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Claremont McKenna College

How the CIA, FBI, and Presidential Administrations Failed to
Prevent 9/11

submitted to
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by
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for
Senior Thesis
Fall 2021

For Mom, Dad, Grandma, and Papa

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INTRODUCTION

On September 11th, 2001, three airplanes crashed into three U.S. buildings and one into a field in Shanksville, Pennsylvania in a coordinated terrorist attack orchestrated by al Qaeda. On that fateful day, almost 3,000 people died and more than 25,000 were injured in what the United States now remembers as 9/11. A shock, 9/11 brought so many questions as to how a disastrous tragedy could occur in the United States in such a short amount of time. More importantly, how were 19 individuals able to hijack four U.S. airplanes, manage to control the aircraft, and fly precisely into both towers of the World Trade Center (WTC) and the Pentagon.

Initially, it was believed to have been a terrorist tragedy that we couldn't have predicted or prevented. Once an investigation started, it became clear that the hijackers' names were familiar to the U.S. intelligence community. It also became clear that this was not the first attack on the United States by al Qaeda and its founder, Osama bin Laden. The 9/11 Commission Report dives deep into the mistakes that the U.S. intelligence communities made in investigating and preventing 9/11 from happening. In the Commission Report, authors outlined the evolution of al Qaeda, piecing together the drastic hate that al Qaeda had against the American government and its people. The timeline of al Qaeda's attacks against the United States and the desire to capture bin Laden and put an end to terrorism do not line up as mistakes and miscommunication occurred within the U.S. intelligence agencies. The first known terrorist attack on U.S. soil by al Qaeda was the 1993 WTC bombings. This introduced the investigation of the CIA and FBI as they pursued to put an end to terrorism and protect the United States.

ROLES OF FBI AND CIA IN COUNTERTERRORISM

The CIA and FBI both have very different roles in combatting terrorism. As members of the U.S. Intelligence Community, they are assigned different geographical locations of the world and to different tasks. The CIA's role in counterterrorism is to collect information on foreign countries and foreign individuals that might contradict the security of the U.S.¹ The FBI, on the other hand, has law enforcement authority that can act on preventing domestic and international terrorism.²

Because President Clinton's administration and the CIA failed to connect bin Laden to the masterminds behind the 1993 WTC bombings, al Qaeda continued their aggression and threats against the United States. We saw this aggression escalate into a future attack on the U.S. Embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998, which, again, was a failure of intelligence collecting and analyzing. The aggression continued in 2000 when al Qaeda attacked the *USS Cole* in Yemen in October. All these attacks were investigated by the CIA and the FBI and in the investigation, a series of intelligence was brought forth about the co-conspirators involved in 9/11.

The CIA established a counterterrorism division in the 1980s with analysts and agents who collected intelligence on these attacks. The structure of intelligence sharing and analyzing in the CIA contributed to the prevalence of the 9/11 attacks as urgent intelligence was not further investigated, nor was it shared with the FBI for further action.³ Because of the CIA, terrorists Nawaf al Hazmi and Khalid al Mihdhar were able

¹ Federal Bureau of Investigation, How does the FBI differ from the Central Intelligence Agency?

² Federal Bureau of Investigation, What is the FBI's role in combating terrorism?

³ Office of the Inspector General, A Review of the FBI's Handling of Intelligence Information Related to the September 11 Attacks.

to stay in the U.S. for several months, attend aviation academies across the country, and plot their attacks on U.S. soil. Additionally, the CIA misjudged the bombings of the U.S. Embassy in Kenya by failing to investigate a report made by a whistleblower who warned them of the attacks.⁴

Similarly, to the CIA, the FBI failed to prevent the 9/11 attacks as they neglected a further investigation on intelligence that was brought forth to the New York headquarters. The FBI failed to acknowledge the lack of resources and training that was provided to their analysts. This contributed to the misjudgment of urgent intelligence and the proper recording of official intelligence. Urgent concerns regarding the terrorists of 9/11 were brought to the FBI in 2000 through the Phoenix Electronic Communication, however, it was ignored by an entry-level analyst who prioritized other things. The failure to acknowledge the internal mistakes the FBI made leading up to 9/11 contributed to the fateful day.

