world's vast oil wealth and its rich cultural and intellectual history, the region has languished, in large part, because its leaders refused to enact the liberalizations necessary to unleash the power of hundreds of millions of people.

After the 9/11 attacks, the President and other senior administration officials vowed to ''drain the swamp'' that birthed al Qaeda and other radical Islamists. Now, after two wars, thousands of casualties and hundreds of billions of dollars, the people of the Arab and greater Muslim world are beginning to drain the swamp on their own.

Last fall, the people of Afghanistan, who only 3 years ago were suffering under the medieval yoke of the Taliban, voted in large numbers in that country's first presidential election, and later this year, they will return to the polls to select a new parliament.

In early January, the Palestinian people took concrete steps to end the Arafat era's corruption and embrace of terrorism and elected Mahmoud Abbas as their new president.

Later that month, in an inspiring acts of collective courage, millions of Iraqis defied a vicious insurgency to cast ballots for a new national assembly that will draft a constitution for a permanent Iraqi government.

In the past two weeks, we have seen the people of Lebanon respond to the savage car bombing that claimed the life of former prime minister Rafiq Hariri by peacefully calling for the restoration of Lebanese sovereignty. Lebanon's ''cedar revolution'' has already invited comparisons with Ukraine's ''orange revolution'' that swept Viktor Yuschenko into power last December.

Today, Saudi Arabians voted in the second of three regional rounds of municipal elections, the kingdom's first, and last Sunday President Mubarak of Egypt proposed a change to the Egyptian constitution that will provide for direct contested elections of president, and he urged its quick adoption so that this fall's election would be held under the new system.

Individually these developments vary in significance. The Saudi elections, for example, are open only to men, and the Egyptian reforms could end up being an effort to fend off rather than promote democracy. Collectively, however, these stirrings of democracy could be the long-awaited beginning of a seismic shift in the politics of the Muslim world. If so, our national security will be enhanced.

For too long, American foreign policy in the Middle East rested on a Faustian bargain with the ruling elites. Even as the Middle Eastern regimes presided over populations who detested them, successive American administrations provided material and political support. As long as the rulers guaranteed the continued flow of reasonably priced oil, we were willing to ignore the turmoil bubbling beneath them.

To some extent, this policy was fueled by American policy makers' belief that Arab and Islamic societies were somehow incompatible with democracy. It was also the product of a genuine fear of what democracy in the Arab world would mean for American influence in the region. The Iranian revolution of 1979 was seen as a harbinger of what could happen throughout the region if American allied regimes loosened their grip.

After 9/11 and the explosive growth of Islamic radicalism throughout the Muslim world, we have come belatedly to the realization that the best antidote for terrorism is democracy. Much of the hatred towards the United States in the Arab world is a direct consequence of our support for despotic regimes.

The administration and Congress need to continue to push our friends in the region to do more to ensure that the tentative steps that we have seen do lead to a new birth of freedom in the Muslim world.

I am particularly concerned about Egypt and its 73 million people. Egypt is the intellectual, political and cultural heart of the Arab world. It is a long-standing American ally that has played a crucial role in the search for peace between Israel and its Arab neighbors. But even as President Mubarak and the Egyptian government have shown great leadership in the quest for peace, they have dragged their heels when it comes to the political and economic reform that is crucial if Egypt is to remain a regional leader.

Recently the Egyptian government arrested Ayman Nour, the leader of a small pro-democracy party in the Egyptian parliament. Nour's arrest is widely seen as politically motivated and precipitated a decision by Secretary Rice to cancel a planned trip to Cairo this week.

I have introduced a resolution calling on Egypt to release Nour and embrace the reforms just announced by President Mubarak. As an important ally, we must not stand idly by and watch Egypt take steps that threaten not only democracy, but our own security.

Throughout the 20th Century, America fought to expand the reach of liberty and democracy, first against Nazism and fascism, and then against Soviet communism. Now with the dawn of the 21st Century, we are again faced with both the fundamental challenge to our core values and the opportunity to bring those values to millions of people. Mr. Speaker, we can and must both meet the challenge and seize the opportunity.

THREAT TO UNITED STATES STILL VERY REAL

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from New York (Mr. FOSSELLA) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. FOSSELLA. Mr. Speaker, the threat to the United States is still very real. Just yesterday it became public that one of the terrorists responsible for the Madrid train bombings had sketches of New York City's Grand Central Station on his computer.

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A few days ago it was reported that Osama bin Laden was caught urging some of his associates to take the threat to the United States once again. Clearly the threat to our country is real, and it is essential that we have a comprehensive strategy for distributing our homeland security grant funding to confront it.

That is why today I am introducing the Responsible Funding For First Responders Act of 2005. The bill reforms the current formula used to distribute homeland security grant money.

Yesterday, our newly confirmed Homeland Security Secretary said, ''I think we owe the American people a more focused and priorities driven'' funding formula. This bill aims to achieve just that.

Over the past few years, we have gone a long way in fighting terrorism. Last year, Congress passed a meaningful intelligence reform which implements many of the 9/11 Commission's recommendations. However there was one recommendation that we did not address adequately.

The 9/11 Commission explicitly stated ''homeland security assistance should be based strictly on assessment of risks and vulnerabilities.'' This bill would put that recommendation, which I think is common sense to most Americans, into effect.

In introducing the bill, I wish to start the debate anew and begin working towards a meaningful first responders funding reform. Since September 11 homeland security funds have been distributed under a formula that requires a minimum of .75 percent to go to each State, and then the remainder is distributed on what we call a per capita basis.

The block grant formula, where most of the funding has originated, does not consider threat at all. This means that almost 40 percent of the money is distributed equally to each State as a result of that minimum, about $1.5 billion. Congress needs to do better.

