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**SEPT. 11 FIVE YEARS LATER: IS AMERICA SAFER?**

**Yes. America is killing its enemies on their home turfs**

**By Lawrence J. Haas**

We can debate endlessly whether we have adequately upgraded our military, secured our borders or protected key potential targets of terrorist attacks, such as chemical weapons plants.

But, national security begins not with the arming of troops, fencing along borders, and X-ray machines at airports. It starts with the recognition that we are at war, that the forces of anti-Western terror and intolerance are seeking our destruction and that we must respond in kind.

In that sense, we are surely safer than we were five years ago. We are engaged and mobilized – not as much as we could be, but far more than we once were. We debate how to confront our enemies, not whether we have them. We debate how to prepare for future attack, not whether we need to.

It was not always such. For decades, we were oblivious to the mounting threats to our safety. We ignored the taunts of our enemies and responded weakly to their attacks, prompting them to ramp up both their rhetoric and action.

Such taunts date back to the 1950s with the Muslim Brotherhood's Sayyed Qutb, who viewed the West as decadent and sought a society under strict Islam. Today, the same taunts pervade the speeches of al-Qaeda's leader, Osama bin Laden; Hezbollah's chief, Nassan Hasrallah; Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, and its president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad; and many others in a network of Islamic fundamentalism that stretches across Europe, African and Asia.

Notwithstanding doctrinal differences over Islam and historic and sometimes bloody splits between Shiites and Sunnis, the leaders of Islamic fundamentalism agree on the virtue of murder in the cause of God and deride freedom-loving peoples as weak and unworthy.

Direct attacks on America date back to 1979, when militants seized our embassy in Tehran and held more than 50 of our people for more than a year. The next two decades brought bombings at a Marine barracks in Beirut, the 1993 World Trade Center bombing, the bombing at Khobal Towers, embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania, the attack on the Navy destroyer Cole, and, finally, the Sept 11, 2001, attacks.

But not until the latter did we awaken from our slumbers and launch any kind of real war in response. We sent our military into battle, and we consolidated domestic safety efforts by creating a Department of Homeland Security. In the private sector, concerned leaders

sought to focus public attention on the need to support pluralism and fight the ideologies that drive terrorism by creating such organizations as the bipartisan Foundation for the Defense of Democracies.

In Afghanistan, we uprooted al-Qaeda's safe haven, killed many of its leaders, and kept the others on the run. In Iraq, we toppled Saddam Hussein, who gave financial bounties to the families of suicide bombers and viewed America as a sworn enemy. We have helped our allies disrupt terrorist plots in Europe, and we are providing key support to nations in Africa and Asia that are confronting their homegrown members of the global terrorist network.

Moreover, we are better at pinpointing the threats at hand. We are focusing more on Iran – the world's most active state sponsor of terrorism, which is seeking to develop nuclear weapons. As Iran's leaders threaten to “wipe Israel off the map” and speak hopefully about “a world without America,” we search for the right combination of sanctions and incentives to persuade the regime to change its ways, or persuade Iranians to change their regime.

Could we do more? Of course! But, we are surely safer than we were on a sunny autumn morning in 2001, when an attack of four airplanes forced us to recognize dangers we had ignored for far too long.

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