

Center for American Progress Action Fund



Taking Control of the Fight against Terrorists:

A Progressive Strategy to Protect Americans

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Executive Summary

Five years after the attacks of September 11, 2001, the United States is not winning the war against terrorist networks. The world has become a more dangerous place, yet the Bush administration's approach remains the same, with too much energy and money focused on the wrong policy in Iraq.

When historians look back on the summer of 2006, they will see it as the period when the Bush administration lost control of events: American troops stuck in the middle of a growing civil war in Iraq that costs American taxpayers \$8 billion a month; a resurgent Al Qaeda and Taliban on the offensive in Afghanistan; Islamist terrorist groups attacking Israel's northern and southern borders; global terrorist networks still plotting against America and its allies; America's adversaries advancing their nuclear programs; and gas prices rising out of control at home.

The Bush administration has allowed America's terrorist enemies to shape the global battlefield to their advantage. The deteriorating security situation is a direct result of the preventive war strategy that the Bush administration developed in 2002. This strategy has not answered the real threats facing America, used inappropriate military tactics, and ignored the advice of our generals, our national security experts, and our allies.

Earlier this year, more than 100 national security experts from across the political spectrum agreed that the United States is not winning the war on terrorism. In a [survey conducted and published by *Foreign Policy* magazine and the Center for American Progress](#), more than eight in ten experts (84 percent) said that the United States is losing the war on terror, and 86 percent concluded that the world is becoming more dangerous for the United States and the American people.



How Safe is America Today from Terrorist Attacks?

Here are some of the results from Foreign Policy magazine's recently published "Terrorism Index," a survey of over 100 top national security experts in 2006 from across the political spectrum, with the results weighted to ensure balance between conservatives and liberals.

Among the key findings:

- 84 percent of the experts said we are losing the war on terrorists
- 86 percent said that the world is becoming more dangerous for the U.S. and the American people
- 57 percent consider an attack on the scale of the London bombing against the U.S. to be likely or certain by the end of this year
- 79 percent consider attack on the scale of 9/11 to be likely or certain within five years
- 93 percent said the war in Afghanistan had a positive impact on the War on Terror, but: 87 percent said the war in Iraq had a negative impact on the War on Terror
- Only 1 of 8 executive national security agencies received an average or better rating when the experts rated them on a 0 to 10 scale (National Security Agency received a 5.2)
- 82 percent indicated that a higher priority needs to be placed on reducing our demand for foreign oil as an action to help in the war on terror
- 87 percent said that the State Department should receive more funding to help in the War on Terror and 65 percent said we need to improve Department of Homeland Security

Instead of adjusting his strategy, President Bush has instead tried to divert attention away from his administration's poor record on national security. Americans can and must do better. The Bush administration has no real plan – but progressives do.

The United States needs to take back control with a [comprehensive strategy](#) that [integrates all components of American power](#). The United States must strike the right balance between going on the offense against the real enemy in the right way and sound defensive measures that reduce the threat posed by terrorist groups. We must develop more effective preventive counterterrorism measures aimed at terrorists' centers of gravity. And we must enact key



legislation to rebuild our military strength, restore fiscal discipline, and enhance our energy security. Specifically, America must:

- Change the course in Iraq and complete the military mission at a time of our choosing
- Restore U.S. military readiness
- Go on the offensive against the real enemy in the right way
- Secure nuclear materials and facilities vulnerable to terrorist groups
- Bring terrorists to justice
- Win the battle of ideas
- Resolve conflicts that fuel terrorist groups
- Support realistic political reform and economic development
- Protect Americans at home
- Reduce America's dependence on foreign oil

In the pages that follow we will examine why the strategies pursued by the Bush administration leave us more exposed to deadly terrorist assaults today, and then detail a progressive plan to make America safer from terrorist attacks.



Still No Safer Five Years Later: The Results of a Flawed Global Strategy

More than five years after the attacks of September 11, 2001, the United States needs to make a strategic shift to make Americans safer. The Bush administration has lost control of America's security. We must take concrete steps to shift the strategy and reassume control.

In an eleventh-hour attempt to divert attention from the dire situation in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Bush administration has launched a [new public relations campaign](#) repackaging its failures in the war on terrorism. The fundamental problem is not simply the Bush administration's mismanagement and incompetence in major projects such as Iraq's political transition and reconstruction. Rather, the main problem is that the Bush administration believes this struggle is similar to the national conflicts of the previous century.

