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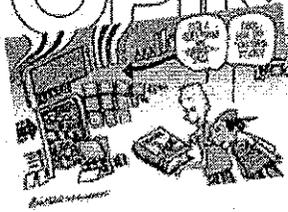
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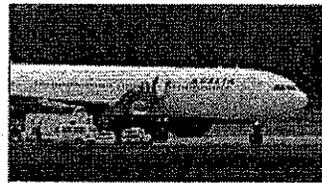
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There's 'work to be done,' 9/11 Commission chairs say

By Lee Hamilton and

Thomas Kean

National Security is too important to become a partisan issue. We believe that in matters of national security, our priority should be to figure out what went wrong and how to fix it.

At their core, the problems evident on Sept. 11, 2001, were about the failures and obstacles to sharing information among the federal partners charged with protecting the country. The failures included connecting foreign intelligence with information about international terrorism collected inside the U.S. The CIA did not watch-list al-Qaeda member and future 9/11 hijacker Khalid Al-Midhar, or notify the FBI when it learned he had a valid U.S. visa. The FBI failed to share information that Osama bin Laden might have sent students to the U.S. to attend civil aviation schools and that Zacarias Moussaoui had been arrested by the FBI after a flight school reported suspicious behavior.

And even if any of this information had been made available, no one in the federal government was charged with fusing together intelligence derived from foreign and domestic sources. If someone had access to all the information, he might have been able to connect the dots and uncover that Islamic terrorists with flight training were in the USA.

To facilitate information-sharing and to create an entity whose job it would be to connect the dots, the bipartisan 9/11 Commission recommended, and the Congress and then-President Bush established, a Director of National Intelligence (DNI) and a National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC):

To empower the DNI to break down bureaucratic, cultural, technological and policy barriers to the sharing of information among federal agencies, Congress provided that the DNI "shall have the principal authority to ensure maximum availability of and access to intelligence information." The NCTC would be the hub, the "primary organization in the U.S. government for analyzing and integrating all intelligence information related to terrorism." The idea was for the DNI to force information-sharing so the NCTC could access and assess all available relevant information and then connect disparate pieces of threat information.

The dots aren't connecting

In the five years since the passage of the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act, the U.S. government has made significant strides to correct the mistakes evident on Sept. 11. But as we've seen from the recent terrorist incidents at Fort Hood and in the skies above Detroit, there is still work to be done. We welcome President Obama's just-completed review of the Christmas Day near-miss as well as the commitments to strengthen the analytic process within the intelligence community.

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While the Detroit incident was apparently not about a failure to share information, we need to continue to examine what went wrong in these recent episodes in order to improve and refine our processes, analysis and information-sharing responsibilities. These events also show the critical need for the DNI and the NCTC to be successful in the vital missions they have been asked to undertake for the country. If the dots are not connected there, likely they will not be connected.

Time to ensure unity

The president should order the DNI to report on any barriers to the sharing of information, but also on ways the authority of the DNI can be strengthened to ensure unity of effort. Congress should support these entities by giving the DNI and the NCTC the resources they need and the ability to recruit and keep the best people for the task. The DNI has been hobbled by disputes over its size, mission and authority, but forcing information-sharing and enabling the NCTC's best analysts to do their work should not be subject to dispute.

We've been leading an effort to conduct a review of the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act and the effectiveness of the DNI. We intend to monitor the implementation of the 9/11 Commission's recommendations and report on new national security threats.

Strengthening the DNI's capacity to collect, analyze and integrate massive amounts of data to protect Americans is a multiyear process requiring sustained support from the White House and oversight from the Congress.

Lee Hamilton, a former congressman from Indiana, and Thomas Kean, former governor of New Jersey, co-chaired the independent bipartisan commission that studied the Sept. 11 attacks and made recommendations designed to guard against future attacks. They now co-chair the Bipartisan Policy Center's National Security Preparedness Group, which continues to study threats to the United States.

(Northwest Airlines Flight 253: Under investigation in Detroit on Christmas weekend./Charles Rex Arbogast, AP.)

Posted at 12:15 AM/ET, January 11, 2010 in Forum commentary, Politics, Government - Forum, Terrorism - Forum | Permalink

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"Still work to be done." You idiots! Just waterboard Cheney and others as to why a single fighter didn't show up for almost an hour after the 9/11 attacks while the year before interceptors were scrambled 168 times for aircraft going off their flight plans. In 1999 during Payne Stewart's fateful plane ride fighters escorted his jet into the ground to make sure it wouldn't crash in a populated area. Not so on 9/11 while numerous aircraft were flying radar art on radar screens from NORAD to every local airport in the vicinity. Hey Cheney, why did you have our military in "stand down" mode that day? "Gluggg gluggg gasp..." Hey Cheney, why did 3 concrete and steel building come down on the same day including one that wasn't even hit. "Glugg gasp, glug cough cough..." Hey Cheney, where was the landing gear and other wreckage from the