# The Threat of Global Terrorism:
# United States Policies Towards Terrorism Before and After September 11, 2001

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September 11, 2001 stands as more than the most devastating and atrocious day in American history. With nearly three thousand causalities and a U.S. national landmark destroyed, it was a day when United States national security was truly shattered and international terrorism was deemed more significant than ever before. Notorious terrorist Usama Bin Ladin and his jihadist organization, al Qaeda, became the number one threat to beat after they carried out heinous attacks on American soil. Consequently, Americans, and the rest of the world, wondered the same crucial question: How could this have happened?

In my paper, I explore what the United States policies towards preventing terrorism were before the 9/11 attacks and how those policies changed post-9/11. I will start by examining terrorist attacks against the United States previous to September 11, 2001. I will then analyze the counterterrorism policies before 9/11 to provide a better understanding of why certain actions were taken and initiatives were put into place. Next, I will examine the policies and strategies taken towards terrorism after 9/11 and how these attacks changed policymakers and leaders outlooks on Usama Bin Ladin and al Qaeda. Lastly, I will discuss why the United States lack of support for counterterrorism prior to 9/11 was a crucial error on their part and what motivated the U.S. government to pursue a less aggressive counterterrorism policy during this time.

***Terrorism Before September 11, 2001***

Prior to 9/11, there were many terrorist attacks and attempts to harm Americans. Although these attacks often produced minimal United States causalities, they certainly induced fear within the U.S. government. Usama Bin Ladin and his terrorists, the prime

culprits at hand, posed as a current and forthcoming threat that needed to be put to an end quickly.

First, it is important to note what the term "terrorism" truly entails. In order for an attack to be considered a terrorist attack, it must comprise of four key components. First, the attack must be "planned or organized," meaning it cannot be a "random or arbitrary" attack but must have been intently constructed preceding the action (Jordan, *National Security*, 297). Second, the attack must be "politically motivated"; it must be carried out because of an organizations' attempt to project its ideologies or expand its sphere of influence (Jordan, *National Security*, 297). Third, the attack must target civilians and not military officials or armed forces (Jordan, *National Security*, 297). Lastly, the terrorist attack must be conducted by a "subnational or clandestine" group, and not "uniformed military organizations" (Jordan, *National Security*, 297). Usama Bin Ladin's organization and its future attacks fell under this criterion, making their actions acts of terrorism.

The beginning of Usama Bin Ladin's reign over global terrorism can be attributed to 1988 when his terrorist conglomeration, al Qaeda, was formed. Bin Ladin fought against the Soviet occupation in Afghanistan in that year. Although the United States was fighting against the Soviets as well, Bin Ladin did not act with help provided by the Americans; he had his own means "of support and training" (National Commission, *Final Report*, 56). Amongst his comrades was the Palestinian Abdullah Azzam, who used to be Bin Ladin's teacher in college. Once the Soviets were defeated in April 1988 by the Afghan jihadists, Bin Ladin collaborated with Azzam in creating al Qaeda, which would serve as their "general headquarters for future jihad" (National Commission, *Final Report*, 56). Bin Ladin was officially seen as the leader of al Qaeda by August of 1988.

Bin Ladin had a basic purpose for al Qaeda: to prepare "the mujahideen to fight anywhere in the world" (National Commission, *Final Report*, 56). He set up many al Qaeda offices and terrorist enterprises in Sudan in 1991. Bin Ladin's influence spread to the United States as well, which can be seen in the formation of the terrorist organization Al Khifa in the East Coast (National Commission, *Final Report*, 58). Bin Ladin did not always perceive the United States as an enemy, however, his view of the Americans changed in the 1990s. When Saddam Hussein threatened Saudi Arabia's national security in 1990 by invading Kuwait, Bin Ladin offered assistance to Saudi Arabia to gather fighters to suppress Hussein. However, the Saudi Arabian government decided to accept help from the United States instead, which resulted in the deployment of U.S. military personnel in many places such as "Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates" (Jordan, *National Security*, 301). Bin Ladin thought this act "threatened the most sacred land of Islam" and was not only an insult to himself, but to his religion as well (Jordan, *National Security*, 301). In 1994, Bin Ladin "publicly denounced the U.S. military presence in Saudi Arabia," stating that American presence in the nation is "the greatest threat to befall the Muslims since the death of the Prophet Muhammad" (Jordan, *National Security*, 301).