The Bush strategy remains heavily dependent on conventional military tactics and actions against nation states that often create more terrorists than they kill or capture. Nor does the administration seem to know when to use the military and when not to. It failed to commit the troops necessary to defeat the Taliban and Al Qaeda leadership in Afghanistan and to the secure initial victory in Iraq. Now the extended military operation in Iraq has made most Iraqis and many Muslims around the world see Americans as the problem, not the solution.

Fixated on their state adversaries, the Bush administration has allowed America's non-state terrorist enemies to shape the global battlefield to their advantage. Though President Bush identified radical ideology and extremist Islamism as the central threat, his administration has taken few effective steps to defeat this threat. In its recent public relations offensive, the Bush administration the confusion by conflating very different threats from Sunni, Shia, Arab, Persian, state, non-state, foreign and domestic under the inaccurate banner of "Islamofascism."

President Bush made a strategic error by leaving a mission unaccomplished in Afghanistan and diverting resources to invade Iraq, especially since evidence has shown that the country had nothing to do with the 9/11 attacks and had no operational ties to Al Qaeda. Today, the Bush administration remains strongly focused on regime change in Iran, rather than developing a strategy for capturing those who attacked the United States five years ago.

Guided by the belief that a quick, cheap and easy invasion of Iraq would unleash a "democratic tsunami" in the Middle East, the Bush administration has eroded America's military ground forces, harmed the country's financial strength with a growing mountain of fiscal deficits and foreign debt, and weakened political will at home as more and more



Americans are tempted to withdraw from robust international engagement. The results of this flawed strategy are grim:

- Global terror attacks have tripled on President Bush's watch
- Osama bin Laden and other top leaders of Al Qaeda remain on the loose
- Global terrorist groups have more room to maneuver, exploiting lawless areas of instability in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Lebanon, the Palestinian territories, and Somalia
- Al Qaeda and the Taliban have regrouped in Afghanistan
- America's overstretched ground forces are bogged down in Iraq
- Army and Marine personnel equipment readiness has eroded so substantially that two thirds of our forces cannot carry out their mission
- Supplies of nuclear bomb materials remain poorly guarded, ripe for terrorist theft and use
- Two members of the axis of evil – North Korea and Iran – have greatly increased their ability to make nuclear weapons

Even as they lose control of the battlefield, the Bush administration remains stuck in the same strategy and wants to stay the course. President Bush, on the eve of mid-term congressional elections, is once again using national security as a political wedge. He has belatedly shifted his policy on a handful of issues, including terrorist detainees and wiretapping, and laid down a barrage of speeches and press releases instead. At the heart of this new public relations campaign are some proposals aimed at changing some of tactics. However, the United States needs a new strategy, not tactical shifts.

A Progressive Agenda to Take Back Control against Terrorists

The progressive strategy to defeat the continued threat posed by global terror networks has ten priority action items:

1. Change the course in Iraq.

The first step for the United States to take back control of its national security is to set a strategy that makes a transition in the military mission from the current broad, open-ended military commitment in Iraq to one of targeted counterterrorist operations with training and



support for the emerging Iraqi security forces. To regain control, the United States must shift the focus from capturing and killing Iraqi insurgents to training and supporting the Iraqi security forces.

The United States should begin a policy of [strategic redeployment in Iraq](#) so that our military has a winning strategy for Iraq and can shift resources to our other national security priorities. The United States should announce it would complete the redeployment of nearly all of its forces from Iraq by the end of 2007, with a plan to increase U.S. political, diplomatic, and economic assistance.

President Bush's promise to never leave Iraq while he is in office sends precisely the wrong message to bickering Iraqi politicians. It postpones the day of political reckoning vital to any security plan. The current strategy also weakens U.S. ground forces, serves as a rallying cry for Al Qaeda, fails to stabilize Iraq, and further increases the financial burden on American taxpayers.

A superpower should never put its security in the hands of others. But this is precisely what the Bush administration has done by waiting for Iraqis to take charge. We need to take back control in Iraq by setting a plan to complete the military mission at a time of our choosing – and not when the Iraqis decide to get their act together. In the five months between the time of the election in Iraq and the establishment of a unity government, the Army and Marines lost the equivalent of five battalions, in soldiers killed and wounded.

Making this transition in the military mission does not mean a hasty withdrawal of U.S. troops – nor does it mean withdrawing from the region. Rather, it means targeting our military assets more effectively in Iraq and in the broader struggle against global terrorist groups. Coupled with intensified diplomatic and political measures aimed at helping Iraqi leaders settle their disputes, a responsible phased drawdown of U.S. troops would give the best chance for progress in Iraq.

