

Ten years ago, on a crisp blue Tuesday morning, 19 al-Qaida terrorists shocked the American conscience. They exploited gaping holes in our open society and killed thousands in the process.

Terrorists stole our sense of security and showed how oblivious we were to the threat gathering around us. In the years since, we have worked at all levels of government to reclaim the feeling of safety. With the death of Osama bin Laden and the rapid fall of dictators and governments that harbored terrorists, we have reclaimed more than just a facade of safety. Today we are better equipped not just to prevent similar attacks, but to respond to any kind of disaster.

Here in Connecticut, Helman Roman joined the National Guard and volunteered to serve in Iraq. An immigrant from Colombia, Roman answered the call after seeing his adopted country attacked. While his wife and two children remained in Manchester, Roman began a year-long tour in Iraq, where he provided security for military convoys, before shipping out to Afghanistan.

There, on the morning of Sept. 11, 2009, an improvised explosive device rocked the vehicle Roman was commanding. The explosion shattered his legs, and resulted in numerous surgeries at Walter Reed Army Medical Center. Staff Sgt. Roman says repeatedly that he does not feel like a hero — that heroes are the men and women who pay the ultimate sacrifice in service to our country. But, as generations of Americans did before him, Helman Roman saw his country under attack and jumped into the arena.

A decade after Sept. 11, our country is safer and stronger because of men and women like Helman Roman. We are also safer because of concrete steps taken after the attacks. Security at airports and on trains is more comprehensive and passengers enjoy protections as never before. While these changes may irk each of us as we travel for work or to see loved ones, the peace of mind it brings cannot be underestimated.

The annual question "Are we safer today than we were on Sept. 11, 2001?" is an ever-evolving query. We may never be 100 percent safe, capable of preventing all attacks and all scenarios, but we are making constant progress toward that goal.

Police departments across Connecticut use federal Community Oriented Policing Services to hire new officers. Since 9/11, our state has secured more than \$67 million from the Assistance to Firefighter and Staffing for Adequate Fire & Emergency Response programs. This funding has allowed departments to improve their communication devices, purchase safety equipment and trucks, and given first responders the tools they need to respond to fire and other hazards, including the winter storms that pummeled our region in February and Hurricane Irene last month.

On a larger scale, Staff Sgt. Roman and our military successfully clamped down on governments that harbored or turned a blind eye to terrorists. During the 1990s, al-Qaida openly ran terrorist training camps in Afghanistan, churning out thousands of fighters who spread out across the globe. Targeted drone strikes coupled with the 2009 surge of troops in Afghanistan have brought us to the precipice of disrupting, dismantling and defeating al-Qaida.

In June, Pentagon officials told The New York Times that strikes in Afghanistan and covert operations in Pakistan — including the one that killed bin Laden and the one that killed al-Qaida's No. 2 just last month — have left the organization "paralyzed." Across the greater Middle East, Connecticut-built submarines, are not just providing firepower to topple Moammar Gadhafi's regime, but they are intercepting the fundamental intelligence being used to quash al-Qaida and prevent future attacks. The USS Scranton, USS Providence and USS Florida have been instrumental in crippling the Gadhafi regime's air defenses, and carried the Libyan people, like Egyptians before them, to the brink of freedom.

Over the past 10 years, we bolstered our own first responders, improved our intelligence gathering and closed the holes used to execute the 9/11 attacks. We are safer today because we replaced the veneer of safety with concrete defenses.

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<http://www.courant.com/news/opinion/hc-op-courtney-9-11-security-0904-20110904,0,7332963,print.story>