The 9/11 Commission Report Study Guide

The 9/11 Commission Report by Various

BOOKRAGS

Contents

Plot Summary

The Commission's report examines all aspects of the terrorists' planning and preparation for the attacks and the government's response, or lack thereof, to the terrorists' activities. Its investigation sought to expose all mistakes and missed opportunities that could possibly have prevented the attacks.

The report begins by painting explaining what happened on September 11, 2001. It then explores the history of modern terrorism, with an emphasis on the roots of al-Qaeda and its leader, Osama bin Laden, the perpetrators of the 9/11 plot. The founding and growth of al-Qaeda is reconstructed along with a parallel examination of the U.S. government's efforts to track and counter it. Concern within the government about the danger posed by al-Qaeda grew steadily throughout the 1990s. Al-Qaeda's terrorist ambitions and animosity toward the United States steadily escalated.

The Commission then tracks the beginnings of the 9/11 plot within Qaeda and traces the planning and growth of the plot over several years. As the 1990s drew to a close, numerous U.S. officials were pressing for decisive action against al-Qaeda. The government's efforts, however, were repeatedly thwarted by a lack of political will, legal impediments, and concern about public opinion. Al-Qaeda managed to plant operatives within the U.S. who began training at flight schools. Some intelligence and FBI officials became suspicious, but bureaucratic hurdles and a lack of inter-agency communication prevented further investigation.

By the summer of 2001, U.S. security and intelligence agencies had become alarmed as intelligence indicated that planning for a major attack was nearing completion. Yet, specific information on the nature of the plot was not available.

The events of September 11, 2001, are then examined in great detail and from several points of view. The police and fire response to the World Trade Center is traced from the first reports of a plane crash. As the disaster unfolded, its magnitude overwhelmed any ability to contain or control events. Yet, thousands of people were rescued.

The response to the attack is then examined. The war on terrorism is launched. This war was not to be merely retaliation against al-Qaeda but, rather, a generational struggle against terrorism in general. While the initial phases of the war are military in nature, over time it is expected to become a war of ideas.

Finally, the Commission recommends a plan for the reorganization of the U.S. government to address past mistakes and to better prepare for the challenges posed by terrorism.

Chapter 1 "We Have Some Planes"

Chapter 1 "We Have Some Planes" Summary and Analysis

This chapter paints a vivid, minute-by-minute portrait of what occurred on the four hijacked aircraft on the morning of September 11. It then analyzes the response of political, military and aviation officials to the unfolding crisis.

Using information from cockpit voice recorders, cell phone calls from flight attendants and passengers, reconstructions of radar data, radio transmissions from pilots of other aircraft and air traffic controllers and some conjecture on the part of the Commission, the report produces a picture of a seemingly routine day for American aviation gone horribly wrong - all in little more than one hour. September 11, 2001, dawned as a cloudless, picture-perfect day in the eastern United States - weather that promised an uneventful day for pilots. The hijackers arrive at their designated airports and submit to the normal security routines of metal detectors and random baggage searches. About half of the hijackers set off metal detectors or otherwise aroused the suspicion of airport security. Chillingly, the only consequence of this was that the hijackers' checked luggage was held until it was confirmed that they had boarded their planes. The routine continues. Passengers board their planes, which taxi away from their gates and take off after the usual minor delays due to congestion.

Then, the first small anomalies are noted. One plane suddenly dips in altitude. Transponders are disabled and air traffic control loses radar contact. Relatives of passengers and airline officials begin receiving cell phone calls from passengers and flight attendants. A picture emerges of flight attendants and passengers stabbed and sprayed with pepper spray. One hijacker, already in control of the cockpit, tells the passengers over the intercom that "We have some planes" and that a bomb is on board; they should remain seated and the plane will return to the airport. The hijacker inadvertently transmits this over the radio frequency used to communicate with other pilots and ground control. A pilot of another aircraft hears this statement and, puzzled, reports it to ground control. Only later would the significance of the hijacker's use of the word "planes" (plural) hit civilian, aviation, and military officials like a bad dream.

Each account of the events inside three of the aircraft comes to a sudden end. This point marks the crash of each aircraft into its target and the loss of all contact and data from that aircraft. The fourth and last of the aircraft to go down, United Airlines Flight 93, crashes without hitting its target. Through cell phone communications with the ground, passengers on this aircraft seemed to have become aware that the World Trade Center and the Pentagon had been hit by hijacked aircraft. In an act of extraordinary and historic courage and patriotism, the passengers of this aircraft organized themselves and rebelled against the hijackers. Incredibly, they even voted on what to do. As the passengers broke through the cockpit door, the terrorists crashed the plane into a field

near Shanksville, Pennsylvania. The rebellion likely spared the White House or the Capitol from destruction.

On September 11, 2001, the FAA and NORAD were the two principal government agencies involved in the defense of U.S. airspace. Although NORAD existed to counter threats from both outside and within the U.S., its principal job was to counter the threat of an attack from the Soviet Union. The FAA faced the somewhat contradictory task of both regulating and promoting the aviation industry. Safety regulations had to be put into effect in such a way so as not to cause undue passenger delays.

In the late 1990s, NORAD carried out exercises for a scenario in which terrorists would hijack and use commercial airliners as weapons. However, NORAD assumed that this threat would originate from outside the U.S., allowing time to launch fighter aircraft and to get authorization for military action from the highest level of government. Any order to shoot down a passenger aircraft had to come from the President or the Secretary of Defense. As the threat of attack from the Soviet Union declined, the number of NORAD alert sites declined from 26 to 7 by 9/11. Each alert site has two fighter aircraft on alert. All four hijacked aircraft on 9/11 originated in NORAD's Northeast Air Defense Sector (NEADS). As a result, only two fighter aircraft were available for any immediate response.

Protocols for the FAA and NORAD working together in the event of a hijacking involved multiple levels of government and multiple approval processes. The protocols were based on assumptions founded on the history of how hijackings unfolded. None of these foresaw the use of airliners in a suicide attack even though NORAD had once contemplated that,

As the simultaneous hijackings unfolded, the protocols utterly failed to provide for an effective military response. The magnitude and unexpected nature of the attacks, combined with the speed with which the plot unfolded, left government agencies fumbling in their attempts to mount a response.

American Airlines Flight 11 had already hit the north tower of the World Trade Center before the President even knew that a jetliner had been hijacked. An order to shoot down United 93 was ultimately issued, but by the time the order reached fighter pilots, United 93 had already crashed. If its passengers had not fought against the hijackers, this plane would likely have destroyed the White House or the Capitol.

The commission's dramatic minute-by-minute account of what occurred inside each aircraft and of the bewilderment in political, aviation and military circles settles the question of whether the plot could have been stopped once it was under way. There was simply no time to mount an effective military response. It is easy to forget that the entire attack from start to finish took little more than 90 minutes. Hijackings have happened before, but a coordinated multiple hijacking meant to turn the aircraft into weapons was unprecedented. Normally, hijackers force the aircraft to land and make demands. There was simply no decision-making structure within civilian, military, or aviation structures that could have dealt with this strikingly original and ingenious plot.

Indeed, for much of those 90 minutes, the few officials who were grappling with the situation were under the impression that a single plane had been hijacked. The realization that several aircraft were involved came late in the attack. Only then did the significance of the hijacker's statement, "We have some planes," dawn on anyone.

NORAD had thought that a hijacked plane could be turned into a weapon, but officials assumed that this would take place outside the U.S., allowing adequate time to coordinate and mount an effective defense. The 9/11 plot was simply too far outside the scope envisioned by the military and government agencies, based on the history of hijacking. This made the plot practically unforeseeable.

Chapter 2 "The Foundation of the New Terrorism"

Chapter 2 "The Foundation of the New Terrorism" Summary and Analysis

Osama bin Laden, the mastermind of the 9/11 attacks, had called for attacks against the United States since 1992. However, his periodic statements singling out the U.S. for attack went largely unnoticed before 9/11. Bin Laden seems to have become convinced that a rag-tag army of Muslim fighters could drive the U.S. out of the Middle East. To bin Laden, the U.S. was a paper tiger. His pronouncements about the importance and duty of every Muslim to kill Americans and Jews cites numerous examples of the U.S. withdrawing after suffering casualties to its troops. In particular, he cites the 1983 Beirut suicide bombing that killed 241 U.S. Marines and the 1993 firefight in Somalia that downed a Black Hawk helicopter. Both incidents were followed by hasty U.S. withdrawals.

Bin Laden's appeal in the Islamic world is based on a widespread sense of lost greatness, a feeling of victimization by outside powers and skillful use of passages from the Koran that seem to justify his actions. Fundamentalist Muslims see the decline of the Muslim world as a direct result of straying from the literal teachings of the Koran. They push for a return to life as prescribed by the Koran. Fundamentalists view outside influences such as Western culture and forms of government as direct causes of the decline of Muslim civilization. These influences are to be attacked as threats to Islam, even if such attacks entail mass murder of innocent civilians.

In bin Laden's view, America is Islam's principal enemy. Most of the regimes of the Middle East are agents of America. America stations troops on the Arabian peninsula, the home of most of the major sacred places of Islam. America steals the wealth of the Muslims, principally in the form of oil. Bin Laden has spelled out what America should do to remedy the situation: It should convert to Islam, it should abandon the Middle East, and it should reform its decadent culture. Failure to comply with these remedies would place the "Islamic nation" at war with America.

Following World War II, a wave of secular, nationalist governments replaced European colonial regimes in much of the Middle East. These governments promised a glowing future of progress and modernization. However, stagnation, corruption, and repression emerged along with a notable tendency to direct popular anger toward foreign scapegoats - principally Israel and its U.S. backers. Political dissent in the Muslim Middle East has no legal outlet in these repressive societies. The secular left has been ruthlessly destroyed, leaving militant Islam as the only outlet for dissent.

The 1970s and 1980s saw oil money flood into the region. Governments created vast entitlement programs and imported millions of foreign workers to perform menial tasks

that were no longer acceptable to natives. Although large numbers of young men obtained university degrees in technology and engineering, the jobs that would absorb these degrees never materialized. Many of these degrees were financed with immense sacrifice by the extended family. The promised golden economy disappeared in a morass of corruption and nepotism. Millions of educated young men faced unemployment and frustration, but they had no way to effect political or economic change in their repressive societies. Bin Laden tapped their deep frustration and anger. The recurring theme that decline was a result of deviation from a "pure" Islam reasserted itself. It has often been noted that many of the 19 hijackers were from educated, middle-class backgrounds.

In 1979, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan. In the West, the invasion was framed entirely within the context of the Cold War as an attempt by the Soviet Union to eventually push through Afghanistan into Pakistan and to establish a warm-water port on the Indian Ocean. In the Muslim world, however, the invasion was seen as yet another replay of outside infidels seeking to plunder the beleaguered Muslims, the latest in centuries of aggression going back to the Mongols. American intelligence services recognized and acted upon the Muslim perspective. Soon, thousands of guerilla fighters from throughout the Middle East were combined with billions of dollars in weapons systems to launch a counter-offensive against the Soviets in Afghanistan. Money flowed from Washington and throughout the Persian Gulf oil-producing region. The assistance was coordinated by Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate (ISID).

Among the guerilla fighters was Osama bin Laden, who was 23 when he arrived in Afghanistan in 1980. Although many of the volunteers in the Afghan jihad were merely middle class or poor, bin Laden stood out in that he was one of 57 children of a Saudi construction tycoon. He could easily have chosen to live the good life of a Saudi prince; instead, he ate humble meals with his fellow jihadis.