This transition will also free up resources focused in Iraq – intelligence operations, Special Forces units, and satellite imagery needed for targeted operations in Afghanistan and other areas plagued by terrorist networks.

2. Restore U.S. military readiness.

By this coming Thanksgiving weekend, the war in Iraq will have continued longer than American combat in World War II. The toll on military personnel and readiness has been already devastating. The human dimension is well documented—long tours of duty, disrupted family lives, recruitment and retention problems, and the lack of adequately trained soldiers. The active and reserve components of the Army and Marines have shouldered most of the burden in Iraq.



The Bush administration's open-ended commitment to Iraq has eroded our military's ability to perform its primary mission: deterring aggressive action by our adversaries around the globe. From North Korea's missile launches in July to Iran's defiance in continuing its nuclear research, the United States has lost control.

Equally important is the long term strain on [Army](#) and [Marine military equipment and arsenals](#). The constant repairing, rebuilding and replacing of worn out equipment throughout the war in Iraq is taking an enormous toll and diminishing our nation's capacity to threaten or engage in future military action, as necessary. The Abrams tank, for example, is functioning at six times its normal rate during peacetime and medium-to-heavy trucks are operating at ten times the normal capacity. To ensure that the troops in Iraq have what they need, the Army and Marines have been forced to take equipment from non-deployed units and pre-positioned stocks.

While our troops are fighting bravely and with great sacrifice, the same cannot be said for the defense procurement process that should provide for them. Political cronies have made millions of dollars in war profits while short-changing the troops. Families have been forced to provide the body armor the administration would not. The failure to up-armor fighting vehicles has caused the loss of lives and limbs. Recent news reports have disclosed that bureaucrats have blocked the purchase of a system that is over 90 percent successful in destroying the rocket-propelled grenades before they can hit our troops because it is made by our ally, Israel, and not a favored American defense contractor.

In order to respond to new challenges abroad or at home, our military desperately needs the time and investments necessary to "reset" itself and recover from operations in Iraq. Our adversaries realize that our military capabilities and resources have been stretched to the breaking point, and they accordingly flout our national security interests openly.

More specifically, Congress should fully fund all requests for military recovery in this and future fiscal years. Additional funds will be necessary for procurement and depot maintenance once the Army in particular has been redeployed from Iraq. The Defense Department must submit to Congress a comprehensive review and analysis of existing equipment and future needs.

In the long term, the Army and Marines should: continue reorganizing around networked combat teams; accelerate the fielding of new situational awareness and communications systems, including the Warfighter Information Network; plan for the continuous enhancement of heavy armored vehicles, such as the Abrams tank and Bradley infantry fighting vehicle; replace their Cold War truck fleet; and maintain all efforts to upgrade their aviation modernization program, including new and improved attack, utility, cargo, and reconnaissance helicopters. Congress must re-establish proper oversight over defense procurement contracts and deliver the best defensive gear to the troops without favoritism.



3. Go on the offensive against the real enemy in the right way.

Conventional military operations alone will not vanquish terrorists. On several occasions in the last five years, the United States has employed the full might of its military—the strongest conventional fighting force in the history of the world—only to see the enemy slip away and multiply. The United States need to take back control by having a more targeted strategy to defeat global terror networks.

Targeted offensive military operations will remain necessary in some instances— the United States cannot stand by idly while terrorist networks continue to plot mass murder and conduct kidnappings and beheadings. Indeed, if the administration had committed sufficient troops to the battle at Tora Bora and kept up the pursuit of Bin Laden, there might not be an Al Qaeda organization today to plague us.

The key is to integrate military operations into a comprehensive strategy that is linked to America’s intelligence, diplomatic, and law enforcement capabilities and that will utilize resources of key allies. The United States must hold terrorist leaders like Bin Laden accountable for their murders. Five years after 9/11, we still have not done so.

A prominent example of this is the Bush administration’s inability to persuade Pakistan to crack down on the pro-Taliban tribal militants who harbor global terrorist networks such as Al Qaeda in Pakistan’s North Waziristan. In early September, the Pakistani government signed a pact with these tribal groups that will allow the area to remain a safe haven for Islamist militants who have planned attacks in Afghanistan and who continue to plot against U.S. interests. The Bush administration has done nothing about this.

To turn the tide, take back control, and dismantle these networks, the United States must upgrade its [human intelligence](#) and law enforcement capabilities. The central question for debate should not be about legal authority—as it has been on the wiretapping debate. The fundamental challenge is developing a corps of military, intelligence, and law enforcement personnel equipped with the ability to disrupt terror plots in advance and take down terror networks. Yet for the first time in more than a quarter century, Congress has failed to pass an Intelligence Authorization Act—the key tool for making the reforms vital to modernizing the intelligence agencies. This [lack of Congressional action and oversight](#) has left America unprepared to meet the threats posed by global terror networks.

