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Why We Failed: The Rise of Islamic Extremism and America's Failure to Stop It 1979-2003

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WHY WE FAILED:
THE RISE OF ISLAMIC EXTREMISM
AND AMERICA'S FAILURE TO STOP IT
1979-2003

A Thesis Submitted to the
Office of Graduate Studies
College of Arts & Sciences of
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Master of Arts

By
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Prologue

Every generation has its defining moment. For my grandparents it was Pearl Harbor. My parents had the Kennedy assassination and for my generation, we had 9/11. In September of 2001, I was eighteen years old and that fall I had started my freshman year of college. Being away from home was not easy on me. Like most people who are away for the first time I missed my family, my friends and the routine of life that I had become accustomed to over the years. But I soldiered through those first awkward couple of weeks by engulfing myself into my studies. I began my collegiate career as a communications major. My life goal was to be a radio disc jockey. I always loved music so I figured in my infinite teenage wisdom that getting paid to talk and listen to my favorite songs all day was the way to go. It is safe to say that my world view was very narrow and naive.

I think growing up in Middle America during the 1990's made me that way. I was sheltered from the kind of hard times that my grandparents always were lecturing me about. Granted, I was always one to keep up with current world events but I never thought they affected me whatsoever. I knew that someone somewhere was living a life full of hardships that I could not imagine, and since I could not imagine them – I didn't. The world had just always seemed so big, and because of its vastness I always believed that anything bad would stay far away. I thought I was untouchable. Then came the morning of 11 September 2001.

I got up early that morning like I had any other Tuesday morning; I did my hair, brushed my teeth, got my things together and went off to class. Everything seemed to be

going along like it always had. I arrived back at my dorm around 10:00 in the morning, still completely unaware that anything was happening. While I was in the lobby of my dormitory I could hear people talking about something out of the ordinary and I could tell that their tone was distressed. Without being able to hear exact details my first thought was that a school had been shot up since that sort of thing was unfortunately quite common in those days. Losing interest I walked up the stairs to my room, opened the door and turned on the television. Sometimes life is surreal and you find yourself in places that you never thought you would ever be. This was one of those moments. On the T.V. was a live picture of the Pentagon with smoke billowing out of the top of it. The graphic on the screen said, “New York and Washington Under Attack.” My eyes were fixated on the screen looking at an image I never thought I would see. Not knowing what to do I did the only thing an eighteen year old could do at a moment like that – I called my mom.

My mother was frantic when I called her. All of her co-workers, like others all across the country, were huddled around a T.V. set at their office watching the events unfold. She told me to get some of my things together and to get home right away. Ironically, I had planned on going home that day anyway because I had to pick up a few items from my house that I needed at school. I had a math class to go to at 11:00 and my professor was less than accommodating toward people who missed his class – so I went. When I arrived in class the attacks were all anyone could talk about. As students, we did not know how we would be able to focus on advanced algebra while our fellow citizens were dying. When my teacher walked in I thought he was going to cry. This was the same guy who on the first day of class told us that when his mother died he was back

teaching the next day. He told us that he understood that our concentration was going to be challenged, but that we should continue with class anyway. About ten minutes into class a woman walked in and told us to leave, that they were shutting down the university. Upon hearing that news I went back to my dorm, did a couple of things, got into my car and drove home.

I got home around 2:00 in the afternoon. By that point the attacks had stopped. When I got in my house the first thing I did, again, was turn on the television. I remember that almost every cable station was either playing affiliated news coverage or had completely gone off the air with a generic message saying something like, “because of today’s tragic events we have suspended broadcasting.” So for the rest of the afternoon I just sat there glued, absorbing all of the information being thrown at me. That evening, somebody put luminaries all down my street in remembrance of the victims and this older woman on my street with tears in her eyes told some of my friends and I that she was so sorry that we had to witness this and that she had hoped that her generation would be the last to see America be attacked. Now my generation had its day of infamy.

My emotions did not get to me until that night. I can recall laying on my couch finally letting the past twelve hours marinate into my psyche. For the first time in my entire life I was actually scared to be an American. I was glad to be at home because I had always felt safe there, but that night I did not. That was when everything changed for me. I had so many questions about what had happened: who did this? Why did they do it? Was it going to happen again? And perhaps most importantly, how could we have let this happen? It is safe to say that my days of yearning for the disc jockey’s chair were officially over. I became obsessed with the inner workings of our government and the

apparatuses there within whose job it was to keep us safe. It had become my passion and I needed to know as much about it as possible.

In this analysis, I will not only give a chronology of the struggle between the United States and Islamic terrorism over the past thirty years, but I will also attempt to provide an answer to that important question of *why* our government failed us so miserably leading up to 9/11 and furthermore, whether the response by our leaders to those attacks, been successful in both combating terrorism around the world and also in keeping the United States safe.

The seeds of Islamic fundamentalism were planted before I was even born, and because of the American Government's inability to effectively stop it in its infancy, it continues to plague nation states and societies all over the world. The United States might have declared war on al Qaeda in late 2001; however, the enemy was at war with us long before then. The story of Islamic terrorism as we know it began almost three decades ago as a part of the Cold War in the country of Afghanistan, where it continues to this day.

I

The Afghan people have paid a terrible price in their fight for freedom. Their villages and homes have been destroyed; they have been murdered by bullets, bombs and chemical weapons. One-fifth of the Afghan people have been driven into exile. Yet their fight goes on. The international community, with the United States joining governments around the world, has condemned the invasion of Afghanistan as a violation of every standard of decency and international law and has called for a withdrawal of the Soviet troops from Afghanistan. Every country and every people has a stake in the Afghan resistance, for the freedom fighters of Afghanistan are defending principles of independence and freedom that form the basis of global security and stability.

– Ronald Reagan, *Afghanistan Day*, 10 March 1982

On Christmas Eve, 1979, the Soviet Army invaded the country of Afghanistan. The Communist government of Afghanistan requested that Soviet troops be deployed there to help fight against the growing number of Islamic rebels who were intent on overthrowing the communist regime. As the Soviets continued to build up their military forces, the Mujahideen used insurgent tactics similar to those employed by groups like the Vietcong during the Vietnam War. As the conflict continued throughout the 1980's, more and more young men from around the Middle East descended on Afghanistan to repel the communist invaders. By 1988, after almost ten years of war, the Soviets decided that the price paid in blood and money was not worth extending the conflict. All Soviet troops were out of Afghanistan by early 1989.

As a result of the Soviet-Afghan War, the Islamic fundamentalist movement was born. A man who would become a key figure down the road in this movement rose to prominence during the Soviet-Afghan conflict. Osama bin Ladin, a Saudi national, was a young man in the early 1980's when he made his way to Afghanistan. He eventually

became a leader of the Mujahideen because of the immense wealth of his family. Bin Ladin would later opine about the Soviet invasion, “I was enraged and went [to Afghanistan] at once. I arrived within days, before the end of 1979.”¹ While in Afghanistan, bin Ladin also put together a prolific network for financing the insurgency, funneling money donated by wealthy individuals, mostly in the oil-rich Persian Gulf states. Ironically, many western nations, including the United States, supplied huge amounts of money and weapons to the rebels as the Cold War continued to rage. Bin Ladin was also heavily involved in recruiting fighters to take up arms in Afghanistan.

As the war with the Soviets wound down, bin Ladin wanted to keep the Mujahideen organized in order to fight similar battles all over the world. Along with the Cleric Azzam, whom Bin Ladin worked closely with during the war against the Soviets, the two men established what they called a base or foundation (al Qaeda) as a potential general headquarters for future jihad.² Any doubts on who should be in charge of the new group were nullified when Azzam was killed in late 1989 by a car bomb.

Paradoxically, it was another assassination that would lead Bin Ladin to his other chief deputy. The late 1980’s saw a large crackdown on Islamic fundamentalism following the murder of Egyptian President Anwar Sadat. Many people sympathetic to or involved in the fundamentalist movement fled Egypt including a surgeon named Ayman al-Zawahiri who would forge close ties with bin Ladin which continue to present day.

By 1991, Osama bin Ladin found a permanent home in the African country of Sudan. The government there agreed to harbor the terrorist leader. During the early 1990’s, bin Ladin set up a complex network of finance that brought in vast amounts of

¹ Lawrence Wright, *The Looming Tower, al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11*, [Knopf, 2006] p. 109

² 9/11 Commission, *The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States* [W.W Norton and Company, 2005] p. 56

monetary wealth along with large quantities of weapons. Protected by the government of Sudan, his organization growing in size and wealth, and his message resonating with young Muslim's around the world, Osama bin Ladin declared war against a new enemy, the United States of America.

II

The early 1990's was a period of transition within the U.S. intelligence community. The conventional wisdom was that we had won the cold war and it was time to reap the peaceful dividend.³ However, the reality was completely the contrary. Shortly after the Gulf War ended in 1991, Osama bin Laden began to preach his hatred for the American government. Speaking at a family mosque, bin Laden threatened the U.S., saying, "The Americans won't stop their support of Jews in Palestine until we give them a lot of blows. They won't stop until we do Jihad against them."⁴ At the time, bin Ladin was barely known by the intelligence community and was believed to be little more than a wealthy Middle-Eastern business man.

During the early 1990's, the entire intelligence community, not just the CIA, lost billions of dollars in funding and the workforce was slashed by almost 25 percent.⁵ The post Cold War peace that many in the government were counting on never materialized as a new kind of threat was simultaneously emerging overseas. This new threat came to fruition on February 26, 1993, when an explosion shook the World Trade Center in lower Manhattan.⁶ The explosion blew through six stories of structural steel and cement, all the

³ George Tenet, *The Center of the Storm – My Years at the CIA*, [HarperCollins, 2007] p. 14

⁴ Wright, *The Looming Tower*, p. 171

⁵ Tenet, *The Center of the Storm*, p. 14

⁶ "Responding to Terrorism: Crime, Punishment, and War" (in Notes)
Harvard Law Review, Vol. 115, No. 4. (Feb., 2002) p. 1219

way down to the PATH train station below the garage and up to the Marriot ballroom above it.⁷ The FBI in New York City immediately went to work to find those who were responsible for the attack. Within days, the FBI identified a truck remnant as part Ryder rental van reported stolen in Jersey City the day before the bombing.⁸ When the accomplice who rented the van went back to the rental place to collect money he thought was owed to him claiming the vehicle had been stolen, the FBI arrested him.

