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GEORGE W. BUSH

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Press Briefing by Homeland Security Advisor Frances Fragos Townsend

Via Conference Call

 [Office of the Director of National Intelligence](#)

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MS. TOWNSEND: Good evening, everybody. Given the leak this weekend of classified information regarding the National Intelligence Estimate dated April 2006 and entitled "Trends and Global Terrorism: Implications for the United States," the President ordered Ambassador Negroponte, the Director of National Intelligence to declassify the text of the key judgment section of that report to the extent consistent with national security interests. And as he said today, in an effort to stop the speculation about what was in the key judgments.

The now declassified -- the declassified key judgments are now available to the press and the public on the DNI website, www.odni.gov. Let me be clear that, you know, with every unauthorized disclosure of classified information it does harm to our national and homeland security. Every leak is a victory for our enemies who plot to kill us, because we tell them something about our knowledge, our intelligence capability and our perspective on their capability.

I should be clear that you, by and large, have the text of the key judgments. All decisions on declassification were made by the office of the DNI. All of the portions related to the key judgments on Iraq, you have. I should tell you that there is probably just a handful, maybe two or three paragraphs that have been redacted in the interest of national security. And to the extent to have questions regarding those decisions, I would direct you to the DNI's office.

Let me just briefly walk you through the key judgments. As you know, it opens by acknowledging that the United States-led counterterrorism efforts have seriously damaged the leadership of al Qaeda and disrupted its operations. However, we judge that al Qaeda will continue to pose the greatest threat to the homeland and U.S. interests abroad by a single terrorist organization.

It goes on to talk about networks and cells that are spreading and adapting to our counterterrorism efforts, as well as further down that the global jihadist movement is decentralized, lacks a coherent global strategy and is becoming more diffuse.

As you know, the President's newly released National Strategy for Counterterrorism, on page four of

that, does reference this point, remarking that the terrorists today are more dispersed and less centralized. The President, in his speech on September 5th, noted that the terrorist threat is more dispersed and self-directed.

The key judgments go on to remark that greater pluralism and more responsive political systems in Muslim majority nations would alleviate some of the grievances the jihadists exploit, and that over time such progress, together with sustained, multi-faceted programs targeting the vulnerabilities of jihadist movements and continued pressure on al Qaeda could erode support for the jihadists.

The President has frequently made the point that freedom is the antidote to terror. He's done that on numerous occasions, and as you know, that really is the key point in the National Security Strategy, on pages nine to 11, of our long-term strategy to combat terror.

The key judgments go on to say that we assess the operational threat from self-radicalized cells will grow in importance to U.S. counterterrorism efforts, particularly abroad, but also here at home. Again, the President talked about the threat from home-grown cells in his speech on September 5th, and acknowledged their responsibility for attacks and planning in both Madrid and Canada.

Now in the next section -- this is the Iraq section in the key judgments, where the key judgments note, "Perceived jihadist success would inspire more fighters to continue the struggle elsewhere." The key judgments goes on to say that "the Iraq conflict has become a cause célèbre for jihadists, breeding a deep resentment of U.S. involvement in the Muslim world, and cultivating supporters for the global jihadist movement." It then says, "Should jihadists leaving Iraq perceive themselves and be perceived to have failed, we judge fewer fighters will be inspired to carry on the fight."

This really underscores the President's point about the importance of our winning in Iraq. On September 5th, the President, in his speech, said, "Iraq is not a distraction from their war on America, it is the central battlefield, where the outcome of this struggle will be decided." We've heard the President say that repeatedly. Also, in the National Security Strategy for Combating Terrorism, on page four, in the challenges section, we make the point that the ongoing fight for freedom in Iraq has been twisted by terrorist propaganda as a rallying cry.

And then later on in the strategy we make the point -- in the section on safe havens, on page 16 -- that terrorists see Iraq as the central front in the fight against the United States, and this is why, in helping the Afghan and Iraqi peoples forge effective democracies is vital.

The key judgments go on to talk about the underlying factors fueling the spread of the movement, and that those factors outweigh its vulnerabilities. It goes on to enumerate both the four underlying factors of fueling -- those are entrenched grievances such as corruption, injustice, and fear of Western domination, which lead to anger, humiliation, a sense of powerlessness; second, Iraq jihad; third, the slow pace of real and sustained economic, social and political reforms in many Muslim majority nations; and, fourth, pervasive anti-U.S. sentiment among most Muslims, all of which jihadists exploit.

On the vulnerability side, it goes on at some length that the jihadist movement, if these vulnerabilities are fully exposed and exploited, could slow the spread of the movement. And they include dependence

on the continuation of Muslim-related conflicts, the limited appeal of jihadists' radical ideology, the emergence of respected voices of moderation, and criticism of the violent tactics employed against mostly Muslim citizens. It notes the jihadists' greatest vulnerability is their ultimate political solution, which is an ultra-conservative interpretation of the sharia-based governance spanning the Muslim world.