Five years after 9/11, the United States government still lacks a sufficient number of experts with the language and cultural knowledge necessary to help the United States engage more effectively in the battle against global terror networks. President Bush squandered a moment of opportunity to issue a call for national public service to have the country’s best and brightest join the ranks of America’s military, intelligence, foreign service, and



homeland security. In previous eras, Americans have answered the call for service from bold leaders and demonstrated that they have been willing to pay any price and bear any burden to protect their country and freedoms.

Another key component of this work is the enhancement of U.S. liaison relationships with intelligence services in other countries. The efforts that foiled the London airline terror plot being hatched in Britain this past August did not involve conventional military operations—it was a combination of strong human intelligence, law enforcement, and cooperation between Britain and Pakistan.

4. Secure nuclear materials and facilities vulnerable to terror groups.

The United States has lost control of efforts to secure nuclear materials and facilities, and the country needs leadership to address this key national security threat. The United States must do more to prevent the ultimate terrorist act: a nuclear 9/11. If terrorist groups could obtain components of a bomb such as highly-enriched uranium, a well-organized group like Al Qaeda could build a crude device, smuggle it into an American city and deliver a blow from which this country might never recover. The key is to prevent terrorist from getting fissile material.

Terrorist groups are actively trying to acquire such nuclear materials. That is why we have cooperative programs with Russia and other nations to secure and eliminate this deadly material. But the programs creep along at snail's pace. The administration is still spending under \$1 billion a year on these proven security programs, or about what we spend every four days in Iraq. The Bush administration proposed cutting funds for the program in this year's budget. Instead, with just triple the spending and sustained presidential attention, the United States could eliminate the most serious threat to American cities before the end of the decade. America cannot afford to lose this race.

5. Bring terrorists to justice.

The Bush administration's detainee policies have caused controversy from the early days of the war on terrorism. The prison at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, and the recent admission that the president authorized a system of secret prisons operated by the CIA have impaired relations with even our most supportive allies and provided our enemies with more tools in the battle for hearts and minds. Even in the face of the Supreme Court's rejection of his original plan for military commissions, President Bush still will not change course, demanding Congress authorize a proposal to try terrorist suspects that is opposed by senior military lawyers and risks further court challenges.

The United States must take back control of the moral high ground and bring terrorist suspects to justice. U.S. detainee policy must ensure that detainees who pose a real security



threat remain securely imprisoned, make accurate determinations of guilt or innocence, and assess the proper punishments. We must restore the United States to its traditional leadership position in the promotion of human rights and respect for the rule of law. Nothing in the president's new proposal will achieve any of these goals.

6. Win the global battle of ideas.

Defeating violent global terrorist groups requires more than targeted military action around the world. As several key Pentagon officials have stated, information is as important as ammunition in this struggle. The nature of conflict and power has changed in an era of globalization and instant communication. The recent wars in Iraq and Lebanon demonstrate the impact that images have on who is perceived to win or lose a conflict.

Unfortunately, the United States is still playing catch-up to the strategies used by global terrorist networks to shape the strategic landscape. It has lost control of setting the agenda and shaping public attitudes. The Bush administration has not taken the right steps to challenge the radical ideologies and propaganda used to stoke the flames of conflict and terrorism.

In 2003, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld asked his team: "Are we capturing, killing, or deterring and dissuading more terrorists every day than the madrassas and the radical clerics are recruiting, training, and deploying against us?" The clear answer to this question three years later is no. Secretary Rumsfeld himself gave the United States a grade of "D" in the battle of ideas.

Five years after 9/11, the United States government still does not completely understand its enemy. President Bush has taken the bait of terrorist leaders such as Ayman Al-Zawahiri and implemented policies that have played into the hands of America's enemies, such as America's extended, open-ended military presence in Iraq.

The United States should make clear that it has no interest in subjugating or permanently occupying any country. To that end, President Bush should make a clear statement that the United States seeks no permanent military bases in Iraq and is not at war with the Muslim world. More broadly, the United States also needs to update the way it conveys its policies and values to the rest of the world. Bush administration officials still operate with a Cold War mindset in a world that has seen a significant global media transformation. The country needs to adapt its foreign policies and communications strategies to defeat the propaganda of global terror groups that inspire groups of individuals to attack America and its allies.

