistan. I think it is fair to say that the Taliban receives – the Taliban and other militant groups receive a not-insignificant portion of their revenue to support their actions against coalition forces in Afghanistan and elsewhere from the poppy trade. Now, although I don't – I can't recall seeing direct al Qaeda involvement in the poppy trade and heroin, the connections between al Qaeda and the Taliban are close enough, and there is enough of a partnership there that I think it's fair to say that al Qaeda and its associated militant groups gain benefits from that poppy trade, the growth of poppies and hoping to sell heroin. Again, I don't want to imply that al Qaeda is out there growing poppies. I don't believe that's the case.

Now, whether or not – I'm not an expert and I couldn't really tell you how that then relates to the distribution – sale and distribution of narcotics here in the United States. Now, Hezbollah is a bit of a different matter, and historically what we have seen from Hezbollah – and I think that continues today – is a presence in the United States of at least facilitators and fundraisers who have engaged in a variety of criminal activity, whether or not it's the drug trade or counterfeit goods or illegal tobacco and the like. And the FBI has been extremely focused on this over the past several years. They've had some great successes and we continue to see some fundraising facilitation for Hezbollah through these same mechanisms, so I don't think that's changed significantly.

MR. ERVIN: Randy?

QUESTION: Thank you for taking the time to be here today. You were on the Robb-Silberman Commission. March of 2005, one of the most striking sentences I've ever seen in a government report. It said, quote, "We would like to emphasize that the United States has not made intelligence collection on loose nukes a high priority," close quote. That's a pretty remarkable statement. Tell me how that's changed in four years.

MR. LEITER: Well, I think on a number of fronts it has.

QUESTION: Were you shocked to discover that on the commission?

MR. LEITER: Well, it's fair to say prior to my time on the commission I hadn't focused on the issue. So was I dismayed by it? Yes. I'm not sure I went in with any preconceived notions about it.

I think the creation of – to start with, the creation of the National Counterproliferation Center was designed – really, prior to the report coming out, was designed by the Congress and President Bush at the time, to address some of that coordination challenge and ensure that the U.S. intelligence community was looking at loose nukes and materials and the like and focusing efforts on them. And I think some of the policy effort of the last eight years – the Proliferation Security Initiative and the like – again, focused on just those challenges, much of what Clark's department at DHS did, trying to establish effective screening mechanisms. It was, again, focused on that. So I think that there was much done on that.

I'll tell you, from the counterterrorism perspective, what we saw two or three years ago was a paucity of real expertise on not just nuclear terrorism but chemical, biological, radiological weapons. It's not easy to necessarily find someone with advanced training in microbiology to come into the intelligence community and focus on the challenges of anthrax, or someone who has experience on nuclear weapons and the like.

So what we did was we said, well, rather than everybody competing against each other – CIA having its unit and CTC having its unit, the FBI having its unit – we brought everybody together to a great extent. And I now manage a joint unit between many organizations, among many organizations. So we have a concentration of expertise, including people from the traditional counterproliferation world, like the Defense Threat Reduction Agency, to make sure that when we are thinking about state proliferation, we're also thinking about what could the terrorist nexus be to any of these things? I mean, digging into that work. And I think that is very different from what we had at the time of the Robb-Silberman Commission.

Now, it is still – it's a tough problem. I have more people examining fewer pieces of data when it comes to CBR and terrorism than at any other time. Why? Listen to what Eric said. More people looking at fewer pieces of data, because there is not a lot reporting out there. There is not a lot of information, and I don't think that's just for a lack of collection; it's because there tend to be just small nuggets, and in part that's a good thing. I think we have – we've been talking about kind of the conventional threat of al Qaeda. I think the gains we've made against the leadership over the past year have also significantly impacted al Qaeda's nonconventional weapons program, and I think that's a good thing.

MR. ERVIN: Barbara and then Toni.

QUESTION: My question here is sort of to the core of what NCTC was supposed to do in the role it's supposed to play. And I want to pick up on a phrase you used when you said, this is a

team sport – counterterrorism is a team sport. And you talked about new players at the table and your SVTC (secure video teleconference) – and all of those. And clearly we now looking at state and local and bringing all these players to the table. The question, though, is, is NCTC adjusting how it plays the game to adjust to the way that all these different players work and operate? You've had HHS and other people in your secured teleconferences, but most of their entire operations work in an unclassified realm, and NCTC works at the very classified realm.

