

HEARING OF THE SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE
SUBJECT: DOWNING ASSESSMENT TASK FORCE
CHAIR BY: SENATOR STROM THURMOND (R-SC)
WITNESSES: WILLIAM PERRY, U.S. SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
GENERAL JOHN SHALIKASHVILI, CHAIRMAN, JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF
GENERAL WAYNE DOWNING (RET.), U.S. ARMY
222 RUSSELL SENATE OFFICE BUILDING
FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 18, 1996

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SAUDI ARABIA

OPENING STATEMENT BY SECRETARY PERRY:

SEC. PERRY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. On Monday night I returned from a trip to the Arabian Peninsula, Turkey and the United Kingdom. I went there to consult with key Arabian Gulf and coalition allies about how to respond to Saddam Hussein's latest acts of aggression and provocation.

Let me give a very quick trip report, because what I did there is closely related to the force protection issue we are discussing today. In three days I traveled 14,000 miles, and met with the leaders of five countries, the heads of state and defense ministers of Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Turkey and Kuwait. And then I stopped off in London on the way home and met with my British and French counterpart ministers. I am happy to report to you that the coalition is alive and well, and is united in its determination to contain Saddam Hussein and to continue Operation Southern Watch in its expanded form.

We are flying additional sorties from Saudi bases to enforce this expanded no-fly zone. We have (betted ?) down an additional strike aircraft -- F-117s in Kuwait and F-16s in Bahrain. And we are sending 3,500 additional troops to fall in on the prepositioned heavy army equipment in Kuwait.

Our British allies are in full agreement with us, and have joined us in a warning to Iraq to stop all operations that threaten our air crews. And the French, while they are not in full agreement with us, are supportive and continue to participate in Southern Watch.

While I was in the region I also visited our military forces there to review the measures which I have directed to protect them against terrorism. In particular, I visited our air crew at the Prince Sultan Air Base in Saudi Arabia. These are the forces that we moved from Riyadh and Dhahran after the bombing at Khobar Towers. I was there six weeks ago to get the approval of the Saudi government

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for that move. The transformation in six weeks is stunning. Six weeks ago it was a large base, but a base which had not been used for several years -- had no housing. Today it is a fully functioning facility supporting more than a hundred sorties a day overflying into southern Iraq. This is a tribute to the outstanding work of General Peay and his Central Command team. We should also credit the very strong support we have gotten from Prince Sultan, the Saudi Arabian minister of defense, and the Saudi Air Force.

So the terrorists who attacked our forces in Saudi Arabia last November and last -- (audio break) -- failed in their first objective. They failed to drive a wedge between the United States and Saudi Arabia. Now we must ensure that the terrorists do not succeed in their other objectives -- to undermine America's will so that we will abandon our military presence, our interests, and our allies and go home. We must not do that.

So we need to start, then, with what is at stake. What is at stake are the same vital interests for which America fought in Desert Storm, to protect the vast energy resources of the region, to protect the stability of the region, to prevent Iraq from developing nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons, and to protect freedom of navigation in the air and sea lanes in the region. These are vital American interests. We are not in Saudi Arabia as a favor to any other country. We are there to protect our vital interests.

We do have close cooperation with friends in the region, and after my visit I can state to you flatly that they want us to remain and that the cooperation will continue.

Desert Storm ejected Saddam Hussein's armies from Kuwait, but it did not end his threats to the region. He has continued to ignore or obstruct the U.N. Security Council resolutions that define the terms of the cease-fire. He has also taken overt acts threatening peace in the region. Each time, we have answered quickly and decisively. Each time he has crossed the line, we have responded, when necessary, with military force. We can do that only because we maintain a robust military force in the region.

Therefore, I reject the option of withdrawing our forces. Clearly, the threat of terrorist attack against our forces poses a direct challenge to our force presence in Saudi Arabia. Indeed, the attack at Khobar Towers dramatically underscores that for our forces overseas, terrorism is a fact of life. We can expect terrorists to try again to attack our forces. The next target could be anywhere in

the region or anywhere in the world. The next target could -- the next weapon could be a larger bomb or a chemical weapon or a nerve agent.

We still mourn for the five Americans killed in Riyadh and the 19 Americans killed at Khobar Towers, but we cannot restore them to their loved ones. What we can do is learn lessons from these tragedies, and the most important lesson is that Khobar Towers is a watershed event that points the way to a radically new mindset and dramatic changes in the way we protect forces from the growing terrorist threat.

We learned lessons after the Riyadh bombing last November. In response to that terrorist attack, we recognized that the Saudi oasis of calm in that region had vanished, and we raised the threat assessment level in the kingdom to high. We beefed up security, including more than a 130 separate force protection measures at Khobar Towers alone. These measures did succeed in preventing a penetration of the security perimeter, thereby undoubtedly saving hundreds of lives. But, clearly, they were not enough.

