Discussion Guide

For more information, visit:
http://www.pbs.org/inthebalance/terrorism/

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Welcome to *In the Balance*

Over twenty years ago, television news pioneer Fred W. Friendly brought to public television a unique series of programs in which participants were forced to put their principles to the test in gripping dilemmas drawn from real life. Now the production company founded by Fred Friendly ushers his vision into a new millennium with *In the Balance*. Beginning with this two-part series on terrorism, *In the Balance* will bring together people in power to confront some of the greatest dilemmas of our time. The fast-paced, in-the-round dialogue may have a new look, but one thing is unchanged: The requirement that panelists put aside their speeches, make hard decisions, and talk to each other rather than past each other.

**Introduction**

How has the threat of terrorism changed us? And how should it change us in the future?

In this *In the Balance* series, we bring together leaders who are experts in preventing and responding to terrorism. Participants came from the media, the police, the FBI; from public health and hospitals; from city halls, state capitals, Congress and the White House. We challenged them with two scenarios that drew on their experiences, their plans—and their fears. As they grappled with the dilemmas, they revealed their thinking on the immense questions the nation and the world now face: How much of the daily battles in the war on terrorism should be revealed to the public? Have we done all we can to prevent or to be prepared for, an attack? How far are we falling short? What are the economic trade-offs of increased security? Must civil liberties be sacrificed for the sake of safety? In our treatment of terrorist suspects, do we risk undermining the values we stand for as a nation?

This series explores some very hard choices facing leaders. But the questions this series raises are not just for the politicians or first responders: They are for you. What have you done, and what more can you do, to prepare yourself and your family in case of an attack? What does it mean for an individual to be “vigilant”? Where do you stand on the trade-offs between civil liberties and security, and how have you made your opinions known?
The attacks of September 11th irrevocably changed the nation. But the challenges we face also present an opportunity for each of us to change for the better: to be better prepared, better informed, better able to help ourselves and each other. It is our hope that these programs, discussion guide and Web site will help each of us as we rise to the challenge.

**How to Use This Guide**

Discussions may be structured in a variety of ways, depending on the audience and the time available. Prescreen each program to determine the best strategy and segments for your group. The segments you choose may be screened one at a time, with discussions after each segment, or a program may be viewed in its entirety with a discussion following.

Here are some recommendations for leading an effective discussion:

**Determining Time and Schedule:**

- If you plan to screen an entire program first, with discussion to follow, allow a few minutes for an introduction, 55 minutes for the program, and an hour or so for discussion, for a total of two hours for the event.

- An excellent way to screen a program is in segments, stopping for discussion after each chapter. A richer, more detailed discussion is likely to ensue. If the segment-by-segment format is used, reserve at least two hours, and perhaps two and a half hours, for the event.

- One may also screen one chapter or a few chapters at a time, with in-depth discussion of each, over the course of several meetings.

The needs of your audience may determine what format and schedule would be most effective.
Leading the Discussion:

One moderator may lead the discussion. In addition, consider whether there are any relevant experts, public officials, or community leaders in your area who could serve on a panel to help answer questions raised in the discussion, or raise additional questions and comments.

During the Discussion:

• Have participants introduce themselves.

• Use the pre-viewing questions to get participants thinking about the issues.

• Consider the listed discussion questions as suggestions. Feel free to alter them or create new ones, especially if you know enough about the participants’ backgrounds to select issues that are meaningful to them. Listen carefully to the answers and adjust your next questions accordingly.

• Stay flexible, ask open-ended questions, and guide the discussion, don’t control it.

• Encourage debate and differences of opinion by playing devil’s advocate at times.

• Have participants explain how they reached their conclusions.

• Encourage members of the group to interact with one another, discussing the ideas expressed and keeping criticism constructive.

• Summarize key points raised at the conclusion of the discussion, and consider plans for “next steps” with participants.