And it reminds me back in the summer of 2001 when we had the high threat and Richard Clarke pulls together a bunch of domestic agencies on July 5th. He tells them there's this terrible threat, but, boy, you can't go home telling the rest of your agency about it and you can't go do anything about it because you're the ones who know. And is NCTC doing enough to say, okay, we can't really effectively have all these new players on the team if we're going to play the old intelligence community game of over-classifying and working it only at this level?

MR. LEITER: I wouldn't say that we're doing enough – we should always do more – but I would also stress that it is not just about NCTC on this front. Let me give you a couple of examples of what we're doing just to give you a sense and I'll let you judge whether or not we're doing enough.

First, as I think you know – as you do know, we have an organization, the Interagency Threat Assessment and Coordination Group, the ITACG – talk about a bad – (inaudible) – but the ITACG comprises, I think right now, 12 individuals from state, local, tribal groups who do nothing but look at the highly classified information and say, what would this mean to a state police officer, to a local police officer, to a tribal official, to a fire department official? How should that be translated to this group? So I had people from the Seattle Police Department and the Illinois State Police, from Las Vegas, Clark County, all across – and that's their job. And that's one piece because, you're right, we are largely composed of classic federal intelligence people who are working at the top-secret level and aren't used to getting that information out. So that's our specific effort.

We also spend a lot of time and money ensuring that all of our products, whether at the top-secret level, starting there, or compartmented, gets down to a lower-level classification. So fundamentally every intelligence product we write, there will be a top-secret version, there's probably going to be a secret version, there may be a confidential version or an unclassified version. There will also be a version – going to Marco's question before, there will be a releasable version to our closest allies to make sure they're on the same sheet. I've already mentioned that.

Our average intelligence articles go out to 17,000-plus users. Now, we may think that that's just a small community, but to me 17,000 is pretty big, no matter how you count it. Now, it doesn't begin to scratch the millions of state and local police officers out there and other first responders, but it's a relatively broad piece.

But my point about how it's not just about NCTC is I think we have now finally, after seven or eight years – four-plus years for NCTC – gotten to a place where the U.S. government writ large has identified what the right roles and responsibilities are for different organizations because,

frankly, I've got a relatively small organization, and that's only relatively small in a Washington, D.C. sense, but a relatively small organization when it's compared to the Department of Homeland Security, the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

And rather than all of us playing the four-year-old soccer – or fourth grade soccer and running towards and saying, I'm going to write a top-secret product on this new piece of threat information, that's not a good use of government resources. It's a waste. And what we've largely come to an agreement on, I think – and it's been accelerated with the new administration, quite happily, with the leadership of Director Blair and Secretary Napolitano and Bob Mueller and the attorney general – is that the sweet spot for NCTC is generally operating at that top secret and secret level. And the sweet spot for FBI is JTTF working through state and local officials at that level, generally the secret level. And the sweet spot for DHS, I think in the future, will be taking the material that's produced by NCTC and FBI and getting it down to a usable level and working very closely with state and local officials who do live in an unclassified world, and making sure that they have the information they need.

To me, that's the key to sports. It's not that NCTC does things to all people, because it will fail for everybody. It's that NCTC and FBI and DHS fit together, whether or not it's for a fusion center or a joint terrorism task force or through the secure video-conference here in Washington.

QUESTION: (Inaudible.) Can NCTC sort of play more of a leadership role? Does the DNI actually make that happen so that the higher classified information can actually get downgraded so that analysts who are working those projects will actually – (inaudible)?

MR. LEITER: I'd like to think we have. I can tell you that a year ago we had – we produced – twice a day we produced what's called the "Situation Report," which is kind of the big-ticket item to terrorism. It comes out twice a day, five days a week. Once a day, every day, we produce the threat matrix, which is that list of all the different threats that we see in the world, something like 2,700 last year – significant terrorist threats. A year ago we only had that at the top-secret level. Today, five days a week, at the secret level – so fundamentally any state and local fusion center, any JTTF anywhere, has access to that "Situation Report." Once a day, every day, they have access to the secret level threat.

