

# Ten years after 9/11: Where do we stand?

A7/120 9.4.11 Terminology Unbalanced

Special to The Times

WITH its vivid introduction, "Tuesday, September 11, 2001,"

laidless in the eastern United States," the "9/11 Commission Report" became an instant best-seller and a National Book Award

finalist. Unchallenged in its objective history of the circumstances and failures leading up to the horrors of 9/11, except by inevitable conspiracy theorists, it set forth a wide-ranging series of recommendations that resulted in more positive changes in our national-security establishment than those from any other such commission in history.

And so where do we stand now, 10 years later?

Inside the United States, at great cost in both dollars and personal disruption, we are clearly safer. In fact, in the past decade there has been only one fatal terrorist attack, the Fort Hood massacre, and that was not the result of an intelligence failure but of a failure to act on available information, probably due to politically correct attitudes on the part of those aware of the threat posed by Maj. Nidal Malik Hasan.

We are now spending some \$80 billion a year on intelligence, twice the amount of 10 years ago. Our public buildings, and many of our private buildings as well, are more difficult to enter. And the elaborate and humiliating process of boarding commercial aircraft is one with which we have become all too familiar. It is, not at all incidentally, ripe for reform.

Our intelligence agencies are far more effective. The National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC) has broken down the foreign-domestic divide between the Central Intelligence Agency and the Federal Bureau of Investigation that inhibited our previous anti-terrorism efforts and significantly contributed to 9/11. The center has also begun the even more difficult task of collecting information from 17 separate federal intelligence agencies and distributing it where it will do the most good, including newly established federal-state-local fusion centers.

NCTC does this under the leadership of a director of national intelligence (DNI), a new position created as a result of a 9/11 Commission recommendation to be the president's chief adviser and the head of the intelligence

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## Ten years after 9/11

GABRIEL CAMPANARIO / THE SEATTLE TIMES



• JOIN A LIVE CHAT at noon Tuesday to discuss the progress the U.S. has made in ensuring America's security while balancing civil rights. Joining Slade Gorton will be Aarsalan Bukhari, executive director of the Council on American-Islamic Relations-Washington; John McKay, Seattle University law professor and former U.S. attorney; and Paul Lawrence, past president of the American Civil Liberties Union of Washington. To submit questions in advance, go to <http://seattle.ms/911chat>

• ATTEND "THE 9/11 CONFERENCE: Security Solutions for the Next 10 years" Friday at the University of Washington. Gorton and Bob Kerrey, both former U.S. senators who were members of the 9/11 Commission, will be among speakers at the daylong conference, held by The Slade Gorton International Policy Center at the National Bureau of Asian Research. For more information: [www.nbr.org/9-11](http://www.nbr.org/9-11)

overseas terrorist organizations find far-softer targets in their own countries and, to a limited extent, in Europe. Violent Islamist extremism has been largely displaced from the West into its own countries, not by choice but by necessity.

Seven years ago, in its report, the 9/11 Commission made four basic points about the threat: • World politics have been fundamentally changed — challenges are now transnational

intelligence agencies as recommended by the commission, thus severely limiting its effectiveness. Even so, there is a far greater unity of effort, and a far greater sharing of information today than there was before 9/11. We could do better, but we're doing well.

Commission recommendation to be the president's chief adviser and the head of the intelligence

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Slade Gorton was a member of the 9/11 Commission. He represented Washington in the U.S. Senate for 18 years.

kind of threat by which small numbers of attackers can inflict highly disproportionate damage; • The enemy is not generic "terrorism" but violent Islamic extremism, a small but extremely intolerant strain of Islam that regards America as the font of all evil, pursuant to which all Americans are proper targets; and • We are not a party to a clash of civilizations but are caught up in a clash within a civilization in which the violent Islamist extremists kill far more of their fellow Muslims than they do Americans and other Westerners. Thus defined, the threat has been neither removed nor even much lessened during the course of the past 10 years. Americans are still the targets of choice; it's just that our defenses are more effective and so the struggle is more and more centered in Muslim nations. Even there, much of the news is good. In nation after nation, in Tunisia, Egypt, and now Libya and Syria, and even in primitive Yemen we see masses of Muslims demanding open and civil societies, in the face of tanks and machine guns, so far with a number of surprising successes. Of course there is always the possibility that the extremists will come out on top, but the risk is clearly worth it. The chance to create civil and democratic governments is so enticing as to be worth far more decisive support from the U.S. administration, if only because such societies are far less likely to sponsor or tolerate violent extremism. But the failed and failing states, Somalia and perhaps Pakistan, will continue to present major challenges as refugees for extremists. And Afghanistan may provide the gravest threat of all. As President Obama carries out his promise to withdraw all of our troops, the risk of a relapse into the Taliban state that preceded 9/11, brutally suppressing all advocates of freedom, not to mention the entire female population, and the resurgence of al-Qaida or its equivalent will loom as an ever-increasing threat. So we have had some real successes since 9/11, albeit at great cost. Much remains to be done, however, and perhaps our principal challenge is complacency and letting down our guard before the struggle is won.