Unlike future al-Qaeda related attacks, the first World Trade Center bombing was not a suicide attack. The mastermind behind the assault was Ramzi Yousef. Yousef had been highly trained in bomb-making at an al-Qaeda terror camp in Afghanistan. Although it created mass confusion and killed six people, the attack was deemed a failure. Yousef's plan was to blow out a portion of one tower's lower infrastructure in order to topple it thereby bringing down the other tower. With Yousef's relationship with bin Laden unclear, it is believed that the finances for the bombing were sent from bin Ladin to Omar Abdul Rahman, also known as the blind Sheikh. Rahman was a veteran of Islamic extremism. During the 1980's he was imprisoned in Egypt as he awaited trial over the assassination of Anwar Sadat. He was eventually acquitted. As soon as he got out of prison in Egypt, he started trying to get into the United States. He succeeded in 1990.⁹ Abdul Rahman was seeking asylum in the U.S., despite being listed as a terrorist on the State Department watch list.¹⁰

At the time of the World Trade Center bombing, Rahman was in charge of a mosque in Brooklyn and consistently taught hatred against the U.S. to his followers,

⁷ Wright, *The Looming Tower*, p. 202

⁸ 9/11 Commission, p. 72

⁹ Tim Weiner, *Legacy to Ashes – The History of the CIA*, [Anchor, 2008] p. 443

¹⁰ Wright, *The Looming Tower*, p. 201

which included Ramzi Yousef. During the investigation of the bombing, an FBI informant very familiar with the blind Sheikh and the mosque he ran tipped off the authorities of his connection to Ramzi Yousef and the other suspects. As a result of this information, the FBI was able to arrest Rahman and four other men in connection to the attack on the World Trade Center. The adequate law enforcement response set the tone for how the United States Government would deal with terrorism throughout the 1990's. Following the investigation, then President Bill Clinton said, "I was pleased with the effectiveness of our law enforcement work, but troubled by the evident vulnerability of our open society to terror."¹¹ The only person involved who eluded the authorities was Ramzi Yousef.

Yousef fled the United States for Pakistan on the night of the bombing. While overseas, Yousef along with his uncle, Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, began devising terrorist attacks on a grandiose scale of the likes had never been attempted. In 1994, after a failed plot to assassinate Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, the two men began to work on what was known as the Bojinka plot. Serbo-Croat for "big explosion," Bojinka was a complex and breathtakingly lethal operation.¹² The plan had three parts. The first and most intricate piece of the plot was their intention of blowing up 11 commercial airliners over the Pacific Ocean. Yousef had done a trial run in late 1994, where he boarded a plane in the Philippines and planted a bomb under his seat while in flight. He then got off after the plane landed and the bomb went off as the same plane made its way to its final destination. All of the planes that Yousef wanted to target were to be headed to the United States. The last two parts of the Bojinka plot involved high

¹¹ Bill Clinton, *My Life*, [Vintage, 2005] p. 497

¹² John J. Miller, Michael Stone and Chris Mitchell, *The Cell, Inside the 9/11 Plot, and why the CIA Failed to Stop it*, [Hyperion, 2003] p. 122

level assassinations. Yousef and Khalid Sheikh Mohammed or KSM, wanted to kill President Clinton and Pope John Paul II as they planned to head to East Asia. Fortunately, Filipino authorities foiled the plot after Yousef's Manila apartment caught fire.

After the Bojinka plot failed, Yousef again returned to Pakistan where he continued to evolve his notable bomb making skills. While in Islamabad, he stayed at a guest house owned by Osama bin Laden. In early 1995, a man associated with Yousef walked into the U.S. embassy in Islamabad and told American authorities he could help them capture Yousef who at the time was the most wanted terrorist in the world.

At 9:30am Pakistani time on February 7, 1995, Pakistani intelligence agents along with the FBI entered the Su-Casa Guest House in Islamabad and knocked on the door of room 16. Yousef was immediately thrown to the floor and handcuffed.¹³ Ramzi Yousef was sent back to the United States where he stood trial and was convicted on a number of charges. He is currently serving a 240 year sentence in Colorado.¹⁴

III

By the mid 1990's, Osama bin Ladin was safe and secure inside Sudan. From his African safe haven, his terror group was working on numerous attacks that bin Ladin was himself financing through numerous business ventures. However, the tide began to turn by the middle of 1995. In June of that year, there was an attempt to assassinate Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak while visiting Ethiopia. The would-be killers, who came from the Egyptian Islamic Group, had been sheltered in Sudan and helped by bin Ladin.¹⁵

¹³ Wright, *The Looming Tower*, p. 233

¹⁴ <http://www.cnn.com/US/9801/08/yousef.update/>

¹⁵ 9/11 Commission, p. 62

Following the failed plot, enormous amounts of international pressure were put on the Sudanese to expel OBL.

By early 1996, the Sudanese government, suffering from severe economic sanctions, elected to give up bin Laden. They first asked the Saudi's (bin Laden was born in Saudi Arabia) to take him; however, they promptly refused. The Saudis had revoked OBL's citizenship years before. After the Saudis refused to take the terror leader, reports claim that the Sudanese offered to hand over bin Laden to the United States. A high ranking Sudanese official at the time reportedly told the CIA, "we are ready to hand him to you."¹⁶ American authorities refused to take him because he had not been indicted for any crimes against the United States at the time, so they felt holding him would be illegal.

Although nobody was willing to take bin Laden, the Sudanese nonetheless asked him to leave the country. Bin Laden also began to have serious money problems. International pressure on Sudan, together with strains in the world economy, hurt Sudan's currency and some of bin Laden's companies ran short of funds.¹⁷ Financially hurting, Osama bin Laden accepted an invitation to go back to Afghanistan in May of 1996. This move proved to be of great utility to bin Laden and al-Qaeda.¹⁸ While in Afghanistan, he would eventually ally himself with the Taliban and transform al-Qaeda into a powerful organization with an international presence.

¹⁶ Wright, *The Looming Tower*, p. 251

¹⁷ 9/11 Commission, p. 62

¹⁸ The Struggle against Terrorism: Grand Strategy, Strategy, and Tactics (in *The Threat of Terrorism: U.S. Policy after September 11*) Barry R. Posen *International Security*, Vol. 26, No. 3. (Winter, 2001-2002) p. 41

IV

It was not until Osama bin Ladin made his move to Afghanistan that the American intelligence community began to take the threat al Qaeda posed seriously. In fact, some inside the intel community were glad to see bin Ladin go to Afghanistan believing that he would be secluded and marginalized. However, the reality would eventually turn out to be quite the contrary. The Taliban, who ruled most of Afghanistan at the time bin Ladin emigrated, were at first skeptical of the terror leader. They soon came to realize that OBL could possibly help their impotent economy and promptly embraced him. The Taliban invited bin Ladin to leave Islamabad and move to Kandahar, which was the center of Taliban rule.

Meanwhile, back in the United States there were three main players emerging in the fight against al Qaeda. In 1996, the CIA was putting together what came to be known as the “bin Ladin Unit,” headed up by Michael Scheurer. The FBI was also beginning to put assets together to combat al Qaeda. Scheuer’s counterpart in the FBI was John O’Neill. O’Neill was an eccentric personality and a veteran law enforcement official when it came to dealing with terrorism. He was believed to be one of the foremost experts in that department. Finally the Clinton Administration’s terrorism czar, Richard Clarke, was the third player. Unlike Scheurer or O’Neill, Clarke had the ears of high level government officials including Cabinet members and even the president himself.

Unfortunately, bitter personal differences and long time agency rivalries caused a rift between O’Neill and Scheurer. They were the two men most responsible for putting a stop to bin Ladin and al Qaeda, and yet they disliked each other intensely – an emotion

that reflected and ingrained antagonism of the organizations they represented.¹⁹ The division between the CIA and FBI caused each organization to be suspicious of each other at a time where their cooperation was vital. Their failure to adequately work together and share crucial intelligence would not be corrected until after the 9/11 attacks.

V

In mid 1997, the CIA began devising an elaborate plan to capture Osama bin Ladin in Afghanistan and bring him back to the United States to stand trial. The plan would involve elements of the CIA but would mostly depend on Afghan tribals. The tribals were not only used because of their expertise of the terrain but also so that if the operation went wrong American blood would not be spilled.

The objective was to infiltrate Tarnak Farms, which was believed to be bin Ladin's residence at the time. A compound of about 80 concrete or mud-brick buildings surrounded by a 10-foot wall, Tarnak Farms a located in an isolated desert area on the outskirts of the Kandahar airport.²⁰ At each corner of the wall was a machine gun nest and parked outside were two T-55 tanks.²¹ The tribals were to go into bin Ladin's residence at night and capture him while he was asleep. They would then transport him to an airstrip where an unmarked CIA plane would be waiting. The plane would eventually make its way to New York City.

However, back in Washington, the plan was received with mixed reaction. At first, the plan met very little resistance as it was scattered throughout the proper intel agencies. Richard Clarke and National Security Advisor Sandy Berger both seemed to initially endorse the plan, although Clarke wrote to Berger that it seemed "somewhat

¹⁹ Wright, *The Looming Tower*, p. 242

²⁰ 9/11 Commission, p. 111

²¹ Richard A. Clarke, *Against All Enemies; Inside America's War on Terror*, [Free Press, 2004] p. 149

embryonic,” he also referred to it later as “half-assed.”²² Many field level CIA operatives, including Michael Scheurer, felt that this was the best plan to capture bin Laden. In fact, the CIA ran numerous rehearsals of the operation, expecting that it would eventually be approved at the highest level.

By May of 1998, upper level cabinet officials including Sandy Berger and Attorney General Janet Reno, along with Richard Clarke and the Director of Central Intelligence George Tenet all expressed serious reservations about the plot. Clarke was afraid that if bin Laden was brought to the U.S., there would not be enough evidence to indict him. On May 29, the decision was made not to go ahead with the operation. The cabinet-level officials thought that the risk of civilian casualties –“collateral damage” – was too high. They were also worried about the safety of the tribals.²³

According to Richard Clarke, “the Counterterrorism Security Group unanimously decided against the assault. One of the many urban legends about al Qaeda that emerged after September 11 was that Attorney General Janet Reno had vetoed the operation. Not true. George Tenet and I did, to avoid getting all of our Afghan assets killed for nothing.”²⁴ No other plan of this magnitude was ever tried by the American government to capture Osama bin Laden. In November of 1998, bin Laden was indicted by a United States Grand Jury in New York for conspiracy to kill American citizens.²⁵

VI

²² 9/11 Commission, p. 112

²³ 9/11 Commission, p. 114

²⁴ Clarke, *Against All Enemies*, p. 149

²⁵ http://www.fas.org/irp/news/1998/11/98110602_nlt.html

On 7 August, 1998, powerful bombs ripped apart the American embassies in Nairobi, Kenya, and Salaam, Tanzania, leaving 184 dead, including 12 Americans.²⁶ Almost immediately, the al Qaeda terror network was the primary suspect behind the deadly attacks thanks to good intel out of Nairobi. In fact, CIA director George Tenet even told President Clinton that it was a “slam dunk” that the bombings were the work of al Qaeda, a phrase he would also use years later to convince George W. Bush that Saddam Hussein was hiding weapons of mass destruction.

