

Ten Years Later: Insights on Al-Qaeda's  
Past and Future Through Captured Records

Introduction:

**Ambassador Nancy McEldowney,**  
Acting President, National Defense University

Audio File Entitled "110913-opening-panel01-with-Vickers"

[Being at Audio Counter 00:07:00 and end at 00:16:25.]

**AMBASSADOR McELDOWNEY:** Thank you very much, Lorry, for that very kind introduction which reveals, if nothing else, how long I've been at this business, so thanks for that.

It is my great pleasure to welcome everyone today to the National Defense University, and I am delighted to see that we have such a large, such a prestigious, and such an expert group here to join us today for this very important event.

Now, this conference and many other events over the past days have served to mark the very solemn anniversary of 9/11. Ten years on, the scars of this tragedy are still raw for so many of us, and I know that is true for many people in this room. The 9/11 attacks were a tragedy that transformed our country and then shaped a generation. The quest to defeat al-Qaeda has proved to be similarly enormous and a truly vexing challenge.

While we have made some significant progress and we want to acknowledge the importance of that progress as we have degraded the leadership, we have to also acknowledge that al-Qaeda and its affiliated movements continue to present a major threat, as we saw so vividly in the threat reporting over this past weekend.

What you will do here today and tomorrow and the work that you will carry forward on the basis of your deliberations at this conference are a crucial part of our effort to combat this threat. Your conclusions, your research, and your expertise can help us unlock the mystery not just on what happened in the past but what we need to do to shape the future as we move forward.

Now, questions that loom over all of us and that will certainly animate your deliberations here are threefold. First, what did we really know before 9/11, and how did we overlook or misuse that knowledge? Second, what have we learned since 9/11, and how can you help us put that knowledge to maximum benefit? And third and most importantly, how do we ensure that future research by both government and private entities is focused on the right subject and using the right tools? These are fundamental and credibly important questions that we must continue ask and answer if we are to remain on the right path.

One key part of our attempt to answer these questions is the project that we have launched here at NDU that we hope to use this conference to introduce all of you do, and that is the Conflict Records Research Center. The CRRC has an invaluable database of primary source

material that will help inform sound scholarship and smart policy over the years to come.

The Secretary of Defense launched the CRRC to make captured records available to civilian researchers, so that together, we can analyze and interpret this vast and vitally important resource.

The CRRC staff is charged with growing this archive to include not only al-Qaeda records but also records from Saddam Hussein's regime. In the future, we hope and expect the records from other conflicts will be incorporated into this database for your use and use by other scholars.

Though still in the early days, what we have found from this archive from examining these records is truly revelatory. What they have given us is the capacity to view ourselves through the eyes of an adversary. They are allowing us to look at what has happened and to see it as they saw it. That is really extraordinary and extremely powerful.

Now, in conjunction with this conference, we have released a number of these documents, and I want to touch on just two of them, which are available for you outside. The first one is a record that was captured in Afghanistan, and it contains a history of al-Qaeda as well as an after-action report of the 9/11 attacks. Think about the power of being able to look at that through their eyes.

Another document describes the terrorist hijacking of an Air France commercial aircraft in 1994, 6 years before 9/11. The terrorist intent to fly that aircraft into the Eiffel Tower was foiled, but we know now that they had been planning for more than 6 years to use aerial mode of operations against us.

And to go back to the questions that I posed to you, what did we know before 9/11 and how did we use that information, we have to continually ask that.

Now, as we look at this material, what we can do with it, how you can help us and we can help you, we need to keep that tactile sense of the relevance of our work, the urgency as we go forward. I believe we have that synergy, we have that momentum, and your presence here today demonstrates that, but there's another ingredient that we must have if we are to be successful, and that is political will and political support from both the executive and the legislative branches. We want people who are prepared to ask hard questions and to challenge accepted wisdom.

Now, it is our great good fortune to have someone exactly like that with us today, someone who has been at the forefront of understanding this threat and what it will take to protect ourselves and to defeat these adversaries.

It is my great honor to introduce to you that type of person who is I think the perfect example of what we are trying to achieve today, and it is Congressman Mac Thornberry from Texas' 13th District.

Congressman Thornberry is the vice chairman of the Armed Services Committee, the chair of the Emergency Threats Subcommittee, and a member of the Permanent Select

Committee on Intelligence.

The National Journal of American Politics has described him as one of Congress' "brainiest and most thoughtful leaders on national defense issues." The Congressional Quarterly has called him a, quote, "most respected voice on national security matters," and the people in this room know just how well deserved this praise is.

Congressman Thornberry was pressing during the 6 months before the 9/11 attacks. Drawing on the Hart-Rudman Commission's work on terrorism, he introduced a bill to establish a national homeland security agency. His work and this bill served as the basis for legislation that subsequently founded today's Department of Homeland Security.

Since 9/11, Congressman Thornberry has been an advocate with those on both sides of the aisle to improve interagency cooperation, and I think most acutely significant for this audience, he has said repeatedly that he believes in and is willing to fight for the importance of developing a deeper understanding of terrorism, so that he can take, together with our friends and allies, the appropriate actions to prevent its spread and to stop the threat.

So please join me in welcoming one of the preeminent leaders of our country on national security questions. Congressman Mac Thornberry.

[Applause.]

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