Lastly, President Clinton and President Bush also failed to protect the United States against al Qaeda in their separate ways. President Clinton was a weak commander-in-chief who did not retaliate when terrorists attacked the U.S. the first time in 1993, and then again in 1998, and 2000. President Bush, on the other hand, did not emphasize the urgency of al Qaeda when he took office shortly after the *USS Cole* attacks occurred. He didn't thoroughly investigate President Clinton's experience with al Qaeda and terrorism, which should have raised red flags right away.

Individuals involved in 9/11 and the *USS Cole* attacks were present on U.S. soil in San Diego, California, and Phoenix, Arizona on the FBI, and CIA's radar. Why weren't

⁴ Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, *The 9/11 Commission Report*, Chapter 4.

they weren't arrested for their connections and participation in previous terrorist attacks before 9/11? How come the U.S. didn't retaliate those attacks? It was because intelligence was not shared between agencies and was not emphasized as urgent by the Presidential Administrations.

CHAPTER 1 – THE CIA

The Central Intelligence Agency was constructed under the National Security Act of 1947 and signed into law by President Harry Truman. It wasn't until 1986 that the CIA established the Counterterrorism Mission Center. Rising concerns for terrorism escalated after bin Laden expressed his anger towards U.S. involvement in the Afghanistan War with the Soviet Union, and in other Middle Eastern affairs. Bin Laden appeared on the CIA's radar as early as 1988 when al Qaeda was founded in Pakistan in response to the Soviet-Afghan war. In the early 1990s, bin Laden was seen as an aggressive threat to the U.S. as he incited several direct and indirect attacks against the U.S., all prompting the foreshadowing of the 9/11 attacks.⁵ If the CIA about bin Laden, how did they fail to act on threatening intelligence involving bin Laden and al Qaeda? After the 9/11 attacks, the United States Department of Justice investigated the intelligence that the CIA had on al Qaeda. Investigative results show that there was a large amount of miscommunication between the CIA and the FBI. Intelligence that was brought to the attention of the CIA was either mishandled by the CIA or withheld from the FBI. Furthermore, detailed intelligence on the planning and execution of 9/11 was either disregarded or handled poorly. As the U.S. Department of Justice investigated the situation between the CIA and the FBI, several employees were found to be at fault.

I will be analyzing key cases and intelligences that determines how bin Laden's anger towards U.S. was mishandled and/or neglected by the CIA. As early as 1991, red flags were raised when bin Laden was expelled from Saudi Arabia for his anti-government threats and attacks. A series of bin Laden's threats started when he was

⁵ Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, *The 9/11 Commission Report*, 55.

linked to financing a Yemeni terrorist group that targeted U.S. troops in Aden, Yemen in 1992. It wasn't until 1993 when the CIA started collecting intelligence on bin Laden that was enough to put his name on the CIA TIPOFF watchlist, a record of all terrorists who have been placed on the CIA's watchlist at any time in history.⁶ A series of physical attacks and threats continued as did the growing concept of attacking the WTC with commercial planes, but why didn't the CIA prevent the four 9/11 attacks?

1993 WTC BOMBINGS, HAZMI AND MIHDHAR

In February of 1993, the first attack on U.S. soil occurred since Pearl Harbor took place. Ramzi Yousef, a member of al Qaeda, parked a van in the garage of the World Trade Center and detonated it. This bomb killed 6 people, wounded 1,000, and destroyed the infrastructure in the South WTC building. In the investigation conducted by the FBI, the van was linked back to al Qaeda member, Mohammad Salameh. This led the FBI to the arrest of Yousef and his co-conspirators, Eyad Ismoil, who was involved. In a statement, Yousef regretted his failure to knock down both towers as it was his initial mission in 1993. Upon a further investigation into Yousef and his co-conspirators, the FBI came across the Bojinka plot that detailed an attempted assassination of Pope John Paul II, the bombings of eleven commercial planes and the CIA headquarters.⁷ This intelligence led to more al Qaeda co-conspirators, Khalid Mihdhar and Newaf al-Hazmi.

Bin Laden's name was circulating with the notion of terrorism and the CIA failed to connect his connection to Yousef. The connection between the 1993 WTC bombings and bin Laden could have been made through Yousef's cousin, Khalid Sheikh

⁶ Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, *The 9/11 Commission Report*, 109.