In 1988, the Soviets withdrew from Afghanistan. The jihadis were triumphant. Recognizing that an effective military structure had been built up in the years of fighting the Soviets, bin Laden established a "base" or "foundation" (al-Qaeda) to preserve this military structure for future jihads.

By this time, bin Laden's No. 2 man was Ayman al-Zawahiri, who had led a unit of Egyptian Islamic Jihad, an organization whose spiritual guide was Omar Abdel Rahman, the so-called "Blind Sheikh." Rahman openly called for the murder of unbelievers, and his preaching led to the assassination of Egyptian President Anwar Sadat. Nevertheless, Rahman received sanctuary in the United States, where from his headquarters in Jersey City, New Jersey, he continued to call for the murder of unbelievers.

In the fall of 1989, Sudan invited bin Laden to move his organization there in order to fight against African Christians in the country's south. After Iraq invaded Kuwait in 1990, bin Laden approached the Saudi royal family and proposed a jihad to retake Kuwait. Bin Laden thought he could replicate the success of repelling the Soviets from Afghanistan. The Saudis rejected bin Laden's proposal and invited a U.S.-led coalition to launch a

war from Saudi soil to retake Kuwait. This invitation was vehemently attacked by bin Laden and many Muslim clerics. The Saudi government moved to seize bin Laden's passport, but he escaped with the help of a dissident member of the royal family. By 1991, bin Laden was running a worldwide network of front charities and businesses from Sudan. He forged alliances with Muslim terrorist groups worldwide and funded their activities. Some of these groups were in the U.S. These groups succeeded in recruiting American Muslims for terrorist attacks against U.S. targets, including the 1998 embassy bombings in East Africa.

In 1992, bin Laden, seeing the presence of Western troops on Islamic lands as an occupation, turned his full attention to attacking American troops and interests wherever he could. Al-Qaeda issued a fatwa demanding that U.S. troops withdraw from Somalia. Two hotels in Aden, Yemen, that regularly housed U.S. troops headed to Somalia were bombed that December.

Bin Laden sent material aid and trainers to help Somali warlords fight U.S. troops. This culminated in the downing of two U.S. Black Hawk helicopters in October 1993. The U.S. response was to promptly withdraw from Somalia.

In 1995 and 1996, U.S. troops in Saudi Arabia were the targets of two major bombings. Al Qaeda plotted but never carried out schemes to blow up a dozen U.S. passenger airliners over the Pacific Ocean and to destroy major U.S. landmarks, including the Holland and Lincoln tunnels in New York City. Iran became active in training al-Qaeda operatives for missions against the U.S. and Israel. In 1994 or 1995, bin Laden sought to establish ties with Iraq's leader, Saddam Hussein, against their common enemy, the U.S. There is no evidence that the Iraqi government responded to these overtures.

About the same time, the Islamist government of Sudan came under intense pressure to stop sheltering the many terrorist groups there. There was an attempt to assassinate bin Laden, probably carried out by Saudi or Egyptian intelligence agents. As sanctions loomed, Sudan offered to turn bin Laden over to the Saudis, but they could not tolerate his presence in the kingdom. Bin Laden fled to Afghanistan on May 19, 1996. This escape may have been facilitated by Pakistan's ISID. Pakistan apparently hoped that bin Laden would train militants to fight India in the disputed Kashmir region.

Over time, bin Laden cemented his ties with Afghanistan's Taliban leadership and found in Afghanistan a new freedom to publish his diatribes against the West. He established camps that trained an estimated 10,000 to 20,000 operatives between 1996 and Sept. 11, 2001. Bin Laden rebuilt his international fund-raising network, and Afghanistan became a kind of international headquarters of terrorism. Bin Laden now felt secure enough to relaunch planning for direct attacks against the U.S. and its interests. On August 7, 1998, the American embassies at Nairobi, Kenya, and Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, were destroyed by truck bombs. The bombings killed more than 200 and wounded thousands, most of them Africans. Interviewed about the non-American casualties, bin Laden stated that killing non-combatants is clearly permissible under Islam.

It is clear that bin Laden's worldview was largely shaped by his experience fighting the Soviets in Afghanistan. Conveniently downplaying the billions of dollars worth of outside military, logistical, and financial support that the Afghan resistance received, bin Laden saw the Soviet pullout from Afghanistan as somewhat of a miracle. Here was a band of ragtag Muslims that could defeat a superpower. God seemed to be on their side. The hasty retreats from the Middle East that the U.S. had seemingly been forced into by Islamist attacks over the years convinced bin Laden that the U.S. was a paper tiger similar to the Soviet Union. He seemed to have become convinced that the U.S. could be driven from the Middle East, if not destroyed.

This emboldened bin Laden to carry out a series of attacks against U.S. interests that steadily escalated in scale. The ultimate logic of Bin Laden's worldview inevitably led to the planning of attacks on U.S. soil.

This worldview is plainly delusional. Bin Laden could not seem to entertain the possibility that the Soviet pullout from Afghanistan was simply a strategic maneuver within the larger context of the Cold War. Similarly, U.S. withdrawals following terror attacks could be seen as strategic rethinking of how to approach the region. Instead, bin Laden seems to have adopted a romantic view of himself and his fighters as slayers of dragons and as legitimate protagonists of Muslim grievance. The assumption that an attack on U.S. soil would be followed by a withdrawal from the Middle East is plainly a fatal miscalculation rooted in bin Laden's romanticism and inability to think strategically using hard facts and a realistic outlook. Following 9/11, the U.S. became more engaged in the region than ever.

Bin Laden's use of Islam's hostility toward "non-believers" to justify attacks on civilian targets is chilling but will eventually become a fatal flaw in his strategy. The use of religious justification for attacking civilian targets masks al-Qaeda's fundamental weakness. It is incapable, on its own, of sustainably confronting military power directly.

Chapter 3 "Counterterrorism Evolves"

Chapter 3 "Counterterrorism Evolves" Summary and Analysis

On February 26, 1993, a truck bomb exploded in the parking garage of the World Trade Center in New York, killing six people and injuring more than 1,000. The blast ripped through six levels of the garage. The low number of fatalities was regarded by many as a miracle. Ramzi Yousef, who planted the bomb, stated later that he had hoped to kill 250,000. The FBI and Justice Department investigations produced rapid results. Suspects were arrested and investigators honed in on Brooklyn's Farouq mosque, where the "Blind Sheik," Omar Abdel Rahman, was an important figure. The FBI uncovered and disrupted a plot to blow up major landmarks including the two tunnels connecting New York with the mainland. Several people, including Rahman, were prosecuted and convicted.

The main legacy of this investigation and prosecution and the disruption of further terror plots was the creation of an impression that the existing investigative and law enforcement system could cope with any terrorist challenge. Also, although the trial brought out evidence that the World Trade Center bombing and the subsequent "landmarks" plot were developed at the Khaldan terrorist training camp on the Afghanistan-Pakistan border, the trials did not flesh out the scope of the terrorist threat that was emerging from bin Laden. The threat to the United States homeland was underestimated at all levels of government and by the U.S. public.

Before 9/11, performance within the FBI was measured by criteria such as numbers of arrests and convictions. Terrorism investigations are inevitably complex and lengthy. Consequently, terrorism investigations did not receive the greatest importance at many FBI field offices. Each field office generally sets its own priorities. These gravitated toward local matters instead of operating within the context of a national picture.

From the end of World War II until the late 1960s, the FBI operated, in part, as a kind of domestic intelligence service. In this role, it was principally engaged in rooting out foreign subversion and espionage. The FBI received significant assistance from the CIA and Army intelligence. The legal basis for this assistance was not well established.

In the 1970s, as part of the investigations into the Watergate scandal and the Nixon Administration, the Church and Pike committees of Congress uncovered wide-scale abuses by the FBI. Revelations that the FBI had spied on domestic dissident groups and, most sensationally, on the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, caused an uproar. This led to legislation that closely regulated intelligence collection within the U.S. In the following few years, this legislation was modified to allow for closer scrutiny of terrorist activities. As recognition of the threat from terrorism grew during the 1980s, Congress authorized the FBI to investigate and make arrests in cases of terrorism against Americans abroad.

A Counterterrorist Center was established in which the FBI and the CIA could cooperate on investigations.

By the early 1990s, the FBI recognized that merely solving terrorism cases was not sufficient. The bureau should try to disrupt and prevent attacks. However, this recognition did not translate into additional funding for counterterrorist operations, nor did it effectively reorient the field offices away from local priorities. Most agents remained inadequately trained in intelligence gathering. The bureau's information systems were woefully antiquated. It has often been stated that the bureau "did not know what it knew," meaning information existed within the bureau but it could not be effectively gathered and connected with other information and institutional knowledge. A report written for the FBI director in September 2001 stated that the bureau had still not shifted out of a "reactive" mode to a proactive and preventative approach to terrorism.

Congress passed the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA) in 1978. This law regulated the collection of intelligence aimed at foreign powers or their agents in the U.S. A special court (the "FISA Court") was established to review proposed intelligence activities. The primary concern was to prevent the FBI from circumventing traditional criminal warrant requirements. The ultimate unintended effect, however, was the creation of an artificial "wall" between the bureau's criminal and intelligence divisions. Concern about and misinterpretation of FISA effectively blocked information sharing between the criminal investigation and the intelligence arms of the bureau.

Numerous other federal law enforcement agencies with thousands of agents were not effectively integrated into the effort against terrorism. The Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), the Customs Service, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF), the Border Patrol, and the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) all had significant expertise and personnel that could have been brought to bear against terrorism. These capabilities were never used.

The FAA has the somewhat contradictory task of both regulating the safety of aviation and of promoting the industry. The FAA maintains its own intelligence unit, which was supposed to receive intelligence from the FBI, the CIA and other agencies. However, the FAA never received information developed at the FBI's Phoenix field office that Middle Easterners were receiving flight training at U.S. flight schools.

By 9/11, the FAA's "no fly" list contained just 12 names of suspected terrorists even though other government lists contained the names of thousands of known and suspected terrorists. Concerns about "racial profiling" or discrimination hampered the FAA's passenger pre-screening system known as CAPPS. Passengers singled out by CAPPS were only required to have their bags screened for explosives. The bags were kept off the plane until officials received confirmation that the passenger had boarded the plane.

In 1993, a proposal to ban all knives, regardless of the size of their blades, from passenger carry-on baggage was rejected because small knives were difficult to detect and because it would have increased congestion at security checkpoints.

Prior to 9/11, the airlines seemed to see check-in security primarily in terms of its potential to cause airport congestion and to hinder on-time performance.

FAA guidelines for flight crews dealing with a hijacking were based on the history of hijacking. These guidelines did not contemplate a suicide hijacking. Thus, flight crews were to accommodate hijackers' demands and to aim toward a peaceful end to the situation.

2001 was a record-setting year for passenger volume and delays. The FAA focused on reducing congestion and increasing capacity. Security took a back seat.

Approximately 80% of all spending on intelligence is within the Defense Department. The CIA is outside this framework. The National Security Agency (NSA) is one of the main Defense Department intelligence agencies, as is the Defense Intelligence Agency. The Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marine Corps each have their own intelligence operations. Many other Cabinet-level departments maintain their own intelligence divisions.