So I think we already have played a role in pushing that information down from the top secret to the secret level. And, again, my point would be it's not necessarily worthwhile for us to have the lead on the push from secret to unclassified. There's a huge need for that, but I just frankly think the FBI and DHS are better positioned to do that because they live with the folks in a way that we do not.

MR. ERVIN: Tom?

QUESTION: Mike, you talked about the trajectory of al Qaeda heading downward. If we do get to the point in the next few years where they are significantly degraded, where do you see the center of gravity moving? You talked about the associated militant groups, AQIM and others. Do you think that they're – and this is very difficult to answer, I understand – they will maintain

a loose network between each other, and will there be tighter operations between them? Will one group rise? Do you see anything that gives an indication at this point?

MR. LEITER: That's a very interesting question, Tom. I think what we see the greatest likelihood of now is less centralized command control, no clear center of gravity, and likely rising and falling center of gravity, depending on where the U.S. and the international focus is for that period. So it is, frankly, hard for us, even though it's a global fight, to always maintain the same focus across the globe.

So what I think is most likely, as we focus on an area like Yemen or Somalia, we will count those down and have a greater effect there, which may in fact provide some opportunity for North Africa or other spots to start to rise again.

Now, what you hope that is going on at the same time is you're building that international capacity to do it on your own. I think we've had some successes there, most notably in Southeast Asia. And you're also – you're draining the swamp. So it's not just about here are our 10 bad guys, let's go get them, and then we've dismantled al Qaeda in – fill in the blank, whatever region you want. We've made it so those 10 or 15 or 20, 30, 50, 300 really bad guys can't find the financial or logistical support or the fertile ground for recruits that they might have today. And that I think we can do – well, we have to do globally.

And I think the president has – the president has laid the groundwork for the rest of the U.S. government to follow. He has charged ahead in fantastic and impressive ways, whether or not it's doing the interview with Al Arabiya, the Norouz message, the statements in his last trip to Turkey, making as clear and more clear than any other human being can that counterterrorism does not mean that the West is at war with Islam. And in fact, if anyone is at war with Islam at all, it's al Qaeda that's at war with Islam.

MR. ERVIN: Prankesh, Holley, Christian, and then Pam.

QUESTION: Michael, one of the issues that's come up, especially with the president's visit to Turkey, was the marked reduction in tourism as well as visitors, in general across students, coming from the Middle East and Islamic countries to the United States. And what is your view and what would you recommend to the new secretary as she makes some of those hard decisions on opening up or further tightening student visa restrictions, especially for the Middle East and tourism-related visa issues?

MR. LEITER: That is a very significant issue. In fact, if I had wanted to go on to Marco's question, that probably would have been three. I guess it could have been one or two as well, which is the enormous challenge we have and have had since 9/11 in balancing the need to have people come to the United States to do the very things we want them to do: learn about American culture, attend American institutions, build linkages, understand our values, understand again that the West is not at war with Islam, and balancing that with the, I think, real and legitimate need to screen people but not screening people in a way that you're alienating them. Again, it's very good that you want to come to the United States. I think that is an issue in Turkey. It's most certainly an issue for many countries in the Gulf, North Africa, et cetera. And I think we

do have to take a step back, and I think we're at a time when we can really do that, eight years later and a new administration, to say, what is the risk we're willing to accept? What are the negative effects that we're causing by screening in a way which is not especially sensitive to these needs?

Now, the obvious challenge here is – and this is not just in counterterrorism. This is in any organizational – this is a standard organizational challenge. This is a standard government challenge, which is it's really easy to measure the risk of letting the wrong person in. Do you want to get 3,000 people killed? Do you want to get 300 people killed? Do you want to be the person who lets the person in who commits terrorism? It's going to be a bad career move. It's much tougher to measure, with any sort of accuracy or tangibility, what the repercussions are of keeping the right person out. All right, so somebody didn't get a student visa. Big deal. Well, clearly there is a cost there, but it's tougher to measure and it's much longer term. How do you strike that balance both in policies and among people who are doing the screening?

It is not an easy question but I do think we're now in a better point in our history – again, eight years after, new administration – to say, all right, let's be serious about measuring both longer-term, less-tangible costs. And also, we've got to put a little bit of the burden on the nations that also want their individuals to travel to the United States for business or study or tourism. They have to assist us in screening people so we don't make mistakes. They have to provide the data, accepting that there are privacy and civil liberties issues that have to be addressed. The more information they can provide to us in that screening process, the fewer mistakes we're going to have. So I think it is a two-way street.

