YJIA: You have emphasized the need to change the rhetoric in the United States surrounding the issue of terrorism, stressing that terrorist acts can emanate from violent extremism that is not jihadi or Islamist in nature; it may also be homegrown. What are the challenges in educating the American public about terrorist stereotypes and Islamophobia in general? Is fostering better relations with Muslim communities a part of that strategy?

Napolitano: In the last ten years, we have made great strides in the fight against terrorism, but we know that the threat is persistent and ever-evolving. While we continue to track and mitigate threats that emanate from abroad, we also see increasing activity from US persons who have become radicalized, sometimes to the point of violence.

In order to protect the country from terrorist threats, whether foreign or homegrown, [Department of Homeland Security] DHS continues to analyze all violent extremist activity regardless of ideology. We don’t have the luxury of focusing our efforts on one particular group. Part of this effort is increased engagement with local communities around the country. Through initiatives like our “If You See Something, Say Something™” campaign, we are raising public awareness of the behaviors and indicators of terrorism and crime, and emphasizing the importance of reporting suspicious activity to local law enforcement authorities. At the same time, we are training local law enforcement to be better able to recognize those behaviors associated with terrorism-related crime so they can incorporate that knowledge into daily efforts to protect our local communities.

We continue to see instances where terrorist attacks are prevented by individuals who report suspicious activity to authorities. The thwarted bombing attempt in New York City’s Times Square is a well-known example of citizens stepping up and playing a role — two street vendors noticed a smoking vehicle and reported it to the police. And just a few months ago, the owner of a gun store in Killeen, Texas called authorities when

Janet Napolitano is the current United States Secretary of Homeland Security. She served as a two-term Governor of Arizona and was named one of the top five governors in the country by Time Magazine. Secretary Napolitano was the first woman to chair the National Governors Association and was the first female Attorney General of Arizona. She has also served as US Attorney for the District of Arizona.
he noticed that an individual in his store was behaving in a suspicious manner—his actions may have helped prevent a potential attack.

Today, more than ever, the public plays a key role in strengthening our homeland security. We are all stakeholders in the effort to keep our families and communities secure and resilient.

**YJIA:** The Department of Homeland Security has provided equipment, training, and capacity-building services for the Afghani customs and border police. Can you discuss your department’s work in Afghanistan, particularly in preventing the transfer of cash and drugs? What are the implications of that work for homeland security in the United States?

**Napolitano:** DHS has worked closely with the Afghan government to help establish a border security and customs system that’s both an effective tool in countering terrorism while also facilitating legitimate travel and trade. In the long term, this will be critical to the stability and security of Afghanistan.

Last December, I traveled to Afghanistan and visited the Afghan Border Coordination Center in Torkham where personnel from the US Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) and US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) are working side by side with Afghani customs and border police.

For several years, DHS has deployed border security and customs personnel to the region to provide civilian assistance to local security officials and share best practices. We’ve also helped them to establish an Afghan Customs Academy, which provides training to Afghan officers on the law enforcement, economic, and environmental aspects of border security, as well as human rights issues related to migration.

**YJIA:** What are some of the unique challenges posed by international cybersecurity threats? How does the Department of Homeland Security coordinate with other branches of the US Federal Government—for example, the State and Defense Departments—in dealing with these issues?

**Napolitano:** Today’s modern world is more interconnected than ever before. Yet, for all its advantages, increased connectivity brings an increased risk of online theft, fraud, and abuse. No country, industry, community, or individual is immune to cyber risks.

At DHS, our operational cybersecurity mission is two-fold. We’re responsible for securing unclassified networks for Federal Executive Branch civilian departments and agencies, also known as the .gov domain. And we work with the owners and operators of critical infrastructure to support cybersecurity preparedness through risk assessment, mitigation, and incident response capabilities.

Over the past two and a half years, DHS has worked closely with our many partners to enhance the federal government’s capacity to protect against cyber threats in a number of ways, including increasing the number of cyber experts at the Department by nearly 500 percent; standing up the National Cybersecurity and Communications Integration Center (NCCIC), a 24/7 integrated watch and warning center that includes
representatives from federal, state, and private sector partners; and developing and testing the country’s first-ever National Cyber Incident Response Plan.

