

# 9/11 commission report generally fair and balanced

VIEW



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report, in great detail, confirms what is generally considered as common wisdom in America today. Most of what it reveals is already known. Some of what it conceals, too, is known. It therefore is really redundant from a knowledge perspective. But it is a potentially powerful political weapon that can be wielded by politicians of every hue. It enjoys the added advantage of being supported by the families of the victims and in that sense has acquired a quality that those in charge may only ignore at their own peril.

It offers nothing new in terms of genuine strategies and recommendations to make America safer; think tanks and experts in the last three years have already recommended much of what it recommends. Its value lies in its summation and accumulation of a large body of facts in one place and will remain a useful reference tool for all who are engaged in the new enterprise of global counter-terrorism.

The report is comprehensive, even verbose, but its key points are:

1. The attacks of 9/11 were unexpected and unprecedented;
2. The American security establishment was ill prepared to combat such an eventuality. Its security apparatus, including the intelligence community, had not adjusted institutionally to be able to anticipate and pre-empt what the report labels as "the new terrorism".
3. The report warns that an attack of even greater magnitude is now possible unless America prepares and acts now.
4. It argues that the US needs to reconstitute its security policies and institutions to facilitate coordination of information, rapid decision-making and pre-emptive action on a global scale. The report redefines American "national interests" and recommends pre-

paredness on a global scale.

5. It recommends foreign policy shifts acknowledging the critical linkage between American security and its foreign policy. The report does a disservice to the nation by not examining this linkage in its laborious effort to explain how and why 9/11 happened. Thankfully, the oversight is corrected in its final recommendations.

The report systematically downplays the significance of US support for Israel and its foreign policy in the Muslim world.

The overriding theme of its operational recommendations is "unity of effort" in all arenas, from intelligence gathering to politics, policy and policing matters.

The report repeatedly calls for the US to defend its values overseas. It forgets to remind us that we must also practice our values here and overseas. It lacks an adequate criticism of US policies which undermine democracy in the US and elsewhere.

The report says it is not Islam but a small minority of "Islamist terrorists" who constitute a serious threat to America.

10. One problematic aspect of the report is the absence of the input of not only American Muslims but also of established scholars of Islam and the Muslim world. Its analysis of Islamic resurgence, the socio-political condition of the Muslim World and the causes for the emergence of Islamic militancy and groups such as Al Qaeda, are poorly studied.
11. It does not express any misgivings about American Muslims.

The best and the most useful part of the report is Chapter 12, "What to do: A Global Strategy". Though not without its limitations, the chapter indicates the commissions' open and fair analysis of the problem and its willing-

ness to engage with the challenges posed by 9/11 attacks. The report identifies the threat as "Islamist terrorism" and recommends a series of strategies to counter it. The report argues that Al Qaeda and groups inspired by Al Qaeda and its militant ideology are a threat to the US interests everywhere. Motivated partly by US policies and partly by their radical ideas they seek to either destroy or convert the US and leave no room for negotiation.

The report advocates soft and tough, diplomatic and militaristic strategies to combat terrorist organisations in the Muslim world. They are practical and wise and the US government will do well to implement several of them. Their sensitivity to the absence of democracy in the Muslim world and the plight of ordinary Muslims deserves special mention. The insistence that the US must eschew compromising democracy in the interest of short-term gains is noteworthy. It must also be pointed out, however, that the recommendations vis-à-vis Pakistan do not conform to this principle.

The report provides an excellent opportunity for American Muslims to participate, rejuvenate and expand the debate on America's continuing response to the 9/11 attacks. It permits them to join other Americans in demanding accountability from the government with regards to its security and foreign policy. American Muslim community can also develop anticipatory strategies to adjust to unfolding realities. A constructive response will secure the community and strengthen its bond with the rest of the nation.

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THE 585-PAGE REPORT BY THE bipartisan-independent 9/11 commission has been published and is already a bestseller. The