⁷ Mazzetti, "Portrait of 9/11 'Jackal' Emerges as He Awaits Trial."

Mohammed, a member of al Qaeda since 1999. Both bin Laden and Mohammed were across Europe and Africa providing terrorist-training facilities and recruiting individuals from impoverished and poor cities and villages.⁸ The drastic failure to acknowledge the intent of Yousef's mission, his Bojinka plot, and the connection between the 1993 terrorists to al Qaeda and bin Laden, led to the foreshadowing and plot of the 9/11 attacks. Yousef was arrested in 1997 for his involvement in the 1993 WTC bombings and for plot to 'blow up' 11 aircrafts. Despite being arrested, Yousef and his co-conspirators, one of them being bin Laden, were not investigated further by the CIA.

ALEC STATION

Shortly after the 1993 World Trade Center attacks, bin Laden's name was linked to financing radical Islamists who were targeting U.S. landmarks, buildings, and people. The CIA Counterterrorism Center established a special group of FBI and CIA agents, called ALEC Station, in 1996 to track bin Laden.⁹ ALEC Station was established with the intent of preventing any possible attacks by bin Laden, and focused solely on tracking bin Laden and his followers. The CIA was able to officially track bin Laden to several attacks, co-conspirators, and threats involving the U.S. by using ALEC station. He was linked to several Jihadist attacks such as the 1993 WTC bombings, the mastermind of the 1993 WTC bombings, the Blind Sheikh, and to the Kuala Lumpur al Qaeda Summit meeting, a meeting to plot an attack on the U.S.¹⁰ A series of bin Laden's threats and attacks towards the United States will be outlined in this chapter.

U.S. EMBASSY BOMBINGS IN KENYA AND TANZANIA

⁸ Maranzani, "How U.S. Intelligence Misjudged the Growing Threat Behind 9/11."

⁹ Central Intelligence Agency, "MFR04017164."

¹⁰ Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, *The 9/11 Commission Report*, 109.

ALEC station was able to gather a series of intelligences that targeted bin Laden and his growing threats towards the U.S. In 1998, ALEC station was involved in the investigation of bin Laden's ties to the bombings of U.S. Embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in February that killed 224 and injured over 4,000. Prior to the actual attacks, the CIA received warnings of a plot to bomb the embassies.¹¹ Mustafa Mahmoud Said Ahmed, an Egyptian who was part of the plot of the U.S. Embassy bombings, entered the U.S. Embassy in Nairobi and confessed to a CIA agent of a plot to attack the U.S. Embassies. The U.S. State Department denied any warnings of the threats towards the embassies; however, a few weeks prior to the attacks, security in the Kenyan embassy was heightened.¹² It is questionable whether the State Department or the CIA knew about the attacks, given the strange behavior providing extra security. Putting the puzzle together, it can be inferred that heightening security in the embassies was potentially incited by the CIA as it was revealed "that they could not rule out the possibility that Mr. Ahmed's threats were serious. But they said that the threats might also be a sophisticated ploy by terrorists to observe and then counter the defenses the embassy would take against a possible attack."¹³ Contradictory to the U.S. State Department's denial of any warnings made by a whistleblower, reports do reveal that the CIA was aware of Ahmed's intelligence and acted with heightened security. They might have denied such warnings as they might have been investigating the report and al Qaeda's involvement. Despite having the intelligence, the CIA was able to holistically build a report of al Qaeda's threats and warnings, but failed to effectively respond to the threats, hence the successful

¹¹ Bonner & Risen, "Nairobi Embassy Received Warning of Coming Attack."

¹² Bonner & Risen, "Nairobi Embassy Received Warning of Coming Attack."

¹³ Bonner & Risen, "Nairobi Embassy Received Warning of Coming Attack."

attacks. Given Ahmed's warnings and their previous investigations on al Qaeda, the CIA should have reported to the FBI the root of the issue: the terrorists.

