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Brian Michael Jenkins, Director of Mineta Transportation Institute's National Transportation Security Center of Excellence, Briefs Congress on Current Terrorism Issues

The briefing, given before new members of Congress, covered foreign policy, national security, and related domestic issues

San Jose, Calif., January 20, 2011 – Earlier this month, Brian Michael Jenkins, Director of the [Mineta Transportation Institute](#)'s (MTI) National Transportation Security Center of Excellence, and the Hon. Juan C Zarate, former Assistant Secretary of the Treasury and Deputy Security Advisor for Combating Terrorism, briefed the newly elected members of Congress on several foreign policy, national security, and domestic issues.

Mr. Jenkins said that America has not suffered further attacks similar to 9/11. On the other hand, few imagined that, ten years later, the United States would still be threatened by the jihadist terrorist enterprise it invaded Afghanistan to destroy. He pointed to several key issues regarding the current terrorist situation:

First, terrorists are operationally weaker, but their determination is undiminished. “An unrelenting campaign has reduced the likelihood of al Qaeda mounting attacks on the scale of 9/11, while international cooperation has created a more hostile environment for terrorists,” Mr. Jenkins stated. “However, in response, al Qaida has become decentralized, so smaller deadly attacks are seen, such as the killing or wounding of 44 U.S. soldiers by Army Major Nidal Hasan at Fort Hood, Texas.”

Second, jihadist terrorist strategy puts increased emphasis on homegrown terrorism. Despite its training camps in Pakistan and Afghanistan, al Qaeda now emphasizes do-it-yourself terrorism, urging local would-be jihadists to do whatever they can wherever they are. Mr. Jenkins said that, without experience or practical instruction, homegrown terrorists have not achieved the sophistication of centrally supported efforts, but they have learned that attacks at home, even when unsuccessful, still cause great alarm.

“Fortunately,” he added, “the number of homegrown terrorists is small. In more than eight years, 125 have been arrested or indicted—a very small fraction of the estimated three million American Muslims.”

Third, terrorist campaigns challenge all democracies, which have felt obliged to facilitate intelligence collection, increase police powers, create new anti-terrorist laws, toughen penalties for terrorist-related crimes and, in some cases, alter trial procedures. Some countries, he said, have even imposed censorship on the news media and suspended other civil liberties. In comparison, the U.S. has taken a middle ground, creating new organizations and policies, while rejecting others.

Fourth, conflicting American attitudes complicate counterterrorism. “While demanding absolute security, Americans remain suspicious of their government,” he said. “Willing to share remarkable amounts of personal information on vast social networks, they reject government infringements on their privacy. They are angry over irksome security measures. But if we accept that the country is at war with tenacious terrorist foes determined to attack American targets, we cannot feign shock and outrage when those foes carry out an attack.”

Fifth, domestic intelligence is always a delicate issue in a democracy. He says that, while some may worry that collecting domestic intelligence is not done well enough, civil libertarians are alarmed by the growth of a vast domestic spying enterprise that includes federal agencies, DHS, fusion centers, and local authorities, with significant involvement by private contractors. While suspicious of any domestic clone of the CIA, they also worry that without central management, the proliferation of participants, many poorly trained, and the growth of databases recording ill-defined suspicious activity and the names of people who have committed no crimes will be uncontrolled and abusive.

Mr. Jenkins listed a number of questions, as well. Should the government assert more control over the internet? According to a Saudi security official, al Qaeda now does 99 percent of its recruiting online. The Internet also enables extremists to find reinforcement for personal discontents, obtain direction, and justify their aggression. “Why should government not assert more direct control over the Internet, outlawing incitement to terrorism as it now outlaws child pornography and other forms of online crime?” he asked.

Is it time to rethink aviation security strategy? He said that subjecting all airline passengers to the same security regime does not constitute intelligent security. The approach must be more discerning. “Admittedly, many do not share this opinion,” he said. “But either way, it is time to fundamentally review how airline security is provided.

Should more resources be devoted to securing public surface transportation? The threat is not hypothetical—it is well established in terrorist playbooks, he said. Terrorists see trains and buses as easily accessible killing fields that offer opportunities to achieve high body counts, cause great alarm, and create costly disruptions. Three terrorist attacks on commuter trains and subways in Madrid, London, and Mumbai caused more than 450 fatalities and thousands of injuries.

Are security expenditures untouchable? Our aim must be sustainability if we accept the premises that this is the threat environment America will live in for the foreseeable future, that security measures imposed now are likely to become permanent features of the landscape, and that a free society and economic strength are vital components of America’s national security, he said.

He closed by noting that Congress cannot allow unreasonable fear and unrealistic demands for security to keep the wagon train circled forever. He said that Congress can conduct a thorough review of intelligence and homeland security. “The President has demonstrated his determination to take on the terrorists,” he said. “There is an opportunity for a bipartisan approach.”

ABOUT BRIAN MICHAEL JENKINS

Mr. Jenkins is an international authority on terrorism and sophisticated crime. He directs MTI’s research on protecting surface transportation against terrorist attacks. He is also a senior advisor to the president of RAND. From 1989-98, Mr. Jenkins was deputy chairman of Kroll Associates, an international investigative and consulting firm. Before that, he was chairman of RAND’s Political Science Department, where he also directed research on political violence.

He holds a BA in fine arts and a Masters Degree in history, both from UCLA. He studied in Mexico and Guatemala, where he was a Fulbright Fellow and received a fellowship from the Organization of American States. Mr. Jenkins was a paratrooper and a captain in the Green Berets, serving in Vietnam and the Dominican Republic. He returned to Vietnam as a member of the Long Range Planning Task Group, receiving the Department of the Army’s highest award for his service. He authored several articles, reports and books, including *International Terrorism: A New Mode of Conflict* and *Will Terrorists Go Nuclear?*

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