It is unpopular with the vast majority of Muslims. It notes recent condemnations of violence in extremist religious interpretations by a few notable clerics, signal a trend that could facilitate the growth of a constructive alternative to the jihadist ideology, notably peaceful political activism. And that, in this way, the Muslim mainstream emerges as the most powerful weapon in the war on terror.

The key judgments also note the importance of our allies around the world. And says that countering the spread of the jihadist movement will require coordinated multilateral efforts that go well beyond operations to capture or kill terrorists.

We've heard the President speak to this issue on a number of occasions. Not only is that noted in the National Security Strategy for Combating Terrorism, it is also noted in numerous speeches of the President, noting our important allies in the war on terror, both in Western Europe, our British colleagues, but also in the Muslim world, in Pakistan and Saudi Arabia.

The next section of the key judgments really speaks to the role of the Zarqawi network in exploiting the situation in Iraq. I would note for you that because this is published in April of 2006, it does not include any reference to the fact that he has been killed. In fact, at one point it notes should Zarqawi continue to evade capture and scale back attacks against Muslims, we assess he could broaden his popular appeal and present a global threat. That's obviously no longer a problem that they would have anticipated.

I would say, following along in the key judgments, the key judgments note that the increased role of Iraqis in managing the operations of al Qaeda in Iraq might lead to veteran foreign jihadists to focus their efforts on external operations. Obviously, the President has noted concern about this, and we take efforts both at home and abroad to defeat the extremists.

Going further along in the key judgments, there is a note that fighters with experience in Iraq are a potential source of leadership for jihadists pursuing the tactics that they use. I would say to you, as we've said before, this is not any different from any other conflict. People with fighting experience will take that experience and use it in the future.

The fact is, they were fighting us long before we were in Iraq, we've made that point, and they were using their experience in prior conflicts. They will continue to do that, which is why it's very important for us to fight against them. Shrinking away from them, withdrawing from the conflict will not alleviate this problem.

The key judgments then go on to note that the radicalization process is occurring more quickly, more widely, and more anonymously in the Internet age. I would note for you that we speak to this in the new National Security Combating Terrorism strategy, and talk about the importance of taking

aggressive efforts against cyber safe havens. That is also, as you continue on in the key judgments, it talks about the groups of all stripes will increasingly use the Internet to communicate, propagandize, recruit, train and obtain logistical and financial support. And, again, as I've mentioned, we do address that in the National Security Strategy for Combating Terrorism.

Dana, that's pretty much my summary walking through it, and recent statements by the President and documents we've released. I'm happy to take questions.

Q Hi, thank you for doing this. I just have one question. You were going through a lot of the judgments in the document. The one that you didn't go over was I guess in paragraph two, where it says that activists identifying themselves as jihadists are increasing in both number and geographic dispersion. And that seems to answer the question that Secretary Rumsfeld posed back in 2003 -- are we capturing, killing or dissuading more terrorists than are being trained and deployed every day? One, do you agree with that? And doesn't this say that more jihadists are being created every day than we're capturing or killing?

MS. TOWNSEND: Well, I guess, George, what I would say to you is, one, we have killed -- I think the -- you know, it's hard to make precise estimates, but we've captured or killed thousands over the course of the conflict. It's difficult to count how many have been added. I mean, there's no -- as you know, they hardly carry membership cards, and they are dispersed and they do hide in the shadows. It would be very difficult to count them.

What I would say to you is I think what the judgments are getting at is this sense that while we see increasing Internet postings and that sort of thing, while imprecise, we see the rhetoric, the extremists' rhetoric increasing. And I am not sure that that's a very good way to count, but it's one way and it's one thing that we look at. And so the judgments are really just trying to note that while we're in the middle of this war and this battle, and we are capturing and killing them, there are also others out there who seem to subscribe to the jihadist ideology. But it's not clear that those are people willing to commit murder. It's this sort of extremist version -- perversion, if you will -- of Islam.

Q How many pages in the entire report? And why can't we see the whole thing?

MS. TOWNSEND: Again, I would refer you to the office of the DNI for the complete -- for the answer on how the judgments were made about declassification. I will say this: You've got, by and large, what is probably roughly 95 percent of the key judgments, themselves. The few that are not there, I can tell you, having read it, go to national security -- directly to national security concerns. There are pieces in the summary up front of the report that are sort of textual and methodology boxes, which explain the analytic process.

And then the details, frankly, of the analytic process and how the analysts viewed this -- to be fair to them, what you want to encourage over the long-term, for this President and for future Presidents, are honest assessments from career analysts in the community. And, frankly, the combination of sources and methods concerns, and maintaining an environment that would provide analysts the ability to give you fair and honest advice, I think those had to be factors in the DNI's decision.