DHS also recognizes that partnership and collaboration are crucial to ensuring that all Americans take responsibility for their actions online. Emerging cyber threats require the engagement of the entire society—from government and law enforcement to the private sector and most importantly, members of the public. To that end, we are continuing to grow the Department’s Stop. Think. Connect.™ Campaign, a national public awareness effort designed to engage and challenge Americans to join the effort to practice and promote safe online practices.

YJIA: You have spoken about the pressing need for immigration reform in the United States and have referenced changes underway within the Department of Homeland Security. Can you talk about the legal and economic constraints that influence how your Department prioritizes cases? How can the United States better coordinate its efforts with the countries of origin from which many US immigrants come?

Napolitano: Nearly three years ago, when President Obama came into office and nominated me for this position, he and I both knew that we were inheriting a broken immigration system with a patchwork of laws and outdated requirements that were in desperate need of updating.

He said two things at the time and has maintained this position ever since:

First, we took an oath of office to uphold the laws of the United States of America, and we will do that by enforcing them in the smartest, fairest, and most efficient way possible. Second, we know the immigration system needs to be updated, and we committed then, and continue today, to seek reforms that make sense and are meaningful.

But Congress hasn’t acted and states continue to pass a patchwork of their own laws in an attempt to fill the void. It is this Administration’s position that Congress needs to take up immigration reform once and for all. We have put forward our ideas and are ready to act quickly and collaboratively to support passage of reforms that make sense.

While doing everything we can to encourage Congressional action, we have undertaken a historic effort to secure the border and enforce our immigration laws in a cohesive way that is smart, effective, and that maximizes the resources that Congress has given us to do this job.

We will continue to work with nations around the world, as well as international organizations such as the UN on issues pertaining to migration, but in order to fundamentally change the broken system we have now, we need Congress to act.

YJIA: Security officials continuously grapple with issues of privacy. Do you regard security and privacy as inherently competing goals? How have your views on privacy changed throughout your time as Secretary of Homeland Security?

Napolitano: Security and privacy are not competing principles, but rather mutually reinforcing values. Protecting privacy and civil liberties is a top priority at my Department. We are determined to protect citizens of all nations while upholding
fundamental rights and using every tool available to combat terrorism consistent with our laws and principles. In doing so, we are firmly committed to strong privacy protections that govern how we collect, store, and share information.

As part of our layered approach to security, DHS has worked with industry and international partners to make travel and all transportations systems more secure through enhancements in information sharing, passenger and cargo screening, and the development and deployment of new technologies. Each layer strengthens our overall security and multiple layers ensure that we have many opportunities to catch our adversaries before they can do us harm. Through the use of new technologies and updating of our critical infrastructure, we aim to protect the privacy of the traveling public while making our transportation system safer and more secure.

YJIA: Ten years on, do you consider September 11th as having fundamentally changed the international system or rather as a symptom of—and a wake up call to—a world that had already fundamentally changed?

Napolitano: Ten years after the September 11, 2001 attacks, America is stronger and more resilient than ever before, but threats from terrorism persist and challenges remain. DHS and its many partners have made great strides to better mitigate and defend against dynamic threats, minimize risks, and maximize our ability to respond to and recover from attacks and disasters of all kinds. Over the past decade, we have expanded information sharing with a full range of partners; strengthened transportation security and the screening for weapons and explosives; improved cybersecurity and the protection of critical infrastructure; bolstered the security of our borders; and improved emergency preparedness and response by providing grants and training and exercises to states, cities, and communities across the country.

More and more state, local, tribal, and international law enforcement officers, as well as citizens, businesses, and communities, are on the frontlines of detection and prevention. The Department of Homeland Security remains committed to ensuring our partners have the tools and information they need to help keep our nation safe.

— April Williamson conducted and served as Lead Editor for this interview.