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**EXPERTS ADDRESS HOMELAND SECURITY POLICY INSTITUTE FORUM ON
IMPROVISED EXPLOSIVE DEVICES: PERCEPTIONS AND THE DOMESTIC THREAT**

APRIL 7, 2010

WASHINGTON — On Tuesday, April 6, 2010, The George Washington University Homeland Security Policy Institute (HSPI) hosted a Policy & Research Forum examining Americans' perceptions of the domestic threat posed by improvised explosive devices (IEDs). The event featured: **Corey Gruber**, Assistant Deputy Administrator, National Preparedness Directorate, FEMA, Department of Homeland Security; **Cathy Lanier**, Chief, Metropolitan Police Department, Washington, DC and HSPI Steering Committee Member; **Josh Meyer**, Director, Education and Outreach, Medill National Security Journalism Initiative, Northwestern University, and former national security reporter for the *Los Angeles Times*; **Mark Mueller**, Acting Deputy Chief, Office for Bombing Prevention, National Protection and Programs Directorate, Department of Homeland Security; **Darby Miller Steiger**, Principal Consultant and Director of Research for the Gallup Panel; and, **Adam Thiel**, Chief, Alexandria Fire Department, Alexandria, Virginia and HSPI Steering Committee Member. **Daniel Kaniewski**, HSPI Deputy Director, opened the event which brought together academics, policymakers, counterterrorism practitioners, as well as law enforcement and emergency response professionals. **Frank Cilluffo**, HSPI's Director, moderated the event and roundtable discussion.

Miller Steiger began with a presentation of the Gallup Panel's polling data regarding IED perceptions. The poll found that a vast majority of Americans believe it is likely the US will suffer an IED attack within the next two years. Few, however, believe an attack will happen in their community. Even in New York City and Washington, DC, only one in five respondents felt such an attack was likely to occur in their city. The Gallup Panel also found that, in the event of an attack, Americans would look first and foremost to emergency response personnel in their community, rather than to federal officials in the Department of Homeland Security or to national journalists.

Gruber stated that Gallup's findings correlate with FEMA's *Personal Preparedness in America* survey. Stating "information is the key," Gruber noted that both data sets support the idea that information can have a direct and indirect effect on how people react in a crisis. He expanded his point by highlighting two important elements that shape crisis behavior. First, how information is received—how it is communicated to individuals. Second, how it is observed—what others observe the people around them doing with said information.

Mueller echoed the importance of an informed public. According to him, what is needed are mechanisms that would allow officials to build upon the knowledge and awareness that already resides within the public. Mueller also stressed the necessity of providing concrete guidance to the public, and the role citizens play in providing key intelligence. He argued that "quite often it is the alert

clerk, it's the off-duty police officer, it's the neighbor" that notices key indicators that enable law enforcement and national level assets to intercede before a threat comes to fruition.

Building on this theme, Lanier stressed that we must recalibrate our thinking on who is actually responsible for preparing for and preventing attacks. She contends that citizens, not the government, have the primary responsibility. However the challenge is that, "there's no picture in the public mind of how to get in touch with Homeland Security." She also noted that business and industry partners play a critical role in picking up on the subtle activity that gives government the ability to prevent attacks. Thus, Lanier argued, it becomes vital that citizens and the private sector be plugged into local authorities, and that these partners be given the tools and guidance regarding what to do when they observe something suspicious.

Thiel told the audience that he had confidence in the protocols for responding to recognized IED threats, such as a pipe bomb or suspicious backpack. However, he was concerned about having the resources needed to be prepared for future threats. Thiel referenced changes in the use and nature of IEDs that are being witnessed overseas. He noted that "the basic resource capability for dealing with any type of emergency incident . . . is in local government. It is primarily funded and resourced by local government. And we all know that right now, local governments are strapped . . . frankly, IED detection, response, and training is not typically considered a core service." As a result, Thiel continued, there are few resources available for addressing this threat.

Responding to the Gallup data, Meyer argued that the lack of trust in media has negative implications for law enforcement, intelligence, and the public at large. He observed that during a crisis, "the information that is pushed out by the federal government is really spotty and what [journalists] have to do is go to [their] sources and get the information piecemeal." Thus, reports are often contradictory, which Meyer suggested might undermine confidence in the media. He contended that the government needs to do more to develop a mechanism for providing vetted information to the public.

Cilluffo highlighted the importance of pushing information out to the public and at the same time pulling in intelligence from local resources. He stressed the value, in both cases, of knowing, and trusting, the individuals with whom one is dealing. Cilluffo also noted that an informed public makes a powerful ally: "one of the best ways to take the terror out of terrorism is to arm our population with knowledge."

For more on the Gallup Panel's poll findings, see the webcast on HSPI's event page. Other resources related to this event are also available at: <http://www.gwumc.edu/hspi/events/ied.cfm>.

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About HSPI's Policy & Research Forum Series:

HSPI's Policy & Research Forum Series spotlights cutting-edge security policy solutions and innovative research. The Series is designed to provide thought leaders in the United States and abroad with a uniquely constructive venue in which to discuss current and future security issues and challenges.

About the GW Homeland Security Policy Institute:

Founded in 2003, The George Washington University Homeland Security Policy Institute (HSPI) is a nonpartisan "think and do" tank whose mission is to build bridges between theory and practice to advance homeland security through an interdisciplinary approach. By convening domestic and international policymakers and practitioners at all levels of government, the private and non-profit

sectors, and academia, HSPI creates innovative strategies and solutions to current and future threats to the nation. For additional information about HSPI, please visit <http://homelandsecurity.gwu.edu>.