In 1992, Bin Ladin focused on attacking what he considered his "far enemy", in other words, the United States (National Commission, *Final Report*, 59). In this year, al Qaeda forces declared a fatwa against the West, resulting in the bombing of hotels in Sudan where U.S. troops were deployed to at the time. No Americans were killed as a result. However, the act in itself exemplified the rising threat of terrorism. This threat was heavily spotlighted in the following year on February 26 in the bombing of the World

Trade Center in New York City. At around noon, "a huge bomb went off beneath the two towers of the World Trade Center" (National Commission, *Final Report,* 71). This attack was not a suicide mission; the bomb was located in an empty truck with a "timing device" in the underground garage of the building (National Commission, *Final Report*, 71). Although there were only six fatalities, more than one thousand civilians were left injured, thus demonstrating and confirming the true danger al Qaeda and Usama Bin Ladin posed to the world.

After this incident, al Qaeda made many other attempts in stimulating fear amongst American citizens. For example, in 1996, "an enormous truck bomb" went off in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia at the Khobar Towers "residential complex" (National Commission, *Final Report*, 60). This complex was home to the U.S. Air Force personnel. The attack resulted in nineteen American deaths and 372 wounded victims. Although these attacks could possibly be attributed to the Iranians, there is a strong link with al Qaeda as well (National Commission, *Final Report*, 60).

In 1998, it was established that Usama Bin Ladin's main focus was attacking the United States (National Commission, *Final Report,* 54). In February of this year, Bin Ladin declared war on the West, particularly the United States (National Commission, *Final Report,* 55). His major attack against the United States occurred in this same year when al Qaeda bombed the U.S. embassies located in Kenya and Tanzania, killing twelve Americans and 201 others. Al Qaeda produced "bomb-laden trucks" that went into the embassies on August 7, 1998 within five minutes of each other (National Commission, *Final Report*, 70). The Nairobi, Kenya U.S. embassy was destroyed and was the site of the fatalities of the Americans. The bombing of the embassy in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania

did not result in any American causality. When asked about the crime in issuing jihadists against Americans, Bin Ladin replied saying, "let history be a witness that I am a criminal" (National Commission, *Final Report*, 70).

Terrorism was on a significant rise and continued to become a fierce global concern. For example, on October 12, 2000 al Qaeda operatives attacked the U.S. Navy when they struck the USS *Cole*. These terrorists sent a "small boat laden with explosives" to damage the *Cole*, leading to the deaths of seventeen crewmembers and the wounding of forty others (National Commission, *Final Report*, 190). This incident was "supervised directly by Bin Ladin"; he was the provider of funds, establisher of the location of the attack, and selector of the suicide bombers (National Commission, *Final Report*, 190). Bin Ladin anticipated the possibility of American military retaliation and consequently, removed al Qaeda's airport compound in Afghanistan and retreated himself (National Commission, *Final Report*, 191). He was then on the run, moving between five or six different residences. However, the United States did not retaliate; Bin Ladin desired a U.S. counterattack and stated that if they did not produce this attack, he would "launch something bigger" (National Commission, *Final Report*, 191). This statement alone can be seen as a foreshadowing of the September 11, 2001 tragedy.

***U.S. Responses Against Terrorism Before 9/11***

Although there were quite a few attacks against the United States prior to 9/11, the U.S. government did surprisingly and alarmingly little in combating al Qaeda and Usama Bin Ladin. Although some members of the U.S. government worked in counterterrorism, more often than not, their efforts were insufficient. Before 9/11, Bin Ladin and al Qaeda were not concepts that the U.S. Congress fully understood, although

al Qaeda's motives were apparent. Additionally, "terrorism seldom registered as important" (National Commission, *Final Report,* 104). The Congress and public focused on foreign and national security issues that were not related to terrorism. Congressional committees gave their attention to problems such as the Southwest border, information technology improvements, sanctions on Pakistan in the 1990s, and the like (National Commission, *Final Report,* 106). Congress also tended to shift "questions of emerging national security threats" away from them and towards other administrations for them to deal with (National Commission, *Final Report*, 107).