Q Could I get a quick follow on George's question? Are you questioning the judgment that jihadists are increasing in both number and geographic dispersion? Because if that's true, how can you say we're safer?

MS. TOWNSEND: I'm sorry, how can you say -- I didn't hear the question.

Q We're safer.

MS. TOWNSEND: I don't think there's any question that we're safer. But as the President said, do I think that we're safe? No. I mean, we've seen most recently in the UK bombing plot, they're plotting and planning to kill us; there's no question about that. We've seen an increase, as we've said before, of these sort of homegrown, if you will, extremists, these ideologically inspired groups. I don't think there's any question that there's an increase in rhetoric.

My only point is, I think it's difficult to count the number of true jihadists that are willing to commit murder, or kill themselves in the process, because they don't nominate themselves to be counted.

Q Fran, I wanted to just follow up on George's question before on -- and particularly focus in on Iraq, in that regard. Every time Iraq comes up in this, you've responded, the President has responded, it's the central front, and therefore, it is integral to terrorism. But another way to read these key judgments is that the order in which we took these things made a difference and that one might conclude from this, though it does not explicitly state it in any way here, that had we not done Iraq first, had we stayed for a while to do Afghanistan or focused on Iran first or something else, that you might not have created what they refer to here as the Iraqi jihad movement that has attracted so much motion.

That, the President doesn't go to, not the question of whether Iraq is or is not, but whether it was -- whether it has, itself, because of its timing, turned the tide somewhat against us. Can you address that?

MS. TOWNSEND: Sure. David, first, let me start with the notion of the central front in the war on terror. What's -- forget what the -- put aside for the moment what the President has said, because he's been clear about the administration's view. Let's look at what bin Laden and Zawahiri have said -- and Zarqawi -- about this being either where they're going to have ultimate victory or ultimate defeat when the President went through those -- the quotations from al Qaeda, themselves.

Q But that made that statement only after we had invaded. In other words, had we chosen to delay invasion dealing with Iraq for X number of years, would -- is it your conclusion from this that we would have avoided having to deal with an Iraqi jihad at the moment that we are dealing with all of the other elements of this problem?

MS. TOWNSEND: Two points. First I would say to you, it presumes that when you say, the order of things, that we can't do more than one thing at a time. And as we know, we're fighting in Afghanistan while we're fighting in Iraq. Second, what I would say to you is, there's always an excuse. I mean, we weren't in Iraq on September the 11th when we got hit, and they hit us anyway. There are always going to be some excuse for them to propagate their hateful ideology -- whether it's the Israeli-

Palestinian conflict, it's the conflict in Afghanistan, it's our troop presence in the Gulf -- there's always an excuse. And so I think that that's not -- I just don't think that holds weight.

Q I wanted to follow up on the earlier question. I know you're referring questions about why more couldn't be declassified to the DNI's office, but it does go to the point that the President and Ambassador Negroponte have been making over the past couple of days, saying that the critics don't have the full picture, are quoting only selectively -- and we still only have four pages of, as I understand it, a 30-page report. So is this going to answer the criticisms that you all have faced over the past couple of days?

MS. TOWNSEND: Thanks for the question. I would say to you -- and, again, I don't make the declassification decisions, that's left to the intelligence professionals in the office of the DNI. What I can tell you is this: There's a very high bar for declassification, and we have to be careful not to be whipsawed into, because somebody breaks the law and leaks classified information, that we do further damage because we're going to engage in a public debate by declassifying too much.

As I've said to you, you have the entire section, unexpurgated, on Iraq. There's not anything in there on Iraq that you haven't seen, in terms of the key judgments. This is a debate, by the way, and a discussion that is focused around the key judgments. And I really think you've got to give some ability of the DNI to weigh the national security risks against the potential gain out of declassification. And on the national security side, you're always going to weigh it on the side of protecting national security interests and sources and methods.

Q Thank you.

MS. TOWNSEND: Sure.

Q I wanted to get back, again, to George's initial question, and this paragraph on the second page. I know we can't do a stacking-up of bodies or a body count, but it says here, "We assess that the underlying factors fueling the spread of the movement outweigh its vulnerabilities," which seems to me somebody is saying, in an equation here, factors causing jihadists are greater than factors detracting.

And then if we look at the individual, itemized four items here underneath, three of them are Iraq-related: fear of Western domination, the Iraq jihad, and pervasive anti-U.S. sentiment among Muslims, which surely is contributed to by Iraq.

So as Americans look at this and say, are we any safer, has this nightmare that existed before 9/11 gotten worse as a result of our actions, doesn't that paragraph say the answer to that question is, yes?

