



[Briefing Room](#)

[Your Weekly Address](#)

[Speeches & Remarks](#)

[Press Briefings](#)

[Statements & Releases](#)

[White House Schedule](#)

[Presidential Actions](#)

[Executive Orders](#)

[Presidential Memoranda](#)

[Proclamations](#)

[Legislation](#)

[Pending Legislation](#)

[Signed Legislation](#)

[Vetoed Legislation](#)

[Nominations & Appointments](#)

[Disclosures](#)

The White House

October 06, 2009

Remarks by the President at the National Counterterrorism Center

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

October 6, 2009

REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT

AT THE NATIONAL COUNTERTERRORISM CENTER

National Counterterrorism Center

McLean, Virginia

11:34 A.M. EDT

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you so much, Mike, for the introduction. Usually it's Mike who comes to brief me at the White House. Today, it's my honor to visit you in your house. I was just told this is called the "bat cave," is that correct? (Laughter.) Mike, thank you for your many years of public service and your outstanding leadership at the National Counterterrorism Center.

It is great to be with all of you. It is great to be here at the hub -- at the headquarters of our efforts to defend America from those who threaten our country and so many others. Our intelligence community is comprised of 16 organizations. We have countless federal and state and local and international partners. And this is where it has to all come together.

So I'm pleased to see Denny Blair and those of you from the Office of the Director of National Intelligence. We have folks here from the FBI and the CIA. We have folks from across the federal government -- intelligence, law enforcement, homeland security and so many others. My understanding is we've even got some of New York's finest -- some NYPD folks who are here. Standing together and serving together, it's clear for all to see -- that you are one team -- that you are more integrated and more collaborative and more effective than ever before. And you're focused on one defining mission, and that is to protect the United States of America and thwarting terrorist attacks around the world.

Now, I just received an extraordinary briefing from some of your colleagues. I have to tell you, I was surprised to see how young everybody is around here. It is a sign of my age that everybody is starting to look young. But the capacity and the dedication that's on display was remarkable. And, look, all of you have some of the most important work that is done in this country -- you're doing it. These big screens I understand are not just to watch SportsCenter. (Laughter.)

But I wanted to come here today and take a few minutes just to deliver a simple message -- and I delivered it inside, and that is the message of thanks -- to say thank you from me, who use your product each and every day to make some very tough decisions, and to thank you on behalf of the American people, who may not even know that you're here but are relying on you each and every day to make sure that their kids get home safely and that when they commute to work it's going to be okay. To think about the profound impact that all of you are having on the day-to-day life of this nation I think is extraordinary. Your professionalism is essential to protecting this country.

Now, we recently observed the eighth anniversary of that terrible day when terrorists brought so much

death and destruction to our shores. And once more we remembered all the lives that were lost. And once more we redoubled our resolve against the extremists who continue to plot against the United States and our allies.

So we need you more than ever. Our troops and our intelligence officers in the field, our diplomats overseas, our law enforcement here at home, they all depend on you -- your analysis, your insights, your ability to work together, across divisions and disciplines, turning information into intelligence and sharing it quickly, in real time, with those who need it.

As I said before, I am one of those consumers of your work product here at NCTC. Every morning I look to you for the latest intelligence. In fact, I think so highly of NCTC that I picked the guy who put NCTC together -- John Brennan -- as my chief adviser for counterterrorism and homeland security. And by the way, John Brennan is here and doing an outstanding job each and every day. He's also, by the way, I think, responsible for getting this spiffy building up and running.

Now, again, a lot of you are working in some obscurity right now. Few Americans know about the work that you do, and this is how it should be. Your assignments require it, and obviously you didn't go into this line of work for the fame and glory, or the glare of the spotlight. You're in this to serve and protect. But today, I want every American to know about the difference you've made -- especially in recent months and days. Because of you, and all the organizations you represent, we're making real progress in our core mission: to disrupt, dismantle, and defeat al Qaeda and other extremist networks around the world.

We must never lose sight of that goal. That's the principal threat to the American people. That is the threat that led to the creation of this Center. And that must be the focus of our efforts to defend the homeland and our allies, and defeat extremists abroad.

We know that al Qaeda and its extremist allies threaten us from different corners of the globe -- from Pakistan, but also from East Africa and Southeast Asia; from Europe and the Gulf. And that's why we're applying focused and relentless pressure on al Qaeda -- by sharing more intelligence, strengthening the capacity of our partners, disrupting terrorist financing, cutting off supply chains, and inflicting major losses on al Qaeda's leadership.

It should now be clear -- the United States and our partners have sent an unmistakable message: We will target al Qaeda wherever they take root; we will not yield in our pursuit; and we are developing the capacity and the cooperation to deny a safe haven to any who threaten America and its allies.

We also know that success against al Qaeda must go beyond destroying their network -- it must be about the future that we want to build as well. And that's why we're putting forward a positive vision of American leadership around the world -- one where we lead by example, and engage nations and peoples on the basis of mutual interest and mutual respect.

As one counterterrorism expert recently observed, because of our efforts al Qaeda and its allies have not only lost operational capacity, they've lost legitimacy and credibility. Of course, nobody does a better job of discrediting al Qaeda than al Qaeda itself, which has killed men and women and children of many faiths in many nations, and which has absolutely no positive future to offer the people of the

world.

So even as we target al Qaeda and its bankrupt vision, we also know that we have to be vigilant in defending our people at home. And that takes aggressive intelligence collection and skillful analysis. And that demands the effective and efficient coordination between federal government and our state and local partners.

And that's what we've seen from you in recent years. We've seen your success here in America in the last several weeks. You've stayed vigilant. You watched for signs. You stitched together the intelligence. You worked together, across organizations, as one team. And then -- arrests in Denver and New York, and still more in Illinois and Texas, have made us safer.

So I say to every American: You see the headlines, but here are some of the people who help write them, who keep you safe. And I say to all of you, you are setting the standard. You're showing us what focused and integrated counterterrorism really looks like. And the record of your service is written in the attacks that never occur -- because you thwarted them; and in the countless Americans who are alive today -- because you saved them. For that, America is in your debt.

Of course, you know that we're facing determined adversaries who are resourceful, who are resilient, and who are still plotting. And no one can ever promise that there won't be another attack on American soil.

But I can promise you this. I pledge to do everything in my power as President to keep America safe. And I pledge to give all of you the tools and support you need to get the job done, around the world and here at home. And I pledge to stay focused on that mission -- just as you stay focused on your mission. So we all have to redouble our efforts in the face of a threat that persists. We're going to have to draw strength from the values that we hold dear. We must keep our eye fixed on the world we seek to build -- one that defeats our adversaries, but that also promotes dignity and opportunity and justice for all who stand with us.

To do that, we need you to keep standing and serving together -- every agency, every department, every branch, every level. One team. One mission. That's how we're going to prevail in this fight, and that's how we're going to protect this country that we all love.

So thanks to all of you. Continue the outstanding work. God bless you, and God bless the United States of America. Thank you very much. (Applause.)

END

11:44 A.M. EDT



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