Throughout the first half of 1998, Osama bin Ladin made numerous statements in which he declared war on the United States. On February 23 of that year, the “World Islamic Front for Jihad against Jews and Crusaders” issued a fatwa, a declaration of war, signed by Osama bin Ladin. The Front announced its desire to kill all Americans, even civilians. This marked the first time bin Ladin had publicly declared war on American civilians.²⁷ With these declarations and threats, the embassy bombings frankly came as no surprise.

Following the attack, the American Government was finally prepared and believed that it had sufficient grounds to retaliate against al Qaeda and more specifically Osama bin Ladin. The Clinton Administration decided that the best way to strike back was to do so with Tomahawk cruise missiles, which seemed to be their preferred use of military force. They proposed firing Tomahawks against eight terrorist camps in Afghanistan, including bin Ladin’s compound at Tarnak Farms.²⁸ Debate also ensued about whether or not to target areas outside of Afghanistan. Eventually, the decision was

²⁶ Larry Schweikart and Michael Patrick Allen, *A Patriot’s History of the United States, From Columbus’s Great Discovery to the War on Terror* [Sentinel Trade, 2004] p. 801

²⁷ Richard Minter, *Losing Bin Laden; How Bill Clinton’s Failures Unleashed Global Terror* [Regnery Publishing, Inc., 2003] p. 162

²⁸ 9/11 Commission, p. 116

made to bomb a pharmaceutical plant in Sudan because it was thought to be tied to bin Ladin but also because it was believed to be making a chemical weapon.

The attacks were carried out on 20 August 1998. In Afghanistan, many of the terror camps were destroyed as a result of the bombardment. However, Osama bin Ladin avoided injury. It is believed that American officials, perhaps as high up as the Secretary of State, decided to inform Pakistani authorities of the impending attack. The rationale behind notifying the Pakistani's was to avoid a reaction by Pakistan if they thought the missile was coming from their rival neighbor India. Both had detonated nuclear weapons that same year. Many people inside the American intelligence community believe that the Pakistanis tipped off bin Ladin as a result.

Regardless, the attacks failed to get bin Ladin. Moreover, in Sudan, the bombs hit their intended target. However, the bombing of the pharmaceutical plant was a mistake. The result of the hasty strike was that the impoverished country of Sudan lost one of its most important manufacturers, which employed 300 people and produced more than half of the country's medicines.²⁹ No connection between Osama bin Ladin or al Qaeda and the plant was found.

Back in Washington, Richard Clarke hoped that the embassy bombings would force the Clinton Administration to put together a long term pro-active plan to deal with al Qaeda. Instead, Clinton continued his policy of only going after the leaders of al Qaeda using precision strikes with weapons fired from, in some cases, thousands of miles away. To his credit, President Clinton did authorize, on numerous occasions in fact, the ability of the United States to basically assassinate Osama bin Ladin. Unfortunately, the tactics used to go about killing OBL proved time and time again to be wholly ineffective.

²⁹ Wright, *The Looming Tower*, p. 282

VII

Despite President Clinton's numerous declarations to his advisors in the latter half of 1998 that he was doing his utmost to go after Islamic terrorism, two major events, one domestic and one foreign, would consume his administration over the next year. On the foreign policy side, Iraq was becoming a large nuisance for the American government. Their unwillingness to comply with weapons inspections, of which they were required as a result of the first Gulf War, was beginning to illicit some sort of response from the West. On 17 December 1998, the United States and Great Britain commenced operation Desert Fox, which was a large scale bombing of Iraq using aircraft and cruise missiles.³⁰ Ironically, during the Iraqi bombing, the CIA reported having actionable intelligence of the whereabouts of Osama bin Ladin in Afghanistan. The CIA advised the White House to capture or kill bin Ladin, but they did nothing.

Meanwhile, President Clinton was embroiled in an impeachment trial for lying under oath about his relationship with White House intern Monica Lewinsky. The House of Representatives voted in favor of impeachment during operation Desert Fox. As a result, some Republicans in Congress had accused the president of something known as "wagging the dog," which basically means that he launched the strike simply to divert attention from his own personal problems. Regardless of his reasons, the Lewinsky scandal undoubtedly preoccupied the president during a time when his full attention would have been most valuable in going after the al Qaeda network. The year 1998 proved to be a turning point in the struggle against al Qaeda and as the millennium was fast approaching, it seemed clear that Osama bin Ladin had the upper hand.

VIII

³⁰ 9/11 Commission, p. 130

During 1999, as the world prepared to usher in a new millennium, counterterrorism and law enforcement officials knew that the celebrations that would take place around the globe would be prime targets for terrorists. In the United States, the FBI and other law enforcement agencies were extremely proactive in attempting to thwart any such attack. However, it was the Jordanians who were first to foil an attack. On 30 November 1999, Jordanian intelligence intercepted a telephone call between Abu Zubaydah, a longtime ally of bin Ladin, and Khadr Abu Hoshar, a Palestinian extremist.³¹ When police searched rented houses in Amman, they found numerous suspicious materials including bomb making equipment. More than a dozen men were arrested and Washington was informed. Interestingly, one of the men involved in the plot who avoided being captured was Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, who would later go on to lead al Qaeda in the Iraq War.

Back in the U.S., intelligence officials feared that what was found in Jordan was part of a larger imminent attack. John O'Neill at the FBI was particularly concerned that, as the millennium approached, al Qaeda would seize the moment to dramatize its war with America.³² Then, on 14 December 1999, thanks to a single border guard's simple intuition, an Algerian man named Ahmed Ressay was arrested attempting to enter the United States from Canada. Ressay tried to get into the country via car, but when stopped at the border crossing, his suspicious behavior led to a search of his vehicle. Once the trunk was opened, agents found two canisters of nitroglycerine, 118 pounds of urea, and four Casio watches wired to batteries and circuit boards. After an investigation,

³¹ 9/11 Commission, p. 174

³² Wright, *The Looming Tower*, p. 296

it was discovered that Ressam's intended target was to be Los Angeles International Airport. He planned to carry out his attack on or around New Years Day.³³

The fact that a terrorist was captured attempting to enter the United States was quite distressing to counterterrorism officials. After his arrest, law enforcement officials found a piece of paper in Ressam's pocket with a phone number on it. After being checked out, the number belonged to another Algerian man living in Brooklyn, New York. Subsequently, the FBI began to stakeout the man's home and on December 30, John O'Neill arrested the man on conspiracy charges and a number of other suspected terrorists on immigrations violations.³⁴

The United States dodged a huge bullet at the end of 1999, and most of the government's success was a result of sheer luck. However, following the millennium scare, it became evident to some, including John O'Neill and Richard Clarke, that terrorists intended to carry out strikes inside the U.S., and some sleeper cells might already be embedded in the country. As the year 2000 was rung in without a hitch, the real question was whether the Clinton Administration would finally get tough on terrorism in its last full year in office, or would it simply wait it out and pass the problem to the next president, whomever that might be?

IX

The year 2000 saw some evolution in the Clinton Administration's plans when it came to dealing with al Qaeda. First of all, they began to get very serious about freezing the assets of not only Osama bin Ladin, but also of the Taliban itself. This hampered the terror groups ability to freely and easily spread wealth around the world to fund further

³³ Minitier, *Losing Bin Laden*, p. 190

³⁴ Wright, *The Looming Tower*, p. 298

attacks. Secondly, the administration started to look to Pakistan as leverage against the Taliban. In fact, President Clinton planned a trip to Pakistan in 2000, even as the Secret Service advised against it for security reasons. When he met with Pakistani President Musharraf, Clinton pleaded with him to up the pressure on the Taliban to expel bin Laden in return for better relations with the United States. Clinton's one day stop over on 25 March 2000, was the first time a U.S. president had been there since 1969, illustrating our lack of influence in that important part of the world.³⁵

Next, Richard Clarke and others decided to explore the option of funding and equipping an Afghan tribal group known as the Northern Alliance. The Northern Alliance controlled much of northern Afghanistan and their leader, Ahmed Shah Massoud, was at war with both the Taliban and Osama bin Ladin. Massoud was more than willing to work with the United States and the CIA developed a fairly extensive relationship with him.³⁶ Having these eyes on the ground was a useful tactic. However, numerous concerns abounded, including staunch opposition to the relationship by the Pakistanis who had been long time adversaries of the Northern Alliance. U.S. intelligence continued its contact with the Northern Alliance up to and after 9/11, as will be discussed later, when they would become a significant ally when American forces invaded Afghanistan in October of 2001.

The final significant counterterrorism development of the year 2000 was the implementation of the unmanned *Predator* drone aircraft, of which Richard Clarke was quite fond. At this point, the Predator was unarmed and used only as a way to spy on the enemy. The *Predator* allowed the U.S. military and intelligence community to have eyes

³⁵ <http://www.globalsecurity.org/wmd/library/news/pakistan/2000/000310-washington.htm>

³⁶ 9/11 Commission, p. 188

in the sky without putting lives at risk. On 7 September 2000, the Predator flew for the first time over Afghanistan.³⁷ Astonishingly, on a flight later that month, a Predator flew over Tarnak Farms and relayed video of a tall man in white standing outside the compound. Many intelligence officials believed the man to be Osama bin Ladin – but the decision was made not to act. The main reason given by the administration was that the risk of collateral damage was too high. In other words, too many innocent woman and children could be hurt and killed by any armed attack and President Clinton did not want to risk handing bin Ladin an opportunity to stoke his recruitments. “I felt it would hurt America’s interests if we killed a lot of Afghani women and children and didn’t even get him,” Clinton recalled.³⁸ The armed version of the Predator flew after al Qaeda in Afghanistan only following September 11. It proved highly successful.³⁹

Despite this process, on October 12, 2000, al Qaeda operatives in a small boat laden with explosives attacked a U.S. Navy destroyer, the USS *Cole*, ripping a large hole in its side killing seventeen American Sailors. The *Cole* was a 505-foot, billion dollar Arleigh-Burke class guided-missile destroyer docked in Aden, Yemen.⁴⁰ The attack on the *Cole* was similar to an aborted attack planned against the USS *Sullivan* eight months earlier. This time, the plan worked to perfection and was a major victory for al Qaeda. The success of the attack ended up becoming a powerful recruiting tool for the terrorist group.⁴¹

³⁷ 9/11 Commission, p. 189

³⁸ Steve Coll, *Ghost Wars; The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and Bin Laden from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001* [Penguin, 2004] p. 531

³⁹ Clarke, *Against All Enemies*, p. 222

⁴⁰ Coll, *Ghost Wars*, p. 532

⁴¹ 9/11 Commission, p. 190

Following the operation, Osama bin Ladin was anticipating some sort of military response from the American government. Again, none came. One reason for this was that officials in the Clinton Administration wanted to be completely sure that it was al Qaeda behind the attack before they would respond, even though most experts were positive that bin Ladin ordered the attack. Moreover, the nation was in the midst of a dramatic presidential election with numerous recounts that lasted more than a month. The Clinton Administration thought it would be counterproductive to begin a military action in Afghanistan only a month before a new president would be inaugurated. In sum, the attack on the USS *Cole* killed seventeen brave Americans, was used as a propaganda tool for al Qaeda and caused countless men from all over the Middle East to travel to Afghanistan to join the Jihad. Besides the investigation into the attack, there was no significant response to this brazen act of terror. The *Cole* attack hit officers and analysts in the CIA's Counterterrorist Center very hard. The millennium period had been a succession of terrifying near misses, but they had gotten through unscathed. Now they had taken the first big loss at bin Ladin's hands since the Africa embassy attacks.⁴²

X

At best, the Clinton Administration's legacy on dealing with Islamic terrorism is unsatisfactory. By the end of 2000, bin Ladin's terror network was operating in more than fifty-five countries and were already responsible for deaths of thousands, including fifty-nine Americans.⁴³ When Bill Clinton left office in early 2001, he left his successor an al Qaeda terror group that was more powerful than ever. Moreover, as the Bush

⁴² Coll, *Ghost Wars*, p. 533

⁴³ Minitzer, *Losing Bin Laden*, p. xvi

Administration began its transition into power, al Qaeda operatives were already in the United States preparing to carry out an attack the likes of which had never been seen.

