

# THE ROOT SOURCE

**9/11 Commissioner former-SECNAV John F. Lehman warns that the United States is failing to address the cause of terrorism.**

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*On 3 April 2006, John F. Lehman, Chairman of J.F. Lehman and Company, addressed the New York Commandery of the Naval Order of the United States. Secretary of the Navy during its massive revitalization from 1981 to 1987, Mr. Lehman returned to public service as a member of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States (the "9/11 Commission"). A graduate of St. Joseph's University, Cambridge University, and the University of Pennsylvania, Lehman, an aviator, served 25 years in the Naval Reserve. Following an introduction by CDR John F. V. Cuspchalk, USNR, Commander of the New York Commandery, Secretary Lehman shared the following thoughts.*

**T**he subject that I want to talk about today is where are we in the war against Islamist terror and what effects is it having on our national security overall. I'm not going to try in the time that I have here with you to give a comprehensive overview, I'm just going to raise a number of key issues. . .

It's been four and a half years since the attacks on 9/11 and it's been some 35 years from the first Islamist attacks on us. It took us a long time as a nation to recognize the nature of this threat. It's a continuing source of

frustration to us in the 9/11 Commission that the Administration keeps calling it a "war against terror." It is not a war against terror. As I have often said, it would be like FDR saying that World War II was a "war against kamikazes." Terror is a weapon. Our enemy is not the weapon. Our enemy is this ideological, operational, movement of Islamist jihad.

It is the first such post-Cold War challenge. It's a challenge that is of a nature that is unlike any that we have ever dealt with before. It has many manifestations of things we've dealt with going all the way back to the Barbary Wars - - those were our first Islamic enemies and they used terror. The only thing new in the world is the history that you don't know. We've dealt with ideological movements before, transnational ideological movements - - Marxist/Leninism, fascism, Nazism - - but we've never dealt with anything that has been completely liberated from the nation state structure.

The Islamist enemy that we face is not rooted in any one country or dependent upon any national apparatus either for financing, training, transportation, or for anything else. They've made use of many different nations around the world but this has very little to do with the structure of national security that we have for

dealing with the world. The structure we have with our State Department, Defense Department, our four or five armed services, and our CIA, - - all this is just the latest evolution of a structure that came out of the Treaty of Westphalia or the Congress of Vienna: the nation state system. That [system] allowed people to deal in orderly categories and most of the transactions, whether they were violent acts of war or diplomatic treaties, took place within this framework. This movement has nothing to do with this nation state structure for providing national security and in the 9/11 Commission that was one of the single most important revelations for all of us - - that administration after administration was attempting to deal with this in a totally invalid framework of reference.

President Reagan, after we had that terrible tragedy with the Marines being blown-up in Beirut by Islamic jihadists, supported by the mujahideen, supported by Iran. The Muslim Brotherhood is the one organization that runs through all of these organizations.

What was Ronald Reagan's response to this attack? He said "we will bring these terrorists to justice." He was thinking in a 200 year-old mental framework. When George Bush the first, had the attacks in the barracks in Saudi Arabia, what did he do? Well, he went on television and said "we will bring these criminals to justice." When the embassies were bombed by Al Qaeda in Africa, what was Clinton's response? President Clinton said "we will bring these terrorists to justice." What was George W. Bush's response to 9/11? He stood down at the site and said "we will bring these criminals to justice." - - Totally wrong, totally irrelevant approach to terrorists, looking in the rear view mirror. By the way, they never

brought anybody to justice. But, even if they had, what the hell difference would it have made? The issue is not forensic; the issue is not bringing these people to justice, its preventing them from doing this in the first place.

Administration after administration has failed to come to grips with how to deal with the root causes to fight this. Still, in our bureaucracies today, the mentality is the cop-shop mentality - - we'll catch them and we'll put them in jail. Of course, that has left largely untouched the growing phenomenon and infrastructure around the world, not just of Al Qaeda - - Al Qaeda happens to have become one of the most effective operations - - but there are many other related Islamist movements and organizations, it is a very decentralized phenomenon we are facing.

Despite what I felt was a very clear set of points [in the 9/11 Commission Report], written in simple declarative sentences laying out what the root sources of what this threat is, where it came from, how it operates today, and a clearly defined simple set of 41 recommendations on what must be done to deal with this, the fact remains that very little has been done. A lot of it has just disappeared into the memory hole and some of it was never even taken up. Today, the most frustrating part of our ignored findings is really what is the root source of this and that is the proselytizing and teaching of jihad worldwide that is taking place since the Second World War.