Federal law prohibits the NSA from gathering intelligence on U.S. citizens or other people within the U.S. except as specified by FISA requirements. The NSA was supposed to notify the FBI of any suspicion of domestic terrorist activities so the FBI could pursue the appropriate warrant. The NSA was aware of communications between individuals within the U.S. and Middle Eastern terrorist elements but did not pursue FISA warrants because it believed this to be an FBI role.

The advent of the Internet, and specifically the World Wide Web, has served to improve communications among far-flung terrorist elements. The Internet has facilitated command and control for terrorist organizations.

The creation of the CIA after World War II was accompanied by a fear that an American secret police or "Gestapo" could emerge. As a result, the CIA was prohibited from engaging in internal security functions. These functions were given largely to the FBI. A kind of territorial tension developed between the various intelligence agencies and between the CIA and FBI.

The Watergate and Pike and Church Committee investigations had a profound effect on the CIA's culture. These investigations as well as others during the 1980s created the feeling that covert action operations were career-damaging and opened agents to investigation and possibly even to indictment. Congress set up oversight committees that scrutinized the CIA's clandestine operations. By the 1990s, a culture of caution permeated the agency. Furthermore, CIA budgets were pared after the Cold War.

Some top CIA officials were obsessed with the idea that the agency had been penetrated by the Soviet KGB. The resulting internal controls greatly reduced information sharing within the agency. The heightened concern about internal security made agent recruitment more difficult, because anything even remotely untoward in a prospect's background - such as extensive international travel - became a disqualification.

The CIA faced stagnant or declining budgets from 1990 through 2000. The success of high-resolution satellite imagery in bringing about victory in the Gulf War of 1991 placed an emphasis on extremely costly satellite and other high-tech infrastructure at the expense of traditional, on-the-ground intelligence operations.

After World War II, the State Department was the chief agency involved in setting foreign policy and advising the President on foreign policy. By the 1960s, however, the Defense Department, through the National Security Council, came to play an ever-larger role in shaping foreign policy. Similarly, counterterrorism coordination was seated at State until the Iranian hostage crisis of 1979-81 moved the center of gravity to the White House and the Pentagon. Nevertheless, by the late 1990s the State Department had created a worldwide, real-time, electronic database of watch-list and visa information. Although this database formed the foundation of the post-9/11 terrorist watch-list, on 9/11 it contained many deficiencies.

By the late 1970s, the Pentagon began to get directly involved in counterterrorist operations. After several high-profile hijackings of passenger aircraft in the 1970s, the Pentagon established an elite unit -- Delta Force, whose missions included high-risk hostage rescues. Delta's first operation - an attempt to rescue the American hostages at the U.S. embassy in Tehran, Iran, in April 1980 - ended in failure with the loss of eight aircraft and five airmen.

The terrorist group Hezbollah's 1983 truck bombing of the Marine barracks at Beirut, Lebanon, prompted the Pentagon to expend significant resources on force protection. In 1993, the Pentagon had another direct encounter with terrorism with the downing of two Black Hawk helicopters in Mogadishu, Somalia, killing 18 U.S. soldiers and wounding 73. By the late 1990s, concern grew about domestic terrorism involving weapons of mass destruction. The Pentagon took the lead in establishing the Joint Forces Command, responsible for domestic catastrophes, whether they be a natural disaster or a terror attack.

In 1986, Libyan agents bombed a Berlin disco frequented by U.S. service personnel. After convincing evidence of Libya's involvement was established, the U.S. launched air raids against Libya. In 1993, the Pentagon launched a missile attack against Iraq's intelligence agency's headquarters in retaliation for a plot to assassinate President Bush during a visit to Kuwait. These operations were seen as successful blows against authors of terrorism in that they created an atmosphere of deterrence. State sponsors of terrorism would now pay a direct and heavy price for their involvement.

The administration of Bill Clinton tapped Richard Clarke to run a mid-level interagency coordinating group called the Counterterrorism Security Group (CSG). The Clinton administration bolstered the wiretapping powers of the FBI and in June 1995 issued Presidential Decision Directive 39, which stated that the U.S. should "deter, defeat, and respond vigorously to all terrorist attacks on our territory and against our citizens." The directive clearly framed terrorism as a matter of national security and not just a crime. The Clinton administration's concerns about terrorism clearly mounted over time. Clarke became a kind of "counterterrorism czar," and he regularly attended Cabinet meetings.

Congress was perhaps the least well-equipped branch of government to deal with terrorism. Issues regarding terrorism were split over many congressional committees. Congress responded to the whims of public opinion rather than focused on the security needs of the nation. In 2001, for example, Congress was focused on reducing airport congestion in a year that saw record levels of air travel. Aviation security was not on the agenda. Congress approved stagnant or declining budgets for the intelligence agencies in the 10 years before 9/11. Although the terrorist threat was building throughout the 1990s, Congress did nothing to expand the powers of intelligence and police agencies to monitor and track terrorists in the U.S.

The 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center, and the successful prosecutions and disruptions of further attacks, imparted a false sense of security. The intelligence and law enforcement communities as well as the public and Congress seemed convinced that the existing approach - treating terrorism that occurred on U.S. soil as a law enforcement problem - was successful.

However, the military increasingly realized that terrorism against Americans abroad required a punitive military response. These military responses, which took place primarily in the Reagan and Clinton administrations, taught state sponsors of terrorism that they would pay a heavy price. State-sponsored terrorism against Americans declined during the 1980s and 1990s.

Terrorism increasingly became the province of non-state actors during the 1980s and 1990s. Mounting an effective military response to them was difficult because of the lack of targets. As the threat of non-state-sponsored terrorism grew, some elements in the intelligence and political areas of government became increasingly concerned. Although some recognized that the threat to the homeland was growing, there was never a coordinated effort to restructure the relevant agencies to address the growing and changing threat of terrorism. Decades-old structural limitations and deficiencies in the FBI and the intelligence community were never addressed.

Threats to aviation were seen specifically through the prism of the history of attacks against aviation -- that is, bombings and hijackings. Although NORAD did conduct an exercise in which planes were hijacked and used as weapons, this scenario did not seem to be taken seriously and was not addressed anywhere else. In 2001, the FAA was beleaguered by record-breaking passenger volume and delays. Congress pressed for action on this "capacity crisis." In addition, intelligence information from other agencies was not reaching the FAA's intelligence unit. Thus, the FAA, the frontline agency in aviation security, was unprepared for the new threat 9/11 represented - the combination of hijacking with suicide attack.

As terrorists learned to adjust their techniques and tactics over time, the agencies assigned to defend the nation remained relatively stagnant. A new focus on high-tech intelligence gathering and an institutional aversion to on-the-ground covert action left the field wide open to actors adept at flying below the radar by use of low-tech means. Information about the emerging threat remained compartmentalized in different agencies, or even within the same agency. These deficiencies and a lack of creative

thinking about the threat represented by bin Laden left the United States wide open to attack on 9/11.

Chapter 4 "Responses to al-Qaeda's Initial Assaults"

Chapter 4 "Responses to al-Qaeda's Initial Assaults" Summary and Analysis

Although President Clinton issued two Presidential Decision Directives (in 1995 and 1998) reiterating that terrorism was a national security threat and not simply a law enforcement issue, the government never formed a coherent policy aimed at destroying al-Qaeda before 9/11. Not even the embassy bombings in East Africa triggered such a coherent objective. Terrorism continued to be treated in a fragmented manner by many federal agencies.

As early as 1992, the U.S. government became aware of Osama bin Laden's involvement in financing terrorist attacks against U.S. interests. In that year, the State Department detected his financing of an attempt to bomb U.S. troops in Aden, Yemen. In 1996, the CIA was concerned enough about bin Laden to set up a unit of about a dozen officers that would monitor him and plan operations against him.

Also in 1996, two disaffected members of al-Qaeda walked into two different U.S. embassies in Africa and disclosed information relating to the nature and intentions of al-Qaeda. Their information was corroborated by independent intelligence sources.

By 1997, the CIA's bin Laden unit knew that al-Qaeda was planning attacks against U.S. interests and was actively seeking nuclear materials. The unit already knew that attacking bin Laden's sources of financing was an important component of the effort against al-Qaeda. Even so, operations against his financial streams never progressed.

In 1995, while bin Laden was still in Sudan, its government began to perceive him as a liability. The Sudanese government made contacts with the Saudis to discuss expelling bin Laden. The Saudis refused to accept him, citing their revocation of his citizenship. Sudan has since claimed that it offered to hand bin Laden to the U.S. The Commission has no evidence of this offer, and it noted that the U.S. had no basis for accepting bin Laden because there was no indictment against him in the U.S.

Bin Laden's return to Afghanistan from Sudan in May 1996 was greeted by a reactivation of CIA intelligence networks there. At one point, the CIA had almost real-time intelligence on bin Laden's movements. On the other hand, a National Security Council review of U.S. policy at the time concluded that U.S. policy toward Afghanistan was "no policy."

The wealth of intelligence on bin Laden's movements led to efforts to sketch out a plan for Afghan tribal militias to capture bin Laden and remove him to a third country for trial on charges of plotting to attack U.S. defense installations. The State Department hoped

to end the Afghan civil war with an economic carrot in the form of a plan to build an oil pipeline across Afghanistan.

Bin Laden's main camp in Afghanistan, Tarnak Farms, was placed under surveillance and mapped by the CIA's Afghan sources. A detailed plan for capturing bin Laden and taking him out of the country was developed and rehearsed. However, when the Executive Branch was asked to approve the plan, an apprehension about collateral damage or civilian casualties effectively blocked it, although administration officials knew that there was great risk in not acting. Briefing papers on the plan stated, "Sooner or later, bin Laden will attack U.S. interests, perhaps using WMD [weapons of mass destruction]." The old fear of conducting covert operations also resurfaced at the CIA. Top CIA executives were apprehensive about conducting a covert operation that, if it failed, could provoke outside scrutiny. The operation was killed.

The focus then turned to diplomatic pressure, in conjunction with the Saudis, against the Taliban. The Taliban's leader, Mullah Omar, promised to expel bin Laden, but the Taliban never followed through. Following this diplomatic effort, some officials later acknowledged that there was a lack of ideas on what to do about bin Laden.

The East Africa embassy bombings took place August 7, 1998. Intelligence soon firmly fixed blame on al-Qaeda. Discussion of a response to the attacks quickly focused on the use of Tomahawk cruise missiles against al-Qaeda's training camps in Afghanistan, including Tarnak Farms. Intelligence emerged about a planned meeting of top al-Qaeda leaders at a camp near Khowst, Afghanistan. There was quick agreement that this gathering should be targeted by the missiles. At the same time, intelligence emerged about the discovery of EMPTA, a precursor of VX nerve gas, at a pharmaceutical factory at al Shifa, Sudan, whose ownership was associated with bin Laden. Bin Laden was known to favor attacks that would lead to tens of thousands of casualties. The al Shifa site was attacked along with the Afghan sites on August 20.

Neither bin Laden nor any of his major lieutenants was killed. Officials thought that Pakistani intelligence had warned bin Laden of the attacks - Washington had had to warn Pakistan because the Tomahawks were flying through Pakistani airspace. Otherwise, Pakistan might conclude that the missiles were a nuclear attack originating in India, which would spark a catastrophic exchange between these nuclear-armed rivals.

Until the embassy bombings, only a few elements of the intelligence apparatus viewed bin Laden as a serious threat. Even after the embassy attacks, al-Qaeda was seen as capable of causing deaths of "only" hundreds of people. U.S. military campaigns in the Balkans and Iraq also caused reluctance to open a new front in Afghanistan against a vaguely defined enemy.

