

Public Statement
Release of 9/11 Commission Report
The Hon. Thomas H. Kean and the Hon. Lee H. Hamilton
July 22, 2004

Good morning. Today, we present this Report and these recommendations to the President of the United States, the United States Congress, and the American people. This report represents the unanimous conclusion of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States.

On September 11, 2001, 19 men armed with knives, box-cutters, mace and pepper spray penetrated the defenses of the most powerful nation in the world. They inflicted unbearable trauma on our people, and turned the international order upside down.

We ask each of you to remember how you felt that day—the grief, the enormous sense of loss. We also came together that day as a nation—young and old, rich and poor, Republicans and Democrats. We all had a deep sense of hurt. We also had a deep sense of purpose. We knew what we had to do, as a nation, to respond. And we did.

But on that September day we were unprepared. We did not grasp the magnitude of a threat that had been gathering over time. As we detail in our report, this was a failure of policy, management, capability, and – above all – a failure of imagination.

Findings

We recognize that we have the benefit of hindsight. And, since the plotters were flexible and resourceful, we cannot know whether any single step or series of steps would have defeated them. What we can say with confidence is that none of the measures adopted by the U.S. government before 9/11 disturbed or even delayed the progress of the al Qaeda plot.

There were several unexploited opportunities.

- o Our government did not watchlist future hijackers Hazmi and Mihdhar before they arrived in the United States, or take adequate steps to find them once they were here.
- o Our government did not link the arrest of Zacarias Moussaoui, described as interested in flight training for the purpose of using an airplane in a terrorist act, to the heightened indications of attack.
- o Our government did not discover false statements on visa applications, or recognize passports manipulated in a fraudulent manner.
- o Our government did not expand no-fly lists to include names from terrorist watchlists, or require airline passengers to be more thoroughly screened.

These examples make up part of a broader national security picture, where the government failed to protect the American people. The United States government was simply not active enough in combating the terrorist threat before 9/11.

- o Our diplomacy and foreign policy failed to extricate bin Laden from his Afghan sanctuary.
- o Our military forces and covert action capabilities did not have the options on the table to defeat al Qaeda or kill or capture bin Laden and his chief lieutenants.
- o Our intelligence and law-enforcement agencies did not manage or share information, or effectively follow leads, to keep pace with a nimble enemy.
- o Our border, immigration, and aviation security agencies were not integrated into the counterterrorism effort; and
- o Much of our response on the day of 9/11 was improvised and ineffective, even as extraordinary individual acts of heroism saved countless lives.

Our failure took place over many years and Administrations. There is no single individual who is responsible for this failure. Yet individuals and institutions are not absolved of responsibility. Any person in a senior position within our government during this time bears some element of responsibility for the government's actions.

It is not our purpose to assign blame. As we said at the outset, we look back so that we can look forward. Our goal is to prevent future attacks.

Every expert with whom we spoke told us that an attack of even greater magnitude is now possible--and even probable. We do not have the luxury of time. We must prepare and we must act.

The al Qaeda network and its affiliates are sophisticated, patient, disciplined, and lethal. Usama Bin Ladin built an infrastructure and organization that was able to attract, train and use recruits against ever more ambitious targets. He rallied new zealots with each demonstration of al Qaeda's capability. His message and hate-filled ideology have instructed and inspired untold recruits and imitators. He and al Qaeda:

- o despise America and its policies;
- o exploit political grievances and hopelessness within the Arab and Islamic world;
- o indoctrinate the disaffected and pervert one of the world's great religions; and
- o seek creative methods to kill Americans in limitless numbers, including the use of chemical, biological and nuclear weapons.

Put simply, the United States is presented with one of the great security challenges in our history. We have struck blows against the terrorists since 9/11. We have prevented attacks on the homeland. We believe we are safer today than we were on 9/11 – but we are not safe.

Because al Qaeda represents an ideology – not a finite group of people – we should not expect the danger to recede for years to come. No matter whom we kill or capture – including Usama Bin Ladin – there will still be those who plot against us. Bin Ladin has inspired affiliates and imitators. The societies they prey on are vulnerable; the terrorist ideology is potent; and the means for inflicting harm are readily available. We cannot let our guard down.

Recommendations – A Global Strategy

This Commission does not have all the answers. But we have thought about **what to do** – a global strategy – and **how to do it** – a different way of organizing our government. But, based on our thorough review of the government’s performance, and our examination of the enemy, we recommend the following elements for a counterterrorism strategy.

This strategy must be balanced. It must integrate all the elements of national power: diplomacy, intelligence, covert action, law-enforcement, economic policy, foreign aid, homeland defense, and military strength. There is no silver bullet or decisive blow that can defeat Islamist terrorism. It will take unity of effort and sustained and effective use of every tool at our disposal:

- o We need to play offense: kill or capture terrorists; deny them sanctuaries; and disrupt their ability to move money and people around the globe.
- o We need to ensure that key countries like Afghanistan, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia are stable, capable, and resolute in opposing terrorism.
- o We need to sustain a coalition of nations that cooperates bilaterally and multilaterally with us in the counterterrorism mission. We need a better dialogue between the West and the Islamic world. We also highlight the need to restrict and roll back the proliferation of the world’s most dangerous weapons.
- o We need to put forth an agenda of opportunity – economic, educational, and political – so that young people in the Arab and Islamic world have peaceful and productive avenues for expression and hope.
- o We need to join the battle of ideas within the Islamic world: communicating hope instead of despair, progress in place of persecution, life instead of death. This message should be matched by policies that encourage and support the majority of Muslims who share these goals.
- o At home, we need to set clear priorities for the protection of our infrastructure, and the security of our transportation. Resources should be allocated based upon those priorities, and standards of preparedness should be set. The private sector and local governments should play an important part of this process.
- o We need secure borders, with heightened and uniform standards of identification for those entering and exiting the country; and an immigration

system able to be efficient, allowing good people in while keeping terrorists out.