Moreover, prior to 9/11, little to no U.S. law enforcement involvement was seen in regards to counterterrorism aside from one sector of the FBI (National Commission, *Final Report*, 82). However, this was not the only government organization that deemed terrorism as a lesser issue. For example, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) believed sabotage to be a more significant "threat to aviation than hijacking" (National Commission, *Final Report*, 82). They pursued initiatives that "enforced aviation security rules," which would in turn provide a "'layered' system of defense" (National Commission, *Final Report*, 83). They believed that if an individual failed to successfully go through one of these layers, "additional layers would provide backup security" (National Commission, *Final Report*, 83). However, none of these so-called "security layers" prevented any of the 9/11 hijackers from "getting on board four different aircrafts at three different airports" (National Commission, *Final Report*, 83). These previous stances on terrorism are in a sense alarming; these administrations overlooked the more severe concern at hand, which was indeed the rise of global terrorism.

Aside from the general actions taken in regards to counterterrorism before 9/11, there were many actions that were taken towards the specific attacks against the United States during this time. There were some members of U.S. committees and congress who understood the significant danger terrorists posed on American national interests and domestic security. In 1993, when President Clinton took office, he decided counterterrorism was a significant issue that needed to be taken on and strengthened. Clinton appointed Louis Freeh to be the Director of the Bureau of the FBI (National Commission, *Final Report*, 76). Freeh was one of those individuals who acknowledged terrorism to be a significant threat to the United States. In response to the 1993 bombings at the World Trade Center, Freeh made a budget request to Congress, stating that "merely solving this type of crime is not enough; it is equally important that the FBI thwart terrorism before such acts can be perpetrated" (National Commission, *Final Report*, 76). This is a powerful statement that holds a lot of weight; preventing terrorists from acting is a policy route that should have been the main focus early on. That being said, Freeh's attempts at moving "resources to counterterrorism" were not successful. The FBI, Office of Management and Budget, and Justice officials stated many in the FBI were reluctant to "shift resources to terrorism from other areas such as violent crime and drug enforcement" (National Commission, *Final Report*, 76). Although these motions seemed small at the time, they may have led to detrimental consequences in the long run.

Moreover, in addition to Freeh's attempts, Doris Meissner was another individual who strove to implement policies for counterterrorism. Meissner became the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) Commissioner in 1993 (National Commission, *Final Report*, 80). In response to the 1993 bombings, she contributed "seed money to the State

Department's Consular Affairs Bureau" in an attempt to "automate its terrorist watchlist" (National Commission, *Final Report*, 80). As a result, the INS sent an individual to the new "lookout" unit; this individual would collaborate with the State Department in "watchlisting suspected terrorists and with the intelligence community and the FBI" to determine what to do when terrorists attempted to enter the United States (National Commission, *Final Report*, 80). However, this initiative was not remarkable. Even in 1996 when the INS was able to utilize "classified evidence in removal hearings," they were only able to expel a small number of illegal aliens that had ties to terrorist activities, none of which were even involved with al Qaeda (National Commission, *Final Report*, 80).

President Clinton understood the threat terrorism constituted on Americans and the world as a whole. The 1993 bombings only stimulated his urgency in partaking in counterterrorism. For instance, in his 1995 State of the Union address, he stated he would implement a "comprehensive legislation to strengthen our [America's] hand in combating terrorists, whether they strike at home or abroad" (National Commission, *Final Report*, 100). To justify his claim in combating terrorism, Clinton "issued a classified directive in June 1995," called Presidential Decision Directive 39 that stated that the United States should "deter, defeat, and respond vigorously to all terrorist attacks on our territory and against our citizens" (National Commission, *Final Report*, 101). This directive heightened the National Security Council's (NSC) authority in organizing counterterrorism efforts within the United States and abroad as well. Richard Clarke, a veteran who specialized in conducing counterterrorism, assisted in these organizations through his Counterterrorism Security Group (CSG). Additionally, Clinton spent a good

portion of 1995 and 1996 attempting to gain cooperation from foreign nations in "denying sanctuary to terrorists" (National Commission, *Final Report*, 101). He began providing the FBI and CIA with increased funds that were to be used for counterterrorism and to assist in this effort.