Richard Clarke, the head of the Counterterrorism Security Group, was by now "obsessed" with bin Laden. Clarke drew up "Political-Military Plan Delenda." "Delenda" is a Latin term evoking something that must be destroyed - in the sense that Rome vowed to destroy its rival, Carthage. The Delenda plan sought to eliminate any

significant threat to American interests by al-Qaeda by using diplomacy, covert action, and military force. Clarke faced difficulty in selling his plan to other top officials. They worried that acting against bin Laden in such a way would only elevate his stature and that the U.S. would also be seen as overreacting.

At the same time, a group of lower-level officials in the Pentagon drew up a strategy against terrorism that called for an aggressive and proactive approach. This group perceived the possibility that terrorists were building up toward "horrific" attacks. Again, higher officials blocked the effort in a preference for caution and out of a worry of being perceived as overly aggressive.

The U.S. and the Saudis launched a joint diplomatic campaign to persuade the Taliban to expel bin Laden. The Taliban refused to comply and the Saudis broke off diplomatic relations with the Taliban. The Saudis, however, were themselves less than cooperative at sharing intelligence with the U.S. about al-Qaeda suspects in Saudi prisons. The Saudis apparently feared exposure of links between al-Qaeda and prominent citizens of Saudi Arabia, possibly including members of the royal family. The U.S. was still in the dark on how and from whom al-Qaeda received its financing.

The diplomatic effort shifted to Pakistan, whose ISID was a key backer of the Taliban. Pakistan raised the bin Laden issue with Mullah Omar, but Omar refused to turn bin Laden over. By July 1999, the U.S. succeeded in labeling Afghanistan a state sponsor of terrorism. The U.N. then imposed economic and travel restrictions on the Taliban, but Mullah Omar was unfazed. The Taliban had virtually no diplomatic or economic ties to the West anyway. The Taliban's policy was now explicitly pro-bin Laden. In 2000, the U.S. and Russia succeeded in adding an arms embargo against the Taliban, who were waging a war against the Northern Alliance rebel group. The flow of arms and assistance from the ISID to the Taliban, however, continued unabated. Pakistan had a fundamental interest in maintaining the stability of Afghan territory.

As it became clear that diplomatic efforts would yield little, the CIA reactivated its efforts to get Afghan tribal leaders to move against bin Laden. Additionally, any financial assets that could be linked to bin Laden were frozen. The U.S. now had enough intelligence on al-Qaeda to disrupt plots against several American embassies.

By October 2000, intelligence streams began to indicate the possibility of some kind of al- Qaeda attack on American soil. Some of these streams indicated use of chemical weapons. Other intelligence indicated cooperation among al-Qaeda, Sudan and the government of Iraq. For several years, Iraq had been known to be cooperating with Sudan on chemical weapons.

In early 1999, intelligence indicated a plot for a conventional hijacking by al-Qaeda in the New York area to win the release of the Blind Sheik. Airports and the FAA were put on alert. No attack ever took place.

In late 1999, new intelligence emerged that bin Laden would spend a night at a specific location in Kandahar. Again, top officials called off a planned attack because of fears of

civilian casualties and of "offending Muslims" if shrapnel damaged a nearby mosque. One lower-level official, angry that the attack was called off, predicted that they would live to regret the cancellation.

The CIA continued to develop plans for Afghan tribal leaders to capture bin Laden. CIA officials were impressed that the leaders agreed to the operation not merely for the money but also because they saw bin Laden as a threat to Afghanistan. Officials handling the operation were greatly concerned that bin Laden be captured alive lest some violation of law occur or a congressional investigation be triggered. However, President Clinton had directly told several CIA officials that he (the President) wanted bin Laden dead; this instruction was never clearly disseminated to all the parties working on the bin Laden problem. There was a continued obsession with caution and aversion to risk. Lieutenant General William Boykin, a founding member of Delta Force, told the Commission, "Opportunities were missed because of an unwillingness to take risks and a lack of vision and understanding."

However, there was an understanding of the problem of pro-Taliban elements within Pakistan's ISID. Officials faced the threat that ISID would warn bin Laden of U.S. operations. Informing Pakistan was critical because of the ever-present danger of Pakistan misinterpreting an operation as being of Indian origin, which could trigger a nuclear exchange between Pakistan and India.

The U.S. then turned to a group far more powerful and organized than the tribal leaders. Afghanistan's Northern Alliance was the Taliban's most important and most capable enemy. The Northern Alliance's leader, Ahmed Shah Massoud, was said to have visibly winced when he was informed of the desire of the U.S. to capture bin Laden alive.

Throughout 1999, high-quality intelligence placed bin Laden at specific locations. Each time, an attack was called off because of concerns about civilian casualties or even of fear of a retaliatory attack by al-Qaeda. The CIA set out to improve its on-the-ground intelligence capabilities in the Afghanistan region. The Northern Alliance was deemed unlikely to succeed in capturing bin Laden. Officials considered placing CIA and covert U.S. military teams on the ground in Afghanistan. Pessimism and caution again derailed these ideas.

Prior to September 11, 2001, various sectors of the intelligence apparatus of the U.S. government had an active and intense focus on bin Laden and al-Qaeda. Some elements of the intelligence community, especially lower-ranking executives, understood the significance and potential magnitude of the al-Qaeda threat. Among the higher ranks, however, the aversion to risk and instinctive caution born of the intelligence scandals of the prior decades repeatedly stymied effective action against al-Qaeda. The six years preceding September 11, 2001, are replete with missed opportunities to capture or kill bin Laden and much of the senior leadership of al-Qaeda.

Significantly, although the departments of State and Justice and senior intelligence and military leaders were mired in legalistic exercises and were concerned with capturing bin Laden alive, President Clinton explicitly stated that he wanted bin Laden dead.

However, not even such an explicit pronouncement from the President of the United States is enough to shake bureaucratic inertia and legalistic fetishes. Opportunity after opportunity to kill or capture bin Laden was lost as the various structures of many government agencies agonized over the potential of a few dozen civilian casualties, minor damage to mosques or violation of federal law if the killing of bin Laden were to be construed as an "assassination." President Clinton showed singular leadership in launching the cruise missile attacks against al-Qaeda camps and the al Shifa pharmaceutical factory, knowing that these attacks would be portrayed as an attempt to divert attention from the Monica Lewinsky affair that Republicans were busily prosecuting at the time.

Chapter 5 "Al-Qaeda Aims at the American Homeland"

Chapter 5 "Al-Qaeda Aims at the American Homeland" Summary and Analysis

Khalid Sheik Mohammed (KSM) was the principal architect of the 9/11 attacks. KSM is the uncle of Ramzi Yousef, the mastermind of the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center. KSM is a Pakistani from the Baluchistan region. Not surprisingly, he came from a religious family and was indoctrinated into jihad by the Muslim Brotherhood in his teenage years. Nevertheless, KSM earned a degree in mechanical engineering at North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University. After graduation, he plunged into the jihad against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. KSM then held a job with Qatar's ministry of Electricity and Water from 1992 to 1996 despite extensive international travel in furtherance of terrorist activity. By 1996, U.S. authorities were looking for KSM, and he fled to Pakistan. KSM was in contact with his nephew, to whom he wired money during the planning for the 1993 attack on the World Trade Center.

Under interrogation after his capture, KSM stated that his hatred of the United States stemmed not from his experience there as a student, but from his disagreement with U.S. policy toward the Palestinians. In the mid-1990s, KSM plotted but did not succeed in carrying out plans to blow up several American airliners over the Pacific (the "Bojinka Plot"). In 1996, KSM met bin Laden and presented a vague plan to hijack planes and use them as guided missiles. These plans evolved over time and bin Laden gave KSM the green light for the 9/11 plot sometime in late 1998 or early 1999.

In 1998, the Indonesian terrorist group, Jemaah Islamiah (JI), accepted bin Laden's offer of an alliance with the purpose of waging war against Christians and Jews. JI members traveled to Afghanistan for training in bin Laden's camps.

The attack on the USS *Cole* in October 2000 and the attack on the French oil tanker *Limburg* in October 2002 were carried out by a close associate of bin Laden's on the Arabian Peninsula, Abd al Rahim al Nashiri. The bombing of the *Cole* was preceded by an attempt to bomb the USS *The Sullivans* in January 2000. In that attempt, the small boat that Nashiri acquired for the attack was so overloaded with explosives that it sank on its way to its target. Nashiri's men were able to salvage the explosives, and word of the operation never leaked out.

The 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center taught KSM that attacking with explosives can be problematic. He began to search for novel means of attack. KSM claims that he thought about crashing a plane into the World Trade Center and CIA headquarters as early as 1995. KSM told interrogators that the 9/11 plot was originally much larger, involving 10 passenger aircraft. Nine of them were to crash into economically important targets such as skyscrapers and nuclear power plants. KSM himself was to land the

tenth plane and deliver a speech to the media denouncing U.S. support for Israel and repressive Arab governments.

Bin Laden considered this plan too large and complex but liked the basic idea. Planning for the operation proceeded. They decided early in the operation that the hijackers would mainly have to be Saudi nationals because Saudis could get U.S. visas with less scrutiny than citizens of most other Middle Eastern countries would. Al-Qaeda began to select and train promising candidates from among the many young Muslim men arriving in Afghanistan eager to wage jihad.

In late 1999, four jihadists arrived in Afghanistan from Germany. Originally from the Middle East, the four were students at German universities who came to their extremist views while in that country. Al-Qaeda immediately focused on these four (the Hamburg Group), who were fluent in English and familiar with Western life and customs. Each member of the Hamburg Group was remembered by friends and family as somewhat religious but not fanatically so. They wore Western clothes and blended in with German society. However, one member, Mohammed Atta, held virulently anti-Semitic views. He believed in a global Jewish conspiracy, based in New York, that controlled the world's financial system.

The four attended the Quds mosque in Hamburg, which featured a prominent preacher, Mohammed Haydar Zammar. He stressed the importance of waging violent jihad and even personally pressed some members of the Hamburg group to fulfill their duty to jihad by fighting in Afghanistan. After 9/11, Zammar took credit for influencing the Hamburg Group. He was already known to German intelligence.

The Hamburg Group went to Afghanistan and were quickly made a part of the 9/11 plot. The four were told to return to Germany and enroll in flight training classes. The group researched flight schools in Europe and quickly determined that U.S. flight schools were preferable because they were cheaper and less rigorous. Three of the four quickly obtained U.S. visas. The fourth appeared to have been rejected because he was from Yemen, an impoverished country with a history of contributing to the problem of undocumented workers in the U.S.

It is clear that extensive international travel was critical to al-Qaeda's operations. Money and couriers needed to be moved frequently. Some trips were undertaken merely to cover up previous trips.

The entire 9/11 plot is estimated to have cost between $400,000 and $500,000. The origin of these funds remains unclear. It is estimated that al-Qaeda's annual budget prior to 9/11 was approximately $30 million, $10 million to $15 million of which was paid directly to the Taliban. This money came chiefly from donations from wealthy individuals in the Gulf states, not from bin Laden's personal fortune. No evidence has emerged of any governmental support for al-Qaeda, other than the Taliban. There is also no evidence that anyone in the United States funded any of the hijackers.

