



HOMELAND SECURITY COMMITTEE

“State of Homeland Security Address” Chairman Michael McCaul, Homeland Security Committee

*The Heritage Foundation
December 7, 2016*

Remarks as Prepared

Seventy-five years ago today, foreign enemies took our country by surprise in the attack at Pearl Harbor. The date continues to live in infamy—not only because of the damage inflicted—but because of the cause we undertook in its aftermath. We set out to confront the forces of tyranny and to defend our freedom. And after four hard years, the “struggle of a generation” against fascism gave way to a *generational struggle* against communism.

This year we reflect on those conflicts while marking a similar milestone: 15 years since 9/11. Much like December 7th, America was not seeking a new global war. But when war came to us on that fateful day, we declared our resolve to see it through. We delivered justice to many of the aggressors. Yet we still find ourselves in a struggle against Islamist terror, and we face difficult choices that will determine whether the conflict takes years...or whether it takes lifetimes.

This morning I will outline what needs to be done to gain the upper hand in this fight. I will also update you on the overall state of homeland security, including the crisis at our borders, the urgency of enforcing our immigration laws, and the silent war being waged against us in cyberspace.

Let me give you the bottom line up front: Our country is less secure than it was eight years ago.

We are grappling with the calamities of retreat and a failed foreign policy. President Obama called for “strategic patience.” But really this was little more than a “wait-and-see” approach to national security. Too often, he was inclined to tell us *what he wouldn’t do* to defend this country rather than *what he would do*.

Sadly, when we refuse to act, our nation’s future—and its fortunes—are put in the hands of rivals. The results are clear: today our allies no longer trust us, our adversaries no longer fear us, and our enemies are plotting against us.

But the American people have spoken, and last month they rejected “leading from behind” policies. Instead, they voted to put *America first* and to make our country safe again. President-Elect Donald Trump recognizes that if we do not shape the world around us, we will be shaped by it. That is why we need to project strength in order to protect our homeland.

We must immediately restore American power to deter our adversaries from taking advantage of us. We also cannot hesitate to advance U.S. interests abroad, nor should we apologize for it. While there is always a chance that our actions will cause backlash, it is guaranteed that *inaction* will cause the world to be more dangerous for America.

Finally, we must champion our ideals. As the President-Elect has said, American values are the bedrock of Western civilization, and we are safer in a world where those values are shared.

This idea—“project to protect”—is rooted in a timeless principle advocated by President Ronald Reagan that the best way to achieve peace is through strength. House Republicans have laid out a bold agenda to do exactly that. It is called “A Better Way,” and beginning next month, we will work with President Trump to make it a reality and reverse the damage of the last eight years.

As we work to restore American greatness, we must remember: *we are a nation at war*. And our highest priority should be the clear and present danger posed by Islamist terror.

We made gains against these fanatics after 9/11. But radicalism struck back. And today, jihadists are harnessing the power of the internet to spread violence like wildfire. America’s enemies have more safe havens to plot from—and larger pools to recruit from—than anytime in modern history. Both ISIS and al Qaeda are working hard to dispatch fighters for external operations, and they are recruiting from within our borders.

In 2015, there was a 650 percent increase in fatal terrorist attacks in the West. Here in the United States, we tracked the highest number of homegrown jihadist plots ever in a single year, mostly tied to ISIS. The year wasn’t any better. Nearly 1,000 people have been killed or injured in terror attacks in Western countries. The violence has reached places like Paris, Brussels, Istanbul, Nice, and here at home in Chattanooga, San Bernardino, and Orlando.

In September, I attended the annual 9/11 ceremony at Ground Zero with President-Elect Trump, Mayor Giuliani, and others. We talked about how much the threat has changed. Just a week later, a man detonated bombs in New York and New Jersey. He radicalized while living among us. And in his blood-stained journal, he cited inspiration from al Qaeda’s Anwar al-Awlaki and former ISIS spokesman Abu Mohammad al-Adnani.