MR. ERVIN: Holly?

QUESTION: On your third challenge where you were talking about how we structure ourselves as a government. What role does counterterrorism play in the overall policy? Do you have any thoughts or perceptions about gaps, (inaudible) a broader suite of observations about how we might address some of those issues?

MR. LEITER: Yeah, sure, although, again, I can give a counterterrorism perspective but I can't tell you – and I wouldn't tell you – what the U.S. policy towards the TFG -- the budding TFG in Somalia is, but I'll give you three quick ones right now: Somalia and the Horn of Africa. We have seen, over almost a generation of Somali youth now, the lack of a central authority and governing structure in the Horn of Africa, mainly in Somalia. It's obviously caused incredible tragedy within Somalia and beyond. Now just back on the piracy point for a minute. Look at the ship. Do you understand what the ship was that they took? It was emergency food aid for Kenya and Somalia. There are very significant U.S. policy interests in Somalia, of which counterterrorism, whether they're fighting Al-Shabaab or al Qaeda East Africa, or a piece of them, but there are much broader issues.

Pakistan and Afghanistan. Pakistan and Afghanistan is not all about terrorism. Are there people who are fighting there who are terrorists? Yes. Is developing a government structure within Afghanistan and providing services and security for individuals throughout most of Afghanistan,

is that truly a terrorism issue? No, but it has to inform those steps that are being pursued by the likes of Ambassador Holbrooke and General Petraeus.

Finally, I think we repeatedly see, when we look at what individuals who have come out of extremism, what they refer to as one of their motivating causes, is clearly Israel and the U.S. support for Israel, or their perceived U.S. support for Israel. And that is something that I think the president has made clear that he is going to tackle with the appointment of Senator Mitchell to work on that region. Again, are there terrorist issues there? Absolutely, both in terms of Hamas and other presence – other organizations in that region. The motivating factor of this may or may not be for certain groups who become violent extremists – so counterterrorism has to be a part of that process, but there are vastly broader issues there at stake than simply counterterrorism.

QUESTION: So just the first part of the question is our own organization. I heard you say there are issues and concerns with how we organize ourselves in playing a team sport in this area. Do you have any thoughts about how we fast forward (inaudible)? What is the key issue?

MR. LEITER: Well, I'm just going to highlight one because it's a follow up so you don't get that much information. (Laughter.)

(Cross talk.)

MR. LEITER: I'm a government official; I only answer what I want to answer. (Laughter.) But I'll give you the one biggest one to me. We have to continue to look at how Congress appropriates and authorizes. I mean, you want the Department of Defense and the Department of State, who are kind of the two principal actors overseas in a place like Pakistan and Afghanistan, to have some flexibility, and when the Department of Defense goes out and sees a problem that they're trying to address – hey, this is a security issue; we'll take that security piece but, you know what, we really need to get USAID and others into this small location and we think we can make big gains. You need the State Department to have the fiscal flexibility to be able to shift resources and get them in there when they need them.

The current way that we go budgeting in the federal government, both the executive branch and with Congress, makes that very hard to have that flexibility. If we want our government to be flexible and respond to emergency situations, we've got to address that.

MR. ERVIN: Okay, two final questions – Christian and then Pam.

QUESTION: A related question on the way the – related to the challenge that you discussed with how the U.S. government is organized. One of the authorities that you have under the Intelligence Reform Act, which you discussed, is operational planning. Can you discuss, you know, the sort of successes and challenges that you face in using that authority to try to break down some of those agency barriers and stovepipes? And a related question: With what appears to be a more robust NSC structure under General Jones, how does that impact those responsibilities that you have for strategic operational planning?

MR. LEITER: I'm happy to try. Again, I'm clearly biased on this one. I think we've made a lot of progress over the past two years in integrating the U.S. government's effort. We started in kind of a classic military model in strategic operational planning: write a big plan, everyone will follow the plan and the budgets will be addressed. For a variety of reasons, that was a useful start, but it wasn't altogether satisfying, nor was it altogether effective. We didn't stop that, but what we added on to it in terms of strategic planning is more targeted and more immediate planning efforts. I'll give you two quick examples.