This year the President's budget once again distributes all the funds based on threat. His fiscal year 2006 budget request which distributes a little over $1 billion in State homeland security grants is based upon risks, threats, vulnerabilities, and unmet essential capabilities.

Let me say what this bill is not. This bill is not designed to pit one area of the country against another. It is designed, I think again speaking to the common sense and conventional wisdom of the American people, to identify where the vulnerabilities are, identify where the threats exist, identify where the risks are and send the money to those areas accordingly.

Why New York City in particular, for example, I think is still a target, let us look what happened after the first

bombing of the World Trade Center that took place in 1993.

In between the bombing in 1993 and the tragic day of September 11, there was a conspiracy to destroy the Holland and the Lincoln tunnels, the George Washington Bridge, the United Nations and the Main Federal Building in Lower Manhattan, as well as a plot to bomb the subway system. The plot was foiled at the last minute by New York City police officers who broke down the door of two individuals who were putting finishing touches on the device.

Since then major media outlets in New York City were the subject of anthrax attacks. In February of 2003 a seasoned al Qaeda operative named Iyman Faris was in New York City on a mission to destroy the Brooklyn Bridge. Faris fought alongside bin Laden, engaged in a battle which included the wholesale slaughter of Russian prisoners and helped supply al Qaeda fighters more recently with sleeping bags, airline tickets, cash and cell phones.

Nearly 2 years after the destruction of the Trade Center, Faris was in New York City conducting surveillance on the Brooklyn Bridge. Faris reported back to his handlers that ''the weather is too hot,'' meaning that security was too tight for the plot to succeed. He was deterred this time.

New York City nevertheless remains a prime al Qaeda target.

Most recently, just before the 2004 Republican National Convention in New York City, two suspected terrorists were arrested for yet another plot to destroy the subway system, this time near Herald Square in midtown Manhattan.

I think it is in our national interest to move this process forward to a point that just makes sense. It is one thing for Congress to come together and compromise how much of the funding is distributed among the States and towns and villages and cities across the country, for example, agricultural funding or funding for our national security; but when it comes to the lives of the American people and the millions of people who come to our shores annually, it is responsible and above all it is not a Democrat or Republican issue. It is just common sense to send the money where it is needed the most. That is what this bill seeks to do.

TALE OF TWO YOUNG MEN

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. DAVIS of Kentucky). Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. POE) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. POE. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak about two young men. They both grew up in Houston, Texas. They both grew up without any family support. They both were basically raised by others. They were both named Michael. And they both chose careers in the criminal justice system.

Michael Lopez chose in the criminal justice system the career of crime. He started committing violent crimes at the age of 11. He spent a lot of time in and out of the criminal justice system. He was a gang member, a drug abuser, committed numerous robberies against other juveniles, a burglar, and a thug in his own community.

Michael Eakin also chose criminal justice as a career, but he chose it as a police officer. Their paths crossed on a quiet peaceful night in Houston, Texas, after Officer Eakin stopped Lopez and his fellow gang members who were cruising Houston, Texas, looking for criminal opportunities.

When Officer Eakin stopped the vehicle, Lopez jumped from the vehicle, took off running and Officer Eakin made the decision to chase Michael Lopez. After capturing Lopez, Lopez pulled out a pistol, pointed it at point blank range and shot Officer Eakin, and then he fled in the darkness of the night.

Lopez was 17 and on probation for criminal offenses. Eakin was 24 and a rookie police officer. Lopez was charged with capital murder of a police officer. In Texas, a 17-year-old is an adult by State law for criminal law purposes and not a juvenile.

It is a long-established rule of law that the States determine the age of accountability for criminal law purposes. Not the Federal Government, not the Federal courts.

I was the judge in the Lopez case, having been a judge for 22 years in criminal cases. A jury heard the case in my court. A jury found the defendant Michael Lopez guilty of capital murder of a police officer. Court TV even showed this on national television. The same jury unanimously found the defendant would be a continuing threat to society in the future. The jury unanimously found there was no mitigation that would warrant a sentence less than death with Michael Lopez.

The defendant was assessed the death penalty by a jury in 6 hours. During sentencing I referred to the defendant as a street terrorist based upon the evidence in the case. On appeal, the highest court in Texas referred to the defendant as a mean little guy and upheld the death penalty.

Now the Supreme Court has gotten involved in these types of cases and declared once and for all that no one 17 or under can be executed for the crimes that they commit. Citing international court decisions and the so-called evolving United States Constitution, the Court yesterday struck down these types of cases five to four.

The Supreme Court of the United States should not look to foreign courts for guidance but to the United States Constitution because that is what they are sworn to uphold. The Supreme Court once again has discriminated against victims based upon the age of the defendant. Whether or not a person agrees or disagrees with the death penalty, whether or not a person feels the age of accountability should be 17 or 18 or 21, there is no precedent in law that the Supreme Court may arbitrarily say a 17-year-old is a mere child and an 18-year-old is an adult.

The Supreme Court has once again promoted the philosophy that America is becoming the land of excusable conduct in our criminal courts. There should be consequences for criminal conduct even for 17-year-olds.

The Supreme Court has replaced the law of the land with its own personal opinion and European thought. This is an affront to the rule of law, to the Constitution, to the 10th amendment. It is an affront to the peace officers in the United States, and it is an affront to Officer Michael Eakin and his family.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from California (Ms. WOOLSEY) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Ms. WOOLSEY addressed the House. Her remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Oregon (Mr. DEFAZIO) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. DEFAZIO addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. BROWN) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. BROWN of Ohio addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. PALLONE) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. PALLONE addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. CUMMINGS) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. CUMMINGS addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from New York (Mr. ENGEL) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. ENGEL addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from California (Ms. LEE) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Ms. LEE addressed the House. Her remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)