KUALA LUMPUR AL QAEDA SUMMIT MEETING

In response to the U.S. Embassy bombings in Africa, the CIA were able to track several of bin Laden's co-conspirators: al-Hazmi and Mihdhar. Intelligence retrieved from the embassy investigation led the CIA to the Kuala Lumpur al-Qaeda Summit in 2000. This Summit consisted of high-level terrorists participating in a negotiation and plot of attack on the United States. The few plots conceived during the Summit were later executed in October of 2000 on the *USS Cole*, and on 9/11. In further investigation, the CIA utilized Malaysian authorities and requested video surveillance; however, there was a failure in the audio. It was later discovered that the summit detailed how the terrorists would board the plane, where they would sit, and how they would gain access to the cockpit to gain control of the aircraft. In the investigation of the summit later in 2001, the commission acknowledged that the CIA did not escalate a follow-up or a response to the Summit. While the investigation on the summit did not help the CIA with preventing 9/11, photographs of the participants brought to their attention of several watchlist terrorists meeting up in a hotel.¹⁴ Additionally, the CIA was able to intercept a phone call between Mihdhar, from San Diego to Yemen where Hazmi was. When presented with this information, the CIA connected bin Laden to the phone number used by Mihdhar. Despite the failure in audio and the lack of intelligence the CIA was able to obtain from

¹⁴ Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, *The 9/11 Commission Report*, 159.

the meeting, it should have set off several red flags as many of the CIA's watchlist terrorists, such as Hazmi, Mihdhar, and bin Laden.¹⁵

The failure to report this meeting, and its participants, to the FBI, the Immigration and Naturalization Security, and the State Department, gave way for these men to continue to execute their plot later known as 9/11, and the attacks on the *USS Cole*.¹⁶ In a report by the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, the CIA's failures are outlined as

“Desk officers at the CIA's Bins Laden unit did not have ‘cases’ in the same sense as an FBI agent who works an investigation from beginning to end. Thus, when the trail went cold after the Kuala Lumpur meeting in January 2000, the desk officer moved on to different things. By the time the March 2000 cable arrived with information that one of the travelers had flown to Los Angeles, the case officer was no longer responsible for follow-up. While several individuals at the Bin Laden unit opened the cable when it arrived in March 2000, no action was taken.”¹⁷

It is evident that when the investigation of the Summit meeting went cold, so did the entire investigation on al Qaeda. Because of a dead-end, the terrorists involved in the Summit meeting were never stopped or further investigated, giving them leeway to execute their 9/11 and *USS Cole* plot. Additionally, the CIA failed to share this intelligence with the FBI despite rising concerns about the severity of the threats made to

¹⁵ Office of the Inspector General, A Review of the FBI's Handling of Intelligence Information Related to the September 11 Attacks.

¹⁶ Gilmore, “What if...”

¹⁷ Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, *The 9/11 Commission Report*, 254.

the United States. According to the 9/11 Commission, “the CIA's zone defense concentrated on ‘where,’ not ‘who.’ Had its information been shared with the FBI, a combination of the CIA's zone defense and the FBI's man-to-man approach might have been productive.”¹⁸ This led to the failure to prevent Hazmi and Mihdhar from entering the United States to attend aviation school, which would then further prevail the fate of the U.S. on 9/11.

The failure to watch the two terrorists, Hazmi and Mihdhar, led to additional intelligence failure as they entered the U.S. 10 days after the Summit meeting to attend aviation school and take English courses. Hazmi and Mihdhar were able to arrive in Los Angeles because they had support from the U.S. Muslim community at the King Fahd Mosque in Culver City.¹⁹ The two individuals were tracked by the CIA to California and were on the CIA’s radar after the Summit meeting in Malaysia, however, according to the 9/11 Commission Report, the CIA never followed up with this intelligence.²⁰ Unfortunately, the action taken upon the two men was not initiated until August of 2001 when they were finally added to the terrorist watchlist, but that was about it. The CIA claims no responsibility for those on the watchlist, as they state “CIA is a more passive participant in the watchlist. The issue of whether the CIA should have shared more information with the watchlist pre-9/11 is something that could be debated ‘all day.’ CIA's failure to watchlist Mihdhar was a ‘screw-up.’ CIA is an intelligence organization - it is not CIA's responsibility to keep a list of who cannot enter the U.S.”²¹ Despite their role

¹⁸ Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, *The 9/11 Commission Report*, 254.

¹⁹ Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, *The 9/11 Commission Report*, 216.

²⁰ Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, *The 9/11 Commission Report*, Chapter 7.