- o If, God forbid, there is another attack, we must be ready to respond. We must educate the public, train and equip our first responders, and anticipate countless scenarios.

Recommendations – Organizing Government

We recommend significant changes in the organization of the government. We know that the quality of the people is more important than the quality of the wiring diagrams. Good people can overcome bad structures. They should not have to.

Day and night, dedicated public servants are waging the struggle to combat terrorists and protect the homeland. We need to ensure that our government maximizes their efforts through information sharing; coordinated effort; and clear authority.

A critical theme that emerged throughout our inquiry was the difficulty of answering the question: Who is in charge? Who ensures that agencies pool resources, avoid duplication, and plan jointly? Who oversees the massive integration and unity of effort necessary to keep America safe? Too often the answer is: “no one.” Thus we are recommending:

- A National Counterterrorism Center. We need unity of effort on counterterrorism. We should create a National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC) to unify all counterterrorism intelligence and operations across the foreign-domestic divide in one organization. Right now, these efforts are too diffuse across the government. They need to be unified.
- A National Intelligence Director. We need unity of effort in the Intelligence Community. We need a much stronger head of the Intelligence Community, and an intelligence community that organizes itself to do joint work in national mission centers. We need reforms of the kind the military had two decades ago. We need a “Goldwater-Nichols” reform for the intelligence community. The intelligence community needs a shift in mindset and organization, so that intelligence agencies operate under the principle of joint command, with information-sharing as the norm.
- Reform in the Congress. We need unity of effort in the Congress. Right now, authority and responsibility are too diffuse. The Intelligence Committees do not have enough power to perform their oversight work effectively. Oversight for Homeland Security is splintered among too many Committees. We need much stronger committees performing oversight of intelligence. We need a single committee in each chamber providing oversight of the Department of Homeland Security.
- Reform in the FBI. We need a stronger national security workforce within the FBI. We do not support the creation of a new domestic intelligence agency. What the FBI needs is a specialized and integrated national security workforce, consisting of agents, analysts, linguists and surveillance specialists. These specialists need to be recruited, trained, rewarded, and retained to ensure the development of an institutional culture with deep expertise in intelligence and national security.

- Changes in Information Sharing. We need unity of effort in information sharing. The U.S. government has access to a vast amount of information. But it has a weak system for processing and using that information. “Need to share” must replace “need to know.”
- Transitions. We need a better process for transitions involving national security officials, so that this Nation does not lower its guard every four or eight years.

These, and other, recommendations are spelled out in great detail in our report. We have made a limited number of recommendations, focusing on the areas we believe most critical.

We are acutely sensitive to the need to vigorously protect our liberties as we guard our security. We endorse many of the actions taken in the wake of 9/11 to facilitate government action and information sharing. But we stress that these measures need to be accompanied by a commitment to our open society and the principle of review – safeguards that are built into the process, and vigorous oversight. We must, after all is said and done, preserve the liberties that we are fighting for.

Concluding Thoughts

Before we close, we offer a few more thoughts. We approached our task with a deep respect for the place of September 11th in our nation’s history. Some have compared the shock we felt to Pearl Harbor, others to the Kennedy assassination. There are no comparisons. This was a moment unique in our long history.

As every four years in this democracy, we are in the midst of a presidential campaign. Our two great parties will disagree, and that is right and proper. But at the same time we must unite to make our country safer. Republicans and Democrats must unite in this cause.

The American people must be prepared for a long and difficult struggle. We face a determined enemy who sees this as a war of attrition – indeed, as an epochal struggle. We expect further attacks. Against such an enemy, there can be no complacency. This is the challenge of our generation. As Americans we must step forward to accept that challenge.

We have reviewed 2.5 million pages of documents, and interviewed over 1,200 individuals – including experts and officials, past and present.

Our work has been assisted by a superb staff. Each one of these professionals has provided dedication and expertise that has exceeded our highest expectations.

We also had the high honor of working with an extraordinary group of Commissioners. Each has shown skill, determination, and collegiality.

We close by thanking the families who lost loved ones on 9/11. You demanded the creation of this Commission. You have encouraged us every step of the way as partners, and as witnesses. From your grief, we have drawn strength. We are determined to do everything possible to prevent other families from suffering your tragedy.

On that beautiful September day, we felt deep hurt, but we believed and acted as one nation. We united as Americans have always united in the face of a common foe. Five Republicans and five Democrats have come together today with that same unity of purpose.

We file no additional views. We have no dissents. We have each decided that we will play no active role in the fall presidential campaign. We will, instead, work together in support of the recommendations in this report. We believe that in acting together, we can make a difference. We can make our nation safer and more secure.

We would be happy to take your questions.