To his credit, during Clinton's years in office the United States did become somewhat more proactive in counterterrorism as circumstances worsened. The CIA and FBI began allocating large assets to fighting terrorism and they were successful at the grassroots level. Because of the hard work of individual agents, the millennium attack was thwarted and numerous arrests of high-valued individuals were carried out. However, Clinton's unwillingness to fight the terrorism problem as a war, rather than a law enforcement issue, will forever tarnish his legacy on this important issue. Clinton's top advisors, especially Secretary of State Madeline Albright and Secretary of Defense William Cohen consistently seemed flummoxed by the threat of Islamic fundamentalism and because of this they failed the president and the American people. Their inaction cost lives. Osama bin Ladin himself should have never made it alive to the year 2001, but because of decisions made by the Clinton Administration, at the highest levels, the terror leader would plague the next administration, and would continue to murder the innocent in unprecedented numbers. "You replay everything in your mind, and you ask, 'Was there anything else that could have been done?'" Clinton said later. "I tried to take Mr. Bin Ladin out of the picture for the last four years I was in office...I don't think I was either stupid or inattentive, so he is a formidable adversary."⁴⁴

XI

While most people associated Osama bin Ladin as the perpetrator behind 9/11 attacks, it was not bin Ladin who actually came up with the plot. Khalid Sheikh Mohammed (also referred to as KSM) devised what became known as the "Planes

⁴⁴ Coll, *Ghost Wars*, p. 537

Operation” in the mid 1990’s. After he saw his nephew Ramzi Yousef fail to bring down the World Trade Center with a truck bomb, he realized that using explosives could be problematic and unpredictable. He therefore drew up a plan to hijack airliners and basically use them as guided missiles. A second part of the plan, which was later nixed by bin Ladin, was to blow up commercial airliners over the Pacific Ocean simultaneous with the attack taking place on the East Coast.

Ironically, KSM was actually educated in the United States. He graduated from North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University in December 1986. Although he apparently did not attract attention for extreme Islamic beliefs or activities while in the United States, KSM plunged into the anti-Soviet Afghan jihad soon after graduating from college.⁴⁵ Lacking the resources to carry out an attack of this scale, KSM decided to pitch it to Osama bin Ladin who listened to KSM’s proposal but did not initially sign on. At the time, bin Ladin was in the process of reorganizing himself in Afghanistan and KSM was not a member of al Qaeda. Eventually however, Osama bin Ladin endorsed the operation in 1998 or early 1999. Khalid Sheikh Mohammed then moved to Afghanistan and immediately began to mastermind what would eventually be the 9/11 attacks.

The plane’s operation was a highly secret mission within al Qaeda, with only a handful of top officials knowing about it. At first, bin Ladin, KSM, and a few others began picking targets for the plan. The World Trade Center, the Pentagon, the White House, and the Capitol Building were a top priority to the group.⁴⁶ After the target selection, Osama bin Ladin picked four trusted men who would be suicide operatives and carry out the attack. However, attaining visas and other travel documents became difficult

⁴⁵ 9/11 Commission, p. 146

⁴⁶ 9/11 Commission, p. 155

for a few of those selected to gain entry into the United States. Meanwhile, a new group of promising al Qaeda recruits were arriving in Afghanistan from Hamburg, Germany. The four men who made up this group came to be known as the “Hamburg contingent.” They quickly became candidates to partake in the operation. The Hamburg group shared the anti-U.S. fervor of the other candidates for the operation, but added the enormous advantages of fluency in English and familiarity with life in the West, based on years that each member of the group had spent living in Germany.⁴⁷ The group from Hamburg included Mohamed Atta and Ziad Jarrah, two of the four eventual pilots of hijacked aircraft on 9/11.

The first potential hijackers arrived in California in January of 2000. The members of the Hamburg cell came to the East Coast that summer and immediately looked to enroll in American flight schools. One of the men from Hamburg, Ramzi Binalshibh, was unable to enter the U.S. His first applications in May and June 2000 were denied because he lacked established ties in Germany ensuring his return from a trip to the United States. In October, he tried one last time but the prior denials were noted and this application was denied as well.⁴⁸ Binalshibh was then ordered to find a replacement. Eventually, Zacarias Moussaoui was chosen as a possible candidate.

During the summer of 2000, bin Ladin and senior al Qaeda leaders in Afghanistan started selecting muscle hijackers – the operatives who would storm the cockpits of the airliners and control the passengers. It is believed that many of these men did not even know the details of the operation they were selected to be a part of. They received some final training in Afghanistan in late 2000 and early 2001, before eventually flying into the

⁴⁷ 9/11 Commission, p. 160

⁴⁸ 9/11 Commission, p. 225

United States. Most of them arrived in Florida that summer. At the same time, the future hijackers were taking cross-country surveillance flights and continuing their training. By August of 2001, most of the pieces for the operation were in place.⁴⁹

XII

Once President Bush took office, his new administration was informed by Richard Clarke and other former Clinton officials about the national security threats related to al Qaeda. Unfortunately, terrorism was non-existent as an issue in the 2000 election and initially not a top priority of the Bush administration. By the spring of 2001, it was becoming clear thanks to unprecedented amounts of intelligence chatter that a large terror attack was being planned and could be carried out in the very near future. However, the information being received by the intelligence agencies was not specific, and most officials believed that only an attack against American or Israeli interests overseas was imminent. Threat reports surged in June and July, reaching an even higher peak of urgency, so much so that CIA director Tenet said that the system was “blinking red.”⁵⁰ The problem for the intelligence community in the run up to September 11 was not that there was a lack of information; but rather that the information that was being collected failed to identify enough specifics for law enforcement and other agencies to act accordingly.

In August of 2001, two important events occurred related to what would happen on 9/11. First, on 6 August, President Bush received a memo entitled, “Bin Ladin Determined to Strike Inside the U.S.” The memo was a part of Bush’s Presidential Daily National Security Briefing. Among other things, the memo stated that terrorists intended

⁴⁹ 9/11 Commission, pp. 248-249

⁵⁰ 9/11 Commission, p. 256

to hijack airplanes and that they had conducted surveillance on federal buildings in New York.⁵¹ Unfortunately however, the memo was extremely vague and did not give a list of targets or a timeline of a possible attack. Nonetheless, law enforcement and other government agencies including the FAA were put on high alert. Also in August of 2001, Zacarias Moussaoui, the man who would come to be known as the “20th hijacker”, was arrested in Minnesota.

Moussaoui had entered the U.S. in February of 2001. He later enrolled in flight school in Oklahoma then continued his training in Minnesota. Moussaoui’s bizarre behavior and background raised red flags with some at the flight school. For example, he said that he did not intend to be a commercial pilot but wanted to learn how to fly a Boeing 747. Someone at the flight school in Minnesota alerted the FBI about Moussaoui and they began to investigate his past. Because of the existing laws which hampered law enforcement from arresting potential terrorists for years, Moussaoui was initially arrested on 16 August on immigration charges. Unfortunately, those same laws prevented the FBI from looking inside Moussaoui’s laptop.⁵²

Following Moussaoui’s arrest, the government and intel community were unsuccessful in putting the rest of the pieces of the puzzle together and by the beginning of September, those pieces involved in the plot were moving into place. A final sign of an impending attack took place on 9 September when Ahmed Shah Massoud, the leader of the Afghani Northern Alliance was murdered by al Qaeda suicide bombers posing as journalists. Some speculate that bin Ladin took out Massoud because without his leadership, the Northern Alliance would disintegrate and be of no service to the American

⁵¹ 9/11 Commission, p. 262

⁵² 9/11 Commission, p. 273

military should an invasion follow the coming attack.⁵³ That prediction would turn out to be false. Meanwhile back in U.S., the terrorists in Florida began to make their way northward and on the morning of September 11, nineteen of them boarded four commercial airliners in Newark, Boston, and Washington D.C.

XIII

The morning of 11 September 2001 started out like any other late summer day. The East Coast was enjoying beautiful weather with crystal clear dark blue skies and warm temperatures. People all over America woke up that Tuesday morning and began their daily routines, completely unaware of the events that were about to transpire. At 8:47am, the CNN program *Live at Daybreak* was carrying a fluffy report on a maternity-wear fashion show in New York. Then, at 8:48am, anchor Carol Lin broke into a commercial about debt relief. “This just in,” she said, “You are looking at... obviously a very disturbing live shot there – that is the World Trade Center, and we have unconfirmed reports this morning that a plane has crashed into one of the towers of the World Trade Center.”⁵⁴

The plane was American Airlines flight 11 being piloted by lead hijacker Mohammad Atta. Flight 11 took off from Boston’s Logan Airport at 7:59am and was supposed to be on its way to Los Angeles. But Atta and four other hijackers stormed the plane and turned it south heading it directly for its target in Lower Manhattan. At 8:24am, the following transmission came from American 11: “We have some planes. Just stay quiet, and you’ll be ok. We are returning to the airport.”⁵⁵ The FAA was immediately

⁵³ Hiro, *War Without End*, p. 297

⁵⁴ James Bamford, *A Pretext for War; 9/11, Iraq, and the Abuse of America’s Intelligence Agencies* [Doubleday, 2004] p. 16

⁵⁵ 9/11 Commission, p. 18

alerted to the status of flight 11 and numerous attempts were made to contact the cockpit. This was the first report of a commercial airliner being hijacked in the United States in decades. Mohammad Atta slammed the Boeing 767 into the North Tower at 8:46am, just two minutes before Carol Lin broke the news.