²¹ Central Intelligence Agency, “MFR04017164.”

in the watchlist, Mihdhar's name should raise red flags in the *USS Cole* and the Summit investigations.

Why did the CIA fail to connect intelligence over the course of the 1990s, and why was the FBI not made aware of such urgent and threatening intelligence? In response to a lawsuit brought by Congress, the Department of Justice investigated the misconnections and intelligence failures of the CIA and FBI. Under federal law, the CIA is an agency that collects foreign intelligence on crimes and people, and the FBI is to protect the country from attack.²² Intelligence regarding any sort of terrorism threat should be shared with the FBI for further enactment on prevention. In the case of bin Laden and al-Qaeda, that did not occur for several reasons.

CIA AND FBI SECRET WAR

Serving as the head of the ALEC station, Michael Scheuer had the responsibility to share any urgent and threatening information with the FBI to further prevent any harm inflicted on the US. It is inferred by Lawrence Wright, author of the *Looming Tower*, that the CIA might have tried to keep their intelligence on Mihdhar and Hazmi quiet because they saw the two men as possible inside sources for the CIA on al-Qaeda. John O'Neill, FBI's counterterrorism expert, and Special Agent, was aware of the intelligence that the CIA had, but could not legally act upon the intelligence. O'Neill believed that the CIA was working with Saudi intelligence to further remove the FBI from the equation.²³

Furthermore, a secret war was potentially at fault for the miscommunication between Scheuer and O'Neill. According to Lawrence Wright, author of the *Looming*

²² Federal Bureau of Investigation, How does the FBI differ from the Central Intelligence Agency?

²³ Wright, *The Looming Tower*, 355.

Tower, Scheuer believed that O'Neill was not reliable with intense and urgent intelligence as he has been reported sharing intelligence while under the influence of alcohol in Russia. It was reported that Scheuer strongly disliked O'Neill and didn't his abilities to handle such intense and high-level information. He believed that the FBI was "too blundering and indiscriminate to be trusted with sensitive information."²⁴ Furthermore, he believed that a formal response to intelligence could further compromise confidential information with foreign services. The CIA was primarily concerned with the conflicts that would arise with the FBI and the so-called foreign services.²⁵ The Department of Justice concluded in their investigation report that

"the FBI had at least five opportunities to learn about [Hazmi and Mihdhar's] presence in the United States and to seek to find them before September 11, 2001. Most of the cause for these lost opportunities involved systemic problems. [The U.S. Department of Justice] found information sharing problems between the CIA and the FBI and systemic problems within the FBI related to counterterrorism investigations...Our review also found that the CIA did not provide information to the FBI about Hazmi and Mihdhar when they should have and we believe the CIA shares significant responsibility for the breakdown in the Hazmi and Mihdhar case. However, the FBI also failed to fully exploit the information that was made available to them."²⁶

²⁴ Wright, *The Looming Tower*, " 352.

²⁵ Wright, *The Looming Tower*, page 312.

²⁶ Office of the Inspector General, A Review of the FBI's Handling of Intelligence Information Prior to the September 11 Attacks.

Given that the CIA had a record of numerous intelligences, ranging from minuscule information to actual planning of an attack on U.S. soil. A serious letdown on the CIA's behalf was their failure to communicate their intelligence to the FBI for further action on a threat and certain individuals. A series of intelligence obtained by the CIA outlined several concerning information that could put Americans at risk. The U.S. Embassy whistleblower, Ahmed, provided the CIA with information that would put many individuals at risk. The CIA failed to share that information with any sort of agency that could protect the American people. Furthermore, the CIA failed to report the suspicious Summit meeting in Malaysia, which ended up being the meeting where 9/11 was planned. Lastly, the intelligence on Hazmi and Mihdhar was not shared with the FBI, especially O'Neill, whose priority is to detain individuals like them. If the CIA had alerted the FBI, the Immigration and Naturalization Security, or the State Department, chances are that Hazmi and Mihdhar could have been stopped long before 9/11 occurred. Additionally, the CIA's failure to connect intelligence on individuals and their affiliations also led to 9/11. 9/11 mastermind, bin Laden, was linked to Hazmi, Mihdhar, the *USS Cole attack*, the 1993 WTC bombing, and two fatwas against the U.S. The CIA did not utilize intelligence on the attacks because bin Laden was able to continue inciting threats and plots for a major attack on the U.S. If the CIA had done a thorough investigation on bin Laden and reported their intelligence to the FBI and other agencies, 9/11 might have been prevented.