MS. TOWNSEND: This will not surprise you. I think there is one of the four that goes directly to the Iraq jihad. But entrenched grievances, the slow pace of reform, and pervasive anti-U.S. sentiment predate the Iraq war, and will continue.

And I think, as well -- I mean, I understand what you're saying about that sentence, about the

underlying factors fueling, outweighing its vulnerabilities. But, again, I want you to remember, this is -- it's talking about the current trends. The President has always said that this is going to be a long, hard slog. This is a long war because it's not only a battle of arms, but it's a battle of ideas. And the battle of ideas is going to be a long-term battle.

And so I don't take issue with it. What I would say to you is, it's a current assessment of what the near term -- what the near-term struggle is going to be about. And I think we all understand that we have a long-term battle in terms of the war of ideas.

Q But for the near term, that pendulum hasn't quite kept, because our goal in life, right, is to get -- so the pendulum, the factor spreading the movement do not outweigh the vulnerabilities. We want vulnerabilities to be larger than factors fueling. That would -- that would be a tipping point we'd look for, wouldn't it be?

MS. TOWNSEND: Well, I think what -- I don't think this is so much a numeric count as an exploiting the vulnerabilities. And we continue to exploit the vulnerabilities every day. This is a constant judgment we make. But I'm not sure of your question. If you're asking me, do I think we're winning the long-term battle? Yes. Do I think that means every day is going to be easy and we're going to see wins every day? No. But kills like Zarqawi are absolute near-term gains.

Q Right. I was just talking about the duration -- they talk here the duration of the time frame of this estimate. So that would be the time frame they're talking about.

MS. TOWNSEND: Right. But what -- I guess my point is, while the killing of Zarqawi is a short-term win for us, it's also a long-term win in the battle of ideas when you look at the context of them saying, his ability to exploit that -- the conflict in Iraq and use that to attract the recruits. He can't do that anymore because he's dead. So it has both a short-term gain for the U.S., and it is certainly a win for us, but it's also a longer-term gain in the battle of ideas.

Q Right. Okay, thanks.

MS. TOWNSEND: Sure.

Q Hi, it's Olivier, and I have two. Wanted to quick follow on John's question, which is, what is the time frame of the estimate, in that trend line? That's the first one. And the second one is, Jane Harmon said today at The National Press Club that the administration is deliberately stalling on another intelligence assessment, this one solely about Iraq, because you don't want things -- you don't want it out before the election. I wanted your reaction to that.

MS. TOWNSEND: Okay, now you've got me -- I forgot the -- I forgot the first question. The first question, the time frame.

Q In that trend line, the one that says that more things are contributing to the jihadist movement than are detracting from it and are likely to do so for the duration of the time frame of this estimate. What is

the time frame for this estimate?

MS. TOWNSEND: The time frame for the estimate is over the next five years. Remember, this is back in April, so it's talking about what they anticipate. It's their assessment now of what they expect over the next five years. Of course, in fairness to the community, that's a difficult thing to predict because you don't know what factors will intervene.

Let me talk for a moment about your question on Jane Harmon. Look, I've had the pleasure of working with her on a number of intelligence reform issues. But I will say to you, we should be clear that the DNI agreed to begin preparing an updated NIE on Iraq. If I recall correctly, I believe that was back in August. Obviously, most NIEs are substantial research and writing projects that can take as much as a year. He agreed to try and have this thing done in -- somewhere in -- something, four to six months, or so, because it requires grasping and coordination throughout the intelligence community.

My understanding is the planned release date, given the work that must be done to have it be comprehensive and complete, is January of '07. But I will tell you, that's still quicker than most NIEs get done. The timing has got nothing to do with the election.

Q Okay.

Q Yes, the argument that's being made is that we are less safe by critics because of the invasion of Iraq. If we could turn that on its head, can you tell us then where do you think we'd be, how this report would read, if we had not gone into Iraq?

MS. TOWNSEND: To be fair to me, I'm not going to speculate. This was written by intelligence community professionals, and you're asking me to presume the last three years of my life haven't existed. It's kind of hard for me, and I'm just not going to speculate about that.

Q Well, then, let me ask you on a different point. The emerging groups that are discussed in this report, the anti-U.S., anti-globalization, can you quantify the threat from that? Is that something that's just looked at distantly over the horizon, or is that something that's more of an emergent, immediate threat?

MS. TOWNSEND: Well, as we know from the statements of al Qaeda, where they have created these partnerships with, for example, North African groups, or South Asian groups, the key judgments do talk about Jemaah Islamiya, Ansar al-Sunnah, and North African groups. We view them as serious threats. We have seen their acts of terror around the world. We take them seriously. We just don't put them -- the key judgments section don't put them on the same level of a threat to you, as centrist as they do al Qaeda.

MS. PERINO: All right, thank you, everybody. Thank you.

MS. TOWNSEND: Good night.

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