In the next couple of years, a number of operations were conducted in the attempt to capture Bin Ladin and hinder al Qaeda from following through with future attacks. However, some of these actions were unsuccessful. In 1996, the CIA created a special unit that worked against Bin Ladin in areas such as analyzing intelligence and planning operations. CIA's head of Directorate of Operations, David Cohen, wanted to have a station that worked against a particular subject, such as Bin Ladin, but was based at the CIA headquarters (National Commission, *Final Report*, 109). This would be called a "virtual station" (National Commission, *Final Report*, 109). Following this instance, Cohen brought about a former analyst who then created the Bin Ladin unit; this unit gathered intelligence on Bin Ladin and al Qaeda. They collected information regarding al Qaeda's military committees and their "operations against U.S. interests worldwide" (National Commission, *Final Report*, 109). The unit strove to create an operation against Bin Ladin that intended on causing harm to his "physical assets and sources of finance," however, these plans never succeeded (National Commission, *Final Report*, 109). If these plans were passed, they may have been able to significantly hinder Bin Ladin's later plans to attack the United States. Moreover, in 1997, the Bin Ladin unit created another plan aiming to capture Bin Ladin and turn him in for trial in "either the United States or in an Arab country" (National Commission, *Final Report*, 110). They went as far as constructing an ambush plan with help from Afghan tribals, but it did not succeed.

Furthermore, the CIA developed many other plans in seizing Bin Ladin, such as a raid conducted on his residence at the time, Tarnak Farms, but none of these covert action operations were victorious. Had the United States been triumphant in ridding the world of Usama Bin Ladin, al Qaeda would have been significantly weakened and the tragedies of 9/11 may not have occurred.

1998 was the year when counterterrorism took precedence within the FBI for the first time. After the U.S. embassy bombings in Tanzania and Kenya in that year, Americans finally started realizing and acknowledging the seriousness of global terrorism. The Deputy Director of the FBI, Robert "Bear" Bryant, created a five-year plan for counterterrorism. This plan called for a "nationwide automated system to facilitate information collection, analysis, and dissemination" (National Commission, *Final Report,* 76). If successful, this plan would have been "a major step toward addressing terrorism systematically" (National Commission, *Final Report,* 76). However, this plan was not successful despite the newfound urgency to combat terrorism within the FBI. Even though the FBI dubbed terrorism its "top priority" in 1998, it did not adequately allocate human resources for the plan. The FBI's budget for counterterrorism expanded exponentially in the mid-1990s, but even after the bombings in 1998, more money was spent for drug enforcement than counterterrorism (National Commission, *Final Report,* 77). Additionally, the FBI lacked "effective intelligence collection effort," meaning they did not have sufficient amounts of trained agents and intelligence from sources (National Commission, *Final Report,* 77).

Following this new focus on counterterrorism within the FBI, in 1999 the FBI split the Counterterrorism and Counterintelligence divisions. Dale Watson became the

head of the Counterterrorism division; Watson understood how important it was for the FBI to strengthen their "counterterrorism capability" (National Commission, *Final Report*, 77). As a result, he created a policy entitled MAXCAP '05 that was presented in 2000. The goal of this initiative was to bring the Bureau to its "maximum feasible capacity" in regards to counterterrorism by the year 2005 (National Commission, *Final Report*, 78). In September 2001, however, the majority of FBI field offices were "operating below 'maximum capacity,'" demonstrating the severe unpreparedness of the FBI before the 9/11 attacks (National Commission, *Final Report*, 78). A stronger, more prepared FBI would have been able to gather proper intelligence and conduct effective operations against terrorists that may have prevented the 9/11 attacks from happening. In addition to the FBI, Clinton further tried emphasizing how dangerous terrorism truly is. In July of 1999, Clinton declared that the Taliban regime is a "state sponsor of terrorism" (National Commission, *Final Report*, 125). He attempted to increase worldwide recognition of different parts of international society that may be harboring terrorists; Clinton wanted to stop these sectors before they caused more damage. However, his efforts were not entirely successful in stopping terrorism.

