To answer critical questions about homeland security and counterterrorism, the Aspen Institute’s Homeland Security Program, in partnership with The New York Times and CNN’s Security Clearance website, presents the third annual Aspen Security Forum. The Forum begins the evening of Wednesday, July 17 at 6:00 PM and ends on Saturday, July 20, 2013.

The Forum is an annual summer gathering at our signature "Aspen Meadows" campus in Colorado of top-level present and former government officials from all relevant homeland security/counterterrorism agencies (the White House; Departments of Homeland Security, Defense, State, Justice, and Treasury; the intelligence community; and Congress); industry leaders (large and small homeland security/counterterrorism-related companies, as well as private equity investors, merchant and investment bankers, venture capitalists, and other financiers); leading thinkers (in other think tanks and academe); nationally noted print and broadcast journalists; and concerned citizens. During three days of in-depth conversation, participants explore various aspects of cyber security; intelligence; counterterrorism strategy; aviation security; maritime security; border security; mass transit security; critical infrastructure protection; “soft targets” security; terrorism finance; and more.
FOR MORE THAN 60 YEARS, the Aspen Institute has been the nation’s premier gathering place for diverse leaders from disparate disciplines around the globe to engage in deep dialogue on the ideas and issues that both shape our lives and challenge our times. The Institute’s mission is twofold: to foster values-based leadership, encouraging individuals to reflect on the ideals and ideas that define a good society, and to provide a neutral and balanced venue for discussing and acting on critical issues. The Institute offers, among other things, a host of programs for intellectually curious, civically engaged members of the general public.

What a difference a year makes! Last summer, top-level government officials, policy experts, industry leaders, and nationally noted national security reporters gathered at the third annual Aspen Security Forum in Aspen, Colo., to consider the question of whether the war on terror was finally over. At that point, with Bin Laden dead and gone, and untold numbers of would-be rivals, lieutenants and foot soldiers either dead themselves or on the run, core Al Qaeda seemed all but irrelevant. Policy makers and pundits were beginning to dig out and dust off their cold playbooks, pondering anew traditional national security threats from perennial nation-state antagonists like Iran and North Korea; scratching their heads and pulling their chins over the middle of the Arab Spring, all while keeping a wary eye on China’s economic, political and military rise and its implications for America’s continued geopolitical primacy.

Well, not so fast. It took only a couple of homemade explosives placed strategically along a marathon route in Boston by two misfit brothers to remind us of what 9/11 should have seared into our national consciousness forever. Yes, America is unique in many ways. But we are no more immune from the virus of terrorism than Israel, or Britain, or any other country. If anything, because of our outside role on the world stage; our openness and tolerance; our very, for want of a more precise term, Americanness: our very uniqueness, ironically enough, makes us the single biggest terror
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very success has made the much easier task of attacking softer targets like sports venues, shopping malls, restaurants and movie theaters that much more appealing, and, therefore, that much more likely.

And people forget that terrorism, interestingly enough, is only partly about killing and injuring people. While a goal is to kill and maim as many people as possible, terrorism’s main goal is to terrorize everybody else. And, if anything, an attack on a literally open target like a marathon route that kills three people in a city like Boston that is not known to be in terrorists’ crosshairs can be said to be even more terrifying than a mass attack on an iconic site in Washington or Manhattan that everyone expects to be at the top of terrorists’ target list.

So, as we gather on July 17–20 for this summer’s fourth annual Aspen Security Forum, we will meet at a time when we have the worst of all possible worlds ... The prospect of a “new normal,” with random attacks on soft targets from coast to coast and everywhere in between. The continued prospect of one-off Benghazi-like attacks on diplomatic and military facilities and other symbols of American power abroad. And, from Damascus to Tehran to Pyongyang, as volatile and complicated a mix of nation-state threats as we have seen since the end of the Cold War.

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To ponder and puzzle over the questions these multiple crises pose for policy makers, the Aspen Security Forum, organized by the Aspen Institute’s Homeland Security Program, has assembled another Who’s Who of the leading names in national-security and homeland-security circles. Among our confirmed speakers to date are:

- Deputy Secretary of Defense Ash Carter
- U.S. Air Force Chief of Staff General Mark Welsh
- Commander of U.S. Special Operations Command Admiral William McRaven and former Commander Admiral Eric Olson
- Commander of U.S. Cyber Command and Director of the National Security Agency General Keith Alexander
- Director of the Defense Intelligence Agency General Michael Flynn
- Former Commander of U.S. Africa Command General Carter Ham
- Former Commander of the International Security Assistance Force and U.S. Forces Afghanistan General John Allen
- Former Commander of the U.S. Pacific Fleet Admiral Patrick Walsh
- Director of the National Geospatial–Intelligence Agency Letitia Long
- Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict Michael Sheehan
- Secretary of Homeland Security Janet Napolitano and former Secretary of Homeland Security Michael Chertoff

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Issues will be explored in depth in one on-one conversations or panels moderated by some of the nation’s foremost journalists, including CNN’s Wolf Blitzer: CBS’s Lesley Stahl, Chris Isham and Dan Raviv; NBC’s Patti Williams and Mike Isikoff; ABC’s Brian Ross; Fox’s Catherine Herridge; NPR’s Dina Temple-Raston; The New York Times’s David Sanger and Eric Schmitt; The Washington Post’s Robert O’Harrow; The Wall Street Journal’s Sinthia Gorman; The Economist’s Edward McInide; Associated Press’s Kimberly Dozier; Time’s Massimo Calabresi; Politico’s Josh Gerstein; The New Yorker’s Ryan Lizza; and Foreign Policy’s Susan Glasser.

Excerpts from the award-winning documentary about the search for Osama Bin Laden, “Manhunt,” based on the book of the same name by CNN national security analyst and terrorism expert Peter Bergen, will be screened, and a discussion will follow featuring Bergen and the director and producer, Greg Barker. The forum is co-sponsored with CNN’s Security Clearance Blog and The New York Times. This summer’s sponsors are Academi; IBM; Microsoft; the Robert R. McCormick Foundation; Raytheon; and Target.

For those who are national security professionals, and those who are simply profoundly concerned about national security, the Aspen Security Forum is not to be missed. While there are any number of security conferences each year in Washington and elsewhere around the country, there is nothing quite like the Aspen Security Forum.

To register and for additional information, please visit aspensecurityforum.org. *