CHAPTER 2 – THE FBI

Contrary to the CIA, the FBI conducts its operation within the United States by collecting domestic intelligence and responding to federal crimes. The FBI is utilized to prevent the country from terrorist attacks, data breaches, and criminal corruption.²⁷ For the last several decades, the FBI has operated with the motto, “fidelity, bravery, and integrity.” During al Qaeda investigations and the rise of terrorism, the FBI has contradicted their motto, putting American lives in jeopardy, hence, 9/11.

In the case of a terrorism, the FBI is responsible for investigating and responding to two types of threats: international and domestic. Established in the 1980s, the FBI’s Joint Terrorism Task Forces focus on gathering and sharing intelligence to respond to a wide variety of threats and provide security in response.²⁸ The FBI escalated their terrorism unit to a more aggressive intelligence collecting agency after the 1983 terrorist barracks attack on the United States and French military officials in Beirut, Lebanon, and the 1993 WTC bombings. In response to the growing threats of the international Jihad movement and the Summit meeting, the sharing of intelligence is essential to prevent further threats and attacks. In 1996 the FBI added the Counterterrorism Center to its already existing Joint Terrorism Task Force, escalating the importance of intelligence sharing with the CIA to prevent and respond to threats.²⁹ At this point in history, bin Laden and al Qaeda were familiar to intelligence agencies in the U.S. The FBI’s ability to handle such intense and

²⁷ Federal Bureau of Investigation, What is the FBI’s role in combating terrorism?

²⁸ Federal Bureau of Investigation, Joint Terrorism Task Force.

²⁹ 107th Congress of the United States, The Terrorist Threat Confronting the United States.

information-filled cases was relatively new and technology was not sustainable for such tedious tasks. Some of the gaps in the structure of the FBI led to a failure to keep up with information on bin Laden and his co-conspirators.

INTELLIGENCE COLLECTING STRUCTURE IN FBI

Agencies in the United States have separate responsibilities when it comes to international and domestic crime. The responsibility of intelligence collecting and reaction to threats is determined based on geography. International intelligence is the responsibility of the CIA, whereas the FBI is responsible for domestic intelligence. The FBI was still adjusting its responses to collecting intelligence and responding to terrorism since it was relatively new and inconsistent for the previous two decades. The FBI was better prepared for domestic terrorism and crime responses, rather than international intelligence collecting on foreign players. In addition, the resources provided for FBI agents did not help them meet expectations as a federal law enforcement and intelligence agency. Only about 4% of the FBI's training was devoted to counterterrorism.

The structure of communication and sharing of intelligence within the FBI failed to establish communication between agents, their superiors, and with other agencies. In addition to the messy communication, computers didn't have the capabilities to store records effectively, and emails were not a reliable source of communication, making it difficult for agents to follow up on reports.³⁰ The loss of reports and intelligence allowed for Hazmi and Mihdhar, who arrived in the U.S., to continue their operations in

³⁰ Zegart, *9/11 and the FBI: The organizational roots of failure*, 170.

the country. Because Hazmi and Mihdhar were in the U.S., it was the FBI's responsibility to collect intelligence on them. However, the FBI was missing international intelligence on the two men. The lack of communication between the FBI and the CIA, as well as the FBI's failure to collect international intelligence led to the growing terrorist issues. Upon an investigation into the sharing of intelligence "in August 2001, the FBI analyst, her supervisor, and an FBI legal expert all believed that they were not allowed to authorize a full-scale criminal investigation to find the terrorists because the original tip about al-Mihdhar had come through intelligence channels."³¹ This agent, along with supervisors, didn't take into consideration the severity of terrorism and how to track a suspected terrorist. Because of this lack of communication, Mihdhar was able to carry on with his involvement in *USS Cole*, the Summit, and 9/11. In this article, the agent was wrong and was criticized for her lack of knowledge and understanding of agency culture.³² Because of the miscommunication and misunderstanding of FBI agents, individuals who had a large contribution to the plot were able to continue their plan for attack. Small or large threats that contributed to 9/11 made a large impact on the severity and execution of the plot.