Initial reports of the crash were sketchy and news organizations scrambled to find out more information. At first it was being reported that a small plane had crashed into the World Trade Center and it was probably the result of a horrific accident. As the thick black smoke continued to billow from the huge tower, news channels all over the country began to break into their live shows to cover the developing story. As the minutes ticked by, speculation began that it in fact was a much larger plane that had struck the North Tower of the World Trade Center. Some eyewitnesses were even beginning to say that it looked like a commercial jet. Then, at 9:03 a.m., before live audiences all over America tuning in on television, another plane flew directly into the South Tower.⁵⁶ As the plane ripped through the building an enormous fireball erupted around it. Millions of people were stunned at what was playing out before their eyes. Almost immediately, what many thought to be an accident just a minute before was now recognized to be an organized and concerted attack against New York. The nation was in shock.

The second plane was United Airlines flight 175, also originating from Boston's Logan Airport and like American flight 11 the plane was travel to Los Angeles. Flight 175 departed from Logan at 8:14 a.m. carrying five hijackers and more than enough jet fuel to make the cross country flight. By 9:10 a.m., the first part of the al Qaeda plot was over and it had been a total success. New York City was in panic mode as citizens began

⁵⁶ <http://edition.cnn.com/2001/US/09/11/chronology.attack/>

to run from the Trade Center while thousands of first responders were getting their orders to head down to the burning towers.

As this was happening in New York, President Bush was at Emma T. Booker Elementary School in Sarasota, Florida for an event to promote his education policy. Bush had been notified upon his arrival at the school about American Airlines flight 77 which hit the North Tower. At 9:06 a.m., the president's Chief of Staff Andy Card stepped up to the President who was sitting in a chair partaking in Sandra Kay Daniel's second grade class and whispered into his ear, "A second plane hit the second tower. America is under attack."⁵⁷ The President's face showed the distress of the news he had just been given. A few minutes later he excused himself and was taken to a holding room where he called the vice president and saw television coverage of what was happening in New York. The President had prepared to make a speech in the library that morning, but instead he gave a generic acknowledgment of the attack:

"Ladies and gentlemen, this is a difficult moment for America. I um, will unfortunately be going back to Washington after my remarks. Secretary Rod Paige and the Lieutenant Governor will take the podium and discuss education. I do want to thank the folks here at uh, Booker Elementary School for their hospitality. Today we've had a national tragedy. Two airplanes, have crashed, into the World Trade Center – in an apparent terrorist attack on our country. I have spoken to the vice president, to the governor of New York, to the Director of the FBI and I've ordered that the full resources of the federal government go to help the victims and their families and to conduct a full scale investigation to hunt down and to find those folks who committed this act. Terrorism against our nation will not stand. And now if you'd join me in a moment of silence. May God bless the victims, their families and America. Thank you very much."⁵⁸

After his remarks, the president left the school and headed for the airport, where Air Force One was to fly him back to Washington. However, on his way to the airport,

⁵⁷ Bamford, *A Pretext for War*, p. 37

⁵⁸ <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/09/>

Mr. Bush was notified that the Pentagon had been hit. Almost immediately, the decision was made not to bring the president back to Washington, he would instead be flown to a safer location. The President strongly wanted to return to Washington and only grudgingly agreed to go elsewhere.⁵⁹ At first, the President's next stop was unknown, even to him. His staff had decided the best and safest course of action was simply to take off, ascend very high, very quickly, and then decide their next step.

While the President was in the air, all major government offices around the capital city were being evacuated as the black smoke from the Pentagon could be seen for miles. An entire side of the building was on fire and people who worked inside were running for their lives. The Pentagon, like the World Trade Center, which was still burning 230 miles up the coast, had been struck by a hijacked airplane. The plane was American Airlines Flight 77 scheduled from Washington to Los Angeles. AA 77 departed Washington Dulles Airport at 8:20 a.m. carrying five would-be hijackers.

On the flight was Barbara Olsen, the wife of Ted Olsen, the solicitor general of the United States. At some point between 9:16 a.m. and 9:26 a.m., Mrs. Olsen called her husband and reported that the flight had been hijacked, and the hijackers had knives and box cutters.⁶⁰ At 9:37 a.m., American Airlines Flight 77 crashed into the Pentagon, traveling at approximately 530 miles per hour. All on board perished, and many other civilian and military personnel in the building were killed.⁶¹ It was the first successful attack on the Capital of the United States since the War of 1812.

At almost the exact moment the Pentagon was struck by an aircraft, a call from a flight attendant aboard another airplane phoned United Airlines to notify them that they

⁵⁹ 9/11 Commission, p. 39

⁶⁰ 9/11 Commission, p. 9

⁶¹ 9/11 Commission, p. 10

had been hijacked. The plane was United Airlines Flight 93. United 93 took off from Newark International Airport at 8:42 a.m. and was scheduled to fly to San Francisco. On the morning of 9/11, there were only 37 passengers on United 93 – 33 in addition to four hijackers. The terrorists who hijacked the three other commercial flights on 9/11 operated in five-man teams. The operative likely intended to round out the team for this flight, Mohamed al Kahtani, had been refused entry by a suspicious immigration inspector at Florida’s Orlando International Airport in August.⁶²

After the hijackers got control of the plane, somewhere above Cleveland, Ohio, the pilot turned the aircraft southeast – heading directly for Washington D.C. Unlike on the other flights, the terrorists aboard United Airlines Flight 93 had lost their needed element of surprise as many of the passengers got word of the carnage taking place around the country from family members they reached via cell phones and air phones. The passengers were told by their hijackers they would be returning to the airport and to stay calm, but after hearing about the other suicide missions, they knew that doing nothing most likely meant certain death. At 9:57 a.m., the passenger revolt began. Several passengers had terminated phone calls with loved ones in order to join the insurrection. One of the callers ended her message as follows: “Everyone’s running up to first class. I’ve got to go. Bye.”⁶³

With angry passengers counterattacking, Ziad Jarrah who was piloting the plane, began swaying the aircraft back and forth to knock them off balance as they were approaching the cockpit. Realizing that it was only a matter of time before the passengers broke down the cockpit door and attempted to regain control of the plane, Jarrah asked

⁶² 9/11 Commission, p. 10-11

⁶³ 9/11 Commission, p. 11

another hijacker, “Is that it? I mean, shall we put it down?” to which the other replied, “Yes, put it in it, and pull it down.” With the sound of the passengers counterattack continuing, the aircraft plowed into an empty field in Shanksville, Pennsylvania, at 580 miles per hour, about 20 minutes flying time from Washington D.C.⁶⁴ The exact destination of United 93 will never be known, but many have speculated that it was intended to hit the Capitol Building. With the passengers of United Flight 93 successfully stopping the hijackers from reaching their intended target by sacrificing their own lives in order to save countless others, it is said that what took place aboard that plane was America’s first victory in the War on Terrorism.

Back in New York, disaster turned to catastrophe at 9:59 a.m. when the South Tower of The World Trade Center collapsed. The south tower was the second of the two buildings to be hit, but because of where the plane struck much lower than the first the structural integrity of the tower was much weaker. The inferno caused by thousands of tons of jet fuel was simply too much for the steel structure to handle. When the 110-story building fell onto the streets of Lower Manhattan, it created a plume of smoke, dust and debris that covered the bottom third of the island. The collapse also killed everyone still stranded inside of the tower, including the countless number of rescuers who rushed in after the plane hit. Exactly a half an hour later, at 10:29 a.m., the north tower collapsed. Two of the top five tallest buildings in the world were in ruins as a result of the brazen attacks.

Survivors in Lower Manhattan began a major exodus out of that part of the city. Many headed north – thousands of people walked to the bridges that led to Brooklyn – and others caught the few ferries that were still operating to New Jersey. America’s

⁶⁴ 9/11 Commission, p. 14

largest city was in complete disarray. Also in disarray was the government as it was trying to cope and fully understand exactly what was happening. It is safe to say that the terrorist attacks caught the American government completely by surprise. Although there was a substantial amount of intelligence gathered throughout the summer of 2001 regarding a possible attack, the U.S. government never anticipated to deal with an attack on this scale.

When the president took off from Florida aboard Air Force One, he immediately called the vice-president who was in the presidential bunker below the White House. Mr. Cheney, then National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice, and Transportation Secretary Norm Mineta were in the bunker as the Secret Service was tracking United 93 heading directly for Washington. As United 93 got closer and closer to the White House, covering a mile every seven seconds, Cheney conferred with Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and then asked Bush to order the United jetliner shot down.⁶⁵ The president did eventually give the order to shoot down civilian commercial airliners if they were deemed to be unresponsive and potentially hostile. The decision was unprecedented. According to Richard Clarke, President Bush made three important decisions that morning, “One, the president had ordered the use of force against aircraft deemed to be hostile. Two, the White House requested a fighter escort of Air Force One. Three, and this applied to all agencies, they initiated COG.” COG was Continuity of Government, a supersecret doomsday plan to keep the Federal government running no matter how badly it was attacked.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Bamford, *A Pretext for War*, p. 64

⁶⁶ Bamford, *A Pretext for War*, p. 66

Unfortunately, the military was also unprepared to effectively respond on the morning of September 11. Bureaucratic difficulties between the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and military caused mass confusion over which planes were hijacked and where they were heading. Eventually the FAA ordered a ground-stop of all aircraft within the United States, meaning that no aircraft, commercial or private, was to takeoff anywhere in America. They also ordered all incoming international flights to either turn around or to land in Canada. Neither had ever happened before.

The military was also having trouble finding an adequate number of fighter jets to even fly defensive air patrols over Washington and New York. Moreover, two jets planes that were in the air doing exercises that morning were radioed and told to head for United 93 with the intention of taking the flight out if it did not follow orders to land. However, those planes were unarmed, so their only course of action would have been to intentionally ram the plane potentially killing the fighter pilot. When asked about this order, one military commander said, "As military men, there are times you have to make sacrifices."⁶⁷ By the time the fighters had reached the vicinity of United 93 it had already crashed near Shanksville.

By mid-morning the attacks had stopped, but not before causing devastation in two of America's largest cities and costing the lives of nearly 3,000 innocent civilians. For the rest of that day, Americans were glued to their television sets as almost every cable channel was either carrying affiliated news coverage or went off the air entirely. Shock was beginning to turn to anger, and the American public was waiting to hear from their president.

⁶⁷ Bamford, *A Pretext for War*, p. 67

George W. Bush had only been in office for eight months when 9/11 happened. The former two-term governor of Texas had practically no foreign policy experience when he was elected, and at that time, nobody seemed to care as foreign policy issues took a back seat to those dealing with domestic policy. Within a matter of hours that morning, his entire presidency changed as he went from a peacetime president to a wartime Commander-in-Chief. But before there could be retaliation, Bush knew his first goal was to comfort a sad and scared country. At 8:30 that evening, the president addressed the nation.