Program One: BioAttack

One day a videotape appears on a journalist’s desk. It claims to be a warning from terrorists, saying a group of the nation’s largest malls have been targeted, and those who shop over Thanksgiving weekend will die. The tape is found to be credible. The journalist, and soon afterward the federal government and state and local governments at the sites of the targeted malls,
face some very difficult choices. Among them: When should the public be told of this threat?

The journalists and government leaders make their choices. Thanksgiving comes, Thanksgiving goes, and, it appears, no attack takes place. Sadly, those appearances are wrong, as becomes clear when some residents of Springfield, home of the nation’s largest mall, come down with an unusual and fatal disease.

Biological terror adds another dimension to the horrors of a "straightforward" physical attack: the possibility that one may be a victim and not know it—until it is too late. As individuals attempt to save themselves from the unleashed pathogen, and the government attempts to contain it, daily life and economic activity in entire regions could come to a halt. Meanwhile, already strained health institutions would struggle to care for the victims, the possible victims, and the worried well—beginning with the task of differentiating one group from another.

Because of the unique nature of a biological attack, its ultimate toll may depend to a huge degree on public behavior. In addition to a strong health system, the best defense against such an attack is a well-informed public that receives and follows clear guidance on how to minimize risks of infection, and that helps rather than hinders the efforts to get medical assistance to those who need it most. By watching and discussing this program, you can begin the process of becoming part of that defense.

Questions to Discuss Before Viewing the Program:

- It is early in the morning on a weekday; you and your family are getting ready for work and school. Suddenly the regular morning news is interrupted by a bulletin stating that three people have died of an unusual disease that may be the result of a bioterrorist attack. No other information is available. What do you do? Do you have any plan in place for such an event?

- What material supplies do you have at home in preparation for an emergency?

- Do you know which of your neighbors might need special assistance in the event of an emergency? Do you know whether your community has any arrangements to provide such assistance?
• What assistance would you like to have in preparing for an attack or other emergency? How could government, the media, or other institutions in your community best provide that assistance?

Chapter One: "You See an Envelope on Your Desk . . ."

Six days before Thanksgiving, a journalist walks into his office and finds an unmarked videotape on his desk. When he plays it, he sees a warning to the people of America, claiming that the largest shopping malls in the nation will be attacked over the Thanksgiving weekend.

Pause at 9:28 after Dale Watson says, "... you can investigate to prevent, certainly."

• What would you do first if you were a journalist and the tape had come to you?

• If the tape is found to be credible, do you as a journalist have an obligation at some point to inform the public? Even if the government requests that you not disclose it?

• As a citizen, what would you want a journalist to do with this information? Would you want to be told about it?

• Should the government always share with the public any information it has about a threat of terrorist attack? Why or why not?

• What if the journalist received the tape from a source that claimed to want to save lives—and who required a promise of complete confidentiality before handing over the tape? Should the journalist keep the promise to protect the source's identity?

Chapter Two: "Do they close the mall?"

The journalists hand the tape over to the federal government, which determines the threat to be credible and supported by other intelligence. While
state and local officials are being informed, the president must decide when and how the public will be informed, and whether the threatened shopping malls should be closed.

**Pause at 15:53 after Warren Rudman says, "Or else be prepared to close down infrastructure almost on a daily basis."

- The mayor and police chief note that federal officials have not always done a good job of providing timely information to them. What would you do as a mayor to improve the information flow? What would you do as head of Homeland Security? How can classified security information get to those who need it without risking leaks?

- What questions would you have for government leaders once the threat is made public?

- The president decides to inform the American public of the threat, but advises against closing the malls. If you were a public leader, how would you answer the question, "Should people go shopping over Thanksgiving weekend?"

- Would your answer be different if you were a private citizen being asked for advice by a family member?

