

Security cuts for New York and Washington underline fraud of war on terror

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New York and Washington, DC, the targets of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, will receive drastic cuts in anti-terror funding, the Department of Homeland Security announced last week. Under its Urban Areas Security Initiative program, the Department has granted New York City \$124 million, down from \$207 million last year and Washington, DC \$46.5 million, down from \$77.5 million last year.

There were also substantial reductions in other large cities, such as Boston and Phoenix, while smaller cities with less visible threats, such as Louisville, Kentucky and Charlotte, North Carolina, and Milwaukee, Wisconsin, significantly increased their funding under the program. New Orleans's share of the funding declined from \$9.3 million to \$4.6 million.

The allocations were proposed by a secret panel of 100 law-enforcement officials from around the country that met at the National Fire Academy in March in Emmetsburg, Maryland. Funding levels are supposedly determined by a number of factors, but especially by a risk assessment. The Department of Homeland Security, though, had the final say on the amount of funding each city received.

The cuts have brought forth a stream of accusations from politicians in New York and Washington, who have pointed out the absurdity of risk assessments that result in cutting funds to the only two US cities that have experienced recent major terrorist attacks.

It is painfully obvious that the distribution of the funds were worked out on an entirely different basis, with money funneled in larger quantities to areas where Republican incumbents are facing tight races in the 2006 midterm elections. New York City's Mayor Michael Bloomberg, himself a Republican, acknowledged as much. "We tried to do some analysis of some of the moneys and whether or not they were

given out for political reasons, and in fact in many of the places where they got money - but arguable there's not threat - there are close elections either at the Senate level or at the House level," he said.

Rep. Joseph Cowley, a Queens Democrat, voiced the sense of betrayal felt by local politicians toward Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff, who had worked under then Manhattan US Attorney Rudolph Giuliani: "When he got the job, we thought, here's a guy from the region, and he's gonna understand what we face. Quite frankly, it's the opposite. It's a slap in the face."

Democratic Senator Charles Schumer said, "[T]his sure looks like a betrayal to me." Senator Hillary Clinton said that New Yorkers did not appreciate having their city used as a prop and a place for conventions. With an eye on the 2008 presidential election, she blamed George Bush for the funding decisions by saying, "At some point the buck stops in the White House."

And the *New York Times* editorialized against, "the serious problems with the department's evaluation process."

Chertoff and other Homeland Security officials defended the allocations by claiming that many of New York City's prominent buildings and bridges were listed as commercial or transportation infrastructure, or that some, such as the Statue of Liberty, were protected by funds disbursed to the state rather than the city.

Federal officials claimed that the city had improperly filed its grant application and that the millions of dollars spent on police overtime for the supposedly anti-terrorist Operation Atlas, which involves a helmeted paramilitary SWAT team roaming the city, was not a permanent security solution.

It is hardly news that anti-terrorist funds are divvied

up according to immediate political needs. There was an outcry last year when the Senate voted to reallocate homeland security funds. At that time, Chertoff was praised in a *Times* editorial for his “strongly written letter” that asked that the Senate fund areas according to risk and need. Democrat Joseph Lieberman was then branded as the traitor for supporting an amendment under which only 60 per cent of homeland security funding was given out according to risk.

Often the uses of homeland security funds are absurd. The aforementioned *New York Times* editorial pointed to a region of Alaska with a population of 7,300 that “spent \$233,000 a while back to buy decontamination tents, night vision goggles and other equipment.” Rep. Anthony Weiner complained in Congress last week about the homeland security money being used to purchase bulletproof vests for police dogs in Columbus, Ohio.

Anti-terrorism funds have also been appropriated in ways that are patently driven by personal profit and official corruption. Last month the *New York Times* ran an expose of Republican congressman Harold Rogers of Kentucky. Rogers is the chairman of the House Homeland Security Appropriations Subcommittee.

Under his tutelage, millions of dollars have been directed to companies in Kentucky developing a tamperproof identification card for transportation workers - when technologies have already been identified for such a card, toward which most other federal agencies are moving. One of the companies involved, Senture, hired Rogers’s son. Senture and other companies associated with the card have made thousands of dollars of contributions to Rogers’s political causes.

Rogers pressured the Homeland Security Department to hire the non-profit American Association of Airport Executives to perform the background checks on transportation workers that would receive identification cards. This association has provided Rogers and his wife with a number of free vacations to Hawaii as well as donations to his campaign.

In New York City itself, homeland security funding has helped pay for stepped-up police surveillance and repression directed against opponents of the Iraq war and other political dissidents. This was demonstrated most graphically in the wholesale crackdown on protests that accompanied the Republican national

convention in August 2004, when demonstrators were subjected to ubiquitous police filming and over 1,800 people were arrested—the vast majority on trumped-up charges that were later dismissed.

Whatever the political squabbles over funding, not a single major newspaper or Democratic politician even questions the legitimacy of the war on terror itself. Every one of them, from New York’s Senator Hillary Clinton on down, accepts the basic premise put forward by the Bush administration—that the United States is under siege by a shadowy, ill-defined enemy that threatens the security of the country.

For nearly five years, the Bush administration, aided and abetted by Democrats like Clinton and Schumer, has endlessly repeated the mantra “after September 11, everything changed” in order to justify wars of aggression abroad, the destruction of democratic rights at home, torture and the abrogation of virtually all restraints on executive power.

The “misallocation” of Homeland Security funds—with the Bush administration for reasons of immediate political expediency diverting hundreds of millions of dollars away from the two cities where nearly 3,000 people died on September 11 and which are unquestionably the most likely targets for any future terrorist attacks—serves as just one more exposure of the completely fraudulent character of this so-called war on terrorism.



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