

Yale lecture: 4.9.2001

Unless we understand the historic significance of the events of September 11, 2001, we are doomed to repeat them. On that date, the nature of warfare changed fundamentally. The distinction between war and crime was obliterated. The “rules of war”—protecting women, children, and other non-combatants—disappeared. The antique notion that warfare could be conducted according to norms of civility—as if we still existed in some ancient age of chivalry—evaporated.

Unarmed civilians, people in business suits and dresses, defenseless, without weapons, were attacked without warning by other civilians armed only with short knives and box-cutters—and a modern jet airliner carrying 30,000 pounds of extremely high octane aviation fuel—brought down the twin symbols of American capitalism and severely damaged the primary symbol of its military might and obliterated the lives of 7000 Americans and citizens of more than 70 other countries of the world.

The culprits—criminals or warriors, depending on your point of view—lived among us. They defied the terrorist “profile” in almost every respect. They had ordinary faces, so ordinary in fact that they took flying lessons, studied martial arts, went to bars, cleared airport security—and cheerfully assassinated thousands of people. They tasted the bounty of what we had to offer and they hated us for what we have and for who we are. These are the faces of war in the 21st century.

We are now confronted with this test: Can mass democracy founded on Constitutional liberties survive direct assaults on its citizens on their homeland in ways that force consideration of abandonment of those liberties. In the classic formulation: What is the balance between security and freedom with barbarians already *inside* the gates.

From October, 1998, until July, 2001, I served as co-chairman, with former Senator Warren Rudman, of the U.S. Commission on National Security/21st Century. We were mandated to conduct the most comprehensive review of America's national security structures since 1947. After a year's study, and in the first of our three published reports on September 15, 1999, we said:

*America will become increasingly vulnerable to hostile attack on our homeland, and our military superiority will not entirely protect us. * * **
Americans will likely die on American soil, possibly in large numbers.

In our final report, on January 31, 2001, we said:

The combination of unconventional weapons proliferation with the persistence of international terrorism will end the relative invulnerability of the U.S. homeland to catastrophic attack. A direct attack against American citizens on American soil is likely over the next quarter century. The risk is not only death and destruction but also a demoralization that could undermine U.S. global leadership. In the face of this threat, our nation has no coherent or integrated governmental structures.

Our political leadership did not hear us. Our military leadership did not hear us. The national media did not listen. Seven thousand people died. Our economy is shaking. And, most importantly, the children of America now see their future as uncertain.

It is very difficult to cause those with established interests and points of view to question their own assumptions, to interrogate their own conventional points of view.

But if this republic is to survive what is quite possibly the most serious threat to its survival in its history, it must look to other resources than its corporations, its army, and its political parties.

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Our Commission did not measure U.S. national security in the 21st century by the size of its army, by the power of its warheads, by the stealth of its bombers. We measured our security by the quality of our scientists and the scope of our educational systems, by the ability of its diplomats to function effectively, by the willingness of Congress to once again make itself relevant, by the ability of America once again to attract its most talented citizens into the nation's service.