



Let's remember 9/11 by taking action, not talking

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When it comes to anniversaries, few are as important as the September 11, 2001, terrorist attack on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, and a fourth target thwarted by the passengers on United Flight 93. Unlike many of the major battles from our Civil War, World War I, World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War, the 9/11 attack intentionally targeted civilians. More Americans died on 9/11 (2,996) than any other day going back to the Battle of Antietam on September 17, 1862 (3,675). Americans should never forget that day.



<http://www.aei.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/RTSN4RK-e1473539804116.jpg>

Manhattan, New York, September 10, 2016. REUTERS/Mark Kauzlarich.

While we remember and mourn the events of that day, to truly honor those who lost their lives, we must commit ourselves to ensuring it never happens again. For the last fifteen years, terrorist groups have changed and adapted, and so too must our homeland security policies.

Though we didn't get everything right in response to the attack, we certainly couldn't continue to ignore the threat from radical Islamic groups, as we largely had done since the first attack on the World Trade Center in 1993. Over the last fifteen years, the threat [grew from one in which Osama bin Laden and al Qaeda focused on spectacular, high consequence attacks to the small cell and lone wolf "Just Do It!" attacks by ISIS](https://www.aei.org/publication/paris-attacks-isis-still-dangerous-al-qaeda-group/) (<https://www.aei.org/publication/paris-attacks-isis-still-dangerous-al-qaeda-group/>) adherents where even one death is celebrated over social media.

The 9/11 attack forced the United States to institute major reforms of our intelligence, military, and domestic security entities to meet the threat from al Qaeda. With the rise of ISIS and other jihadi groups, we again must make changes to our national security apparatus to ensure that we detect and stop as many terrorist attacks as possible.

To that end, AEI launched the [Homeland Security Reform series](https://www.aei.org/feature/homeland-security-reform-series/) (<https://www.aei.org/feature/homeland-security-reform-series/>) this year to detail key reforms for our policymakers to consider. These reforms include:

- Create a [national commission on terrorists' use of technology](https://www.aei.org/publication/national-commission-on-terrorists-use-of-technology-is-needed/) (<https://www.aei.org/publication/national-commission-on-terrorists-use-of-technology-is-needed/>) to quickly gather and analyze data from law enforcement and technology companies on how terrorists are using technology, especially encryption, to recruit soldiers, to communicate information, and to plan and execute terrorist attacks. The commission would provide recommendations to policymakers on enacting reforms that would help law enforcement keep us safe, preserve the rights of the private sector to provide goods and services to consumers, and protect our civil liberties.
- Consolidate [domestic intelligence entities under the FBI](https://www.aei.org/publication/consolidate-domestic-intelligence-entities-under-the-fbi/) (<https://www.aei.org/publication/consolidate-domestic-intelligence-entities-under-the-fbi/>) to ensure that information and intelligence work being done by local, state, and federal law enforcement entities is done together under one roof. We can ill afford for information or intelligence to reside in siloed places in cities across America where it could be missed, thereby undermining our ability to see the whole picture.
- Give [states and localities a voice in Washington](https://www.aei.org/publication/giving-states-and-localities-a-voice-in-washington/) (<https://www.aei.org/publication/giving-states-and-localities-a-voice-in-washington/>) so that our security policies going forward are truly national instead of just federal. All too often, our national security policies don't reflect the deep

experiences and resources possessed by state and local law enforcement and first responders. Giving those entities permanent seats in the national security policymaking process will increase the validity and fidelity of the policies created in Washington.

- Enhance our [human intelligence activities in local law enforcement](https://www.aei.org/publication/enhanced-human-intelligence-is-key-to-defeating-terrorists/) (<https://www.aei.org/publication/enhanced-human-intelligence-is-key-to-defeating-terrorists/>) to help overcome the use of technology by terrorist and the increasingly covert ways terrorists now act. By directing homeland security grant funding to bolstering the monitoring, surveillance, and undercover activities in the higher risk cities across America, we can increase our chances of detecting small cell and lone wolf terrorists in our midst.
- Develop [regional outreach groups in key jurisdictions to build connections and trust](https://www.aei.org/publication/create-regional-outreach-groups-to-establish-connections-and-build-trust/) (<https://www.aei.org/publication/create-regional-outreach-groups-to-establish-connections-and-build-trust/>) between law enforcement and Muslim communities. These regional outreach groups must not be aimed at collecting intelligence, but must be sincere efforts aimed at breaking down barriers, eliminating suspicions, and keeping communication channels open.

Of course, there are more reforms we must make, especially in [our foreign policy and defense](https://www.aei.org/publication/15th-anniversary-911-remember-al-qaeda/) (<https://www.aei.org/publication/15th-anniversary-911-remember-al-qaeda/>) entities. We must evolve as our enemies evolve. It is the nature of war.

Anniversaries are important reminders of the tragedies of the past. Those events also must serve to spur our policymakers to move beyond soothing words and to act to make sure America is postured properly to meet today's realities and tomorrow's threats. We will honor those who died on 9/11 far more by what we do than what we say.

This article was found online at:

<http://www.aei.org/publication/lets-remember-911-by-taking-action-not-talking/>