This is the new terror threat. Young jihadists are being radicalized online and urged to attack the *kuffar*—the non-believer—in their own backyard. Just last week, another ISIS-inspired terrorist launched a brutal attack on the campus of Ohio State University. He is one of more than 100 ISIS supporters that have been killed or captured in the United States while plotting in its name.

Only days ago, the group’s new spokesman urged followers to increase attacks against non-believers where they least expect it, “in their homes, markets, roads, and clubs.” Unfortunately, he may have receptive ears. The FBI has open terrorism investigations in all 50 States, most of which are connected with ISIS.

So how did we get to this point?

The answer is policy failure. For eight years, the Obama Administration reluctantly played global whack-a-mole with jihadists, rather than leaning into the fight with decisive leadership. They said terrorists were on the run when they were really on the rise. And they lacked moral clarity about the overall conflict, let alone a clear plan for victory.

Next month, the Trump Administration will inherit a counterterrorism policy in shambles and a generational struggle that is only getting longer.

However, I believe our new President-Elect is much more clear-eyed about the danger.

He knows we must define the threat to defeat it, as we did with fascism and communism. And in this ideological struggle against Islamist terrorism, Donald Trump is committed to winning. He understands that these fanatics have perverted a major religion into a weapon, and they are using it to target our way of life. While there were sharp disagreements in our presidential campaign, now is the time to come together as a nation to give the commander-in-chief an opportunity to turn the tide in the war.

We must also actively protect our homeland. In September, I released the first comprehensive counterterrorism strategy in years, with more than 100 recommendations for winning the fight, including here on the home front. Donald Trump has laid out serious plans to do the same. And I will work with him to implement the biggest domestic counterterrorism overhaul in a decade.

From a homeland security standpoint, the overhaul must have two main pillars. One is to start shutting down all terrorist pathways into the United States.

First, we must begin “extreme vetting” of foreign travelers. There are many ways to reach our shores, including as a tourist, student, immigrant, or refugee. Terrorists have exploited every single one of these routes, so we need to ramp up security for all of them.

My Committee already took a big first step. Last year, we passed a law blocking certain individuals from coming to the United States if they have recently traveled to a terrorist hotspot, unless they go through extra screening first. But we need to go further.

Anyone applying for a visa to our country should undergo a much more intensive, up-front background check. That is why I plan to revamp U.S. visa security and provide expanded authorities to our frontline investigators. We also need to bring security screening into the digital age by using social-media intelligence and new technology. In general, our goal should be to identify and exclude individuals who have ties to terror, who advocate Islamist extremism, or who support the overthrow of our government and Constitution.

Second, we should immediately suspend immigration from high-risk countries where we cannot confidently weed out terror suspects. This includes Syria.

Let me be clear: we are a compassionate nation, and we have a very proud tradition of welcoming refugees. But we cannot let terrorists take advantage of our humanitarian efforts. We know for certain that groups like ISIS have already used refugee flows as a Trojan Horse to attack our allies in France and Germany. Top national security officials have told me—privately and publicly—that they are not confident in our ability to prevent terror operatives from infiltrating the Syrian refugee program. So until we get the right protections in place, it should be suspended.

Third, we need to push our defenses outward. It’s not enough to combat terrorist travel if our allies don’t do the same. Once a jihadist gets to Europe, he is only a plane-flight away from America. So we need to pressure foreign governments to step up, and we also need to help them. If we let the dark cloud of terror creep over Europe, we will be in greater danger, too. That is why I have called for a “Marshall Plan” for counterterrorism to help U.S. allies get better at finding, catching, and locking up jihadists.

The second pillar of our counterterrorism overhaul must be to stop radicalization from within.

First, we need to repeal and replace President Obama's failed, politically correct "Countering Violent Extremism" policies. Our programs should focus on more than generic violence prevention. They should target the specific threat we face from radical Islamist terror.