In perhaps his best speech either before or since, President Bush was able to console the nation and reassure them that even though the attacks were horrific, America was still as strong a country as it was the day before. “These acts of mass murder were intended to frighten our nation into chaos and retreat. But they have failed. Our country is strong. A great people has been moved to defend a great nation. Terrorist attacks can shake the foundations of our biggest buildings, but they cannot touch the foundation of America. These acts shatter steel, but they cannot dent the steel of American resolve,” the president said.⁶⁸

Thus ended one of the darkest days in American history. What happened on 11 September 2001 was the biggest failure by the United States government since the Civil War. A government’s most sacred and serious duty is to protect its people and the Bush Administration took that for granted in their first eight months in power, just as the Clinton Administration had before it. Had the intelligence community been more vigilant in the years before 9/11, the plot most likely would have been thwarted and all the lives lost that morning could have been spared. As a result of the attacks something had to be

⁶⁸ <http://www.september11news.com/PresidentBush.htm>

done and it was evident by most, both inside government and out, that changes must be made not only to American foreign policy but also to our national security apparatus.

XV

Americans woke up on 12 September in a new world. Almost everyone knew that the attacks that took place the morning before changed things, but exactly how much would change was still uncertain. The American people were looking to their government for answers. That morning, President Bush called a meeting of his newly formed war cabinet. The meeting had numerous objectives, the most important of which was determining who was behind the attacks. Flanked by Secretary of State Colin Powell to his right and Vice President Dick Cheney at his left, the president said at the meeting that what happened the day before was “more than an act of terror, it was an act of war.” He went on to say that it “was a monumental struggle between good and evil, and that good will prevail.”⁶⁹

Though he never made a reference of blame for the attack, Osama bin Ladin was the primary suspect from the beginning for many inside intelligence circles. They believed that bin Ladin was the only international terrorist with the resources, such as the money and the manpower, to pull off such an extravagant attack. As mentioned previously in this analysis, there had been many warnings about bin Ladin’s intent to attack American targets, but few foresaw such a brazen attack on the American mainland.

By late 2001, Osama bin Ladin was still relatively unknown to the American people. Unless a person closely followed world events, the name bin Ladin would not have meant much. Moreover, words like Taliban and al Qaeda were similarly new to the American lexicon, but in the days following the attack, people were being inundated with

⁶⁹ <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010912-4.html>

these new phrases as everyone tried to educate themselves as to who was behind the attack and why they did it.

For his part, President Bush was forced, like any wartime president, to do two main things: plan the war effort behind the scenes while simultaneously getting public support for military action from the people. In this situation, however, the president had a third duty, and that was to heal the nation. The American people do not get rattled easily. Throughout our history we have been fortunate that the atrocities of most foreign wars have stayed far away, but 9/11 brought the horror home. As early as the day after the attack, citizens of New York and surrounding areas began covering parts of the city with posters with the pictures of loved ones who might still be trapped in the ruins of the World Trade Center. American flags were being bought in record numbers as people who had never flown the flag put it outside their homes and on their cars. And candlelight vigils were held around the nation for those who had lost their lives. The country needed leadership and George W. Bush knew he needed to step up.

Once Bush adjourned his cabinet meeting on 12 September he went to the Pentagon to survey the damage. He shook hands with first responders and others who were there trying to pull anyone they could out of the rubble. The president made 14 September a National Day of Remembrance. To commemorate the day, President Bush gave a speech at the National Cathedral in Washington saying, "God's signs are not always the ones we look for. We learn in tragedy that his purposes are not always our own. Yet the prayers of private suffering, whether in our homes or in this great cathedral, are known and heard, and understood. There are prayers that help us last through the day, or endure the night. There are the prayers of friends and strangers, that give us strength

for the journey. And there are prayers that yield our will to a will greater than our own.”⁷⁰

After his speech in Washington, the president traveled to the still smoldering ruins of the World Trade Center, now dubbed Ground Zero. During the visit, the president greeted dozens of tireless workers at the site. In perhaps his most inspiring moment as president, Bush, standing on nothing more than a pile of rubble and speaking with a bullhorn was being yelled at by onlookers in the crowd that they could not hear him. Unfazed, Bush famously retorted, “I can hear you. I hear you, the rest of the world hears you, and the people who knocked these buildings down will hear all of us soon.”⁷¹

On 20 September the president addressed a joint session of Congress. The speech to Congress and the nation marked a shift from healing to a march toward war. The president outlined in no uncertain terms that the war the country was about to endure was going to be different. It would not be conventional and it would not be easy. The speech was incredibly optimistic, attempting to get the American people on board by ensuring them that victory was a certainty.

The president also introduced Osama bin Ladin, the Taliban and al Qaeda to the American people giving them a crash course on who they were and where they lived. Moreover, the president also outlined what his foreign policy would look during the speech when he said, “And tonight, the United States of America makes the following demands on the Taliban: Deliver to United States authorities all the leaders of al Qaeda who hide in your land. Release all foreign nationals, including American citizens, you have unjustly imprisoned. Protect foreign journalists, diplomats and aid workers in your

⁷⁰ <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010914-2.html>

⁷¹ <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010914-9.html>

country. Close immediately and permanently every terrorist training camp in Afghanistan, and hand over every terrorist, and every person in their support structure, to appropriate authorities. Give the United States full access to terrorist training camps, so we can make sure they are no longer operating. These demands are not open to negotiation or discussion. The Taliban must act, and act immediately. They will hand over the terrorists, or they will share in their fate.”⁷² Making no distinction between the terrorists and the nations that harbor them became known as The Bush Doctrine, a totally different policy than the one embraced by the Clinton administration. The president ended the speech this way:

Great harm has been done to us. We have suffered great loss. And in our grief and anger we have found our mission and our moment. Freedom and fear are at war. The advance of human freedom -- the great achievement of our time, and the great hope of every time -- now depends on us. Our nation -- this generation -- will lift a dark threat of violence from our people and our future. We will rally the world to this cause by our efforts, by our courage. We will not tire, we will not falter, and we will not fail. It is my hope that in the months and years ahead, life will return almost to normal. We'll go back to our lives and routines, and that is good. Even grief recedes with time and grace. But our resolve must not pass. Each of us will remember what happened that day, and to whom it happened. We'll remember the moment the news came -- where we were and what we were doing. Some will remember an image of a fire, or a story of rescue. Some will carry memories of a face and a voice gone forever. And I will carry this: It is the police shield of a man named George Howard, who died at the World Trade Center trying to save others. It was given to me by his mom, Arlene, as a proud memorial to her son. This is my reminder of lives that ended, and a task that does not end. I will not forget this wound to our country or those who inflicted it. I will not yield; I will not rest; I will not relent in waging this struggle for freedom and security for the American people. The course of this conflict is not known, yet its outcome is certain. Freedom and fear, justice and cruelty, have always been at war, and we know that God is not neutral between them. Fellow citizens, we'll meet violence with patient justice -- assured of the rightness of our cause, and confident of the victories to come. In all that lies before us, may God grant us wisdom, and may He watch over the United States of America.⁷³

⁷² <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010920-8.html>

⁷³ <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010920-8.html>

Bush's message and performance in the week following the terror attacks seemed to have resonated very well with the public. Eight out of 10 Americans watched Bush's address to Congress on television, a record, and were impressed, resulting in his popularity rating soaring to 91 percent, the same as his father, George Bush, Sr., achieved in the afterglow of the Gulf War a decade earlier.⁷⁴ With the nation firmly behind him it was time for this untested president to rally a bruised America away from grief and anger toward resolve and patience. Meanwhile, the American military, the most powerful military in the history of the world, was gearing up for a new kind of war and the first war of the 21st century.

XVI

By mid September of 2001, it was clear within the Bush Administration that Afghanistan would be the first battlefield of the war on terrorism. That same month, the U.S. Senate passed a resolution by 98 votes to none, authorizing the president to use "all appropriate and necessary force" against nations, organizations or individuals who were involved in the acts of terrorism against America or harbored people who were involved.⁷⁵ ⁷⁶ Differing from the policy of the Clinton Administration, however, it was not going to be sufficient simply to remove bin Ladin from the country, but rather to take out the Taliban leadership in Kabul and support regime change and nation building, something George W. Bush was against during his campaign for the presidency. However, Afghanistan in general was a mystery to many Americans including most inside the government.

⁷⁴ Dilip Hiro, *War Without End; The Rise of Islamist Terrorism and Global Response* [Routledge, 2002] p. 323

⁷⁵ Hiro, *War Without End*, p.308

⁷⁶ Two Senators did not vote: <http://projects.washingtonpost.com/congress/107/senate/1/votes/281/>

The country of Afghanistan had essentially been in political and social anarchy since the Soviets pulled out in 1989 and very little if any relations had been attempted by the U.S. thereafter. “On a percentage basis,” the leading Western analyst of the Red Army’s Afghan war estimated, “the Soviet Union inflicted more suffering on Afghanistan than German inflicted on the Soviet Union in World War II.”⁷⁷ From 1992 to 1996 the country was basically run by various mujahedeen groups. Then in 1996, the Taliban came to power inside the country under the leadership of Mullah Omar. Taliban is a Pashto and Persian word of Arabic origin referring to lower-level students of Islam, usually from poor, rural backgrounds and always male.⁷⁸ When they captured control of Kabul in September of 1996, the Taliban enjoyed unchallenged control of 70 percent of Afghanistan, and it subdued much of the remaining territory over the next two years. At one point during his tenure in office, the administration of Bill Clinton viewed the Taliban favorably and sent high-level officials to consult with its leaders.⁷⁹ The reasons for American interest in Afghanistan were their oil supply and also their proximity to Iran. Nothing substantial came out of those meetings and only Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates ever officially recognized the Taliban as a legitimate government.⁸⁰ During the late 1990’s, the Taliban increasingly isolated its neighbors which included such powerful world-players as China, Russia, and the aforementioned Iran.

At the same time, terrorist activity inside of Afghanistan was beginning to reach a fevered pitch. In the five years after 1996, al Qaeda trained some 11,000 recruits in

⁷⁷ Michael Scheuer, *Imperial Hubris; Why the West is Losing the War on Terror* [Potomac, 2007] p. 27

⁷⁸ Shaista Wahab and Barry Youngerman, *A Brief History of Afghanistan* [Facts on File, 2007] p. 210

⁷⁹ Wahab and Youngerman, *A Brief History of Afghanistan*, pp. 211-212

⁸⁰ Wahab and Youngerman, *A Brief History of Afghanistan*, p. 223

Afghanistan, up to 3,000 of them aspiring terrorists and suicide bombers. By late 2001, some 6,500 foreign al Qaeda fighters were stationed at dozens of bases around the country, the majority in Kabul and east.⁸¹ Osama bin Ladin was amassing a small army of terrorists from his safe haven in Afghanistan and the Taliban was aiding the effort. Disturbingly, the rest of the world, including the United States, permitted this mobilization.

