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Op-Ed

Red Sox Nation?

It was recently released that about 380 tons of powerfully high explosives *vanished* from a facility south of Baghdad. That these explosives could easily be used to construct numerous deadly devices, including nuclear weapons, isn't the scary part. What's scary is that the facility that housed the explosives, Al Qaqaa, was well known about before the war and yet nothing was done to keep it under surveillance when we went in. In fact, a brigade of the 101st Airborne spent the night at Al Qaqaa on its way to Baghdad without even checking the place out. In their defense, they didn't know what was supposed to be there. But why didn't they? Shouldn't they have at least been given the intelligence about what they were sleeping next to? This recent overlooking of a serious threat is just one example of a dangerous trend we're following and begs the question: where is the vigilance that 9-11 was supposed to have instilled in us?

The terror attack in New York three years ago destroyed more than a few buildings and innumerable lives; it destroyed our foolish sense of safety. Now, along with plans to rebuild a structure at Ground Zero and with time and memorials to heal wounds, we also seem to be rebuilding the imaginary walls that once protected our shores.

Right after the attack, I remember seeing the perimeter of a nearby Coast Guard base lined with concrete barriers and fully armed soldiers at the gates. Now all that's there is a simple hydraulic pole-gate. A few days ago, I even drove right up to one of the buildings on the base, no questions asked, no hindrances in place.

Well, maybe these were isolated incidents. Surely a few incidents are bound to occur even under the most intense watchfulness. Maybe there truly is a vigilant eye perched over our high technological towers watching for any misdeed and possible threat. But wait; didn't the president just cut part of the Department of Energy's budget that combats nuclear proliferation? Nuclear proliferation is one of the most pressing and potentially deadly threats we face today. Nukes and the materials needed to make them are cheap and abundantly available ever since the Soviet Union collapsed. In the December 2001 issue of Time Magazine, Jeffrey Kluger tells how 2 lbs of uranium-235, weapons-grade material, was going for only \$30,000 on the black market.

The budget for fiscal year 2005 cuts the budget of the Nunn-Lugar Program, a successful nuclear nonproliferation program, by 10% and does not increase the International Atomic Energy Agency's funds even though the current administration said it would increase its capabilities. The 2005 budget also stunts the acceleration of an effort that purchases and breaks down Russian highly enriched uranium (HEU), which is bad considering we didn't buy any HEU last fiscal year. If we do have towers of vigilance, we're taking out some of the cornerstones.

In the past fiscal year we spent about \$2 billion on nonproliferation efforts. We also spend about \$41 billion on homeland security and \$81 billion on the national missile defense and the war in Iraq. While \$2 billion dollars is by no means a small amount of money, it's 20 times less than we spend on homeland security. If what Matthew Bunn, an expert in nuclear weapons and a former Clinton advisor, says in the Kluger article is true, that is "If that stuff [nuclear material] gets on the market, nothing else we do will work", we should probably divert some funds. There's a biblical saying that your heart will be where your treasure is, and our money apparently isn't in securing nuclear material.

While nuclear proliferation is a clear and present threat today, it isn't the only one. Biological and chemical weapons are also becoming increasingly easy to obtain by terrorist groups and rogue states. Those who want to harm us will become more and more sophisticated as technology progresses and more and more deadly if our efforts to curb their weapons procurement don't rise to meet the challenge. September 11, 2001 was not an accident, or a singularity that slipped through a crack in our defenses. It was the exploitation of our lack of defenses. It was a knocking down of the imaginary wall that we constructed since December 7, 1941. Unfortunately, we seem to be forgetting to man the stone curtains we raised around our nation after that disastrous fall day and are returning to the lax vigil behind the transparent wall of sloth and ignorance. Or maybe we're just hoping that with minimal efforts we'll get the bad guys before they do anything again. I may live in Boston, but even I'm not that hopeful.

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