**Chapter Three: "A public threat? I have a sprained ankle!"

Nothing seems to happen over Thanksgiving weekend. But the Tuesday after Thanksgiving, 45-year-old John Smith arrives by ambulance at Springfield’s largest hospital. A person with no other health problems, Smith came down with what appeared to be the flu two days earlier. When he arrives at the hospital he is coughing up blood, and dies soon afterward. Other reports indicate that in the past 24 hours there have been several unusual fatalities from a disease that at first resembles the flu. The ER physician must deal with the fact that the others who were in the ER with Mr. Smith and his family may have been exposed to a very dangerous disease.

**Pause at 27:37 after Dale Watson says, "In parallel, yes."**
• Wilmer Alvarez notes that federal guidelines call for hospitals to have at least one isolation room in preparation for the outbreak of a dangerous contagious disease. Should more be required? Should more tax dollars be spent to assist hospitals in these preparations?

• Many hours before the diagnosis is confirmed by lab tests, the emergency room physician and public health commissioner suspect that John Smith died of pneumonic plague. Should they share those suspicions with the public before they are confirmed? Should they share them with others at the hospital—patients and staff—before they are confirmed?

• Should the hospital be able to prevent someone who may have been exposed to the disease from leaving? What would you do if you were the emergency room physician and the person insisted on leaving?

Chapter Four: "The lab calls back. It is plague."

Soon, the mayor and state and federal authorities are informed about the possible bioattack, and the story becomes public. At each level government authorities gear up to respond.

Pause at 34:42 after Richard Clarke says, "states may want to quarantine, other countries are certainly going to want to quarantine."

• Dr. Goldschmitt observes that "during the anthrax scare, the shelves were made bare, because everyone went in and grabbed" antibiotics that could be used to treat anthrax. What should be done to protect pharmacies' stocks of needed antibiotics in an emergency? Who should get the antibiotics in pharmacies, and how should they be distributed?

• Do you know how best to avoid being exposed to a disease spread by airborne droplets, such as pneumonic plague? How would you find out? Do you know whom you would call for health care if you feared you were exposed in a bioattack? Do you consider yourself prepared for such an event?

• So far the outbreak is limited to Springfield, one of the locations threatened in the terrorist videotape. What would you do if you were the mayor of one of the other threatened locations? What would you do if
you were a resident of one of the other threatened locations? What would you do if you lived in an area that was populous, had a shopping mall, but was not threatened in the tape?

Chapter Five: The Press Conference

Under some intense questioning by the press, the mayor and public health commissioner inform the public of what they know, and what steps individuals should take.

Pause at 42:05 after Frank Sesno says, “We are part of this process now. And that’s part of our responsibility.”

• Health Commissioner Susan Allan advises those with a cough and fever to call their doctor immediately rather than go to the emergency room, but Jake Tapper observes that for the uninsured of Springfield, “the emergency room is their doctor.” Has the fact that millions of Americans lack health insurance become a security issue as well as a health issue?

• James Gilmore accuses the journalists questioning the mayor of “assign[ing] blame” and “sowing panic.” Do you agree? What questions would you ask if you were at the press conference? What would you want to know if you were at home watching the press conference?

Chapter Six: "People are terrified."

The story of the apparent bioterrorist attack in Springfield is the lead story across the nation and the world. Residents of Springfield are terrified, and some, instead of taking the government’s advice and remaining home, are attempting to flee the area. The governor is considering quarantine.

Meanwhile, it is flu season, and thousands of residents are showing up at Springfield hospitals, afraid that a cough and fever could be the first symptoms of a disease that can kill them in 48 hours if untreated. The hospitals are overwhelmed.

Pause at 46:16 after Susan Allan says, “it’s much more like a battlefield approach to health care.”
• The governor argues that some form of quarantine to prevent people from fleeing Springfield may be necessary, while the health commissioner and police chief argue that "it is too late" and resources should be directed to other tasks. With whom do you agree?

• Despite instructions to remain home, would you consider leaving Springfield after the story of the bioattack became public? Do you believe government attempts to keep you in the city would be appropriate?