This should not come as a surprise to anyone. People have been writing about this phenomenon for 30 or 40 years. I remember picking up a book, a paperback, that was 20 years old three or four years ago after 9/11, out at

LaGuardia. It was called "Among the Believers" and it was a travelogue by V.S. Naipaul, traveling through Indonesia. He describes how Indonesia was a classic, laid back syncretist [society], very tolerant - - a lot of the historic animist religion mixed in. [However, he also] described in detail how all of the village schools were very organized, well-equipped, Saudi-run, and preaching jihad. This was 27 years ago. Then, he went back about 10 years ago, to see some of the people that he had known who were teaching in these schools, who were in the government, and so forth. What he described, of course, was a militant, anti-American, Islamic establishment, largely funded by Saudi Arabia that was sending jihadists to train in Al Qaeda, and in Afghanistan. It was a very well-organized system of training in these Saudi-funded madrassahs, then getting scholarships to study in Saudi Arabia, and then on to paid scholarships into the United States, into Britain, and Europe, but primarily American universities

So you take someone like Khalid Sheikh Mohammed [who] dreamed up and executed the 9/11 attacks. He grew up in one of these jihadist, Saudi-supported schools, he went on a full scholarship to one of the state universities in North Carolina, and then he got his masters of engineering. So, he knows the United States, he lived here for six years, and he loathes it, he loathes every part of it, because from the time he was old enough to read and write he has been fed this undiminished diet of hatred and [a puritanical, fanatical] interpretation of Islam.

I'm not a religious scholar but there are many people that have written eloquently like Bernard Lewis on the history of Islam. There have always

been these puritanical, fanatic groups, offshoots, but they have never had any traction in the broad flow of Islamic history. The vast historic tradition of Islam is represented by the Ottomans and before that the Caliphate in Baghdad. This was a very tolerant, open, expansionist but not jihadist, tradition that values literature and art and science. The wahabis are the Saudi sect of Salafism, that is a puritanical, fundamentalist view, which disagrees, by the way, with much of what Mohammed himself wrote directly. But it never got any traction until the end of the Second World War [when] suddenly the wahhabis House of Saud found itself in control of the world's largest source of oil. As part of their social compact internally, what is now called their "Department of Religious Affairs" got a very big chunk of the revenue. That huge chunk of oil revenue was then directed into what is now some 350 wahhabis schools around the world, many preaching openly jihad.

I'm sure many of you have read the articles around the last year or so, about how over 80 percent of the mosques in the United States are Saudi-funded and wahhabis.

It wasn't an accident, which we wrote about in our report, that many of the hijackers when they came into the United States by various legal and illegal means often went straight to the nearest Saudi mosque, particularly the King Faud mosque in L.A., where they were helped to find apartments, given money, and were passed on to the Saudi mosque in San Diego, where they helped them get flight training, and then they were passed on to Phoenix, where the famous Phoenix memo was written. But, all this was done through this network that just coincidentally happens to coincide with

the network of Saudi-supported mosques and schools within the United States.

I'm not suggesting here that the Saudi government is consciously involved in Al Qaeda, with the attack on the United States, or anything else. But, there is very clearly an awareness of what the wahhabis movement around the world is doing and its relationship to the recruiting and training of terrorists all over the world. So far, no administration, this Administration, the Clinton Administration, the Reagan Administration, you name it, no one has ever raised this officially with the Saudis (or [with] the [United Arab Emirates]), by the way, the other large wahhabis establishment in the Middle East).

Why is it that we see not just in the violent strains of this but all over Europe now, wahhabism - - fundamentalism - - putting women back into the burkas and cutting the hands off petty thieves in European countries and all of the manifestations of a return to this bizarre, puritanical interpretation of Islam is on the rise? Yet, no one officially in our government has ever made that an issue as we did in the 9/11 Report or raised it as an issue with the Saudi government or the government of the UAE. It's a huge blind spot and one that we have got to address.

As former commission members, we spend most of our time, when we are called to testify after the 9/11 Report [answering questions] about how we are doing, what are we getting done, what legislation [is needed]. Most of it is on the specific operational things that we recommended and some of that has been enacted very effectively and there has been improvement in our overall security. But, can we say now that we are now reasonably safe from that kind of attack? The answer is no. It is much,

much harder today for a group like Al Qaeda to mount something of the scale of 9/11 but as far as infiltrating nuclear materials into the Newark container port or putting a bomb in Grand Central Station, we are almost no safer today than we were at 9/11. That is pretty worrisome.

But, I'm not here to cast a pall. I just want to suggest that the effort is not over and until we begin to recognize the root causes of this, we are really dealing with the capillaries, not the arteries. As Don Rumsfeld has said, they are creating [terrorists] much faster than we can capture them or kill them. We're at the wrong edge of that lever and until we change the framework of the way we view this threat, we're not going to get any safer because the movement is very much against us in terms of demographics and population.