

Obama's Homeland Security chief invokes "terror threat"

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In a speech delivered in New York City Wednesday, Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano echoed the terror warnings of her Republican predecessors, while making it clear that little, aside from rhetoric, has changed in the department since its creation under the Bush administration.

In remarks addressed to the Council on Foreign Relations, Napolitano said that "President Obama has been forceful about seeing the threat of terrorism in all its complexity, and in bringing all our resources, not just the federal government, to bear against violent extremism."

She insisted that it was "urgent" that Washington "refocus our counter-terror approach to make it a shared endeavor...to make it more layered, networked and resilient."

Later in the afternoon, Napolitano visited "ground zero," the site of the demolished Twin Towers, to, as she put it, "assess progress." There is very little of it, with the site still a gaping hole without either new buildings or any memorial to the 2,700 people killed there. The developer, the city and the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey are at loggerheads, given the difficulty in securing bank financing, the dearth of demand for office space and the refusal of the crisis-ridden state governments to provide more public funding.

The main purpose of the visit was to once again link the Homeland Security Department and the wide range of repressive legislation enacted under the Bush administration to the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on New York and Washington—events that have yet to be subjected to any genuinely independent investigation and for which no one in the US government has ever been held accountable.

Like her Republican predecessors, Napolitano is continuing to subject the American people to a propaganda campaign portraying a supposedly omnipresent threat of terrorism—the key pretext for the US wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and all of the related crimes of the past eight years, from torture to domestic spying.

The alleged terror threat, Napolitano said, is "persistent and evolving."

She used this threat to justify the continuing government crackdown on undocumented immigrant workers. "Illegal immigration is not only a matter of sovereignty, but could pose a national security threat as well," she said.

Napolitano's visit sparked protests because of her expansion of programs deputizing local police agencies as arms of immigration enforcement in the hunting down of undocumented workers.

The department has secured a major funding increase for a program known as "Secure Communities," in which officials overseeing local jails are empowered to check the fingerprints of all those detained against the Immigration and Customs Enforcement data base. Critics of the system point out that the vast majority of those turned over to immigration authorities as a result have been arrested on minor charges such as failure to produce identification or traffic violations.

A second program that is being expanded is known as "287(g)," which cements partnerships between the federal government and local police agencies, authorizing local cops to enforce federal immigration laws. The program has been employed—most infamously in the Phoenix area by Sheriff Joe Arpaio—to carry out dragnets for undocumented workers in Latino neighborhoods under the cover of anti-crime campaigns.

In her speech, Napolitano's references to terrorism centered on what she called "home-grown threats." She cited the arrest this week of seven men in North Carolina and earlier arrests in Minneapolis. In both cases, not even federal authorities have accused the defendants of planning terrorist actions inside the US. In the North Carolina case, the accused are alleged to have sought to join the Palestinian struggle in Gaza, while the Minneapolis arrests were of young Somali immigrants who had returned to their country, allegedly to fight against the US-backed Ethiopian occupation.

She also referred to the case of five men convicted late last year in connection with a "terrorist plot" to attack Fort Dix in New Jersey. As the evidence at trial demonstrated, the supposed plot would never have existed outside of the activities of an FBI agent provocateur who initiated it and worked over a protracted period to ensnare the defendants in it.

In referring to the Fort Dix case, Napolitano praised a Circuit City store clerk who called authorities after one of the men brought in a videotape of them doing target practice for transfer to a DVD.

She claimed that this action demonstrated the need for a "culture of collective responsibility" in which "every individual understands his or her role." She continued, "You are the ones who know when something is not right in your community."

In the question-and-answer session that followed Napolitano's speech, a member of the audience asked her whether she was suggesting that US citizens be trained "from school days on" to "watch more carefully their schoolmates, their co-workers, their families and their neighbors and then more effectively report what they say to some authority."

The Homeland Security secretary found no problem with this description of a police state, replying that her questioner was "getting the gist of what I'm saying" about the "culture of collective responsibility."

What was most striking about Napolitano's presentation was that, more than six months after the coming to office of the Obama administration, there have been no substantial proposals for either scrapping or revising policies initiated under the Bush White House at an agency deeply implicated in attacks on the democratic rights of the American people.

In this, as in its prosecution of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the use of military tribunals and its

invocation of "state secrets" to quash court cases challenging domestic spying and extraordinary rendition, the Obama administration is continuing the essential policies of its predecessor, merely with a change in tone.



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