• What if you lived in a city near Springfield, and some Springfield residents tried to flee to your city? Would you wish to stop them if you could? How would you want your city to deal with the Springfield residents?

• Wilmer Alvarez and Susan Allan describe health care for the thousands coming to the hospital as something close to "field triage." Does your local hospital have a plan in place for such an event? How could you find out? Does the plan include enlisting and training volunteers in advance of such an event?

Chapter Seven: The Antibiotics Arrive

A massive amount of antibiotics from the Strategic National Stockpile arrive in Springfield. The health commissioner wants to focus distribution efforts on those diagnosed with the disease, and all those likely to have been within the shared breathing space of those with the disease. Because all those who have contracted the disease so far were residents of the northeast quadrant of Springfield—the wealthy part of town—the first distribution center will be located in that neighborhood. But other residents would like all the antibiotics to be distributed to everyone in Springfield immediately.

Pause at 51:28 after Jake Tapper says, "nobody really knows what's going on here yet."
• Susan Allan says it is not a realistic goal to distribute antibiotics to all one million residents of Springfield at once. How could residents of other parts of Springfield be convinced not to swarm the distribution center in the northeast part of town? What would convince you to stay home rather than head for the distribution center?

• Does your city or county have a plan to man distribution centers in response to a health emergency? Can individuals or organizations volunteer now to assist in such a plan? How could you find out?

• What should be done for those who should receive antibiotics but cannot get to the distribution center?

• What could public officials do now to help retain public trust during an event such as this?

Chapter Eight: Conclusion

Two weeks after the attacks, five hundred cases of plague were confirmed and over three hundred people are dead. As the program concludes, panelists consider how best we can prepare today to respond to such a scenario.

• Having witnessed this scenario unfold, what more can be done to prepare for such an event by:
  
  • the federal government?
  • state and local governments?
  • hospitals, doctors and public health officials?
  • journalists?
  • your workplace?
  • your local schools?
  • your community?
  • local volunteer organizations?
  • you?

Program Two: City Under Siege
After bombs hidden in empty baby strollers go off in two major amusement parks within days of each other, leaders must deal with fears that the bombs are the beginning of a series of terrorist attacks. They must grapple with how to advise the public: Do they urge them to be more “vigilant”? In this context, what does vigilance mean?

For one citizen, those questions become immediate when he overhears an ambiguous but suspicious telephone conversation by someone waiting at the DMV. Should authorities be informed of the call?

While the overheard telephone call and hundreds of other leads are being investigated, intelligence agencies unearth some very credible and very disturbing information about a plot to smuggle one or more dirty bombs in shipping containers going to Port City. Eventually a confidential informant identifies a particular port employee as part of the plot. Without knowing who else is involved in the plot—or where the bombs are—leaders must struggle with how best to prevent an attack. The president chooses to keep the port employee under intense surveillance. To avoid tipping off the terrorists, he keeps the information from the public, and even from state and local governments including Port City’s. Is that the right choice?

When it appears the port employee is about to leave the country, he is picked up for questioning, and soon he tells his lawyer that he does know where the bombs are—and that they will go off within hours. At that point leaders are faced with the most painful dilemma of all: What would they do to get the information they need from the suspect?

City Under Siege forces us to consider how we as a nation should—and should not—change in the face of a terrorist threat, and how our values as well as our safety may be at risk in the war on terrorism. As the nation weighs civil liberties against security, it is essential that members of the public take part in the dialogue. Viewing and discussing this program is one way to begin.

Questions to Discuss Before Viewing the Program:

- What does it mean to be “vigilant” in one’s daily activities? Do you know? Does the advice to be vigilant have any meaning to you?

- Have you ever considered alerting authorities of something such as an unattended package? What about an overheard conversation that you
found suspicious? Did you ultimately contact authorities or decide against it? Why?

