



News Room

Lincoln Memorial

News Releases

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Terrorists To Protest Organizers: Lessons Learned From The Demise Of bin Laden and The Future Of U.S. National Security

WASHINGTON, DC - James R. Locher III, President and CEO of the Project on National Security Reform (PNSR), said he was "really proud" on Monday, May 2 after hearing about the successful raid on Osama bin Laden by U.S. Navy SEALs the day before. Locher, former Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low Intensity Conflict and architect behind the Cohen-Nunn legislation that created U.S. Special Operations Command, played a significant role in building modern special operations forces.

Kathryn Boughton, a reporter for the *Litchfield County Times*, [interviewed Locher](#) after he spoke at the Kent Memorial Library the day of the raid. He said, "In Kent, I talked about Gen. Stanley McChrystal and what he had done in terms of creating interagency teams. I suspect we saw that same approach in Pakistan. It is exactly the kind of collaboration and teamwork that we really need--but it is a real exception."

Locher's comments drew from a recent study in PNSR's research agenda. Released by the Institute of National Strategic Studies (INSS), "[Secret Weapon: High-value Target Teams \(HTT\) as Organizational Innovation](#)," authors Christopher Lamb and Evan Munsing describe the power of interagency teams and what makes them work. *Foreign Policy* defense blogger and Center for a New American Security Senior Fellow, [Thomas Ricks, wrote of the study](#), "this is one of the most interesting monographs I've read in some time... The most compelling part of the study is the discussion of interviews with former members of the high-value targeting teams about what worked and why."

Three key innovations -- networked-based targeting, the fusion of intelligence and operations, and the integration of counterterrorism and counterinsurgency -- required unprecedented collaboration between diverse departments and agencies and special operations forces. In order to succeed, the teams required common purpose, clearly delegated authorities, a small size, co-location, and a supportive organizational context.

The case study also illustrates the lack of interest in interagency teams, why they atrophy, and why in all likelihood the United States will fail to institutionalize this powerful new capability. Locher said, "The next time we have a need, we will be fortunate to have someone like Gen. McChrystal, because what he did is not institutionalized."

In addition, as [written on the PNSR blog](#), "even at this high point of success, high value target teams cannot be the sole solution to America's security challenges." Yet, if the U.S. government can bring the same effectiveness used in the bin Laden raid to address other security problems (for example, U.S. development aid to Pakistan), it could transform the future of U.S. national security.

Colonel (retired) Christopher Holshek, a PNSR Senior Associate, [wrote in *The Huffington Post*](#):

"...National security writ large had not only become more globalized by 9/11, it had also become more humanized. Outside Iraq and Afghanistan, with which Washington has largely been obsessed for nearly a decade, in places like Africa that represent the bulk of security and development challenges around the world, "human security" and civil society challenges such as poverty and food security, rule-of-law and justice, governance, economic development and job creation, and public health contextualize the security problem. Human security is about individuals and communities, empowered by global interconnectivity and the 24/7 media -- terrorists as much as protest organizers."

However, Locher warns, the U.S. government is too slow at adapting to the rapid changes occurring in the world, especially at a time of fiscal constraint. He said, "We have always been able to win ugly by throwing money at a problem, but that is no longer the case. We have lost our margin for error and we are headed for a decade of austerity, when even great programs are being killed. The times call for a national security system that is effective, efficient, participatory, and agile. Unfortunately, we don't have it. We have the opposite of that -- a system that is archaic, designed 63 years ago, that still clings to Cold War concepts. How can we secure our children's future with our grandparents' government?"

Locher says in Washington, "Everyone is working as hard as they can to stay ahead of the 24-hour-a-day news cycle... There is no time to worry about institutional reform."

Institutional reform is integral to the future of U.S. national security. As the PNSR blog states, "the special operations forces that conducted the bin Laden operation were themselves a product of Congressional reforms from the late 1980s. Legislation offered by Senator Sam Nunn and Senator William Cohen and supported by many others passed into law and created the U.S. Special Operations Command. As a result, the United States has the world's finest special operations forces."

As the U.S. reflects on the lessons learned from 9/11 to the demise of bin Laden, as the end of the heavy American presence in Iraq and Afghanistan comes into view, and as the Middle East reshapes itself, it is high-time to transform the U.S. national security system for the next chapter of the American power and influence in the world.

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