It is startling that the 9/11 plot was originally much larger, involving 10 aircraft and attacks on nuclear power plants. Equally startling is the revelation that an organization that is seemingly so steeped in radical Islamism as al-Qaeda is also influenced by irrational anti-Semitic conspiracy theories that have mainly emanated from Europe. Mohammed Atta believed that the world economy was controlled by a group of Jews in New York. KSM and al-Qaeda in general perceive some sort of Western conspiracy against Islam - a kind of new crusade. For them, the U.S. is the all-powerful dragon that must be slain. For them, nothing happens in the Middle East unless Washington gives its blessing.

Al-Qaeda is an innovative organization that encourages internal dialogue and competition. The rapid escalation in the scale and complexity of its operations over just a few years is the result of an open managerial structure -- unlike that of U.S. intelligence agencies. KSM refused to swear allegiance to bin Laden, preferring to remain independent. Yet bin Laden was open to his ideas. Al-Qaeda seized on chance opportunities, such as the appearance of the Hamburg Group in Afghanistan, and learned from its own mistakes.

By contrast, the immensity and intransigence of the U.S. intelligence apparatus prevented it from adapting and learning from a rapidly changing post-Cold War environment. Not even repeated al-Qaeda attacks against U.S. interests was enough to cause decisive change in the intelligence-military structure. Al-Qaeda suffered negligible retaliation for its deadly attacks before 9/11. The Middle Eastern mentality perceives this as weakness.

The U.S. intelligence-military apparatus had numerous opportunities to kill bin Laden and inflict grave harm on al-Qaeda. Its intransigence and preoccupation with legalisms and caution prevented decisive action. One must wonder where the tens of billions of dollars spent on intelligence are actually going.

Chapter 6 "From Threat to Threat"

Chapter 6 "From Threat to Threat" Summary and Analysis

President Clinton was so concerned about al-Qaeda that he received a daily briefing on the latest intelligence on bin Laden's whereabouts. The president repeatedly spoke in public about the looming threat of terrorism and WMDs, but did not mention bin Laden or al-Qaeda by name for fear of increasing their stature. As the millennium approached, the public was still largely unaware of al-Qaeda and was focused on the potential threat posed by the "Y2K" computer problem.

In late 1999, Jordanian authorities broke up a cell with ties to al-Qaeda that was planning to attack a hotel in downtown Amman, Jordan, and several Christian holy sites. Several members of this cell were American citizens of Middle Eastern origin. One was a cab driver in Boston who regularly sent money to his fellow plotters to help finance their operations.

It was thought that the Jordanian plot was part of a larger series of al-Qaeda plots planned for the turn of the millennium. The American intelligence apparatus launched a full-press effort to disrupt suspected al-Qaeda plots. They renewed pressure on Pakistan for action on the bin Laden problem. The Taliban was directly warned that it would face direct retaliation for any attacks that could be traced to al-Qaeda.

In late 1999, Ahmed Ressam, an Algerian who had been trained at Afghan camps and who was in Canada on a bogus political asylum claim, was arrested at the Port Angeles, Washington, border crossing. Ressam was singled out for secondary inspection by an alert customs agent who noticed his nervousness. As Ressam was being patted down, he panicked and ran but was apprehended. Inspectors found bomb-making materials and timing devices hidden in his car. Evidence later seized in Montreal revealed that Ressam had been planning to attack Los Angeles International Airport (LAX).

Ressam's arrest prompted the FBI to ask for an unprecedented number of wiretaps. Raids were carried out against what was thought to be a jihadist cell in Montreal. Unreliable reports about attacks in several U.S. cities and detentions of Algerians on the U.S.-Canadian border added to the sense of urgency. The FBI, which usually withholds information on investigations, was divulging details of ongoing operations to the many Cabinet-level meetings taking place in December 1999. The bureau returned to its normal practice of withholding information after the urgency of the millennium crisis passed.

Various intelligence entities tracked several known and suspected terrorists to a gathering in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, on January 5, 2000. Three of the attendees left the meeting on January 8, but agents lost their trail in Bangkok, Thailand. None of the names of these three was ever placed on any watch list, nor was the FBI informed that

they held U.S. visas or that at least one of them flew to Los Angeles in January 2000. As a result, no effort was made to determine whether these three people were in the U.S. They were later involved in the 9/11 plot.

By this time, officials recognized that the efforts against al-Qaeda were not making a significant dent in the organization. Several officials sought an increased tempo for the efforts. Three aspects of the anti-terrorist effort were strengthened: More money was directed toward CIA anti-terrorist efforts; authorities launched a crackdown on terrorist organizations operating within the U.S.; and officials strengthened immigration enforcement. However, several other deficiencies, such as a lack of Arabic translators, went un-addressed.

Washington stepped up pressure on Pakistan with regard to the Taliban. President Clinton visited Pakistan on March 25, 2000, and "offered the moon" to Pakistan's President Musharraf - improved relations with the United States in return for decisive action against the Taliban and al-Qaeda. However, Clinton held a weak hand with respect to Pakistan, as existing U.S. sanctions precluded the offering of carrots. Congress blocked most economic and military aid to Pakistan.

The federal government had some success in freezing Taliban assets that reached the U.S. banking system. The Federal Reserve Bank of New York froze $215 million worth of Afghan gold. However, freezing the assets of a nebulous organization such as al-Qaeda was far more difficult. Very few al-Qaeda financial assets were ever identified. While Richard Clarke sought funding for a terrorist financing analysis center, neither the Treasury Department nor the CIA was willing to commit money for it. The FBI had extensive intelligence on terrorist financing that originated from within the American Muslim community, but it never connected this information specifically to al-Qaeda's financing.

Attention was also given to strengthening America's borders prior to 9/11. Proposed measures included deporting illegal aliens, tightening control of student visas, targeting human- trafficking gangs, increasing coordination between the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) and the FBI and creating a special court in which secret evidence could be used to deport individuals deemed a threat to national security. These measures succumbed to well-organized "special interests" that prompted Congress to weaken these national security protections.

In December 1999, Ahmed Shah Massoud offered to attack bin Laden's Derunta training camp. The CIA worried that such an action would violate the "assassination ban." Massoud was told to back off. Massoud then attempted to make the administration understand that they were facing a common enemy. Richard Clarke understood this. He wanted to increase U.S. support for the Northern Alliance.

President Clinton was now frustrated with the lack of progress in neutralizing bin Laden. This spurred an effort to find new ways to get better intelligence on his whereabouts. The search focused on using a new type of aircraft, the Predator - an unmanned drone with video surveillance capabilities. The intelligence gathered by the Predator was far

better than expected. The Taliban scrambled MIG fighter jets against one Predator and attempted to shoot it down.

After the attack on the *Cole*, bin Laden ordered his media committee to create a video re-enactment of the attack. The video was disseminated widely in the Arab world and was a

very successful recruitment tool for al-Qaeda. The U.S. stepped up support for the Northern Alliance and again warned the Taliban that it would face consequences for harboring bin Laden. President Clinton, however, felt that he needed iron-clad evidence that al-Qaeda was behind the *Cole* attack before he could launch strikes against Afghanistan. Clinton did not feel that he had such evidence by the time he left office despite a large body of material pointing at al-Qaeda. One angry State Department official rhetorically asked Defense officials, "Does al-Qaeda have to attack the Pentagon to get their attention?"

Richard Clarke then prepared a document in the last weeks of the Clinton administration that presented a plan to roll back al-Qaeda to the status of a "rump group" like some of the once- feared terrorist organizations of the 1980s.

The outcome of the November 7, 2000, presidential election was not decided for 37 days after the vote. This cut the transition period for the new Bush administration in half. President Clinton, Richard Clarke and other top national security officials tried to impress the danger and importance of al-Qaeda on the Bush team. Bush asked whether bin Laden could be killed. The Bush team was told that terrorism represented the chief threat to national security and that it would spend more time and effort on terrorism than on any other issue. The new national security adviser, Condoleezza Rice, decided to retain Clarke and his entire team - an unusual action for a new administration.

Clarke immediately set out to convince the new administration that it should give counter-terrorism priority. He urged a quick formulation of policy toward the Taliban and the Northern Alliance. Clarke wanted a top-level meeting on these issues. This meeting did not take place until September 4, 2001, one week before 9/11.

Discussion continued on what response to pursue in retaliation for the *Cole* attack, event though the CIA still had not acquired conclusive evidence linking the *Cole* attack to al-Qaeda. Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz thought the *Cole* attack was "stale." The new administration did propose to Congress a substantial increase in counterterrorism funding.

President Bush expressed his support for a much more aggressive approach to terrorism. He stated that he was "tired of swatting at flies." The administration then formed a policy for neutralizing al-Qaeda using all means of diplomacy and economic and military power. Clarke felt that the new proposal was no different than what he had presented to the new administration in January 2001. Clarke concluded that the new administration was "not serious about al-Qaeda," and in frustration, he asked to be transferred out of the CSG.

Yet again, discussion in the new administration focused on cajoling the Taliban to expel al- Qaeda and bin Laden. If this failed, the administration would begin providing increased funding to the Northern Alliance and other Taliban opponents.

The military felt that effective action against al-Qaeda would have required large-scale intervention in Afghanistan. There was great fear that the public would not support such a seemingly unilateral and unprovoked action.

The focus of the FBI and the Justice Department in the new administration drifted from counterterrorism. There was no budget increase for counterterrorism activities.

By the September 4 counterterrorism meeting, Clarke had reached a boiling point on the indecisiveness of U.S. policy. He told Rice in a personal note that the fact that the attack on the *Cole* happened during the previous administration did not diminish the importance of retaliating. Clarke worried that the lack of a response for the *Cole* attack was sending terrorists the wrong message - that there would be no price to pay for attacking American targets. He stated that the continued existence of large-scale camps dedicated to training terrorists in ways to kill Americans was intolerable. Clarke excoriated the CIA for its bureaucracy and indecisiveness. The September 4 meeting produced a new presidential directive on covert action that mainly focused on using the Predator to gather intelligence. On September 9, news of Ahmed Shah Massoud's assassination by al-Qaeda operatives posing as journalists arrived in Washington. The directive was expanded to allow for use of lethal force against al-Qaeda command and control structures.

Before 9/11, one of the chief constraints in forming and carrying out an effective strategy against al Qaeda and terrorism in general was the clear bias in the American public and in international opinion against the use of U.S. military power. Both the Clinton and the Bush administrations were acutely sensitive to the perception of the U.S. as the lone remaining superpower acting with arrogance and excessiveness. Indeed, before 9/11, world opinion would have found a direct military attack on Afghanistan to be incomprehensible, bizarre, and outrageous to - only because both administrations failed to keep the world informed about the role that Afghanistan, the Taliban and al-Qaeda played in terrorism. As the events after the 9/11 attacks demonstrated, world opinion was united in taking decisive action against a nation and a regime that sponsored horrific acts of terrorism. The United States led a coalition that invaded Afghanistan, toppled the Taliban, and destroyed al-Qaeda's infrastructure.

There should have been a way for the U.S. government to inform the American people and world opinion about the threat posed by al-Qaeda without revealing classified information. If such a policy were pursued and the world understood Islamism for what it really is - a supremacist, expansionist, intolerant cult bent on carrying out mass-casualty attacks on civilians - the U.S. would have had far more leeway in carrying out preventive attacks against the Taliban and al-Qaeda. There would have been far less concern about congressional investigation and international backlash. The public and the international community would have understood.

