Every year, our nation commemorates the anniversary of September 11, memorializing the lives lost and honoring people who risked their lives to save many. In the 14 years since this tragedy, a sense of unity still resides, driving the ongoing need to reflect on the nation's homeland security needs and efforts moving forward.

In the aftermath of September 11, the Homeland Security Act of 2002 created the Department of Homeland Security. Twenty-two separate federal agencies integrated into a unified department, responsible for securing and preparing the United States for confrontation of any threat. [1]

For the U.S. military, the 9/11 attacks prompted a new era of war-fighting in which increased intelligence collection, manhunts and commando strikes surpassed methods used in prior conflicts. Our nation confronted terrorism through immediate response and launched ground wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. [2]

“There had been a fairly lengthy hiatus there where we had been a peacetime force, training people for an eventuality we hoped would never come,” said retired Gen. James T. Conway, the former Marine Corps commandant who led troops in the 2003 Iraq invasion. “But it put us back on a war footing. We realized it from Day One. Things changed dramatically on 9/11 because we knew that our country would not sit still and let that go unpunished.” [2]

After President George W. Bush declared the “War on Terror,” it was known that the U.S. military had a new adversary, Muslim fundamentalists and Iraqi insurgents, who used tactics such as suicide bombers, improvised explosive devices (IEDs), beheadings and other means to repress American involvement. These methods caused the military, particularly the Army, to develop a new plan to counter violent extremism: counterinsurgency and counterterrorism. [3] Military strategists believe that threats to contemporary national security today are best described as a global insurgency, and will ultimately be the wars of the future. [4]

Counterinsurgency is more than combat. The Pentagon has devoted billions of dollars to countering the IED threat, a primary cause of casualties in
Afghanistan. Counter-IED technologies include electronic jammers, surveillance equipment and robots. [2]

In many ways, the 9/11 attacks established a unity of effort and progression of joint work within agency boundaries. Because of the sheer quantity of terrorist incidents, many agencies now work together to fight back. Three unified commands within the DoD (SOCOM, CENTCOM and NORTHCOM) deal with terrorism as a primary concern. In addition to these three unified commands, six others have regional responsibilities, including at least two military branches established to provide effective control of U.S. military forces in peace and war. [5] The convergence of branches points toward an unprecedented chance for the U.S. military to raise efficiency of training and preparedness to have better capabilities respond to tomorrow's imminent threats.

References:

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