

Lt. Colonel (Ret.) Charlie Brown
“As America Sleeps”
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As a career Air Force officer, I've always believed that America's security is our top priority, and a sacred responsibility that transcends partisan politics. I don't think our current elected leaders agree---evidenced by the fact that our Congress is meeting for only 97 days a year during a time of war, and spending more time discussing gay marriage and flag burning than creating a clear and consistent policy that will defend our homeland from terrorism.

Empty rhetoric like “Stay the Course” and “We'll fight them over there so we don't have to fight them here,” does not by itself equal a substantive or coherent national security strategy—and it won't protect our homeland from another attack by an enemy that is determined to kill Americans.

It is worth noting that in the immediate aftermath of 9/11, our government did several things right. We attacked Al Qaeda in Afghanistan (though we still haven't caught/killed Osama Bin Laden, Mullah Omar, or Ayman Al Zawahiri), and, despite initial resistance to the idea, we convened the bi-partisan 9/11 Commission to help address huge gaps in our security infrastructure here at home.

The Commission's findings are well stated in the quote below:

“The missed opportunities to thwart the 9/11 plot were also symptoms of a broader inability to adapt the way government manages problems to the new challenges of the twenty-first century... There were also broader management issues with respect to how top leaders set priorities and allocated resources”---9/11 Commission, Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Acts Committed Against the United States

With these comments in mind, it is nothing short of appalling that Congress still hasn't implemented most of the Commission's recommendations. Especially since most Americans—regardless of party affiliation---agree on the most important steps we need to take:

- Immediately secure our borders with increased law enforcement, high-tech surveillance equipment and the use of biometrics for identifying potential terrorists entering the country. Currently, we have more than 5,000 miles of unguarded borders that can be crossed, virtually at will, by terrorists, and biometrics remain largely unused.
- Create and implement a national railway and public transit security plan. Since 9/11 Congress and the President have failed to create a national transportation security plan and have actually called for cuts in transit and rail funding. Two of the most atrocious post 9/11 terrorist attacks, in Madrid and London, targeted public transit systems and killed hundreds of innocent civilians.
- Increase the amount of baggage and cargo regularly screened at our seaports and airports. Currently, only 5% of port containers are screened, and 75% of ports lack detection equipment for radioactive material. More than a half dozen measures to address these gaps have been voted down by the GOP led Congress since 9/11.
- Get the politics out of Anti-Terror/DHS funding, focus on real threats and stop the practice of using these vital funds for pork barrel politics. For example, next year, Louisville Kentucky will get more Anti-Terror funding, while New York, Washington, and San Diego will get less.

- Stop the bureaucratic infighting and fragmented communications that plague our intelligence gathering operations. Americans are unsafe because the CIA, NSA, DIS, INS, FBI and other security forces are still unwilling, and in some cases, unable, to share information.
- Adequately resource FEMA with competent leadership, and restore it to a cabinet level post. The most worrisome part of the inept response to Hurricane Katrina was that it occurred 4 years after 9/11.

I was proud to defend America “from all enemies, foreign and domestic,” for nearly 3 decades in the armed forces. But I know the real frontline in the fight to keep America safe is now in Washington – where we must win the war against partisan politics, bureaucratic infighting and misguided priorities in order to make sure that America is safer in the years ahead.

With tensions rising in the world’s most unstable regions, the time to act is now.

Charlie Brown, Lt. Col. Ret., lives in Roseville, CA, and spent 26 years in the U.S. Air Force. He served as a rescue helicopter pilot at the end of the Vietnam War, and has flown reconnaissance missions in support of military operations around the world. He is also a credentialed California teacher, former professional staff-member at the Roseville Police Department, and Democratic Nominee for Congress in California's 4th District. www.charliebrownforcongress.org.