Numerous changes and events occurred in the United States in the year 2000. One of these incidents was the USS *Cole* bombing that took place in October. The attacks reinforced the fear of terrorism within the U.S. government. The CIA added more "covert action authorities" to the July 1999 Memorandum of Notification (National Commission, *Final Report*, 193). This gave the U.S. permission to "develop capture operations against al Qaeda leaders" in different places around the world, regardless of the circumstance (National Commission, *Final Report*, 193). President Clinton wanted to attack al Qaeda

in Afghanistan immediately, however, he was unable to do so unless if the FBI or the CIA was able to say with certainty that "we [the United States] believe that he [Bin Ladin] did this" (National Commission, *Final Report*, 193). This was a truly inconvenient and frustrating position for the president to be in; he wanted to respond to the *Cole* attack as soon as he could but was prevented by these government agencies. Moreover, on November 11, Clarke informed Clinton that their investigations were producing a clearer image that al Qaeda and Bin Ladin were behind the attack. Even with that being established, the CIA stated a month later that they had "preliminary judgment" that al Qaeda was behind the attack but there were other possibilities (National Commission, *Final Report*, 195). There were no firm conclusions drawn about who was truly responsible for the attacks. The agencies had not given Clinton a "definitive answer" and were preventing him from going to war or taking other measures in harming al Qaeda (National Commission, *Final Report*, 195). Other members of the government, like Defense Secretary Cohen, stated that it would not have been wise for the United States to "risk killing civilians based only on an assumption" that al Qaeda was involved (National Commission, *Final Report*, 195). In the end, the FBI and the CIA never "reached a firm conclusion" about who the culprit was behind the *Cole* attack (National Commission, *Final Report*, 195). Richard Clarke did not believe this to be an ideal situation; he felt that these agencies were "holding back" and was disappointed by their lack of action and military response (National Commission, *Final Report*, 195). Others shared his disappointment, such as the State Department's Michael Sheehan who asked Defense officials, "Does al Qaeda have to attack the Pentagon to get their attention?" (National Commission, *Final Report*, 196).

Not only did the USS *Cole* occur in 2000, but also a new president was elected into office that year on November 7. In December, newly elected president George W. Bush sat down with Clinton to discuss many foreign policy and national security issues. Clinton made a very powerful statement to Bush during this meeting: "I think you will find that by far your biggest threat is Bin Ladin and the al Qaeda" (National Commission, *Final Report*, 199). He also stated that "one of the biggest regrets of [his] presidency is that [he] didn't get him [Bin Ladin] for [Bush]" (National Commission, *Final Report*, 199). Bush was briefed of the significance of al Qaeda and Usama Bin Ladin and so were members in his administration. Clarke informed newly appointed National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice on terrorism early on and attempted to persuade her in giving terrorism a "very high priority" and to fulfill the plans he had tried to implement in the Clinton administration (National Commission, *Final Report*, 201). One of his efforts included submitting an extensive memorandum suggesting policy initiatives such as providing aid to the Northern Alliance to ensure their sustained fight against al Qaeda in Afghanistan. He also advised that the administration respond to the *Cole* incident. The Bush administration appeared to take counterterrorism seriously, which can be seen in their proposal to provide the CIA and the FBI with more funding for counterterrorism. The fact that the U.S. government was now approaching terrorism with urgency and determination is a great improvement and accomplishment.

The first year of President Bush's presidency was full of instances in which counterterrorism was a main issue, however, more actions could have and should have been taken in regards to combating terrorism. In April 2001, the CIA briefed the Deputies Committee on al Qaeda, stating that they are the "most dangerous group we face" and

warning that “there will be more attacks” against the United States and in the world in general (National Commission, *Final Report,* 203). This briefing meeting resulted in the approval of providing aid to the Northern Alliance to ensure the rebels continuation in assisting the Americans in capturing Bin Ladin and banishing al Qaeda. Clarke was still troubled by the slow pace of policy reviews but had a newfound hope regarding the focus on counterterrorism. Moreover, later in the spring of that year, Clarke “expressed concern” about terrorist forces within the United States and about a possible attack on the White House by a variety of different terrorist organizations (National Commission, *Final Report*, 204). This is a significant theory that the U.S. government should have given more focus on. Clarke felt this concern as well. In the summer of 2001, Clarke became increasingly frustrated with the counterterrorism sector and stated that the administration was not “serious about al Qaeda” (National Commission, *Final Report*, 205).

