

THE HOMELAND SECURITY POLICY INSTITUTE  
PRESIDENTIAL TRANSITION TASK FORCE

*Thinking Anew – Security Priorities for the Next Administration*

The nation is poised at a crossroads in its consideration of security policy. A coherent strategy to address 21<sup>st</sup> century threats to the United States, one that treats national and homeland security as a seamless whole, has yet to emerge. Washington will soon be marked by a new Administration, a new tone, and a new space – offering a rare opportunity to catch our collective breath, to think creatively and anew about the most vexing challenges this country faces, and to put the most powerful of those reasoned ideas into action.

To help fuel this process, The George Washington University's Homeland Security Policy Institute (HSPI) assembled in a Task Force some of the finest minds in the country to leverage their expert insights into today's most pressing matters of national and homeland security. The goal is to further policy discussions of the top strategic priorities in the area of security and to lay out an action plan for addressing them. Ours is a multi-sector, big picture approach that examines the international and domestic aspects of security, and is informed by Task Force members who served in the current as well as past Administrations, Fortune 500 companies, academia, research institutions and non-governmental organizations with global reach. To push the boundaries of our thinking, the Task Force received briefings from subject-matter experts at the forefront of their fields. In addition, our effort has been further informed and supplemented by discussions that took place under the rubric of HSPI's Ambassador Roundtable Series, and Policy and Research Forum.

Four strategic priorities have emerged that command the attention of the new Administration. To further consideration of these vital issues within the broader policy community, the HSPI Presidential Transition Task Force is pleased to announce its upcoming series of roundtables, *Thinking Anew – Security Priorities for the Next Administration*. Through these forums, the Task Force hopes to identify the benefits, challenges and way forward to achieving these objectives critical to our nation's security in the coming decade. Given prevailing fiscal realities, prioritization becomes all the more important. These sessions are intended to continue the dialogue with the incoming Administration throughout the transition and 2009 with an eye to helping shape security policy. The priorities as identified by the Task Force, as well as the key issues and open questions that require further consideration are as follows:

**PROACTIVE STRATEGY AND RESILIENT FOUNDATIONS: STRIKING THE RIGHT FEDERAL STANCE**

A proactive and resilient posture is paramount. It underlies the desired end-state, namely to stay ahead of the curve in the form of security threats or, in the alternative, to bounce back quickly if the nation falls short of that ideal. The right federal stance would support these goals, but what form might it take? To date, homeland and national security have been treated as distinct enterprises, each with their own supporting structures in the executive branch, including within the Executive Office of the President, and in Congress. Close examination of potential threats however, has made plain the need to more closely align the two. Barriers to achieving such alignment and

the resulting failure to exploit synergies include, for example, insufficient bandwidth of the National Security and Homeland Security Advisors, and the opaqueness and short term nature of the budgeting process for homeland security investment priorities. Closer alignment would hopefully lead to a more coherent strategy, but policy without resources is rhetoric. How can the Quadrennial Homeland Security Review be leveraged to drive long term planning and budgeting? Congress is of course a crucial partner in the mission. An effective and workable system of oversight designed to ensure accountability is needed. The principles of transparency and collaboration should guide the new Administration's actions and interactions with the Hill. Being proactive also requires sound strategic and tactical intelligence. To defeat our adversaries (or help facilitate their implosion), we must first properly understand them – their history, tactics, and the ideologies they espouse. State and local capabilities and needs must inform both what we do and how we do it, in the context of our intelligence framework. Suggestions on the way forward emphasize simultaneously the importance of embedding privacy protections and due respect for civil liberties at each step along the way.

#### **NATIONAL APPROACH TO PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE: SHAPING EXPECTATIONS, ENHANCING CAPABILITIES**

Most incidents that occur each day in the U.S. are handled at the local level. Some require assistance from other local jurisdictions, counties, the State, or multiple States. Few involve federal assistance. However, those incidents that do require federal support, especially those incidents of a catastrophic magnitude, require a proactive, coordinated federal response. To respond effectively, significant planning and resource investments are required at all levels of government for the most likely scenarios the nation will face, but this planning effort has only recently begun in earnest. A robust regional structure led by the Department of Homeland Security has long been discussed as a means of coordinating federal interagency support, and drawing forward to support State and local governments' capabilities, but current efforts are limited in scope. At the same time, incident management roles and responsibilities at the federal level require further clarification so that the American public can rest assured that our senior leaders have their lines of authority clear before the next major incident. To address these challenges, should the next Administration create new Presidential policies (as well as associated plans and frameworks), or enhance existing ones?

#### **ENGAGE AND ENLIST THE AMERICAN PUBLIC: PEOPLE – OUR GREATEST STRENGTH**

Americans are a resourceful and resilient people, yet there is evidence to suggest that a culture of preparedness has yet to prevail fully. How might the new Administration foster such a culture, in which individuals take seriously the responsibility of being prepared to survive for three days on their own, to create evacuation plans for themselves and their families, and to get out of harm's way when appropriate? New communications technologies give rise to new possibilities and opportunities; how might these technologies be harnessed to build not only a baseline of civic literacy concerning preparedness, but also a network of prepared citizens? Further, even if the majority of citizens take action as suggested, all levels of government and communities will still bear a responsibility to support the most vulnerable, including the truly impoverished and those with special needs. In past, mostly lip service has been paid to the idea that disaster planning efforts at the local, state, and federal levels require civic engagement. Moving forward, how could the public be most constructively and meaningfully engaged in these endeavors? And how do we protect the volunteers that do step forward, both in planning for and responding to a crisis?

## **INTERNATIONAL STRATEGY: RE-INVIGORATING OUR ROLE IN THE WORLD**

We cannot go it alone; our own security depends upon the stability and engagement of other nations. Historically, the United States has been a good global partner, and has made use of the full range of tools of statecraft, including humanitarian and development assistance, and trade initiatives. The time has come to recapture and reinvigorate these elements. Indeed, our standing in the world has suffered for reasons both real and perceived. The task before us is not without challenge however. For instance, economic development may bolster security, but how can the United States avoid the charge that its aid is merely a façade for counterterrorism? What mechanisms might be invoked to build a nuanced messaging capability to this end? A coordinated U.S. outreach and communications strategy is a necessary, but lacking, precursor to confront radicalization and recruitment by extremist groups. (This would include efforts such as facilitating voices within the Muslim world to counter radicalization and recruitment, and exercising care regarding the use of lexicon). How might we best go about de-conflicting and synergizing existing government and non-government efforts in this area, bearing in mind that the most authentic and compelling voices reside at the grassroots level? Looking to the future, how could the United States better engage productively with international organizations and institutions to build security and stability abroad, and foster respect for and adherence to international law in the form of longstanding, fundamental and widely accepted norms?

With your help, and through the HSPI Presidential Transition Roundtable Series, we aim to confirm that these are in fact the right questions to ask and, if so, to generate together a thoughtful and productive way forward for the new Administration.