By late September of 2001, while the Pentagon was busy finalizing war plans, President Bush was doing his best to forge a coalition of willing nations to assist the U.S. in its new effort to combat global terrorism. With most of the world behind him, Bush reached out to Pakistan, a nation that was a long time ally of the Taliban. Moreover, nearly all observers assert that the government of Pakistan was instrumental in the rapid rise of the Taliban, possibly even its creation.⁸² Realizing the mounting pressure on his nation, Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf decided to solicit full cooperation with the U.S. led coalition, a decision that would cause him great political harm. But Musharraf knew that the writing was on the wall for the Taliban, and continued support of them from his government could make themselves a future target of the United States. The willingness of the Pakistanis to cooperate with the U.S. was a major benefit for the Bush administration as they went forward and Musharraf himself became vitally important. Pakistan was a nuclear power, so it was of paramount importance that the Musharraf regime remained in tact.

On 7 October 2001, in a brief address to the nation, President Bush announced the beginning of military actions in Afghanistan codenamed Operation Enduring Freedom.

⁸¹ Wahab and Youngerman, *A Brief History of Afghanistan*, p. 220

⁸² Wahab and Youngerman, *A Brief History of Afghanistan*, p. 210

The operation would involve both ground and air units to root out members of al Qaeda and the Taliban with the intent to capture or kill. The operation began with a series of strikes by numerous aircraft including both bombers and fighters, along with Tomahawk cruise missiles launched from ships and submarines. United States Special Forces were used heavily in the early days of the war because of their ability to get into and out of tough and hostile terrain. During initial combat operations in northern Afghanistan as part of Operation Enduring Freedom, Army Special Forces were tested to a degree not seen since the Vietnam War. With little time to prepare for this mission, Special Forces teams were to land by helicopter deep in hostile territory, contact members of the Northern Alliance, and coordinate their activities in a series of offensives.⁸³

The Northern Alliance, as noted earlier, had for years been in contact with American intelligence agencies and would play a crucial role in helping the U.S. military dismantle the Taliban's control in Afghanistan. American Special Forces worked along side Northern Alliance troops to take control of important population centers like Kabul, Kandahar and Mazar-e-Sharif. By mid November, the Taliban was in disarray and what was left of al Qaeda was on the run.

After the fall of Kabul, al Qaeda and Taliban forces had retreated into major strongholds in the Tora Bora Mountains south of Jalalabad near the Pakistani border, some of the most rugged terrain in the world. The terrorists had controlled the area for years, digging hundreds of caves and refuges and establishing their training camps. In addition to being intimately familiar with the area, they had emplaced extensive fortifications and stockpiled weapons and ammunition to fight a protracted defense.⁸⁴

⁸³ <http://www.history.army.mil/brochures/Afghanistan/Operation%20Enduring%20Freedom.htm>

⁸⁴ <http://www.history.army.mil/brochures/Afghanistan/Operation%20Enduring%20Freedom.htm>

Osama bin Ladin, his top deputy Ayman al Zawahiri and Taliban leader Mullah Omar all were able to escape the initial onslaught brought to Afghanistan by the United States military. It is believed that they also made their way to the mountainous security of Tora Bora by December of 2001. Despite thousands of sorties called in by Special Forces troops in the area, it is thought that all three men were able to survive the barrage and make their way into the extreme eastern Pakistan where they would be protected by sympathetic tribesmen. Nobody is certain of the physical condition the three men were in when they escaped Afghanistan in late 2001, although some intelligence reports have stated that bin Ladin himself was seriously injured during an airstrike while he was still in Tora Bora; that report has never been substantiated. Audio and video footage of the terror leader that have surfaced since 2002 seem to indicate that he in fact did survive any injury.⁸⁵

By early 2002, the United States military effectively rid Afghanistan of Taliban rule, without much of any significant organized resistance. Al Qaeda elements also were driven out of the country as a result of the American military. Now the Administration back in Washington had to set up a democratic government inside of the war torn nation. At the CIA several officers proposed Hamid Karzai as the new Afghani president. Karzai was a moderate Afghan leader who had been a junior minister under the Taliban but defected and joined the opposition. Karzai took the oath of office as Afghanistan's president on 22 December 2001 – just 102 days after 9/11.⁸⁶ It would have seemed that the swift military victory in Afghanistan followed by the creation of a semi-stable

⁸⁵ 9/11 Commission, p. 338

⁸⁶ Bob Woodward, *State of Denial; Bush at war, Part III* [Simon and Schuster 2007] p. 130

government in Kabul meant that the United States had succeeded in the first theater of the Global War on Terrorism.

Unfortunately, hindsight has proven that not to be the case. There are many reasons that the war in Afghanistan cannot yet be labeled a success. First and foremost, now seven years since the first shots were fired, the war has not ended. Why? Well for starters, some believe the fact that the U.S. waited almost a month after 9/11 to attack Afghanistan allowed many senior members of al Qaeda and the Taliban including bin Ladin, al Zawahiri and Mullah Omar to escape. Moreover, some intelligence reports indicate that bin Ladin began dispersing members of al Qaeda out of Afghanistan to nearby countries before the attack on America anticipating a severe response. Also, when the aforementioned leaders hid in the Tora Bora Mountains, American military leaders were unwilling to use boots on the ground to hunt them down, deciding rather to rely on airpower against the wishes of CIA officers in the area. Furthermore, once bin Ladin and other left over Taliban and al Qaeda arrived in the border area between Afghanistan and Pakistan, the U.S. seemed incapable of devising a coherent policy to go after them. Inadequate resources on the ground along with an unwillingness to carry out any military operations inside of Pakistani territory made the area a safe haven for the terrorists.⁸⁷

The Karzai government however was able to gain a respectable foothold in Afghanistan, but only with substantial aid both financially and militarily from the Americans and eventually NATO. That is not to say that the country was or has ever been completely pacified. Remnants of the Taliban continue to mount offensives, primarily in the spring, against Afghani and coalition security forces. Although they are continuously

⁸⁷ 9/11 Commission, p. 338

defeated, they are still, to this day, able to retreat to the tribal areas of the Afghan/Pakistan border to regroup.

By mid-2002, without a clear cut victory to speak of in Afghanistan, the Bush Administration was already beginning to set its sights on the next theater in the war on terror and this time the bulls eye was on a country that had no solid connection to the events of 9/11, but had been a thorn in the side of U.S. foreign policy makers for the better part of 20 years. But before the war in Iraq commenced, the Bush White House was busy dramatically transforming their intelligence gathering capabilities. Those changes, which would become a political liability for Mr. Bush, became powerful tools in thwarting future attacks and in apprehending many highly sought after individuals.

XVII

President Bush and his advisors realized that using the military was only one piece of the puzzle when it came to combating and capturing terrorists. New and drastic measures were needed to keep the American mainland safe from further attacks so in October of 2001, the president signed into law the USA Patriot Act. The Patriot Act made possible what should have been done all along. It laid out the future ground work for intelligence and law enforcement agencies regarding counterterrorism, most importantly, it made it imperative that the two work together. For years, different governmental bureaucracies like the FBI and CIA were unwilling to share vital information and in many cases actually competed against one another. In a post 9/11 world, those types of petty squabbles were unacceptable. The Patriot Act, passed in late 2001, vastly expanded

the ability of United States law enforcement agencies to go after and hunt down suspected terrorists both domestically and abroad – much to the chagrin of many civil libertarians. A central provision of the bill was the removal of “the wall” on information sharing between the intelligence and law enforcement communities.⁸⁸ The Patriot Act was legislative proof that the Bush administration was now serious about combating terror and it showed that they were willing to do anything they could within the law to protect America. The bill was strongly supported by both major political parties and passed both Houses of Congress with ease.

Another change instituted by the Bush administration as a result of the 9/11 attacks was the creation of the Department of Homeland Security. This new department was to be headed up by a cabinet level official who would be in charge of coordinating the effort to protect the American mainland. President Bush nominated popular Pennsylvania Governor Tom Ridge to be the first Secretary of Homeland Security and he was easily confirmed.

Things also changed around the world. It was now the policy of the United States to hunt down suspected terrorists anywhere they were, regardless of which country’s borders they found themselves within. Actionable human intelligence on the ground was always the preferred method of capturing a terrorist alive. That way they could be interrogated and hopefully give up valuable information regarding a future attack. But the U.S. military was once again relying heavily on the Predator drone. The Predator proved to be an effective anti-terror tool and would later be armed with missiles to take out suspected terrorist hideouts. But again, having people on the ground was always the preferred method.

⁸⁸ 9/11 Commission, p. 328

In March of 2002, there was actionable intel on a high value al Qaeda terrorist named Abu Zubaydah. Zubaydah had run a terrorist camp in Afghanistan where some of the 9/11 hijackers trained. He was, says an FBI official, like a U.S. Army recruiting station for al Qaeda.⁸⁹ As a high ranking member of the terror group, capturing Zubaydah was a top priority. By late March, the CIA amassed a team to act on intelligence they had received as to Zubaydah's whereabouts and on the 28 March, he was captured alive. Abu Zubaydah turned out to be in a two-story house in Faisalabad, an industrial city in Punjab Province in Western Pakistan.⁹⁰ Psychologically, getting Zubaydah was a significant victory inside of a depressed and browbeaten United States intelligence community. During Zubaydah's subsequent detention, the CIA began to implore certain coercive interrogation methods to get him to talk. While it is still not clear exactly what Zubaydah was faced to endure, there have been reports by various media outlets that he was forced to do things like stand for an extended period of time and also face sleep deprivation. Moreover, Zubaydah is also believed to have undergone something known as waterboarding.

Waterboarding is a highly controversial form of interrogation. During waterboarding, the suspect is put flat on his back and then has his face covered either with a rag or with cellophane. The interrogators then proceed to pour water on the person's face to simulate a feeling of asphyxiation and drowning. Though the process is extremely uncomfortable and causes the person to react with much distress, it is not life threatening and does not leave any permanent physical scarring. While in captivity, Zubaydah did begin to give the CIA valuable leads to go after other prominent al Qaeda

⁸⁹ Ronald Kessler, *The Terrorist Watch; Inside the Desperate race to stop the next attack* [Crown, 2007] p. 44

⁹⁰ Kessler, *The Terrorist Watch* , p. 46

members. Zubaydah identified Ramzi Binalshibh, who was eventually captured in September 2002. Binalshibh was a top al Qaeda recruiter and a member of bin Ladin's inner circle.⁹¹

With Osama bin Ladin and his top deputies becoming more and more elusive in early 2002, American intelligence operatives continued to go after other high ranking members of al Qaeda and particularly those who were involved in the planning and preparation of the 9/11 attacks. On 1 March 2003, they got their big prize. Working with their Pakistani counterparts in Intel known as the ISI, American officers were able to track down and capture Khalid Sheikh Mohammed – the previously mentioned mastermind behind the attack on the United States. Mohammed was given to the U.S., detained and taken into custody for interrogation. Exactly where he was taken immediately following his capture is still not known.

