

## Central Intelligence Agency

### Director of Central Intelligence

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# SPEECHES AND TESTIMONY

**Statement by Director of Central Intelligence  
George J. Tenet  
to the  
National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States**

**24 March 2004**

**(as prepared for delivery)**

I welcome this opportunity to testify before you and the American people on the Intelligence Community's decisive role in the war on terrorism.

What I will offer today, both in my statement and in my answers to your questions, is a personal perspective. Nothing I have worked on is more important or more personal. I am a New Yorker. And, like many others in our country, I had friends who were killed at the World Trade Center, the Pentagon, and in Pennsylvania. The fight against this enemy has shaped my years as Director of Central Intelligence.

- September 11th is a tragedy that we all will carry with us for the rest of our lives.
- The Community that I am privileged to lead and represent has also lost officers in this war. Those who now fight this battle through long days and nights are devoted to a single mission: trying to ensure that the terrorists who committed these atrocities will never live in peace.

I have worked for two different administrations—two different political parties. Both sets of policymakers care deeply about the challenge of terrorism.

- The first group lived through the terrorist phenomenon and wrestled with difficult issues thoughtfully and diligently.
- The second group, this Administration, was working hard before September 11th to devise

a comprehensive framework to deal with al-Qa'ida, based on the best knowledge that we in the Intelligence Community could provide. And, during this time, the Intelligence Community did not stand still.

You, as the Commission, must evaluate all of this. I, as Director of Central Intelligence, must tell you clearly that there was no lack of care or focus in the face of one of the greatest dangers our country has ever faced.

The recent years of this war are well publicized. But the early years are not. For us, the conflict started long ago, after we witnessed the emergence of bin Ladin and al-Qa'ida in the early 1990s.

- Bin Ladin was only just starting to expand his reach when we saw him as an emerging threat during his time in Sudan. In 1996, he moved to Afghanistan. We characterized him as one of the most active financial sponsors of Islamic fundamentalist terrorism.

During his years in Sudan, Bin Ladin was not yet the center for terrorist operational planning that he became in Afghanistan. But we were concerned enough about him that in January of 1996, we created a dedicated component in the Counterterrorist Center – the Bin Ladin Issue Station – that was staffed by officers from multiple agencies with the mission of disrupting his operations.

- We also issued the earliest of what turned out to be a long series of warnings about Bin Ladin and al-Qa'ida. And I believe those warnings were heeded.

This terrorism problem changed fundamentally after Bin Ladin moved to Afghanistan in 1996. The country had become a haven where terrorists could disseminate their ideology, plot, fundraise, and train for attacks around the world.

- In 1998, Bin Ladin issued a fatwa telling all Muslims it was their duty to kill Americans and their allies, civilian and military, wherever they may be.

We recognized, through our collection, analysis, and disruption efforts of the 1990s, that we had to change to meet this evolving threat.

We had captured and rendered terrorists for years, but we knew we needed to go further, to penetrate the sanctuary Bin Ladin found in Afghanistan. We knew that because our technical coverage was slipping; al-Qa'ida's operational security was high; we were taking terrorists off the street but the threat level persisted; and, finally, we had to operate against a target that was buried deep in territory controlled by the Taliban, an area where we needed to expand our on-the-ground presence.

- Standoff operations required predictive intelligence – knowing precisely where a target would be many hours in advance – that we did not have. We needed close-in access to understand the target and maximize our chances for success.

- And while we were collecting, we continued to build a coalition of friendly services around the world that would expand our regional access.

So we did change. We developed a new baseline strategy in the Spring of 1999 that we called, simply, The Plan. We worked on The Plan through the Summer. We told our customers and counterparts in Washington all about it.

Under this Plan, we developed a broad array of both human and technical sources. Our efforts were designed to disrupt the terrorists and their plots; collect information; and recruit terrorist spies, all to support new operational initiatives. To penetrate Bin Ladin's sanctuary, we also worked with Central Asian intelligence services and with the Northern Alliance and its leader, Ahmad Shah Masood, on everything from technical collection to building an intelligence capability to potential renditions.

- And we developed a network of agents, inside Afghanistan, who were directed to track Bin Ladin. We worked with friendly tribal partners for years to undertake operations against him.

Our human intelligence rose markedly from 1999 through 2001.

- By September 11th, a map of Afghanistan would show that these collection programs and human networks were in place in numbers to nearly cover the country. This array meant that when the military campaign to topple and destroy the Taliban began in October 2001, we were able to support it with an enormous body of information and a large stable of assets. These networks gave us the platform from which to launch the rapid takedown of the Taliban.

The worldwide coalition we built allowed us to respond during periods of high threat.

- The Millennium period was the first of a series of major, coordinated operations among a coalition of countries. I told the President to expect between five and 15 attacks against the United States. We disrupted terrorist attacks—that saved lives. There were actions in 50 countries involving dozens of suspects, many of whom were followed, arrested, or detained.
- During the same time period, we conducted multiple arrests in East Asia, leading to the arrest or detention of 45 members of the Hizballah network in a totally separate operation.
- During the Ramadan period in the Fall of 2000, we helped break up cells planning attacks against civilian targets in the Gulf. These operations netted anti-aircraft missiles and hundreds of pounds of explosives and brought a Bin Ladin facilitator to justice.
- We began to fly the Predator in reconnaissance mode in this time period.

Finally, during the summer of 2001, reacting to a rash of intelligence reports, I personally contacted a dozen of my foreign counterparts. Our partners' work led to arrests and detentions in Bahrain, in Yemen, in Turkey.

- It led to disruptions in two dozen countries.
- We helped halt, disrupt, or uncover weapons caches and plans to attack US diplomatic facilities in the Middle East and Europe.

In a few minutes, I have described what thousands of people did, over the course of years, in this country and overseas. But despite these efforts, we still did not penetrate the plot that led to the murder of 3,000 men and women on that Tuesday morning.

Since September 11th, we have worked hard to enhance intelligence and improve the integration of this government.

- We have strengthened our ties to law enforcement, from having officers working jointly in the field in this country to breaking down walls that impeded cooperation, thanks to the Patriot Act.
- We have a new Terrorist Threat Integration Center.
- We have made a much more comprehensive and integrated effort to fill critical gaps we had in our process of watchlisting potential terrorists.
- We have a Department of Homeland Security.

All of this is to make a final, key point: As a country, you must be relentless on offense. But you must have a defense that links visa measures, border security, infrastructure protection, and domestic warnings in a way that increases security, closes gaps, and serves a society that demands high levels of both safety and freedom.

- We collectively did not close these gaps rapidly or fully enough before September 11th. We have learned—and are doing better, in an integrated environment that allows us to respond faster and more comprehensively than three years ago. And much more work needs to be done.

Mr. Chairman, the war ahead is going to be complicated and long. You need an Intelligence Community. You need a Homeland Security Department. And we need stamina to continue in this fight, because it is going to go on for many years.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

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