Second, we must make it very difficult for terrorists to recruit within the United States. I was pleased this week to hear that tech companies are taking steps to remove jihadist content online as quickly as they already do with child pornography. I have pushed them hard on this. And I hope to see more leadership from the tech sector, including actions to swiftly delete terrorists' social media accounts before their missives go viral.

We must also aggressively counter-message jihadist propaganda. The government has failed to empower local, credible voices to push back against the narrative of our enemies. Now is the time to get off the bench. We should be helping NGOs fight back and keep more people from going down the path to terror.

Third, we must make sure communities know how to spot the early warning signs of Islamist extremism. I will push for expanded awareness at the state and local level, as well as confidential nationwide tip lines to report terror threats. Today I am also announcing plans to draft legislation to automatically notify communities when a terrorist is let out of prison. We have locked up hundreds and hundreds of extremists since 9/11, and many are starting to be released. Whenever they are, we should make state and local law enforcement aware in order to keep our communities safe.

Finally, we've got to confront the issue of terrorists "going dark." I get threat briefings every week and can tell you that the bad guys are using encrypted applications to recruit our own people and to plot against us, all while avoiding detection. I will renew my efforts to create a national commission to provide near-term, actionable recommendations to Congress on dealing with this threat without undermining our own digital security.

Today I also want to discuss the crisis at the borders and our broken immigration system.

During the presidential campaign, Donald Trump said he would secure our territory and confront illegal immigration head-on. A lot of people doubted him. Talking heads here in Washington have spent years promising border security, while giving us the opposite. In fact, the open-border dreams of politicians have created real-life nightmares for everyday Americans. Just read the headlines down south: Crime. Drugs. Human trafficking. And fear.

That is all about to change. Starting next month, the people are going to get what they asked for. We are going to build the wall. Period. In the process, I will stand side-by-side with the Trump Administration to throw out President Obama's reckless immigration policies and start enforcing our nation's laws.

We must start with an immediate border security "surge," which I call on the Trump Administration to announce DAY ONE. In the meantime, we have started to work on emergency plans in Congress to build the tough array of barriers we need along the border, close all gaps, and defend American sovereignty.

This legislation will be unveiled in the New Year, and I will personally push to get it to the President's desk—quickly.

We will put in place a historic, multi-layered defense system so that drug cartels and terrorists don't slip through the cracks. That means more Border Patrol agents, new authorities, aerial surveillance, sensors, and other technology to protect our territory. We will take a military-style approach to the problem by giving agencies the real command-and-control they need to get a handle on the situation.

Congress should fund this effort straight-away, but we cannot stick Americans with the bill. Our neighbors have failed to contain the crisis within their own countries, and they must have skin in the game to fix it once and for all. There are many reasonable ways to do this. For starters, we can put in place new immigration fees from Mexico, institute a security toll at border crossings, "seize and freeze" drug cartel assets, and more. But it shouldn't be limited to Mexico.

Other countries in Latin America have contributed to the crisis—and failed to rein in the chaos—so they should help pay for these fixes, too. In turn, we will offer to work with them to help their governments figure out how to secure their borders and keep threats from spilling over into neighboring countries like our own.

Additionally, we must prevent new waves of illegal immigrants by overturning failed White House policies. I will back Donald Trump's effort to rescind the Obama Administration's unlawful executive actions. And I will do all I can to help him end "catch-and-release," provide a deterrence by quickly deport people who come here illegally, and reform asylum standards so that aliens cannot simply use "magic words" to get a free pass into America.

Moreover, we will work with the Administration to take sweeping actions to find and remove all criminal aliens in our country and demand foreign governments accept those who are sent back. This will be a nationwide effort, and we should cut off all federal funding to "sanctuary cities" that refuse to comply.

I will see to it that we catch people who overstay their visas, as well, by putting in place a rigorous entry-exit system to keep track of foreign visitors. This is critical, and it's one of the major unfulfilled recommendations of the 9/11 Commission. It's exactly how the 9/11 hijackers remained in our country. And now visa overstays account for almost half of all illegal aliens in our country.