One of the policy strategies the Bush administration took in regards to counterterrorism was diplomacy. They strove for tame relations amongst nations such as Afghanistan and Pakistan. These nations had the most connections with al Qaeda, Usama Bin Ladin, and terrorism in general. In regards to Afghanistan, the NSC created plans that would deal with the Taliban. However, people like the Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage believed the NSC’s efforts were too slow and were not being efficient enough in restraining the Taliban. Additionally, Clarke argued that U.S. motives against the Taliban should not have to go through lengthy policy reviews. Moreover, Clarke and Cofer Black from the CIA further emphasized providing aid to the Northern Alliance. However, Rice and the Afghanistan staff member for the NSC, Zalmay Khalilzad, felt

that providing aid solely to the Northern Alliance was not enough and neighboring states needed to be assisted as well. This ideology led to the development of the CIA policy in providing "covert assistance to the Taliban's foes" (National Commission, *Final Report*, 206). By including a significant amount of actors in the fight against terrorism, not just domestically but nationwide, would significantly hinder the Taliban's efforts in assisting al Qaeda, thus reducing the threat of terrorism. Moreover, in regards to Pakistan, President Bush attempted to strengthen peaceful relations between the Pakistani General Musharraf. He "urged Musharraf to use his influence with the Taliban on Bin Ladin and al Qaeda" (National Commission, *Final Report*, 207). These attempts were not entirely successful. By the time 9/11 occurred, Pakistan had not done much in regards to fighting terrorism.

Aside from diplomacy, many military policy options were suggested and the military strategies at the time were criticized. For example, Secretary Rumsfeld believed the Defense Department at the time was "not organized adequately or prepared to deal with new threats like terrorism" (National Commission, *Final Report*, 208). Meanwhile, General Franks, the commander of Central Command, agreed with Rumsfeld and stated that a powerful military plan to combat terrorism would "go all the way," meaning it would allow the U.S. to engage in activities such as "securing rights to fly over neighboring countries" (National Commission, *Final Report*, 208). Moreover, in June 2001, a draft of the presidential directive came about; this directive explored the Defense Department's "lead role in protecting its forces abroad" (National Commission, *Final Report*, 208). It also advised Secretary Rumsfeld to "develop contingency plans" to strike al Qaeda and the Taliban within Afghanistan (National Commission, *Final Report*, 208).

However, this directive still needed President Bush's signature and Secretary Rumsfeld was not able to command his "subordinates" to comprise a military plan "against either al Qaeda or the Taliban before 9/11" (National Commission, *Final Report*, 208).

On September 4, 2001, the Principals Committee met for the first time regarding al Qaeda. Before the meeting, Clarke sent Rice a note that "criticized U.S. counterterrorism efforts past and present" (National Commission, *Final Report*, 212). This note is extremely significant. Clarke emphasized crucial points that were extremely significant in regards to terrorism. He asked critical questions such as "are we serious about the al Qida threat? ... Is al Qida a big deal?" (National Commission, *Final Report*, 212). Furthermore, Clarke said: "Decision makers should imagine themselves on a future day when the CSG has not succeeded in stopping al Qida attacks and hundreds of Americans lay dead in several countries, including the U.S." (National Commission, *Final Report*, 212). This claim is extremely significant. Clarke predicted exactly what happened in the 9/11 tragedy just days before the attacks occurred. He couldn't understand "why we [the United States] continue to allow the existence of large scale al Qida bases where we know people are being trained to kill Americans" (National Commission, *Final Report*, 213). He went on and wrote "You are left waiting for the big attack, with lots of casualties, after which some major U.S. retaliation will be in order" (National Commission, *Final Report*, 213). With all of that being said, the 9/11 attacks occurred a week later.

***September 11, 2001 and U.S. Actions Against Terrorism***

The plans to attack the United States on September 11, 2001 were under preparation since 2000. Usama Bin Ladin and his fellow terrorist leaders began recruiting

"muscle hijackers" who would carry out the task of taking control of aircraft cockpits and passengers on board (National Commission, *Final Report*, 231). Twelve out of thirteen hijackers were Saudi Arabian and the one was from the United Arab Emirates. However, in the end, there were nineteen hijackers total. These recruits went through extensive training that involved concepts such as "firearms, heavy weapons, explosives, and topography" (National Commission, *Final Report*, 234). In April 2001, these hijackers began entering the United States on tourist visas. The majority resided in Florida and acted as a normal American or tourist would. Moreover, the plane tickets for September 11 for these hijackers were all "purchased between August 25 and September 5" of 2001 (National Commission, *Final Report*, 249). In the days before the attacks, the hijackers went to their departure locations and waited to board their designated airlines. Their plans for September 11 were largely inconspicuous.