• Do you believe that in some situations civil liberties must be sacrificed to obtain security? In what situations do you believe such a sacrifice is appropriate? Are there other situations in which you believe the government has gone too far in the name of security? Are there still other situations in which you are unsure where the balance should be struck?

• Should torture of a suspected terrorist ever be acceptable?

Chapter One: The Stroller Bombs

Two deadly bombings take place within a few days of each other in amusement parks in two different American cities. In each instance witnesses reported seeing an unattended baby stroller at the site moments before the explosion.

Pause at 9:28 after Flynn says, "nobody really has it under control."

• Would it be irresponsible—or simply accurate—for a journalist to describe the bombings as terrorism? Why?

• What are the responsibilities of public officials, such as the mayors of cities with amusement parks, in this situation? What are the responsibilities of owners of amusement parks? What are the responsibilities of owners of other places where people congregate, such as theaters or stadiums?

• Would a security guard at an amusement park be justified in examining more intensely a group of park patrons that appeared to be speaking Arabic? Or someone that, in the guard’s opinion, looked Arabic? Why or why not?

• Ahmed Younis says, "the leadership in my city . . . has yet to engage with the community at my mosque or at my church and let us know how we can be of service." If you were the mayor, how would you engage Younis’s community? What message would you bring to the
mosques, churches, and temples of your city? (Would the message be identical in each venue? Why or why not?)

- If you were a public leader, would you encourage Americans to continue with their recreation plans, including trips to amusement parks?

Chapter Two: The Overheard Conversation

Someone overhears the following telephone conversation at the Department of Motor Vehicles office: "Listen, don’t go to Harbor Stadium. Please, I’m telling you, people will get hurt there and I don’t want you anywhere near that place." The person overhearing the conversation also hears information—a customer number—which authorities could use to identify the speaker.

Pause at 15:45 after Robert Khuzami says, "maybe you don’t want to wait very long because of the fear of another attack."

- What would you do if you overheard the conversation? What factors do you weigh in making your decision? Would you have any concern about the fate of the speaker after you reported him to the authorities? Should that affect your decision, or not?

- While Jamie Gorelick acknowledges that "concerns about harassing someone" may be legitimate, she would pass the tip to law enforcement and "assume that they will do their jobs in a professional way." Would you make the same assumption?

- Do "vigilant" citizens have a duty to listen in on each others' conversations? How might that affect community life?

- Would it matter to you if the speaker were young or old? Male or female? With a distinct local accent, or a distinct foreign accent? Should it matter?

Chapter Three: The Analyst's Report
An intelligence report describes chatter indicating that terrorists are preparing a substantial attack within the United States on July 4th. A powerful weapon, perhaps a dirty bomb, is in transit via container ship. The chatter is reinforced by information on a laptop seized by Scotland Yard with detailed maps, schedules, and job postings for Port City and three other United States ports.

**Pause at 22:09 after Warren Rudman says, “I don’t believe that anyone has done a very good job of doing that.”**

- Governor Keating states that he should not be informed of a possible threat unless "it’s timely, relevant and substantiated." Should the governor be informed of the analyst’s report? Should the mayor? Should private businesses operating at the port be informed?

- Warren Rudman says that, "up to now, I don’t believe that anyone" in government “has done a very good job” of taking the steps necessary to make ports and shipping more secure. How can Americans hold officeholders to account on this issue—before an event brings the issue to the forefront?

- Stephen Flynn and others suggest that increasing security at our ports will be difficult and costly. How do we determine how much of our resources should be devoted to the effort? Who should be involved in making that decision?

**Chapter Four: The Port Employee**

A confidential informant, known to be reliable, reports positive identification of a port employee complicit in the bomb plot. The employee is a United States citizen. If this intelligence is traced back to the informant, his life will be at risk.

**Pause at 31:59 after Warren Rudman says, “I am just going to stonewall them on this information.”**
• Should protection of the informant's identity be a factor in how this information is used? What if this informant could remain a useful source in the future?