The Khobar Towers explosion was of unprecedented magnitude. Our defense special weapons agency, whom I assigned more than a month ago to make an assessment of this, assesses that the bomb was more than 20,000 pounds equivalent TNT. That is about 100 times larger than the previous bomb used in Riyadh. The attack was of an unexpected sophistication. The terrorists had well-developed intelligence, they maintained tight operational security, and they penetrated extensive Saudi domestic security apparatus.

The scale of the attack partially circumvented the extensive force protection measures we took after the Riyadh attack and in response to intelligence indications.

We now know that we face an unprecedented threat. We must fundamentally rethink our approach to force protection, and we have done that along three lines. We are relocating, we are restructuring, and we are refocusing.

First, we are relocating. The location at Khobar Towers made defense against such an attack almost impossible. Therefore we are moving our combatant forces to the Prince Sultan Air Base, whose remote location permits much more extensive security protection against terrorist attack. I had the opportunity to review that when I was visiting the Prince Sultan Air Base. They have, for example, a 1,200-foot security perimeter all around the base, a single access

road with very, very tight controls.

Our noncombatant forces in Riyadh perform missions that require them to remain in that urban area, so we are consolidating them at Eskan (ph) Village and undertaking newer security precautions there.

Secondly, we are restructuring. We are changing assignment policies, and we are bringing home most family members.

And, third, we are refocusing. We realize that incremental fixes in force protection can always be defeated by attacks of greater magnitude. Force protection in this new threat environment is not simply more barriers and more guards. It requires a fundamental re-evaluation of how we prepare for, equip, and posture to do missions.

We have always been concerned about force protection, but now we must factor into our force protection plans the threat of sophisticated and massive terrorist attacks. As we decide where and how to deploy our forces overseas, we will place the threat of terrorism front and center. Force protection against terrorist attacks will now be one of the most important considerations we weigh, along with other key mission tasks, when we decide how best to undertake a deployment, and we are examining our current missions in light of this threat to make sure that we have thought through force protection in the way we are carrying them out.

This message has gone out to all of our commanders.

Hasn't force protection always been important? Of course it has. A good example is in Bosnia, where we face a variety of threats. When we approved the Bosnia mission, force protection was given a high consideration. Indeed, it was determined by the force commander to be a primary component of his mission. That led to an extensive set of protection measures, including the requirement to wear flak -- flak vests when outside secure areas, a no-alcohol policy, and extensive and specific threat training for everyone who was deployed to the theater.

These were the right force protection measures for the Bosnia mission, and they have paid off very, very well for us.

But while force protection has always been important, I now believe that we must expand the scope and increase the priority of force protection in every mission because of the elevated terrorist threat. Putting force protection up front as a major consideration,

along with other mission objectives, will require changing the mindset with which we plan and carry out operations and will also require structural changes in the Department of Defense. It will require tradeoffs in other areas -- cost, convenience, in quality of life for our troops.

This will be a tough answer for our men and women in uniform, who will live in less comfortable surroundings and spend more time avoiding and defending against terrorism. When our air crews move from Khobar Towers to the Prince Sultan Air Base, they're moving from an air-conditioned apartment building to tents. This is not an improvement in the quality of life for them, but it will be protecting their lives.

It is also a tough answer for them and their families, more of whom must now experience the loneliness of unaccompanied tours.

The other important step I took after the Khobar Towers attack was to ask General Wayne Downing (ph) to give me a fast, unvarnished, and independent look at the incident and our force protection policies and practices in the CenCom region and to offer ideas on how we can prevent such tragedies in the future.

General Downing's report confirms my belief we must make a fundamental change in our mindset, and we are responding this report with an additional set of actions beyond the ones that I'd already taken.

First of all, I am issuing a DOD-wide force protection standards. Secondly, we will ensure that designated local commanders have full authority and responsibility for force protection. Third, the secretary of State and I have agreed to transfer responsibility for force protection for most of our noncombatant troops on the Arabian peninsula from the State Department to the Department of Defense, and we will consider this policy for other locations, as well. Fourth, we will take steps to improve intelligence collection on the terrorist threat and making it more useful to commanders in the field. Fifth, we will take steps to improve U.S. host nation cooperation on force protection. Sixth, we will raise the funding level and resource visibility for force protection, including efforts to seek out new technology.

And, finally, I am designating the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff as the single, DOD-wide focal point for force protection, and in his testimony he will tell you more about how he is going to carry

out that responsibility.

Since the first day that I have been the secretary of Defense, my first priority has been for the safety and welfare of our forces. We have large forces, and they are often exposed to danger, and so we do have incidents where our military personnel are killed in accidents, in terrorist attacks, in military conflicts. Each time this happens, I feel the loss deeply, and each time, I review what we can do to reduce the risk to our military forces in the future.

It was in this spirit that I asked Wayne Downing to conduct the study. I did not want a whitewash, I did not want a cover-up. I wanted a hard-hitting analysis that gave thoughtful recommendations for real change.

