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April 6, 2004

The Honorable Thomas H. Kean, Chair  
The Honorable Lee H. Hamilton, Vice Chair  
National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States  
Room 5125  
301 7th Street, SW  
Washington, DC 20407

Dear Governor Kean and Mr. Hamilton:

President Bush declared “war against terrorism” after the September 11 attacks.<sup>1</sup> Thirty months later, one of the major questions confronting the September 11 Commission, members of Congress, and the public is whether the United States is winning this war.

There is no simple answer to this question and no single way to assess our progress in the war on terror. The President frequently claims that the United States is winning the war on terrorism based on the number of senior al Qaeda leaders captured or killed.<sup>2</sup> While there has been progress on this front, Richard Clarke and other experts say that the war in Iraq may actually be increasing the number of al Qaeda recruits.<sup>3</sup> Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld has also raised concern about increasing the number of al Qaeda operatives.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *George W. Bush Addresses the Nation*, FDCH Political Transcripts (Sept. 11, 2001).

<sup>2</sup> *See, e.g., President George W. Bush, State of the Union Address* (Jan. 20, 2004) (“nearly two-thirds of their known leaders have now been captured or killed”).

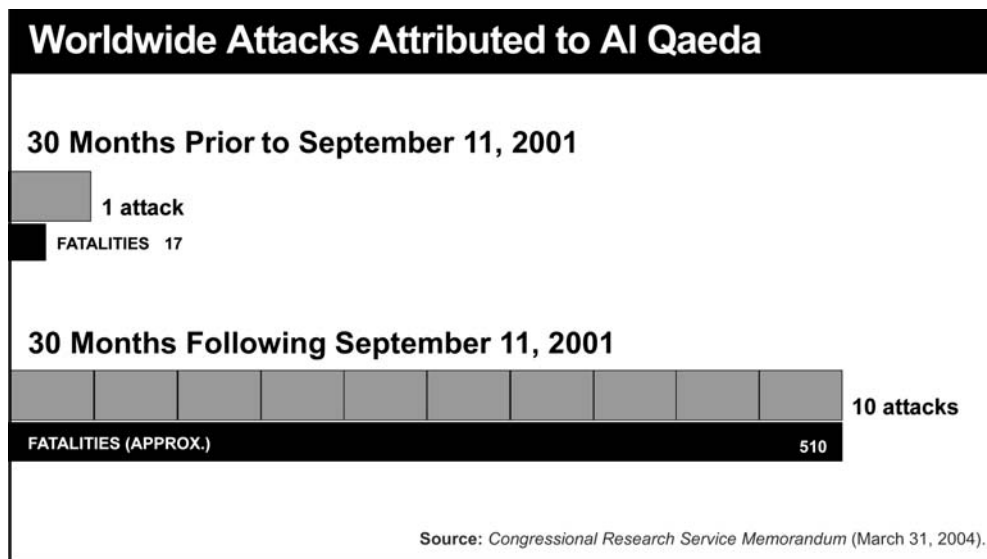
<sup>3</sup> *See, e.g., Meet the Press*, NBC News (Mar. 28, 2004) (“The president of Egypt said, ‘If you invade Iraq, you will create a hundred bin Ladens.’ . . . It’s turned out to be true”).

<sup>4</sup> Memorandum from Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld to General Richard Myers, Paul Wolfowitz, General Pete Pace, and Douglas Feith (Oct. 16, 2003) (online at <http://www.usatoday.com/news/washington/executive/rumsfeld-memo.htm>) (“Today, we lack metrics to know if we are winning or losing the global war on terror. Are we capturing, killing

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Clearly, one important measure of whether the United States and other nations are succeeding in the war against terrorism is whether the number of terrorist attacks launched by al Qaeda is increasing or decreasing. For this reason, I asked the nonpartisan Congressional Research Service to assess the number of terrorist attacks by al Qaeda before and after President Bush declared war on terrorism on September 11. I am transmitting a copy of the CRS report with this letter.<sup>5</sup>

In the report, CRS compares the number of al Qaeda attacks in the 30 months before the September 11 attacks to the number of al Qaeda attacks in the 30 months since the September 11 attacks. The report finds that there was one al Qaeda attack worldwide in the 30 months before September 11, with 17 fatalities. In comparison, the report finds that there have been at least ten al Qaeda attacks worldwide since September 11, with approximately 510 fatalities.



The CRS report also examines the period of time between 1992, the date of the first known al Qaeda attack, and the September 11 attacks. CRS finds that there were four al Qaeda attacks during this nearly nine-year period, with approximately 318 fatalities.

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or deterring and dissuading more terrorists every day than the madrassas and the radical clerics are recruiting, training and deploying against us?”).

<sup>5</sup> Congressional Research Service, *Terrorist Attacks by Al Qaeda* (Mar. 31, 2004).

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Finally, the CRS report examines the number of “disrupted” al Qaeda attacks before and after September 11. CRS finds that during the 30 months prior to September 11, two purported al Qaeda attacks were disrupted. In the 30 months after September 11, one purported al Qaeda attack was disrupted.

The CRS report includes a number of important caveats. CRS indicates that there is no authoritative government report available that assesses terrorist attacks after 2002. In addition, CRS notes that “the attribution of terrorist attacks can be unknown for months or years, and sometimes (especially with respect to Al Qaeda) it is probably never definitively known.” According to CRS, these limitations mean that the listing of attacks by Al Qaeda “may not be entirely complete or correct.”

Another significant limitation is that CRS did not include “terrorist attacks that have occurred in Iraq, many of which are suspected to have a link to Al Qaeda (or its associated groups).” As a result of this limitation, “a large number of attacks that could qualify for the list” were excluded from the report.

Nonetheless, CRS concludes that its findings represent “the best judgment that we can make on the available information.”

I hope you find this CRS report helpful to your deliberations. It suggests that the nation has a long way to go in fighting al Qaeda and that the record of success cited by President Bush is not as clear-cut as the White House claims.

Sincerely,

/s Henry A. Waxman

Henry A. Waxman  
Ranking Minority Member