In 2001, "counterterrorism officials" often received "reports about threats" within the United States and globally as well (National Commission, *Final Report*, 254). George Tenet, the Director of Central Intelligence, was very often informed about threats related to Usama Bin Ladin. He passed on his information to President Bush through the President's Daily Brief (PDB). Furthermore, in the spring, the "level of reporting on terrorist attacks and planned attacks" was heightened drastically to its "highest level since the millennium alert" (National Commission, *Final Report*, 255). This is crucial; the United States government was well aware of the possibility of a detrimental terrorist attack months before 9/11 but little was done about it. Additionally, the FBI was informed of possible terrorist attacks on the cities of London, Boston, and/or New York. The FBI also received information directly from an extremist Muslim in Arizona that the

"United States was a 'legitimate military target' for Muslims" and that "al Qaeda's murderous attacks on U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania were justified" (Berger, *Jihad Joe*, 127). Moreover, the month of May was full of these snippets of information; for example, on May 16, a U.S. embassy received a warning stating that Bin Ladin and his followers were "planning an attack in the United States using 'high explosives'" (National Commission, *Final Report*, 256). The whole of 2001 was spent receiving terrorist threats and investigating the sources behind these threats. However, none of these threats were adequately responded to. The U.S. government was "unable to capitalize on mistakes made by al Qaeda" before 9/11 and "time ran out" (National Commission, *Final Report*, 277).

The attacks on September 11, 2001 brought about significant policy changes within the United States not previously seen before. There were obvious prompt responses that took place immediately following the attacks. For example, the most significant task was to "harden our nation's defense against a second attack" (Bush, *Decision Points*, 155). A vast amount of security measures were put into place. President Bush "approved the deployment of National Guard forces to airports" and "put more air marshals on planes" (Bush, *Decision Points*, 155). These were security policies not previously seen. Additionally, President Bush "tightened procedures for granting visas and screening passengers" to prevent intruders from entering the United States unauthorized (Bush, *Decision Points*, 155).

Furthermore, the U.S. government deemed domestic policies as one of their first priorities; they needed to assist the victims of the attacks. The government did such things as provide "federal emergency assistance," compensate the victims, reopened

financial markets, etc. (National Commission, *Final Report*, 326-7). However, a significant change in the government included the creation of the Department of Homeland Security on September 14, 2001. This new "White House entity" would be more focused on domestic security than any agency was before (National Commission, *Final Report*, 327). It provided for a "more secure America" (Homeland Security, "Creation of Department"). Moreover, the government engaged in tightening immigration policies. For instance, the Immigration and Naturalization Service agents collaborated with the FBI in "arresting individuals for immigration violations" that were "encountered while following up leads in the FBI's investigation of the 9/11 attacks" (National Commission, *Final Report*, 327).

Many new policy strategies and routes were established in regards to counterterrorism following the attacks. For one, the time between fiscal years 2001 and 2004 experienced an increase in federal spending on "defense, homeland security, and international affairs" by over fifty percent (National Commission, *Final Report*, 361). The last time an increase in spending for national security of this amount was experienced was during the Korean War. Moreover, Americans began realizing how widespread the threat of terrorism is and how rapidly and quickly attacks could be carried out in contemporary times. A significant United States policy and strategy in the post 9/11 era was to view the entire globe as "the American homeland" (National Commission, *Final Report*, 362). This is because the Americans viewed any attacks "against American interests" anywhere in the world to be equivalent to terrorism within the United States itself.

To efficiently and effectively combat terrorism in the twenty first century, the United States believed the accurate way to go was to focus policy decisions on assisting "remote regions and failing states" (National Commission, *Final Report*, 367). These areas of the world are often "breeding grounds for attacks against Americans at home" (National Commission, *Final Report*, 367). The U.S. began focusing on driving the Taliban out of places like Pakistan and Afghanistan. Additionally, the United States aimed on working with Saudi Arabia in establishing a strengthened relationship to fight Islamic terrorism together.

