

**TESTIMONY OF GEORGE J. TENET
BEFORE THE
NATIONAL COMMISSION ON TERRORIST ATTACKS UPON THE UNITED STATES**

April 14, 2004

I welcome the opportunity to appear before the Commission and the American people to address the performance of the Intelligence Community in the period leading up to September 11, 2001. First, some context.

By the mid-1990s the Intelligence Community was operating with significant erosion in resources and people and was unable to keep pace with technological change. When I became DCI, I found a Community and a CIA whose dollars were declining and whose expertise was ebbing.

- We lost close to 25 percent of our people and billions of dollars in capital investment.
- The pace of technological change and a \$3 trillion telecommunications revolution challenged the National Security Agency's ability to keep up with the increasing volume and velocity of modern communications.
- The infrastructure to recruit, train, and sustain officers for our clandestine services—the nation's human intelligence capability—was in disarray.
- We were not hiring new analysts, emphasizing the importance of expertise, or giving analysts the tools they needed.

I also found that the threats to the nation had not declined or even stabilized, but had grown more complex and dangerous.

The rebuilding of the Intelligence Community across the board became my highest priority.

- We had to invest in the transformation and rebuilding of NSA to attack the modern communications technology that the terrorists and other high priority targets were using.
- We had to invest in a future imagery architecture to replace aging satellites.
- We had to overhaul our recruitment, training, and deployment strategy to rebuild our human intelligence critical to penetrating terrorist cells.

- We had to invest in our people by recruiting, training, and equipping the best analytical talent we could find.
- **And while we were rebuilding across the board, we ensured that investments in counterterrorism continued to grow while other priorities either stayed flat or were reduced.**

Finally, we knew that our information systems were becoming obsolescent during the greatest information technology change in our lifetimes. We were missing opportunities to gather and fuse data. We recognized the technical problem well before 9/11 and took steps to solve it.

- I challenged the Intelligence Community to do better in my 1999 “Strategic Intent for the Intelligence Community.” A cornerstone of this strategy was information sharing.
- The Intelligence Community Chief Information Officer began immediately to build a Community information infrastructure integrated across agencies and with systems that are interoperable.

While we were doing all this, terrorism was not the only national security issue we had to worry about. At no point during this period did we have the luxury to put all our resources against terrorism alone. As you know well, there was intense interest in such threats as:

- China’s military buildup and the threat to Taiwan,
- North Korea’s nuclear capability,
- The prospect for war between India and Pakistan, and
- Our support to combat operations in the Balkans.

Building our overall capabilities would be instrumental in how we positioned ourselves against al-Qa’ida and its terrorist organizations that represented a worldwide network in 68 countries and operated out of a sanctuary in Afghanistan.

We also needed an integrated operations and collection plan against al-Qa’ida. We had one. I have previously testified about the 1999 strategy that we called simply, “The Plan.” The Plan required that collection disciplines be integrated to support worldwide collection and disruption and penetration operations inside Afghanistan and other terrorist sanctuaries. CIA’s Counterterrorist Center, CTC, was our operational focus.

In 1998, after the East Africa bombings, I directed the Assistant Director of Central Intelligence for Collection to ensure that all elements of the Intelligence

Community had the right assets focused on the right problem with respect to al-Qa'ida and Bin Ladin. He convened frequent meetings of the most senior collection specialists in the Community to develop a comprehensive approach to support the Counterterrorist Center's operations against Bin Ladin.

He told me that despite progress, we needed a sustained, longer-term effort if the Community was to penetrate deeply into the Afghanistan sanctuary. We established an integrated Community collection cell focused on tracking al-Qa'ida leaders and on identifying al-Qa'ida facilities and activities in Afghanistan. The cell, which met daily, included analysts and operations officers from CIA, imagery officers from NGA, and SIGINT officers from NSA.

We used these sessions to drive signals and imagery collection against al-Qa'ida and to build innovative capabilities to target Bin Ladin and the al-Qa'ida organization.

- We moved a satellite to increase our coverage of Afghanistan. CIA and NSA designed and deployed a clandestine collection system inside Afghanistan. NGA intensified its efforts across Afghanistan and more imagery analysts were moved to cover al-Qa'ida. NGA gave the highest priority to al-Qa'ida targets in the intense daily competition for overhead imagery resources.
- We established an integrated Community collection cell that focused on tracking al-Qa'ida leaders and on identifying and characterizing al-Qa'ida facilities and activities in Afghanistan.
- When Predator began flying in the summer of 2000, we operated it in a fused, all source environment within the Counterterrorist Center.