The indecisiveness and bureaucratic inertia of the Clinton and early Bush administrations are elements that al-Qaeda seems to have understood well. The U.S. imposed handicaps

on its own ability to act, and the near-pacifism of the U.S. population was a further asset to al-Qaeda. Al-Qaeda struck repeatedly and with near impunity throughout the 1990s. Undoubtedly, the timidity of the U.S. response and the misorientation of U.S. public opinion both hamstrung the U.S. government and emboldened al-Qaeda to proceed with the 9/11 attack. Even attempts to tighten U.S. immigration procedures were blocked by ethnic special interests from the Middle East. A nation cannot wage war with its population oblivious to the enemy. Public opinion is an important element of national power and strength. Educating the public about the threat of terrorism was clearly neglected before 9/11.

Chapter 7 "The Attack Looms"

Chapter 7 "The Attack Looms" Summary and Analysis

The first two of the eventual 19 hijackers arrived in California from Southeast Asia on

January 15, 2000. These two, Nawaf al Hazmi and Khalid al Mihdar, spoke almost no English and knew little of life in the West. KSM denies that al-Qaeda agents were in place to assist these two. Little is known of their movements in their first two weeks in California. It appears likely that they received help from the Muslim community around the King Fahd mosque in Culver City. One imam at this mosque, Fahad al Thumairy, who was also a diplomat at the Saudi consulate, was associated with an extremist faction that was said to approve of the events of 9/11. Thumairy had contacts in other U.S. cities.

In early February 2000, Hazmi and Mihdar moved to San Diego with the assistance of Mohdar Abdullah, a Yemeni student in California. After denying to the FBI that he knew about the 9/11 plot when he assisted Hazmi and Mihdar, he bragged to fellow prison inmates in September 2003 that he had known about the plot at the time and expressed the opinion that the U.S. had brought the attack on itself. In June, Mihdar returned to Yemen. Abdullah was deported to Yemen in June 2004.

Hazmi and Mihdar enrolled in English classes and in flight training classes. They had almost no language aptitude and were forced to drop both endeavors. Some of their flight instructors noticed that they seemed interested only in learning how to control aircraft and not in learning to perform takeoffs and landings. In December 2000, a third hijacker, Hani Hanjour, arrived in San Diego. Hanjour and Hazmi later moved to Arizona for flight training.

In early summer of 2000, the Hamburg group arrived in the United States and began searching for flight training schools that would accept them. One member of the Hamburg cell, Mohammed Atta, traveled from Germany to Prague, Czech Republic, before flying to the U.S. He apparently thought that this would contribute to operational security. All of the flight school training was paid for with money wired from Dubai by an al-Qaeda associate.

The Czech intelligence service reported that, while in Prague, Atta met with an agent of Iraqi intelligence. Reports of this meeting circulated widely in the media. However, no direct evidence was located confirming the meeting. The Iraqi agent, now in custody, denied ever having met Atta. Some of the hijackers moved to Virginia and later to Paterson, New Jersey. It is clear that they received significant assistance in both these locations from American Muslims.

There were two kinds of hijackers: those who would fly the aircraft and those who would subdue and control the passengers (the muscle hijackers). Twelve of the 13 muscle

hijackers were Saudi citizens. Almost all were in their 20s, unmarried and had no more than a high school education.

Many have suspected that Saudis were chosen in order to drive a wedge between the U.S. and Saudi Arabia. However, KSM and other detainees have stated that Saudis were chosen purely for practical reasons - they faced less scrutiny at U.S. consulates and border points than other nationals of the region would.

Most of the hijackers received special training in Afghanistan that was personally overseen by bin Laden himself. They were schooled in the techniques of hijacking, handling explosives and disarming air marshals. They were required to butcher a sheep and a camel to gain experience with knives. They also underwent a sort of decoy training - for example, in building truck bombs - so they could not disclose the true nature of the operation if they were caught.

There have been extensive and long-standing contacts among Iran, the Iranian-supported terrorist group Hezbollah and al-Qaeda. Al-Qaeda members have received training from Hezbollah. Iran facilitated the transit of al-Qaeda members across its territory. Up to 10 of the hijackers were known to have traveled through Iran between October 2000 and February 2001. Hezbollah also has ties within Saudi Arabia.

The Commission is unaware of any evidence showing any foreknowledge of the 9/11 plot by Iran or Hezbollah. However, the Commission believes this topic warrants further exploration by the U.S. government.

In spring and summer of 2001, the hijackers traveled extensively on cross-country and regional flights across the U.S. These are thought to have been surveillance flights in which they carefully familiarized themselves with security procedures and in-flight operations. During flight training, several of the hijackers requested permission to fly the Hudson Corridor, a low- altitude route over New York's Hudson Valley and New York City. They flew this route several times in the company of an instructor.

By July 2001, bin Laden was growing worried about operational security with so many operatives in the U.S., and he asked that the attacks be carried out as soon as possible. Bin Laden was especially keen on hitting the White House. Atta communicated back that the White House would be difficult to hit and that the Capitol should be kept in mind as an alternate target. Bin Laden had hoped to launch the attack during a visit by Israel's prime minister to Washington in July.

On August 16, an al-Qaeda operative named Zacarias Moussaoui was arrested on immigration charges in Minnesota after his flight instructors grew suspicious and reported him to authorities. It is not clear whether Moussaoui was intended as a 20th hijacker or was intended to be part of a subsequent wave of attacks.

The hijackers decided to target cross-country flights because they would have a maximum amount of jet fuel on board. They also targeted Boeing aircraft because they thought that Airbus aircraft had a type of automatic pilot that would prevent them from being deliberately crashed. KSM stated that he did not learn of Moussaoui's arrest until

after 9/11 and that if he had learned about it before then, he would have called off the whole attack. All 19 tickets were purchased between August 25 and September 5. By August 2001, rumors were rife in the jihadist community of an impending attack on U.S. soil. There is evidence that Mullah Omar opposed direct attacks against the U.S. - probably because of pressure he was feeling from Pakistan. There was significant dissent within top al-Qaeda leadership about the wisdom of striking directly on U.S. soil. One senior al-Qaeda leader even wrote bin Laden a note that said the impending attack was not in accordance with the Koran.

Chapter 8 "The System Was Blinking Red"

Chapter 8 "The System Was Blinking Red" Summary and Analysis

The President's Daily Brief (PDB) is the main mechanism for communicating sensitive intelligence to the President. Information in the PDB is distilled from an immense volume of intelligence. Only the most important and sensitive information makes it to the PDB. The PDBs from January 2001 through September 10, 2001, contained 40 articles relating to bin Laden.

In the spring of 2001, there was a sudden spike in intelligence indicating a heightened risk of a Muslim terrorist attack against U.S. interests. Specific but unconfirmed and anonymous tips indicated that al-Qaeda was planning attacks on U.S. soil. Other reporting indicated plots to hijack aircraft and demand the release of incarcerated terrorists, including the Blind Sheik.

By early summer, the threat reporting accelerated and took on a tone of urgency and imminence. Reports emerged that the planned attacks would be not merely devastating but "spectacular" and a "severe blow" to U.S. interests. In late June, all CIA station chiefs were ordered to push host governments for maximum possible disruption of al-Qaeda cells. State and local law enforcement agencies were asked to exercise maximum vigilance and to report any suspicions to the FBI. In mid-July, new reporting indicated that bin Laden's plans encountered delays of up to two months.

The FAA warned airlines about an increased threat of hijackings, but the warning focused on overseas threats. CIA Director George Tenet told the Commission that at this time "the system was blinking red." Paul Wolfowitz, however, questioned the intelligence streams, wondering whether they were merely deception designed to study U.S. reactions. Two senior intelligence officials were so shocked about the intelligence that they considered resigning and going public with their concerns.

On August 6, 2001, President Bush received a PDB entitled "Bin Laden Determined to Strike in U.S." that stated, among other things, that bin Laden prepares attacks years in advance and is undeterred by setbacks; some al-Qaeda members are U.S. citizens and al-Qaeda appears to have a support network inside the U.S.; a clandestine source claims that an al-Qaeda cell in New York is recruiting Muslim-American youths for attacks; and the FBI is conducting 70 full field investigations related to bin Laden. President Bush told the Commission that he found it reassuring that the FBI had so many bin Laden-related investigations active.

Despite the unprecedented level of intelligence warnings, none contained specific information as to the timing or the targets of an attack. The numerous bin Laden-related

FBI investigations did not lead to a corresponding overall consideration of the possibility that the threat was in fact directed at U.S. soil. Clarke thought it very likely that al-Qaeda sleeper cells were already in the U.S. However, the 19 hijackers cannot be properly called "sleeper cells." They were operating almost openly. The threat was assumed to be overseas. As a result, border control was not tightened and electronic surveillance was not oriented toward a domestic threat. State and local law enforcement coordination with the FBI was not instituted. There was no warning to the public.

The FBI was aware of the presence in the U.S. of two men who were at the Kuala Lumpur terrorist meeting. These two would become part of the 9/11 operation. The bureau began efforts to track and possibly interview them. The "wall" placed many impediments in the path of this investigation. Confusion reigned over whether to classify the operation as an "intelligence" or a "criminal" operation. One FBI agent wrote angrily that the "wall" and the FISA procedures in effect protected bin Laden and his operatives more than anyone else. Ultimately, this case was handed to a single agent who had no counterterrorism experience. The case was labeled "routine." The agent did not locate the two before 9/11.

The Commission regards this episode as a significant failure. The "wall" and FISA procedures were misunderstood inside the FBI. The two men could have been pursued under the existing *Cole* criminal case. They used their real names and would not have been difficult to find. They could have been held on immigration violations and interrogated as to their contacts and connections with al-Qaeda. The Commission believes that this would have presented a realistic possibility for disrupting the 9/11 plot.

In July 2001, an agent at the FBI's Phoenix office sent a memo to headquarters speculating about a "possibility of a coordinated effort by Osama bin Laden" to have al-Qaeda agents trained in aviation at U.S. flight schools. This agent noticed an inordinate number of students of "investigative interest" at Arizona flight schools. Top officials did not act on this memo. However, the Commission does not believe that acting on the memo would have disrupted the 9/11 plot.

In August 2001, the FBI's Minneapolis field office took notice of Zacarias Moussaoui. The field office began investigating him and classified the investigation as an intelligence case. Moussaoui revealed his jihadist beliefs and became agitated when asked about his religious beliefs. He could not provide an explanation for his $32,000 bank account. The agent suspected that Moussaoui planned to hijack a plane. However, a connection to al-Qaeda was not established. If such a connection were recognized, questions would have arisen about a possible larger al-Qaeda plot involving hijacking airliners.

The FBI in Minneapolis sought a FISA warrant to examine Moussaoui's computer. Again, confusion about FISA requirements caused headquarters not to pursue the warrant - despite the arrival from France of information connecting Moussaoui to Chechen terrorists. FBI headquarters even complained that Minneapolis's FISA request was "spun up" or designed to grab attention. The Minneapolis supervisor said that was

his intent and that he was "trying to keep someone from taking a plane and crashing into the World Trade Center."

No connection was ever made between the suspicious flight training activity in the U.S. and the increased threat reporting that had been flowing throughout the spring and summer. Only after 9/11 did officials learn from British intelligence that Moussaoui had attended a terrorist training camp in Afghanistan. Had this information been available in August, the Commission believes that Moussaoui would have received intense, high-level scrutiny. The Commission believes that full investigation prior to 9/11 of Moussaoui's connections could have disrupted the 9/11 plot.