Whether activists like it or not, we are a nation of laws, and we cannot enforce them selectively. Doing so harms our democracy, and it undermines our way of life. In the meantime, we can't forget about American workers. We've got to protect our economy by re-examining foreign guest-worker programs and mandating the use of E-Verify to ensure illegal aliens are not taking away U.S. jobs.

So my message to the American people is this: your voice was heard, and Congress will work with the Trump Administration to get the job done.

We also need to sound the alarm about the danger at our digital frontiers.

We are fighting a silent war in cyberspace with unlimited fronts, and this was a watershed year. Nation states, criminals, hacktivists, and terrorists are infiltrating our networks. Some want to embarrass us. But others are seeking to copy our innovation, steal our nation's secrets, and even undermine the very

foundations of our republic. Every person in this room is a target, and the phones in your pockets are the battlespace.

The enemy is winning. Hackers have been making off with your financial data and healthcare information, and just weeks ago we saw them shut down major websites like PayPal and Twitter. But such attacks are only a fraction of what is possible. America's critical infrastructure, from water treatment facilities to the power grid, has been infected by malicious code. And it could be used to grind our economy to a halt.

What's worse, our democracy itself is being targeted. For instance, Russia's recent hacks should be a wake-up call—and a call to action. We cannot allow foreign governments to interfere in our democracy. When they do, we must respond forcefully, publicly, and decisively. That is why in the "Better Way" agenda released by House Republicans this year, we said it was time to start treating "network security" as an urgent matter of "national security." The United States should respond to cyberattacks in a way that will make our adversaries think twice about doing it again.

At the same time, we've got to get serious about playing defense. A 19th century bureaucracy cannot protect us from 21st century threats. So I have proposed a major reorganization and consolidation of our domestic cyber efforts into a single, strong cybersecurity agency at DHS. This will be one of my highest priorities in 2017. In addition, we will do more to help state, local, and private sector stakeholders protect their own networks and share cyber-threat data.

Finally, I believe it is time for us to fix the broken bureaucracy at the Department of Homeland Security.

Make no mistake, DHS plays a vital role in stopping bad people and bad things from getting into America. And there have been improvements since the Department was created. But morale at DHS is terrible and too often the mission has gotten drowned out by organizational infighting.

We can do better.

It's time to undertake wholesale reform at DHS, including eliminating bureaucratic bloat, scrapping failing offices, and cutting through the red tape. For instance, I believe we need to revamp TSA by giving more airports the option to privatize frontline screening, which saves taxpayer dollars and improves efficiency.

We must also consolidate the disjointed array of WMD defense offices to better protect Americans against chemical, biological, and nuclear threats. And my Committee will soon release a report calling for serious reform of the DHS intelligence enterprise to make sure the right information gets to the right people at the right time.

Perhaps more than anything, we must make sure DHS stays ahead of our enemies and that it leverages private sector innovation to deal with emerging threats from drones, IEDs, and beyond. Next year my Committee will work with the Trump Administration to bring much-needed reform to the Department and to give Americans the homeland security they deserve.

* * *

A few months ago, I traveled to London and visited the underground war rooms where Winston Churchill led the fight against the Nazis. I was struck by a quote.

“Twice,” Churchill said, “the United States has had to send several million of its young men across the Atlantic to find the war. But now war can find any nation, wherever it may dwell between dusk and dawn.”

That was 70 years ago. If only Churchill could see the world we live in today.

In the past year, war has repeatedly been brought to our soil in the form of Islamist terror, reminding us that two great oceans are not enough to protect us from aggression. But even in this new age, we still have a shield far greater than any—and one bitterly envied by our enemies: the American spirit.

The cause for which we fight—and the power of our resolve—cannot be matched by our foes. So as we rededicate ourselves to victory in this long war, let us remember: our nation’s values have withstood assault from the darkest forces in history. And we will make sure they prevail again.

###