All of this collection recognized the primacy of human and technical penetration of al-Qa'ida's leadership and network and the necessity to get inside its sanctuary in Afghanistan. This integration was the context of the plan we put into place in 1999.

- Between 1999 and 2001, our human agent base against the terrorist target grew by over 50 percent. We ran over 70 sources and sub-sources, 25 of whom operated inside Afghanistan.
- We received information from eight separate Afghan tribal networks.
- We forged strategic relationships, consistent with our plan, with liaison services that, because of their regional access and profile, could enhance our reach. They ran their own agents into Afghanistan and around the world in response to our al-Qa'ida-specific tasking.
- The terrorist training camps in Afghanistan were critical targets for penetration. Therefore CIA undertook unilateral and liaison programs to identify individuals to insert directly into the al-Qa'ida training program.

The period from early 2000 to September 2001 also was characterized by an important increase in our unilateral capability. Almost one half of the assets and programs in place in Afghanistan on September 11 were developed in the preceding 18 months.

By September 11, 2001, a map would show that these collection programs and human networks were operating throughout Afghanistan. This array meant that when the military campaign to topple the Taliban and destroy al-Qa'ida began that October, we were already on the ground supporting it with a substantial body of information and a large stable of assets.

Let me say something about our analytical work. The record before 9/11 already showed a large number of very specific reports that represented significant strategic intelligence analysis on Bin Ladin, al-Qa'ida, and Islamic extremism. Senior policymakers were well informed of the terrorist threat by:

- National Intelligence Estimates on the foreign terrorist threat in the United States,
- Assessments of Bin Ladin's quest for a WMD capability,
- Analysis of the role of Islamic financial institutions in financing extremist movements,
- Analysis of the key shift in the Bin Ladin threat from one aimed at US forces in Saudi Arabia to US interests worldwide,
- Analysis of Bin Ladin's command of a global terrorist network, and
- Assessments of the critical role played by Afghanistan in international terrorism.

Our analysis got to the policymakers in many forms, including daily current intelligence, medium-term assessments, Community papers, and National Estimates. And it was available to the most senior policymakers.

- The analysis of the seriousness of the al-Qa'ida threat was a feature of five major Memorandums of Notification that underpinned covert action programs.
- Analysis was presented and discussed in the Counterterrorism Security Group chaired by the NSC, which was the main point of action for formulating policy responses to the terrorist threat.

- In my annual public worldwide threat briefings here on Capitol Hill, I identified terrorism as one of the top three challenges facing the country every year since becoming DCI, and every year since 1999 I have highlighted Bin Ladin as the chief threat to US security.

Assessing Our Performance

The intelligence we provided to our senior policymakers about the threat al-Qa'ida posed, its leadership, its operational span across over 60 countries, and the use of Afghanistan as a sanctuary was clear and direct. Warning was well understood—even if the timing and method of the attacks were not.

- The Intelligence Community had the right strategy and was making the right investments to position itself for the future and against al-Qa'ida specifically.
- We made good progress across intelligence disciplines in attacking al-Qa'ida. Disruptions, renditions, and sensitive collection activities no doubt saved lives.
- However, we never penetrated the 9/11 plot. While we positioned ourselves very well with extensive human and technical penetrations to facilitate the takedown of the Afghan sanctuary, we did not discern the specific 9/11 operational plot.

We made mistakes. Our failure to watchlist al-Hazmi and al-Mihdhar in a timely manner—or the FBI's inability to find them in the narrow window of time afforded them—showed systemic weaknesses and the lack of redundancy.

- There were at least four separate terrorist identity databases at State, CIA, Department of Defense, and FBI. None were interoperable or broadly accessible.
- There were dozens of watchlists, many haphazardly maintained.
- There were legal impediments to cooperation across the continuum of criminal and intelligence operations. It was not a secret, we all understood it, but little action was taken by anyone to create a common arena of criminal and intelligence data that we all could access.

But most profoundly we lacked a government wide capability to integrate foreign and domestic knowledge, data, operations, and analysis.

Warning is not good enough without the structure to put it into action.

- We all understood Bin Ladin's intent to strike the homeland but were unable to translate this knowledge into an effective defense of the country.
- Doing so would have complicated the terrorists' calculation of the difficulty in succeeding in a vast open society that was, in effect, unprotected on September 11.

