Within a week of the shocking events of September 11, Council President Leslie H. Gelb formed our Independent Task Force on Terrorism. Its purpose was to raise questions that needed to be answered, suggest areas that required in-depth deliberation, and identify linkages between subjects that could become unduly compartmentalized.

The task force brought together over 50 of the nation’s most experienced leaders, including former cabinet officials, Nobel laureates, and a former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. It included experts on border control, public health, bioterrorism, cyber-security, intelligence, and homeland security. My fellow director Ambassador Richard C. Holbrooke and I co-chaired this effort. General Charles G. Boyd, the Council’s Henry A. Kissinger senior fellow, served as our able project director. The assembly of this extraordinary group of individuals and its work product demonstrates the unique capacity of the Council to respond rapidly to international crises.

Each task force meeting began with a briefing by a government official or topical expert followed by a spirited exchange of ideas regarding the topic on the agenda. It was not possible to reach a consensus on every subject. However, the knowledge gained by task force members as a result of these exchanges raised their awareness and enhanced their ability to have meaningful and constructive discussions with individuals in government service, the media, and the broader public. And where consensus was reached, often a paper was produced—such as the one on how the government might more effectively communicate its views in the Muslim world, which was shared with the administration early on.

The work of the task force has been enriched by several related activities at the Council. For example, our chairman, Peter G. Peterson, is leading a task force of experts who are focusing on public diplomacy more broadly. A subgroup of the terrorism task force has produced two first-rate papers (available on the Council’s website) on strengthening the U.S.-Saudi and U.S.-Egyptian relationships; these papers discuss the critical nature of those relations to U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East. Another subgroup, headed by Chuck Boyd, is studying issues of public health and bioterrorism with the intention of developing recommendations to reorganize the public health infrastructure. Also, the Council is about to launch a task force chaired by Maurice R. Greenberg and directed by William F. Wechsler, formerly at the Treasury, and Lee S. Wolosky, a former International Affairs Fellow who served at the National Security Council, to contribute to the public debate on terrorist financing. In the short term, “by following the money,” governments
may be better able to identify terrorist organizations and prevent an attack. Over the longer term, disrupting their flow of funds helps us to destroy them. The report of this task force will describe the challenge and the steps taken to address the problem thus far. The task force also intends to make recommendations about what should be done and how to do it.

The Council has undertaken more than 20 task forces over the past nine years, reflecting the breadth of its work and its importance in the foreign policymaking world. It is often hard to quantify the immediate impact of any given task force, but this is not because they have no impact. Often, it is because their resonance is not immediate. Indeed, several of the Council’s past task force reports have recently been brought to the fore by the new policy climate. These include Strengthening Palestinian Institutions, from a task force chaired by Michel Rocard and directed by Henry Siegman; U.S.-Cuban Relations in the 21st Century, from a task force chaired by Bernard Aronson and William D. Rogers and directed by Julia E. Sweig; Building Support for More Open Trade, whose task force was chaired by Kenneth M. Duberstein and Robert E. Rubin and directed by Timothy F. Geithner; and A Letter to the President and a Memorandum on U.S. Policy toward Brazil, from the task force chaired by Stephen Robert and directed by Kenneth R. Maxwell. The conclusions of a task force on State Department reform, chaired by Frank C. Carlucci and cosponsored by the Center for Strategic and International Studies, were discussed with Secretary of State Colin L. Powell as soon as he took office. This recognition underscores the fact that the Council is way ahead of the curve when it comes to foreign policy.

Finally, as a Council member based in Washington, I am so very pleased with the outstanding quality of the Washington Program this year. Its offerings have been rich and varied. For example, Vice President Dick Cheney spoke at the launching of the Geoeconomic Center. We have benefited from thoughtful discussions with U.S. Trade Representative Robert B. Zoellick, President Vladimir Putin of Russia, Vice President Hu Jintao of China, and President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt. Thanks to Chuck Boyd and Joy Drucker, and, since Chuck’s departure, Anne R. Luzzatto, the Council has become a real pillar of the policy community in our nation’s capital. All of us in Washington look forward to Robert C. Orr’s leadership of the Washington office in the year ahead.

Carla A. Hills
Vice Chairman of the Board