• Richard Clarke suggests going public with information that a "hostile terrorist group might be trying to smuggle something into the United States." Warren Rudman says he would rather use careful surveillance of the port employee to prevent the attack before the public is told. Which approach do you prefer? How soon would you share this information with the public?

• Richard Clarke dismisses the idea of using color codes to raise alert levels. Do you believe such alert levels have a value? Have you ever changed your behavior because of a change in alert level?

• Warren Rudman, as the president, decides that in order to prevent a leak to the media while the surveillance goes on, the governor, mayor, and port security will not be informed of the threat. He says he will "stonewall" even after Stephen Flynn argues that "I've got a lot of people in the industry that can probably help." Do you agree with the president's decision?

• Later, Douglas Duncan, as the mayor, says that if people believe "we know things that we are not telling people, whom we are deliberately putting in harm's way . . . they lose confidence." If an attack took place, and you learned after the fact that the government knew more about the threat than was disclosed to the public, how would you react? Would you lose confidence in your government leaders? What if the government secrecy had been part of an attempt to prevent the attack?

Chapter Five: Getting Information from the Suspect

Intelligence analysts run a cross-check of the known aliases of the suspected port employee against the air travel database. It turns up a reservation on Thai Airlines, departing for Manila that night. Intelligence analysts assess the likelihood of the suspect's flight as high. The suspect is brought in for questioning.
Pause at 51:05 after Jonathan Freiman says, "... in order to protect ourselves and protect our way of life."

- The suspect tells his attorney that he knows where the bombs are, and when they will go off. The attorney has an ethical obligation to disclose this information in order to save lives. Should the attorney lie to his client, promising complete confidentiality, until the client discloses what he knows about the bombs? Should he instead explain to his client his ethical obligations to disclose certain information? What would you do if you were the attorney?

- Government attorneys say that they can get legal authority to eavesdrop on the suspect’s "confidential" conversations with his lawyer. Is this an appropriate power for the government to have? Should the suspect’s lawyer have warned him of the possibility of government surveillance before their conversation began?

- How far should the government go to get information about the “ticking time-bombs” from the suspect: Negotiate with his lawyer? Declare the suspect an "enemy combatant" and remove his lawyer? Lie to the suspect and try to get information, perhaps through someone pretending to be his lawyer? Use physical intimidation? Torture?

- Frank Keating argues that in the scenario described here, one should use "every stratagem available," including torture. Richard Clarke argues that "force doesn’t work." Jonathan Freiman argues that “every society that has ever authorized the use of torture in a ticking time-bomb situation has seen that authority expand." Even in the extreme circumstances described in this scenario, is torture ever justified?

- How might the use of torture by our government affect other aspects of the war on terror—such as the image of the United States in the world?

- Who should decide how this suspect is treated? What checks should there be on law enforcement, and on the executive branch generally, in the treatment of this suspect?

Chapter Six: Conclusion
The moderator stops the ticking time-bomb and asks, "Who is responsible here? Who is in control?"

- How can you have a say in the security and civil liberties decisions made by the executive branch of government—the president, government attorneys, intelligence agencies? In what ways can you be informed and let your opinions be known? Have you done this? Do you believe it is important to do so? Why?

- Jamie Gorelick observes that it is up to Congress to provide oversight and a national dialogue on crucial questions such as the use of torture. Do you agree, and if so, do you believe Congress is adequately performing that duty? Do you want Congress to do more? Do your representatives in Congress know your views on this issue?

* * *

“BioAttack” and “City Under Siege” deal with a topic we do not enjoy contemplating: future terrorist attacks on American soil. Yet, as Congressman Charles Rangel observes, in preparing for those possibilities, we can become a people better able to confront any crisis. Individuals that think about, discuss, and prepare for the challenges their nation faces are stronger for it—whatever the future holds.