It is reassuring and disturbing to learn of the high quantity and quality of in-depth information about al-Qaeda's activities that was known to intelligence agencies and the FBI before 9/11. The intelligence and law enforcement communities came tantalizingly close to disrupting the plot on several occasions. It seems clear that the main blockage to such a disruption was the artificial impediment of bureaucratic procedure, the ill-conceived and misinterpreted requirements of FISA and inter-agency lack of cooperation. The astonishing insights of individual personnel were also ignored. That an FBI agent in Minneapolis had a foreboding about a plane crashing into the World Trade Center is chilling and astounding - equally so the agent in Phoenix who speculated about an al-Qaeda plan to train agents in aviation in the U.S. The intuitive dimension that is inherent in investigative work must be recognized. There should be opportunity to pursue intuitions.

Bureaucratic impediments and career considerations must be altered to serve the goals at hand. Perpetuation of bureaucracy and careerism should not supersede the mission of an organization.

Chapter 9 "Heroism and Horror"

Chapter 9 "Heroism and Horror" Summary and Analysis

On a normal weekday, the seven buildings of the World Trade Center complex (WTC) were populated by approximately 50,000 workers with an additional 40,000 going through the complex's concourse.

The September 11, 2001, attack was not the first against the WTC. Muslim terrorists attacked the complex with a truck bomb on February 26, 1993. During this attack, heavy smoke filled several stairways, and several people were rescued by helicopter from one of the tower roofs. The memory of this rooftop rescue left many people who were in the towers on 9/11 with the mistaken impression that rooftop rescues were part of the WTC evacuation plan. In fact, this was not the case and on 9/11, doors leading to the roofs were locked.

Following the 1993 attack, the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey (PA) made substantial structural and technological changes to the towers to improve emergency preparedness.

Ten minutes after the first plane hit the WTC's north tower, it is believed that an order to evacuate the tower was issued over the building's intercom system. The violence of the impact, however, disabled large parts of the intercom system and many people inside did not hear the evacuation order. Instead, they did as they had been trained - gathering at least two floors below any smoke or fire to await instructions. People above the point of impact were trapped.

Hundreds of people are thought to have perished immediately on the floors that were hit directly. An announcement over the intercom system in the south tower advised tenants to remain in place until further notice. However, many people left the south tower.

Dozens of fire companies, including elite rescue units, with hundreds of firefighters began responding. FDNY ordered the south tower evacuated. Firefighters encountered civilians jumping from upper windows. Several fireballs traveled down elevator shafts and exploded into the lobby. Several units were sent up the stairways of the north tower to determine the situation at the point of the fire and to begin rescuing trapped civilians. Some officials began to recognize the possibility of a partial collapse of the upper floors. However, a complete collapse of the tower was beyond anyone's imagination. NYPD helicopter pilots contemplated rooftop rescues, but they reported that the roof of the north tower was already engulfed in flames and smoke.

The south tower was hit by United Airlines Flight 175 at 9:03. It was already being evacuated, but hundreds remained in the building. Again, hundreds were killed on impact. Some ascended the stairways to the roof but found the roof doors locked. A

"lock release" order was sent to the computer system that controlled all the locks in WTC, but damage to the computer equipment from the impact prevented the order from being carried out.

Throughout this period, people in the two towers were calling 911 for instructions. 911 operators were unaware of the evacuation orders and generally advised people to stay put. Communications problems plagued operations at the scene. One fire official later stated that people watching on TV had more information than fire commanders did. Firefighters

continued to ascend the stairways of both towers seeking to rescue civilians and to gather information on the extent of the fire. Radio communications were difficult and sporadic.

At 9:32, an instruction that all firefighters in the north tower were to return to the lobby was apparently not heard by the firefighters.

The south tower collapsed at 9:59 a.m., killing everybody who was still in it. The evacuation of the north tower continued. All rescue personnel were again ordered to evacuate the north tower. Only some heard the order. One FDNY chief went to each stairway and shouted over a bullhorn, "All FDNY, get the fuck out!" For many firefighters, this was the first news of an evacuation order. They began to evacuate the tower. Others refused to leave while civilians were still in the building or while separated comrades were unaccounted for. Some firefighters who refused to leave urged police to do so because they did not have protective gear. The north tower collapsed at 10:28 a.m., killing all who remained within it.

The attack killed 2,973 people, including 343 FDNY personnel, 37 members of the PA police department and 23 members of the NYPD.

At 9:37 a.m., American Airlines Flight 77 slammed into the Pentagon. Although some communications and response difficulties echoed those in New York City, the attack on the Pentagon paled in magnitude when compared with the situation at the WTC. The emergency

response to the Pentagon was effective and well coordinated. The building was evacuated and the situation was contained.

It is estimated that between 16, 400 and 18,800 civilians were in the WTC at 8:46 a.m. September 11, 2001. Of their number, 2,152 died in the attack. 95% of them were at or above the impact zone. The evacuation and rescue efforts of first responders prevented the catastrophe from becoming much worse.

Difficulties in coordination and communication caused problems for the first responders on 9/11 at WTC. FDNY had difficulty communicating with NYPD and the numerous other governmental entities that responded to the attack. Nevertheless, what was already a catastrophe was contained and limited by heroic and selfless service by the first responders. The death toll could have climbed into the tens of thousands. The

nature and scale of the attack was beyond the scope of even the most imaginative disaster planner.

Hindsight allows analysis of what could have been done better. However, such an incomprehensibly evil action was beyond the imagination of any sane human being prior to 9/11. Now, unimaginable evil must be imagined.

Chapter 10 "Wartime"

Chapter 10 "Wartime" Summary and Analysis

After the attacks, the President was taken to Offutt Air Force Base in Nebraska. The Secret Service advised him not to return to Washington, and Offutt was equipped to shelter the President for an extended period.

The CIA informed the President that early indications pointed to al-Qaeda. The President declared, "We're at war." All non-emergency civilian aircraft were grounded. Later that day, the President overruled the concerns of the Secret Service and returned to the White House, where he addressed the nation that evening. In this address, he informed the world that no distinction would be made between terrorists and the nations that harbor or assist them.

By September 14, Vice President Richard Cheney formed and presented to the President an early version of what would ultimately become the Department of Homeland Security.

Concerns lingered about possible follow-up attacks. The INS began detaining hundreds of individuals to minimize the risk of additional attack. A senior al-Qaeda detainee later stated that these efforts forced al-Qaeda to restrict its operations in the United States. The USA PATRIOT Act took shape. This act removed the "wall" blocking information flow between law enforcement and intelligence agencies.

In initial meetings with top Cabinet officials, the President stated that the U.S. was in a new kind of war and that this war should be one that sought to eliminate terrorism in general, not just al-Qaeda.

The war planning immediately recognized the importance of Pakistan. The U.S. demanded overflight rights and an immediate end to Pakistan's support for the Taliban. Pakistan agreed to the U.S. requests. Pakistan's President Musharraf stated that he would pay a heavy domestic political price and needed to show his public that Pakistan would benefit from the decision to cooperate.

An ultimatum was delivered to the Taliban demanding that it turn over bin Laden and his lieutenants and that the Taliban end all support for terrorism. Other parts of the U.S. government began tracing any financing related to terrorism and froze these assets.

Throughout the period immediately following 9/11, there was strong suspicion that Iraq was involved in the plot. The operation seemed too sophisticated even for al-Qaeda. However, little evidence could be found of any Iraqi involvement. Nevertheless, a case began to build within the administration that Iraq was a strategic threat to the United States as it had long-standing ties to terrorism and an interest in weapons of mass destruction (WMD). On September 20 before a joint session of Congress, the President linked al-Qaeda to the embassy and the *Cole* bombings. He stated that destroying al-

Qaeda would only mark the beginning of America's war on terrorism. Within two months, the Taliban had been deposed and about one quarter of al-Qaeda's top leadership had been killed or captured.

The attacks of 9/11 elicited decisive and clear change in U.S. foreign policy. The speed with which al-Qaeda was recognized to be the author of the attack reiterates the fact that a great deal was already known about its operations. The U.S. response to the plot would not merely be a tit-for-tat retaliation.

A new doctrine was quickly elaborated according to which the U.S. would act in a decisive and proactive manner against threats to its national interests. The logic behind the Iraq war was seeded in this new doctrine. Problem states that could potentially fail or that could serve as bases for terrorist groups could no longer be allowed to fester. Iraq was just such a state. Although no evidence of involvement by Iraq in the 9/11 plot was ever found, the rationale for the Iraq war is firmly rooted in the policy shift sparked by 9/11.

The significance and scope of this new foreign policy posture has been underestimated and misunderstood. The 9/11 plot has sparked a generational struggle that will transform the world, especially the Middle East.

Chapter 11 "Foresight and Hindsight"

Chapter 11 "Foresight and Hindsight" Summary and Analysis

The 9/11 attacks exposed four kinds of failure - imagination, policy, capability, and management.

The end of the Cold War created vacuums that bred new and unexpected scenarios of instability, primarily in the Middle East and South Asia. The U.S. in the 1990s stood alone as a hyper-power. While Afghanistan dropped from the U.S. radar after the withdrawal of the Soviet Union, to the Afghans and others in Asia and the Middle East, America's power was pervasive and omnipresent.

In the two years before 9/11, the U.S. government, despite mounting piles of intelligence, failed to keep the public educated as to what al-Qaeda and Islamic terrorism was and what kind of threat it presented to national security. The ignorance of the public acted as a real constraint on U.S. policy. At least one plan for invading Afghanistan with ground troops prior to 9/11 was abandoned because officials feared that the public would have seen such an invasion as unjustified and arrogant. As early as July 1995, intelligence predicted an attack by loose groupings of Islamist terrorists within the U.S. Nevertheless, what few intelligence reports there were that did portray bin Laden as a serious danger were greeted with skepticism. This skepticism resisted the idea of a new "super-terrorism."

Richard Clarke pressed the new administration relentlessly with regard to al-Qaeda. Clarke wanted acknowledgment at the highest level of the new administration that al-Qaeda represented a first-order threat. Clarke wrote a scathingly critical memo to Rice just one week before 9/11 about the administration's foot dragging on al-Qaeda. Clarke maintained that al-Qaeda represented the "point of the spear of radical Islam."

In the late 1990s, U.S. intelligence became aware of vague reports of plots to fly hijacked aircraft, sometimes laden with explosives, into U.S. cities or buildings. One report mentioned a Libyan plot to fly aircraft into the World Trade Center. None of the reports was ever corroborated. Other reports emerged of plans to crash planes into CIA headquarters. In 1999, the FAA identified the possibility of a "suicide hijacking" plot by al-Qaeda or a similar group but judged such an attack as highly unlikely.

A systematic approach to investigating possible surprise attacks has existed within the intelligence community since the Pearl Harbor attack of 1941. This system was primarily applied to the possibility of a surprise Soviet attack. There is no evidence that this system was ever applied to al-Qaeda or to terrorism in general.

Application of this system to the 9/11 plot could have revealed weaknesses in terrorist planning and operations including the need for a suicide operative with the knowledge

to fly a large jet airliner and the consequent alertness to suspicious persons receiving flight training.

During the transition from the Clinton to the Bush administrations, the CIA informed President Bush that killing bin Laden would have an impact, but ending the sanctuary that Afghanistan provided to al-Qaeda was the key to dismantling the group's threat. However, a ground invasion was regarded as inconceivable, given the public's ignorance - in both the U.S. and around the world - of Afghanistan's role as a base for al-Qaeda.