Those of you who have had time to read this report will see that I got what I asked for, as I knew I would when Wayne agreed to be the chairman of this commission. Now it is up to General Shali and me to carry out those recommendations. I have already completed action on very extensive changes to improve protection of our forces in Saudi Arabia, which I have partly described to you by describing the Prince -- the move to Prince Sultan Air Base. I have approved and initiated action on the other important changes recommending by General Downing, and I have restructured our institutions so that these changes will endure.

Endurance is important, because I believe that terrorists pose a serious threat to our forces today and will for many years to come.

Most of what I've described to you looks forward. It describes actions we are taking to provide -- improve the protection of our forces from now on, but I must also be concerned with looking back. What led to the tragedy, and how do we determine responsibility?

The day that I received the Downing (ph) report, even before I read it, I sent it to the secretary of the Air Force with a request to determine accountability and consider possible disciplinary actions. The Air Force has subsequently established a conveniatory (ph) to that purpose, which requested findings no later than December the fourth, and we will take appropriate actions at that time.

I cannot comment further at this time on the culpability of individuals without exerting command influence which could prejudice their findings, but I also have to consider my own accountability. As the secretary of Defense, I am responsible for the safety and welfare

of all our forces, and I feel this responsibility very deeply.

How do I manifest that responsibility? I cannot expect every security fence or determine the adequacy of every base force protection plan, but I can manifest this responsibility in four important ways.

First of all, by establishing the policies and the guidance for our commanders, including the policy and guidance on force protection. Secondly, by organizing instruction at the Department of Defense in such a way that force protection is optimal. Third, by allocating resources to our commanders, including resources for force protection, and, finally, by carefully selecting and supervising the military and civilian leadership in the Department of Defense. These are the criteria by which I judge myself whether I am meeting my responsibilities.

How well have we done on establishing the policy affecting force protection? We did have policy guidance for force protection which spelled out in considerable detail how force commanders should carry out their force protection responsibilities. General Downing (ph) has pointed out that they were not directives and that they were not given sufficient emphasis and attention. I believe that Wayne is right on that. This was my responsibility, and I am already taking actions to change these to directives and to send orders to all commanders to increase the emphasis on priority.

Secondly, how well did we organize to carry out force protection responsibilities? Goldwater-Nickles made fundamental changes in our command structures. These changes have been incorporated, and I believe serve us very, very well. General Downing's (ph) report has argued that we are -- while we meet the letter of Goldwater-Nickles in the force protection area, we do not meet the spirit, because the commander who has the responsibility is 7,000 miles away from the scene of the operations. I believe, and General Shali believes, that he has a good point. We are adding that force protection responsibility to the Joint Task Force commander who is on site, and are considering more extensive changes. General Shali will discuss that more in his testimony.

How well have we allocated resources for force protection? We spend literally billions per year on force protection, and I believe it is well spent. But General Downing (ph) is correct in saying that we do not have a budgetary focus on force protection, nor do we have a budgetary focus in our resource allocation process and the

institutional process by which we decide how to pass funds out to different programs.

This is also my responsibility, and I have concluded that it has to be changed. I am changing it in two different respects. First of all, I have directed the comptroller to organize and isolate and then aggregate all of the force protection features in our budget so that we can look at force protection as an entity, and this, then, gives us a handle on what is happening in force protection.

Having that handle, we then need somebody to grab the handle and turn, and so the second change is that I've designated the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff as the focal point, focal responsibility within the Department of Defense, for overseeing that responsibility. That means, then, that as the commanders in the field see issues or see problems and want support, if they require budget support, they require new R&D, they require more resources, they can go directly to the chairman and he can grab that handle and get something done. We have that handle if we want to build a new fighter airplane or if we want to build a new submarine. We do not have it for force protection, and this change will accomplish that.

Finally, I have thought very carefully about my responsibility for the selection of our senior military leaders -- in particular, General Shalikashvili and General Peay. I recommended both of them to the president with full confidence in their ability, and I still recommend them and I still have full confidence in their ability. They are superb soldiers with a distinguished combat record. They are strong military leaders. They are dedicated to the safety and welfare of their soldiers.

In spite of that, this tragedy occurred, and they are now working day and night to try to -- to take actions which can prevent a recurrence of the tragedy.

If this nation ever gets into a real military conflict again in southwest Asia or any other place in the world, we will thank God that we have military leaders like General Shalikashvili and General Peay, so to whatever extent they are responsible for this tragedy, then so am I, for I supported them and I still support them.

This is how I see my personal responsibilities. From my first day as the secretary of Defense, I have put all my energies and talent into carrying out the responsibilities of this vitally important job. I have enjoyed some substantial successes, and I am proud of those

successes. The Khobar Tower was a tragic failure.

In the wake of this failure, many in Congress and in the media are asking who is to blame. I will not participate in the game of passing the buck. We have a systematic and judicious process of military justice. We will let it proceed carefully and objectively. In the meantime, I will not seek to delegate the responsibility for this tragedy to my military leaders. They have served their country with enormous distinction and considerable sacrifice. They deserve our gratitude, not our blame.

To whatever extent you judge that this tragedy resulted in failures of leadership, the responsibility is mine.

Mr. Chairman, that concludes my statement.