While in detention, KSM was questioned numerous times about his involvement in the planning and implementing of the 9/11 attacks. Furthermore, KSM was also asked about his involvement in any future attacks al Qaeda was planning against the West. To the surprise of many inside the intelligence community, KSM seemed very willing to give up important information on the inner workings of al Qaeda, even naming names. One official said that because of his cooperation, “We’re getting valuable, credible, specific information.”⁹² Khalid Sheikh Mohammed also later admitted to being responsible for perpetuating the failed plot by would be shoe-bomber Richard Reid in 2001. Moreover, he also took the credit for personally decapitating American journalist

⁹¹ Kessler, *The Terrorist Watch*, p. 50

⁹² <http://www.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,436061,00.html>

Daniel Pearl in 2002.⁹³ In early 2008, The Director of Central Intelligence Michael Hayden admitted to an open session of Congress that the CIA had waterboarded KSM during his detention. Hayden has since prohibited the CIA from using the procedure.⁹⁴

Khalid Sheikh Mohammed was one of al Qaeda's most successful members since officially joining the organization back in the late 1990's. His high level involvement in more than two dozen terrorist plots has made him the most senior terrorist to be captured by the United States since the start of the Global War on Terrorism. Currently, Khalid Sheikh Mohammed is awaiting trial by military tribunal at the United States terrorist detention facility at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. Both Ramzi Binalshibh and Abu Zubaydah also currently reside in American custody at Guantanamo Bay.

XVIII

By mid-2002, The War on Terrorism appeared to be going along quite well. Afghanistan had been liberated with soft resistance, high level terrorists within al Qaeda were either captured or killed, the Taliban was in disarray and most of the world community was in lock-step behind all of the action the United States was taking. Riding high with popular public opinion comfortably behind him, President Bush wanted to expand the War on Terrorism to a second battlefield – Iraq.

The President wondered immediately after the 9/11 attacks whether Saddam Hussein's regime might have had a hand in them.⁹⁵ Ultimately cooler heads prevailed and it was decided within his administration that Afghanistan should be the first priority. But as time went on, many prominent players inside the Bush administration were convinced that any War on Terrorism would not be successful without targeting Saddam Hussein's

⁹³ http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/in_depth/2811855.stm

⁹⁴ <http://abcnews.go.com/Blotter/TheLaw/story?id=4244423&page=1>

⁹⁵ 9/11 Commission, p. 334

regime inside of Iraq. The first Gulf War, begun by the president's father, failed to take out Hussein after he invaded Kuwait in 1990, and over the next decade, Saddam was constantly playing the role of antagonist against the United States.

Post 9/11, the Bush administration's philosophy was that it was too risky to have an enemy of the United States ruling a nation that could possibly be in possession of weapons of mass destruction. Saddam Hussein had actually used chemical weapons against Iraq's own Kurdish population in Halabja in late 1988.⁹⁶ Hussein routinely kicked out United Nations weapons inspectors in violation of the sanctions set in place by that body following the first Gulf War, which only added to the suspicion that he was hiding something. Not willing to take the risk of Saddam passing a chemical or biological weapon to a terrorist organization, President Bush looked to the U.S. intelligence community, the same group that failed us prior to 9/11, to find out what they could about the current state of Saddam Hussein's weapons program.

The Bush administration used three key events to make its case for war against Iraq using WMD as its primary argument. First was the National Intelligence Estimate titled *Iraq's Continuing Programs for Weapons of Mass Destruction* released in October of 2002. Second was the unanimous passage by the United Nations of UN resolution 1441 which gave Saddam Hussein one last chance to comply with weapons inspections and disarmament. And finally there was then Secretary of State Colin Powell's testimony to the United Nations on 5 February 2003.⁹⁷ Powell's speech at the United Nations was essential in making the case for war. Colin Powell had been a highly respected public servant by both sides of the political aisle, so most people were willing to believe what he

⁹⁶ Raphael Israeli, *The Iraq War* [Sussex Academic Press, 2004] p. 7

⁹⁷ Report of the Select Committee on Intelligence on the U.S. Intelligence Community's Prewar Intelligence Assessments on Iraq [Government Document, 2004] pp 8 and 68

had to say. Powell told the UN that, “every statement I make today is backed up by sources, solid sources. These are not assertions. What we’re giving you are facts and conclusions based on solid intelligence.”⁹⁸ Powell passionately closes his remarks this way:

For more than 20 years, by word and by deed, Saddam Hussein has pursued his ambition to dominate Iraq and the broader Middle East using the only means he knows: intimidation, coercion and annihilation of all those who might stand in his way. For Saddam Hussein, possession of the world's most deadly weapons is the ultimate trump card, the one he must hold to fulfill his ambition.

We know that Saddam Hussein is determined to keep his weapons of mass destruction, is determined to make more. Given Saddam Hussein's history of aggression, given what we know of his grandiose plans, given what we know of his terrorist associations, and given his determination to exact revenge on those who oppose him, should we take the risk that he will not someday use these weapons at a time and a place and in a manner of his choosing, at a time when the world is in a much weaker position to respond?

The United States will not and cannot run that risk for the American people.

Leaving Saddam Hussein in possession of weapons of mass destruction for a few more months or years is not an option, not in a post-September 11th world.

My colleagues, over three months ago, this Council recognized that Iraq continued to pose a threat to international peace and security, and that Iraq had been and remained in material breach of its disarmament obligations.

Today, Iraq still poses a threat and Iraq still remains in material breach. Indeed, by its failure to seize on its one last opportunity to come clean and disarm, Iraq has put itself in deeper material breach and closer to the day when it will face serious consequences for its continue defiance of this Council.

My colleagues, we have an obligation to our citizens. We have an obligation to this body to see that our resolutions are complied with. We wrote 1441 not in order to go to war. We wrote 1441 to try to preserve the peace. We wrote 1441 to give Iraq one last chance.

Iraq is not, so far, taking that one last chance.

We must not shrink from whatever is ahead of us. We must not fail in our duty and our responsibility to the citizens of the countries that are represented by this body.

Thank you, Mr. President.⁹⁹

Powell’s powerful testimony did what it was intended to do, in that the American people along with much of the world community believed that Saddam Hussein

⁹⁸ Select Committee on Intelligence, p. 239

⁹⁹ <http://www.state.gov/secretary/former/powell/remarks/2003/17300.htm>

possessed weapons of mass destruction. By early March, three out of four American's supported invading Iraq.¹⁰⁰ On 19 March 2003, President Bush ordered the beginning of Operation Iraqi Freedom. The mission was to remove Saddam Hussein and his regime from power and find his stockpiles of weapons. While the former was completed with relative ease initially, the latter never materialized and no weapons were ever found. The war in Iraq has continued however, and today, almost six years after it began, there are still more than 130,000 American troops inside Iraq and 4,138 brave servicemen have sacrificed their lives.¹⁰¹

The failure to find weapons of mass destruction in Iraq was just another in a long line of intelligence problems that have plagued our government over the past three decades when it comes to combating global terrorism. What happened prior to 9/11 transcends politics with both major political parties and two presidential administrations, one Democrat and one Republican, failing to take the terror threat seriously costing innocent people their lives.

Conclusion

Fear is a powerful emotion. It can make a person do things that they would not do under normal circumstances. Fear is what Americans did not have before 9/11. We were complacent with our peace. Our belief that oceans would always protect us blinded our ability take threats on our nation's security seriously. In my opinion, and after all of my research, that is the answer to why we failed. It might be simplistic, but we as a people, from powerful to poor, from presidents to peasants, from Democrat to Republican, never imagined that we would be hit the way we were on 9/11. Complacency is the reason

¹⁰⁰ <http://www.gallup.com/poll/28390/Gallup-Poll-Review-Key-Points-About-Public-Opinion-Iraq.aspx>

¹⁰¹ http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/ops/iraq_casualties.htm

Osama bin Ladin was not taken out at Tarnak Farms in 1998. It is why we allowed the 9/11 hijackers to travel in, out and around America for more than a year before the attacks without knowledge of their presence. It is why there was no military response after seventeen U.S. sailors died when the USS *Cole* was attacked. It is why terrorism was not even a major issue in the 2000 presidential election. And it is why nineteen men, driven by radical religious beliefs, were able to board airplanes, kill thousands of innocent people and shock the world on an otherwise beautiful September morning.

Some men, however, did try to warn the powers at be that something extraordinary was imminent, that al Qaeda and the likes had their sights set not on American targets overseas, but were looking to bring the war home to our shores. Men like Richard Clarke, Michael Scheurer and John O’Neill, though not perfect, realized the severity of the threat but failed to convince their superiors to act accordingly. For John O’Neill, his life would end as a result of a very tragic irony. After leaving the FBI in August of 2001, O’Neill was hired on to be the head of security at the largest and one of the busiest buildings in New York City – the World Trade Center. O’Neill was in his 34th floor office in the North Tower at 8:46 a.m. when American Airlines Flight 11 crashes into it. In the minutes after the attack, O’Neill made his way to the command center that had been set up. There he sees an FBI agent who later said, “[John] was in FBI mode. Then he turned and kind of looked at me and went toward the interior of the complex. From the time John walked away to the time the building collapsed was certainly not more than a half hour or 20 minutes.”¹⁰² When the North Tower went down, John O’Neill went with it.

¹⁰² <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/knew/john/timeline.html>

At the beginning, I discussed the fear I had on the night of 11 September 2001, and that feeling has stuck with me to this very day. I will never forget the way I felt watching regular people, moms and dads, sons and daughters, brothers and sisters, forced to jump out of the World Trade Center to their deaths only because they went to their job that morning, just like they had countless other mornings. I will never forget the way I felt when I saw images of walls around New York City plastered with the pictures and stories of loved ones who were still missing as the rubble in Lower Manhattan continued to smolder. But I now have another fear; I fear that the American people are beginning to once again get complacent.

Tough counterterrorism measures put in place after the last attack have prevented another one for more than seven years. Policies like waterboarding and other coercive interrogation methods, warrantless surveillance, the Patriot Act, Guantanamo Bay and others while not always politically popular have saved lives. And as we transition into a new administration, I hope and pray that those responsible for keeping us safe going forward will remember the lessons we learned on 9/11 and since, so that we can continue to live in the peace that we all love but take so much for granted. Nothing is more important.

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