During periods of heightened threat, we undertook smart, disciplined actions, but ultimately all of us must acknowledge that we did not have the data, the span of control, the redundancy, the fusion, or the laws in place to give us the chance to compensate for the mistakes that will be made in any human endeavor. This is not a clinical excuse—3,000 people died. In the end, one thing is clear. No matter how hard we worked -- or how desperately we tried -- it was not enough . The victims and the families of 9/11 deserve better.

Let me now describe some of the changes we have made since the 9/11 attacks.

On the terrorism issue, the crucial importance of sharing data was greatly assisted by the Patriot Act. It also is being addressed with the creation of the Terrorist Threat Integration Center, TTIC. TTIC is capturing in one place data available in FBI and CIA operational files and data from domestic agencies and the foreign intelligence community. You will hear more about TTIC later today from its Director. For the first time we are bringing together in one place intelligence databases and other terrorist threat-related information spanning the intelligence, law enforcement, homeland security, diplomatic, and military communities.

Better warning will result from the integration of data from domestic and foreign sources as envisioned in TTIC. Yet, warning must be accompanied by action. The Department of Homeland Security has been established to take action to protect the homeland. This is an important and necessary initiative. But there must be a national commitment to sustain and enhance the capabilities of DHS.

We have taken major strides to achieve a Community that operates more as a single corporate unit than is commonly understood:

- We have put in place an intelligence requirements system that is reviewed every six months by the President and the NSC to ensure that we have the most urgent priorities where they should be. It is more flexible and precise than any previous system.
- We have tied our requirements system into our budget building process so that we can begin planning now to get the resources we will need not only for today's issues but also for those five years or more over the horizon.
- We now have a means of connecting those priority decisions back to our two most precious resources—people and collection systems. We regularly check

our array of collectors and analysts to ensure not only that we have covered our most urgent needs, but also that we have the right collectors and analysts assigned. We have a much better sense of where our gaps lie and where we can find the resources to fill them.

- We also have instituted processes by which we can shift collection and analytical resources on fairly short notice to areas where they are most needed. We put a mechanism in place to work with senior collection managers to ensure that we have integrated collection strategies against the highest threats to our national security.
- We have a Collection Concepts Development Center to study our toughest analytical issues in order to find innovative ways to collect against them.

And on the important information technology front, we have in place a roadmap for building a more information-integrated Intelligence Community.

- Today, Intelligence Community officers around the world can be connected electronically to each other and to their customers at all security levels.

As for the future, proposals to reform or reorganize the Intelligence Community should be considered in the broader context of the mission of US intelligence. Terrorism, as important as it is to our national well being, is not the only area of concern for the country or the Intelligence Community. I would urge the Commission to consider the following principles as you review management or organization proposals.

We have spent enormous time and energy transforming our collection, operational and analytic capabilities. The first thing I would say to the Commission is that the care and nurturing of these capabilities is absolutely essential.

It will take us another five years of work to have the kind of clandestine service our country needs. There is a creative, innovative strategy to get us there that requires sustained commitment and funding. The same can be said for the National Security Agency, our imagery agency, and our analytic community. The transformation is well under way, but our investments in capability must be sustained.

Second, we have created an important paradigm in the way we have made changes to the foreign intelligence and law enforcement communities—beginning with the Counterterrorist Center and evolving through the creation of TTIC—with the fusion of all-source data in one place against a critical mission area.

- This approach could serve as a model for the intelligence community to organize our most critical missions around centers where there is an emphasis on fusion, the flow of data, and full integration of analytic and operational capabilities.

Third, in the foreign intelligence arena, aside from the President, the DCI's most important relationship is with the Secretary of Defense. Rather than focus on a zero sum game of authorities, the focus should be on ensuring that the DCI and the Secretary of Defense work together to guide investments tied to mission.

- Together, these investments have enormous power when they are synchronized. This is precisely what Don Rumsfeld and I have been trying to do.

Fourth, the DCI has to have an operational and analytical span of control that allows him or her to inform the President authoritatively about covert action and other very sensitive activities.

Finally, our Oversight Committees should begin a systematic series of hearings to examine the world we will face over the next 20-30 years, the operational end state we want to achieve in terms of structure, and the statutory changes that may need to be made to achieve these objectives.

Thank you. I look forward to your questions.

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