A significant change in U.S. intelligence occurred almost immediately after the 9/11 attacks. Intelligence was given top priority after this incident, which was not previously as significant. For the first time, everyone within the United States agreed that terrorism was a top priority: "the Congress, both major political parties, the media, and the American people" (National Commission, *Final Report*, 361). For example, the emergence of the beginning of the USA PATRIOT Act occurred just a week after the attacks. It was officially put into action on October 26, 2001 with great congressional support. This act would assist in identifying "potential terrorists" and in deterring "additional attacks" from occurring in the future (National Commission, *Final Report*, 328). It essentially "eliminated the wall and allowed law enforcement and intelligence personnel to share information" (Bush, *Decision Points*, 160-1). It allowed for such things as tapping suspicious cell phone numbers and freezing terrorist assets (Bush, *Decision Points*, 161). Additionally, it gave the government permission to obtain warrants to carry out examinations of "business records of suspected terrorists"; this could include "credit card receipts, apartment leases, and library records" (Bush,

*Decision Points*, 161). As a consequence, this act has allowed for the seizing of terrorist cells in various states within the U.S. such as New York and Florida. It blocked "gaps the terrorists exploited when they attacked" the United States (Bush, "Patriot Act," 29). Furthermore, another policy put into place in regards to terrorism was entitled the Terrorist Surveillance Program. The goal of this program was to "monitor so-called dirty numbers, which intelligence professionals had reason to believe belonged to al Qaeda operatives" (Bush, *Decision Points*, 164). It protected civil liberties while "monitoring terrorist communications" (Bush, *Decision Points*, 164).

In regards to the Global War on Terror, a title coined by the Bush administration that came into play as a result of the 9/11 attacks, President Bush created what was known as the Bush Doctrine. This doctrine followed a preemptive approach in regards to counterterrorism, meaning it would "identify and target threats before they had a chance to strike at the United States" (Jordan, *National Security*, 303). A preemptive approach to terrorism was not seen prior to 9/11. This doctrine embodied a "four-point plan to fight the Global War on Terror": the first point was to "make no distinction between the terrorists and the nations that harbor them," second to "take the fight to the enemy overseas before they can attack us again here at home," third to "confront threats before they fully materialize," and fourth to "advance liberty and hope as an alternative to the enemy's ideology of repression and fear" (Bush, *Decision Points*).

***Conclusion***

The threat of global terrorism was widely underestimated and overlooked in the years preceding September 11, 2001. Although al Qaeda and Usama Bin Ladin were the biggest threats to U.S. national security in these years, prominent American governmental

agencies such as the Department of Defense were not "fully engaged in the mission of countering" terrorism (National Commission, *Final Report*, 331). However, certain members of the U.S. government, such as Richard Clarke, did greatly attempt to focus American attention on the terrorism issue but were unsuccessful in their efforts. Furthermore, U.S. capabilities in combating terrorism were outdated and insufficient in the pre-9/11 era; their policies and methodologies were almost inapplicable to the severe imminent threat posed by al Qaeda. The U.S. lacked adequate intelligence in regards to Usama Bin Ladin's plans, therefore leading to the 9/11 tragedy. Had the United States government put terrorism at the top of their list of priorities, these insufficiencies may have been avoided and terrorist attacks not just within the United States, but around the world, may have been prevented. Although the United States did not focus heavily on counterterrorism prior to 9/11, they also lacked the means to carry out significant counterterrorism efforts. Public opinion towards terrorism at the time was not significant; the public did not recognize terrorism as a big threat. Furthermore, prior to 9/11, the terrorist attacks that occurred did not result in mass United States casualties. The number of American deaths was low, leading American policy makers into thinking terrorism was not as significant of a threat as it actually was and is. The United States belief that terrorism was not an imminent threat prior to 9/11 resulted in insufficient funding for counterterrorism measures and lack of support for combating terrorism as a whole. Spending more money on counterterrorism before 9/11 may have guaranteed less defense spending in 2001 and may have led to the diminishing of the threat of terrorism.

The 9/11 atrocities shifted Americans' views on terrorism and it became an area of immense concern amongst every United States citizen. Severe and intense security

measures were put into place following this incident, which were measures that were not previously seen. Although these new found counterterrorism policies and initiatives better secured the United States post 9/11, if these were put into place years previously, the loss of thousands of American lives might have been saved.

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