7. Resolve conflicts that fuel terrorist groups.

Events this past summer in the Middle East vividly show how the United States has lost



control of events. The United States should invest more to support a more stable Middle East by working actively to help parties resolve deadly conflicts and disputes. Over the past five years, the Bush administration has foolishly disengaged from the Middle East peace efforts. As a result, dangerous political and security vacuums have emerged, filled by groups such as Hezbollah and Hamas.

The United States needs to revive its focus and attention to help Israelis and Palestinians resolve their conflict. These efforts should include encouraging the development of a pragmatic Palestinian leadership while showing no tolerance for militant actions. Intense and sustained U.S. involvement to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will not only improve the quality of life and enhance stability in the region, it will improve the image of the United States, which has been damaged by its inaction and disengagement.

Beyond the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the United States must help to halt the killing and to resolve conflicts involving other key Muslim-majority countries. These include stopping the genocide in Darfur and helping India and Pakistan resolve their disputes. In all of these instances, diplomatic intervention to ward off conflict is less costly than military action after violence escalates. The United States has for too long sat idly on the sidelines, failing to leverage its diplomatic, political, and economic power to bring greater stability in critical regions of the world and enhance its own strategic position in the world. Inaction has carried considerable cost.

8. Support realistic political reform and economic development.

Another key element of the needed strategic shift is the development of a more sensible and realistic program to support political reform and economic development. The United States needs to move beyond a narrow focus on elections and devise a strategy that promotes broad political and economic reform in the Middle East. These U.S. policies should strengthen the rule of law and the judiciary, support broad civic education, advance women's rights, and protect the rights of religious minorities.

By narrowly defining democracy as elections, the Bush strategy has backfired in key places, with elections empowering Islamist extremists such as Hamas that espouse violence. Instead of looking for short-term advances and photo opportunities associated with elections, the United States should develop long-term programs to help build democratic institutions and strengthen the rule of law. It should make long-term commitments to strengthening civil society, and it should support the freedom of the press as a means to help win the global battle of ideas. There are no short-cut approaches to advancing political reform.

The United States should also reform the way it provides foreign assistance with a focus on streamlining development and economic assistance efforts abroad. No single individual or



institution within the United States government has a mandate to oversee and implement development-assistance strategies. The United States needs to eliminate the waste and overlap in foreign assistance that has only grown under President Bush's mismanagement. One particular area of focus should be increasing America's capacity to provide development assistance to weak and failing states.

9. Protect Americans at home.

Taking back control and ending the open-ended commitment in Iraq will free much-needed resources for homeland security. Five years after 9/11, the United States is still dangerously unprepared to prevent or respond to attacks at home. Nearly all of the cargo shipped to the United States passes through U.S. ports without screening, and passenger planes still fly with cargo holds that have not been inspected.

The tens of billions of dollars spent over the past five years have done little to improve the security of U.S. ports, chemical plants, nuclear reactors, mass transit systems, and hundreds of "soft targets" across the country. Experts rate the Department of Homeland Security one of the least effective agencies in the government. Clark Kent Ervin, the former inspector general of the Department of Homeland Security, says the department has "earned its reputation as the most dysfunctional agency in all of the government."

The American people deserve a homeland strategy that is integrated into a realistic national security strategy. In particular, the United States needs to take urgent action to address homeland security problems that still remain five years after 9/11, such as securing critical infrastructure and developing emergency response capabilities. The United States needs to appoint true experts, not political cronies, to the leadership of the Department of Homeland Security. It also needs to return the Federal Emergency Management Agency to the highly capable operation it was in the 1990s.

In addition, the National Guard should be transformed into the nation's homeland defense force, and the equipment readiness they have lost in Iraq restored.

10. Reduce America's dependence on foreign oil.

The Bush administration has lost control of gas prices, and the United States has become even more dependent on foreign oil on President Bush's watch. For six years in a row, President Bush called for less dependence on foreign oil. But for six years in a row, America's dependence on foreign oil has grown—as has the price of oil. Dependent on others for our energy, America does not have the leverage to call on the Saudis and others to be responsible actors.

Moreover, record prices for a barrel of oil are deepening America's trade deficit and giving



scarce hard currency to countries such as Iran, which has used that money to subsidize terrorists, among them Hezbollah. The result is a national energy policy that borrows money from our economic competitors in China and Japan to indirectly subsidize some of the governments whose resources subsidize Hezbollah, Hamas, and extremists throughout the Middle East and South Asia.

The United States needs a new strategy to address [energy security in the 21st Century](#). Robust investment in energy conservation and renewable energy such as biofuels will reduce our dependence on oil and give America the freedom it needs to pursue its own national security goals.



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