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Box 5, Folder 1, Proposal for the Convening of a White House
Conference on Combatting International Terrorism, 28 April 1986.

AZ Proposal for the Convening of a
WHITE HOUSE CONFERENCE ON COMBATTING INTERNATIONAL TERRORISM

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"Terrorism deeply troubles the American people. A Roper Poll conducted before the TWA 847 hijacking showed that 78 percent of all Americans consider terrorism to be one of the most serious problems facing the U.S. Government today, along with the deficit, strategic arms control and unemployment..."

That statement depicting the feelings of the American people toward the growing menace of international terrorism emerges as one of the conclusions of the "Public Report of the Vice President's Task Force on Combatting Terrorism" issued in February 1986 (p.17).

The report then adds:

"Terrorism deeply troubles the American people. They feel angry, victimized, vulnerable and helpless. At the same time, they want the United States Government to have a strong and consistent national anti-terrorist policy. While such a policy exists, the Task Force believes that better communication is necessary to educate the public to our policy and to the ramifications of using force during terrorist attacks." (p.21)

One of the significant recommendations of the Task Force calls for the launching of a "Public Education Effort" in these words:

"Because of the lack of understanding and currently available information concerning our national program for combatting terrorism, a broad education effort should be undertaken to inform the American public about our policy and proposals as well as the many ramifications of the use of force against terrorism, including death of innocent people, destruction of property, alienation of allies and possible terrorist reprisals. The education effort should take the form of publications, such as this report, seminars and speaking opportunities by government officials." (p. 27).

In keeping with the objectives of the Task Force recommendations, this paper proposes that one of the most effective means for achieving widespread "Public Education" would be the convening of a White House Conference on Combatting International Terrorism.

Based on other experiences with White House Conferences - on Children and Youth, on Aging, on the Family, on Foreign Aid and Trade - this model (or some adaptation of it) provides an effective ^{national} mechanism

for seeking to realize the following purposes:

A) A national forum for educating key leadership from ~~all~~ segments of American society about the facts, policies and programs of our Government in combatting international terrorism. Much of the basic information contained in the Vice President's Task Force Report on Combatting Terrorism is generally not known-even to informed Americans. The use of that report, together with the documents ^{issued} prepared by the Director of the Office for Counter-Terrorism and Emergency Planning of the State Department, the CIA, the FBI, the FAA, and other appropriate U.S. agencies, in the preparations for the White House Conference and for its program discussions, could raise the consciousness of American public opinion molders and provide them with a firm grounding in the data that is available about the long-term problems of international terrorism, ^{and} the concerted action that is required to combat it.

B) The national forum of a White House Conference might bring together key leadership of the major groups that compose American Society -- business, labor, media, ^{education,} religious, racial, ethnic, civic, and other voluntary groups. This cross-sectional and interdisciplinary forum would be ~~asked~~ invited to consider and exchange views regarding the key themes and issues that are outlined in the Task Force Report; namely,

(1) The Growing Threat of Terrorism - the nature of terrorism; the geographic distribution of international terrorist incidents; U.S. casualties resulting from international terrorist incidents; domestic vulnerability; terrorist incidents in the United States.

(2) U. S. Policy and Response to Terrorists - current policy, managing terrorist incidents, coping with the threat; alleviating causes of terrorism; U.S. resources for combatting terrorism (law enforcement, prosecution of terrorists; better security for civil aviation and maritime activities; increased assistance to other

governments; better, more timely intelligence); personal and physical security; Federal Agencies' roles in combatting terrorism; international cooperation; political, economic, and military considerations in determining responses.

(3) The Role of Congress in Combatting Terrorism - current legislation pending legislation; potential legislation.

(4) American public opinion

(5) Terrorism and the Media.

(6) Task Force Conclusions and Recommendations - national policy and program recommendations; policy criteria for response to terrorists; a new National Security Council position; American personnel requirements in high-threat areas; international cooperation through additional international agreements, close extradition loop-holes, impose sanctions against Vienna Convention violators; evaluate and strengthen airport and port security, intelligence recommendations for consolidated intelligence center of terrorism; increased collection of human intelligence, exchange of intelligence between governments; legislative recommendations, study of the relationship between terrorism and the domestic and international legal systems; communications recommendations for support program for hostage families; launching a public education effort; and working with the media.

C) As White House Conference will inevitably bring together a diverse group of citizens of varying political and ideological views, but with effective, skilful conference leadership that need not preclude the genuine possibility of developing a national consciousness and even a consensus for support of a strong, reasonable government policy and program for combatting the epidemic of international terrorism.

This writer's experience with White House Conferences on Children and Youth, Aging, Foreign Aid and Trade, World Hunger and Refugees demonstrated that such forums can help forge broad and powerful national constituencies that back critically-needed legislation, funding, and public opinion support for necessary political action. Given the magnitude of the threat of international terrorism to American and Western democratic values and institutions, a White House Conference on Combatting International Terrorism may well be an idea whose time is now.

Submitted by
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As was the case with other successful White House Conferences, a dramatic by-product was the formation of Governor and Mayor's Committees. These provided local instrumentalities that enlarged the involvement of community leadership for implementing on a long-term basis, the findings and recommendations that are crystallized at the White House Conference and its various workshops.