

**Center for Strategic and International Studies**

**The National Security Division at 10: Past, Present, and Future**

**Keynote Address by Denis McDonough**

**Speaker:**

**Denis McDonough,  
White House Chief of Staff**

**Introduced by:**

**John P. Carlin,  
Assistant Attorney General, National Security Division,  
Department of Justice**

**Location: CSIS Headquarters, Washington, D.C.**

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JOHN P. CARLIN: Our next – our next speaker, and it's my pleasure to introduce him, is Denis McDonough. Denis McDonough is currently our president's chief of staff, a position he assumed in February of 2013. But prior to fulfilling that role from the beginning of this administration, Denis had served in the National Security Council, and his most recent role before switching was as the deputy national security advisor. Before that, he was a longtime foreign policy expert. Those in law enforcement, the intelligence community, the military know that Denis has always been a friend to those in the enforcement community, and has worked hard to take seriously the problems that we confront and devise solutions. So please join me in welcoming him here today. (Applause.)

DENIS MCDONOUGH: Well, good morning, everybody. I noticed I was listed as a keynote speaker in the program, so if I get to keynote length something will have gone dramatically wrong.

John, thanks for a very kind introduction. It's great to be here.

When I got the invitation to come today, I was both honored and determined to make it. And I was determined to make it because of my admiration for the NSD, for its leaders, for its mission, but also for my deep appreciation for the terrific, terrific people that staff and run the NSD who have been identified and trained, and indeed, as I'll detail in a second, shared with us at the White House. So happy anniversary to you all, and thank you very much for the opportunity to be here.

In both mission and structure, the National Security Division gives form to the Department of Justice's highest priority: to combat terrorism and other threats to national security. It's designed, in fact, to ensure greater coordination and unity of purpose between prosecutors and law enforcement agencies, between intelligence attorneys and the intelligence community. Importantly, and I believe in a uniquely American way, the NSD recognizes, even embodies, our belief that our laws are preeminent – our laws and the rule of law are a preeminent tool in our fight against terrorism. And what a successful fight you have fought these first 10 years.

In counterterrorism, your attorneys played an important role in prosecuting such terrorists as Zacarias Moussaoui, the man who planned to attack JFK Airport, Arbabsiar and the plot right here in Washington, D.C., Warsame, and the coordination between al-Shabaab and AQAP, and a very coordinated and unique effort to draw on the full range of tools that we have in this fight.

In counterespionage, you're central to such investigations and prosecutions as those as Noshir Gowadia and Leandro Aragoncillo; Kendall and Gwendolyn Myers, who had spied for the Cubans for years; and the Russian illegals, an operation that not only serves a national interest but has also given us a new and exciting TV drama. (Laughter.)

And in intelligence operations, I think importantly, particularly given the ongoing debate in this country, you've worked to enhance the efficiency and ensure the integrity of the uniquely American FISA process.

NSD was at the forefront of our response to such threats as the al-Qaida plot in New York City subway, the attempted bombing of Northwest Airlines Flight 253 on Christmas Day, and then the bombing attempt at Times Square. In all these cases, the division's response underscored not only its significant contribution to prosecuting terrorists, but also – and I think this is critical – its significant contribution to preventing and disrupting future attacks and future plots.

So, over the years, as the threat environment has continued to evolve, NSD has also proven itself capable to adapt and tackle new challenges. This is perhaps most evident in your work on cybersecurity. Indeed, beginning under David and Lisa's leadership, and with an all-hands-on-deck approach, you've already successfully undergone another transformation and made cybersecurity a top priority the same way you did with counterterrorism in the aftermath of the terrible attacks on 9/11. Today, with your National Security Cyber Specialist network, you're helping to realize a vision that the president underscored when he said we need to ensure that – our prosperity and security online for generations to come.

These 10 years have been a function of a tireless dedication to mission and of the excellent people at NSD, but also a result of terrific leadership. You just heard from everybody: Ken; Patrick, who led the initial charge to bring together prosecutors and law enforcement agencies, intelligence attorneys and the intelligence community all as one team with the purpose of protecting the American people; David Kris, who was instrumental in breaking down the wall between intelligence and law enforcement agencies even before the creation of NSD, and who then as its leader brought his prodigious work ethic to bear on facilitating even greater cooperation; and John, who possesses a virtue of tackling – always tackling the biggest and toughest challenges with skill and dedication, but uniquely for this town never drawing attention to himself, only focusing on the mission.

So NSD has been blessed with the finest leadership. And, together with a team of top-notch public servants, you have accomplished big things. The president is grateful for that, and asked that I extend to you his thanks for that great work.

But NSD – and this is why it was so important to me to come in this current job – NSD has also blessed the rest of us, and in particular the White House, with your enormous human capital. NSD is good, but by sharing its talent – including with us at the White House in detailees and now permanent employees in many cases – the rest of us are better. Consider this terrific list of detailees to the White House just in this administration: Carrie Bassen (sp), David Newman, Jim Walsh, Charles Luftig, Josh Geltzer, Samir Jain (sp), Lucian Sikorski (sp), Stephanie Raymond (sp), Robert Miranda, Anthony Ferrante, Kevin Stefanik (sp), Michael Gee (sp), Garth Harbison (sp), Amy Pope, Nate Jones, Kate Heinzelman, Beth George – and, of course, none other than the indefatigable Lisa Monaco, your fourth assistant attorney general for national security. Now, you'll spend some time with her later this morning, but I can tell you that she is perhaps the single most critical person on the president's staff, and she brings to that position of trust and responsibility the same attributes that NSD brings to its mission, to its building, and to this country: teamwork, dedication, a focus on facts not ideology, and as I said earlier a belief that our laws and indeed the rule of law strengthen and distinguish us. And for that reason, we're all safer.

So I thank you again for inviting me, for your work, for your dedication, and most of all for sharing with us this terrific human capital – Lisa, by the way, most of all. So, happy anniversary. God bless. Thanks again. (Applause.)

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