

Balboni: Janet Napolitano's exit marks a time to re-evaluate

July 12, 2013 by MICHAEL BALBONI



The departure of Janet Napolitano as Secretary of Homeland Security will undoubtedly bring a deluge of comments regarding the effectiveness and results of her tenure. The change in leadership, however, should also provide the nation with a much-needed opportunity to review and evaluate the department as a whole.

The secretary's decision to resign comes at a significant crossroads in the history of our national security. On the one hand, the Boston Marathon bombing has reawakened fears about homegrown radicalization, homemade explosive devices and the vulnerability of hometown

events. This attack has caused many of us to wonder, "Is anywhere in America truly safe?"

At the same time, the revelations of the NSA leaker, Edward Snowden, that the federal government has the ability to compile email records and monitor nearly every phone call made in our country, has made many wonder whether the spying in the name of security is worth of the loss of our individual anonymity.

Juxtapose these two events, and you have the very complex tableau that faces our society.

Benjamin Franklin once famously said, "Those who would trade their liberty for security deserve neither." Inherent in that statement is the notion that security and freedom are not mutually exclusive. What is needed, however, is a rigorous cost-benefit analysis, which weighs the impact on every individual versus the safety of the whole. The Supreme Court has ruled that though individual liberties may be abridged, that abridgment must come as a result of a compelling rationale and be done in the least intrusive way.

Is it fair to say that the capture of millions of phone records of unaccused Americans is the least intrusive way to achieve the compelling purpose? Perhaps it is, but that analysis needs to be a part of a robust and open dialog with the American people.

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Unfortunately, in the harrowing days following 9/11, our government had to scramble to try to establish a domestic security infrastructure to defend against a nonstate, asymmetric enemy who wore no uniform and would attack innocent civilians who were simply going to work on a clear Tuesday morning. The threats were ubiquitous, unseen and potentially crippling to our country. In light of this, there were hundreds of programs created, thousands of security personnel hired and billions spent to protect us from this new foe.

Truth be told, there were and are programs and protocols that are more "security theater" than real protective strategies. Once created, the historic inertia of government allows these ineffective programs to languish -- and have the potential, if not to harm, then at least to undermine the confidence of the American people that the government really knows how to protect them.

How can we provide a scalable, flexible, cost-effective and innovative set of solutions that can also add value to our everyday lives? What's needed are innovative programs that don't look at past attacks (such as the shoe bomber), but anticipate the next one. What's needed is to "bake in" security systems that make us safer from all kinds of hazards, not just terrorism. What's needed is a program that engages the public more effectively, rather than scaring the populace with the media's sensationalized coverage.

Americans should embrace the post-9/11 paradigm, but demand that the systems that protect us do so in a way that keeps our freedoms. The time is now for an honest debate about the best way to defend this nation.

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