First, what I mentioned in my opening comments briefly was when we see a threat today, as we saw beginning in 2006 with the heightened threat coming out of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas – Westerns being trained – we were given the responsibility to insure that the U.S. government defenses and intelligence community was organized in a way and was doing operations in a way that were more likely than not to deter the threat, obstruct the threat, or collect more intel on it. That has become an ongoing process of at all times, wherever we see the threat coming from – Pakistan and Somalia, et cetera, working with Homeland Security, FBI, the rest of DOJ, the Department of Defense, Central Intelligence Agency and the rest of the intelligence community – kind of a broad swath – and saying, what are your programs right now? Are the programs at the right level? We just got this piece of threat reporting; how do we address that? Is there a gap? Is there some way you can help this other agency? We do this very regularly and very intensely up to the deputy secretary level on a regular basis.

We also have the plans in place today that, again, if the threat increases, we can present to deputy secretaries, the principals, the president those list of options that the U.S. government might want to take that we've already thought through, domestically and overseas, to address that threat. That has become more of the face of strategic operational planning, and I think it is one that has been quite effective and it's actually incredibly well received by the interagency because it gives them a better understanding of what the other guy on the team is doing.

The other piece that I had, which I think has had slow but increasing traction, is the budgetary piece, and strategic operational planning, I think working hand in hand with OMB, the Office of Management and Budget, has been extremely effective in figuring out where all the counterterrorism dollars go, and what really is counterterrorism and what might not be core counterterrorism, and doing that not only across all departments and agencies, getting down into the Social Security Administration, the Tennessee Valley Authority, but across all mission areas and into specifics of mission areas. So not just what's everyone spending on combating weapons of mass destruction from terrorists but specific programs of screening, intelligence collection and the like, which then tees people up to make decisions about whether or not, when we say we're going to prioritize combating violent extremism, whether or not we're putting our money where our mouth is. And I think that's a pretty powerful tool to have.

Now, the other piece of the question was –

QUESTION: Related to – from what appears to be a –

MR. LEITER: Oh, NSC, yes. The relationship between the National Security Council and Strategic Operational Planning has always been an interesting one because when I describe to

people what Strategic Operational Planning does, nine times out of 10 they say, wait a minute; I thought that's what the NSC did. And in fact, if you look at the mandates of the NSC and Strategic Operational Planning, although there are some distinctions, the similarities are quite striking.

The fact is that the NSC – and anyone here who has ever worked at the NSC or worked with the NSC knows, the NSC is not well-positioned to work intensively on issues on an ongoing basis across the interagency with real continuity. The NSC, strengthened or not, will, I believe, always spend a significant amount of its time on the inbox. Look at the number of CT directors there are at the NSC, empowered or not. I think it's – let's put it this way: It's fewer than 20. Strategic Operational Planning has a depth of expertise from across the interagency that when you say, let's do something about the counterterrorism plan for Somalia, you can engage at a depth and a level with the interagency in a way that the NSC cannot because they've got to manage the next meeting, they've got to manage the next crisis, support the president, et cetera.

So I think a strengthened NSC is a wonderful thing for the interagency. I think that a strengthened Strategic Operational Planning accomplishes the goal that General Jones has stated publicly, which is a stronger interagency rather than a department by department by department approach to a problem.

MR. ERVIN: Final question. Pam?

QUESTION: Well, since I'm 24/7 I'll stick with a today issue or recent issue. The Brits made an arrest of a number of terrorism suspects. Can you tell us anything about the links there may have been between these people and the FATA region? Are these people that have been there and been trained? Does it have any connection to any plot that might be directed towards U.S. interests?

MR. LEITER: I hope this is my most anticlimactic answer of the day, which is I'm really sorry but it's an ongoing investigation the British are conducting and I can't comment on it at all.

MR. ERVIN: And what a terrific way to end. (Laughter.) Mike Leiter, thank you very much. I knew that you would be provocative and interesting and insightful, and you've been all those things and you've earned your invitation to Aspen –

MR. LEITER: Thanks very much.

MR. ERVIN: – and I'll make sure that happens. Thank you all very much for attending.

(Applause.)

(END)