The Department of Defense was never fully engaged in countering al-Qaeda before 9/11. The CIA was the lead agency dealing with al-Qaeda. The FBI and the CIA were not effectively communicating prior to 9/11. In December 1998, CIA Director Tenet issued a directive that attempted to place the intelligence community on a war footing against al-Qaeda. This directive never received wide distribution and its war sentiment was not adopted in the wider intelligence community culture.

Chapter 12 "What To Do? A Global Strategy"

Chapter 12 "What To Do? A Global Strategy" Summary and Analysis

Countering terrorism is now the most important security objective of the United States. Unlike warfare between nation-states, terrorism represents a transnational threat. Terrorism is not contained or defined by national boundaries. Nation-states must always consider the potential for retaliation in response to any aggressive action. Terrorists, particularly suicide terrorists, are not deterred by the threat of retaliation. They have little to lose.

Islamist terrorists have repeatedly and openly stated their objectives: America must be converted to Islam or be destroyed. This is not a position that can be reasoned with or negotiated with. Destruction of terrorism and the Islamist ideology that spawns it is the only effective response. To the extent that a moderate form of Islam seeks to discredit radical Islamism, the United States must place its full support behind moderate forces.

Terrorists inevitably make mistakes in their planning and operations. The U.S. government did not exploit any of al-Qaeda's mistakes in its planning for the 9/11 strike. Al-Qaeda required the sanctuary that Afghanistan provided to conduct its planning and operations. Henceforth, terrorist sanctuaries such as Afghanistan cannot be tolerated. Some intelligence analysts regard certain large European cities with extensive Muslim populations as possible sanctuaries on a par with Afghanistan. Some American cities cannot be far behind. Other countries and regions that are susceptible to becoming sanctuaries include Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, parts of West Africa, and parts of Southeast Asia.

Saudi Arabia is the font of much of the ideology and funding of Islamist terrorism. The Commission recommends that the U.S. push Saudi Arabia to accelerate and deepen the reforms set in motion. Charitable contributions must be scrutinized carefully lest they fall into the hands of terrorists. Intolerant school curricula and extremist preachers must be dealt with.

The Commission believes that U.S. foreign policy is a large factor in forming the image of the U.S. in the Arab world. The U.S. must evaluate the long-run cost of supporting repressive regimes in the Middle East. These regimes should be prodded toward reform. The U.S. must stand up for its true values and must do a better job at communicating these values.

The Commission also recommends promoting greater economic openness and development in the Middle East. Additionally, stringent efforts must be undertaken to

prevent WMDs from reaching terrorists. Additional assistance should be provided to the countries of the ex-Soviet Union to secure and dismantle nuclear materials.

Travel is an unavoidable aspect of planning and operations for terror groups. The U.S. must now view border security as an aspect of national security. Intelligence should focus on identifying patterns of travel that indicate potential terror activity. Authorities should work to guarantee the integrity of travel documents. The Commission believes that a biometric border screening system offers the greatest border security. Additionally, border inspectors should be given more leeway to trust intuition and instinct when deciding to subject a traveler to greater scrutiny.

The Commission believes that national standards are needed for the issuance of birth certificates, driver's licenses, and other documents to prevent fraud. Additionally, officials should focus on securing the nation's entire transportation infrastructure - not just aviation. Accordingly, funding for homeland security must be based on an assessment of risks and not be seen as a general revenue-sharing program, as are other federal programs.

September 11, 2001, should serve as a wake-up call indicating that the U.S. is no longer conveying an image of positive values around the world. Animosity toward the U.S. is at its highest. U.S. foreign policy has entered marriages of convenience with too many repressive and backward regimes, particularly in the Middle East. The short-term advantages of these marriages are no longer worth the long-term costs.

Nevertheless, Islamism is a uniquely implacable ideology that cannot be reasoned with. It must be destroyed. Islamism is subscribed to by only a small percentage of Muslims. The vast majority of Muslims, who are moderate and reasonable, must be engaged in a new dialogue. The U.S. in its foreign policy and through cultural exchange programs can show through its deeds and words that it is a reasonable and fair power. Middle Eastern regimes must be prodded toward democratic reform. Economic development in the region must be given a new impetus. In the meantime, the Islamist threat requires the U.S. to seriously fortify its borders and critical infrastructure.

Chapter 13 "How to Do It"

Chapter 13 "How to Do It" Summary and Analysis

America's national security apparatus was organized to fight the Cold War. The government must be reorganized for the challenges of confronting nebulous, non-state actors (terrorist organizations).

The Commission recommends: Creating a National Counterterrorism Center that will unify intelligence on terrorism and bridge the foreign-domestic divide; creating the position of National Intelligence Director (now known as Director of National Intelligence) that will unify all the disparate intelligence agencies across the government; redesigning the government's computer information systems on a network model rather than the current hub-and-spoke model; improving congressional oversight to increase accountability; and strengthening all agencies involved in homeland defense.

A National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC) would solve the problem of different agencies acting on the same problem with no one clearly in charge. Opportunities to uncover the 9/11 plot were lost because of lack of direction and cooperation among various agencies. The NCTC would eliminate duplication of effort. The NCTC could also act as a central location at which all threat information could be gathered to form an integrated picture.

Creating an office of National Intelligence Director would reduce barriers that agencies face in conducting joint operations; allow for creation of common standards across the foreign-domestic divide; provide a central impetus to setting priorities and allocating resources based on the threat; and provide a central organizing principle to the immensely complex and far-flung intelligence apparatus of the U.S.

The commission believes that agencies lack incentive to share important information. They tend to hoard information. When important information is developed, it should be separated from the sources and methods used to generate it, and then be shared widely.

The Commission believes that congressional oversight of intelligence operations must be streamlined. The Commission found that 88 congressional committees have some intelligence oversight authority. Additionally, the transition between presidential administrations must be improved. After the election, the winning candidate should submit a list of names of proposed Cabinet leaders to the FBI for background checks. This would speed congressional approval of new Cabinet members.

The Commission does not believe that the U.S. needs a new domestic intelligence agency such as Britain's MI-5. However, the FBI must be authorized to act much as a domestic intelligence agency would. The FBI infrastructure is well suited to gathering

domestic intelligence so long as agents receive rewards and incentives to devote the time and patience that intelligence work requires. The FBI should also establish a framework for tapping the thousands of state and local law enforcement officers to gather intelligence.

The 9/11 plot was carried out by a relatively small and loosely organized group based in Afghanistan, one of the most remote and underdeveloped areas of the planet. The group exploited the outdated and top-heavy American intelligence infrastructure. Even while operating in the U.S., they did not bother to use false names or identities. The plotters found it easy to fly "under the radar."

Nevertheless, the American security and intelligence apparatus came tantalizingly close to discovering or disrupting the 9/11 plot. Bureaucratic impediments, however, stood in the way of effective action.

The Commission has laid out a promising blueprint for unifying and coordinating the vast intelligence apparatus of the U.S. government both domestically and abroad. The plan recognizes that the enemy is no longer organized as nation-states but as nebulous ad-hoc groups that are capable of great flexibility and adaptability.

Style

Point of View

The 9/11 Commission Report is written in a documentary or report style. The report synthesizes a vast body of source material to reconstruct the 9/11 plot.

Structure

The 9/11 Commission Report is divided into 13 chapters plus appendices and notes.

Quotes

"The cockpit is not answering, somebody's stabbed in business class - and I think there's Mace - that we can't breathe - I don't know, I think we're getting hijacked." - flight attendant Betty Ong, American Airlines Flight 11. Chapter 1, page 5.

"Nobody move. Everything will be okay. If you try to make any moves, you'll endanger yourself and the airplane. Just stay quiet." - Hijacker, American Airlines Flight 11. Chapter 1, page 6.

"How the hell could a plane hit the World Trade Center?" - Vice President Richard Cheney. Chapter 1, page 35.

"We're at war ... Somebody's going to pay." - President George W. Bush. Chapter 1, page 39.

"This is a new type of war." - NORAD crew member. Chapter 1, page 46.

"[They called for the murder of any American, anywhere on Earth as the] individual duty for every Muslim who can do it in any country in which it is possible to do it." - Osama bin Laden and others. Chapter 2, page 47.

"We do not have to differentiate between military or civilian. As far as we are concerned, they are all targets." - Osama bin Laden. Chapter 2, page 47.

"[The Islamic nation, a nation that al-Qaeda's leaders said] desires death more than you desire life." - Osama bin Laden. Chapter 2, page 52.

"Merely solving this type of crime is not enough; it is equally important that the FBI thwart terrorism before such acts can be perpetrated." - FBI Director Louis Freeh. Chapter 3, page 76.

"Having a chance to get [bin Laden] three times in 36 hours and forgoing the chance each time has made me a bit angry..." - CIA bin Laden unit chief. Chapter 4, page 140.

"The threat could not be more real...Do whatever is necessary to disrupt UBL's plans ... The American people are counting on you and me to take every appropriate step to protect them during this period." - CIA Director George Tenet. Chapter 6, page 176

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"Under the Taliban, Afghanistan is not so much a state sponsor of terrorism as it is a state sponsored by terrorists." - National Security Council staff note. Chapter 6, page 182.

"Decision makers should imagine themselves on a future day when the CSG (Counterterrorism Security Group) has not succeeded in stopping al-Qaeda attacks and

hundreds of Americans lay dead in several countries, including the U.S." - National Counterterrorism Coordinator Richard Clarke. Chapter 6, page 212.

"Someday someone will die - and wall or not - the public will not understand why we were not more effective and throwing every resource we had at certain 'problems.' " - FBI agent working on the *Cole* case. Chapter 8, page 271.

"We had a very strong sense we would lose firefighters and that we were in deep trouble, but we had estimates of 25,000 to 50,000 civilians, and we had to try to rescue them." - FDNY Lower Manhattan Division Chief Peter Hayden. Chapter 9, page 290.

"We were going to vacate the building, get everybody out, and then we were going to get out." - Unidentified FDNY Chief. Chapter 9, page 291.

"The enemy of America is not our many Muslim friends; it is not our many Arab friends. Our enemy is a radical network of terrorists, and every government that supports them." - President George W. Bush. Chapter 10, page 337.

Topics for Discussion

Discuss how the history of airliner hijackings before 9/11 left the government unprepared for the 9/11 plot.

Discuss the roots of Osama bin Laden's appeal in the Muslim world.

Discuss how bureaucratic inertia played a role in the failure to detect and stop the 9/11 plot.

How did the government's failure to keep the public informed about what al-Qaeda is and the threat that it posed ultimately hamper U.S. options in neutralizing al-Qaeda?

What is "the wall" and how did it hinder detection of the 9/11 plot?

Discuss whether the 9/11 plot was imaginable or reasonably foreseeable before 9/11.

What aspects of the 9/11 plot were unique as compared with the history of hijackings before 9/11?

What influence did the 2000 presidential election have on operations and planning against al-Qaeda?

Do you believe that Iraq and Saddam Hussein were involved with al-Qaeda in any way or in the 9/11 plot?

Discuss the role of hindsight in examining history.

Summarize how the Commission would reorganize the intelligence agencies to better counter terrorist plots. What would you suggest to improve the ability to fight terrorism?

The Commission had its final hearing in June 2004. Discuss any news that you have heard since that is relevant to the Commission's conclusions.