The FBI became aware of Hazmi and Mihdhar's connection to the Summit meeting in Malaysia while the meeting was still taking place. Shortly after the Summit meeting intelligence on Hazmi and Mihdhar was shared with the FBI in January of 2000. The CIA shared surveillance of in Los Angeles and records of Mihdhar's visa

³¹ Zegart, *9/11 and the FBI: The organizational roots of failure*, 171.

³² Zegart, *9/11 and the FBI: The organizational roots of failure*, 171.

being approved for travel to New York.³³ FBI analysts reviewed this information and was made aware of follow-up information about Mihdhar. It was revealed that Mihdhar arrived in July of 2000 and Hazmi had never left the country. Further review showed that the two were on the CIA's TIPOFF watch list, inciting an aggressive alert on the two of them. In addition to the two men, the FBI noticed that there were more individuals who had ties to al Qaeda that were enrolling in U.S. aviation schools. A memo was sent from the FBI Phoenix office to the FBI Headquarters warning them of a "possibility of a coordinated effort by Usama Bin Laden to send students to the United States to attend civil aviation school."³⁴ The FBI failed to analyze the Phoenix EC in an urgent matter, especially since they already had intelligence on al Qaeda's plots to use aircrafts to attack the United States. With a collection of this information, the FBI failed to make connections between the terrorists who entered the country and enrolled in aviation school, and their affiliation to al Qaeda.

As the CIA did their analysis of intelligence on al Qaeda, the FBI was focused on two individuals, Omar Bayoumi and Zacarias Moussaoui. The two individuals had close ties to Mihdhar and Hazmi and were directly involved with al Qaeda. The FBI's failure to recognize the connection between the two failed the intelligence community and the country.

OMAR AL BAYOUMI

Bayoumi has been on the FBI's radar since 1994 as he was linked to Saudi

³³ Office of the Inspector General, A Review of the FBI's Handling of Intelligence Information Prior to the September 11 Attacks.

³⁴ Kitfield, *Twilight Warriors: The Soldiers, Spies, and Special Agents Who Are Revolutionizing the American Way of War*, 26.

Arabia's intelligence agencies. Initial links between Bayoumi and the Saudi Arabian government were made in 1994 as a review of his bank account reflected several thousands of dollars in monthly stipends from the Saudi Arabian government. Residing in San Diego, Bayoumi had close ties to the Muslim community and was suspected to be a spy for the Saudi Arabian government. This suspicion led to an investigation made by the FBI, leading to more discovered tips and intelligence. The first tip was from Bayoumi's landlord who reported gatherings of Middle Eastern men in Bayoumi's apartment, weekly, along with several suspicious packages from the Middle East. In January of 2000, Bayoumi was linked to Mihdhar and Hazmi as he was seen picking them up from the airport and driving them to San Diego. For several months Bayoumi and Hazmi and Mihdhar were linked financially, and socially, all on the FBI's radar.³⁵

“Bayoumi's logistic support to Hazmi and Mihdhar included translation, travel assistance, lodging and financing. Anomalous money transfers within Bayoumi's bank accounts coincide with transactions wherein Bayoumi aids Hazmi and Mihdhar.”³⁶

With Bayoumi having been reported several times under several suspicions, especially in connection to his close intelligence ties to the Saudi Arabian government, the FBI failed to take his connections to Hazmi and Mihdhar seriously. This is where the FBI could have utilized their intelligence to establish ties between Bayoumi and several al Qaeda terrorists in the U.S. Given the heightened threats of al Qaeda,

³⁵ Office of the Inspector General, A Review of the FBI's Handling of Intelligence Information Prior to the September 11 Attacks.

³⁶ The Federal Bureau of Investigation, ENCORE Investigation Update, Review and Analysis: Interview, 9.

Bayoumi's connections should have raised red flags on the FBI's radar. Especially, given that he had close ties to terrorists that are already on the CIA and FBI's watchlists. Bayoumi's suspicious behavior and his role as a translator and tour guide for Hazmi and Mihdhar indicate that the chances he knows about the 9/11 plot are concerningly high. Despite lack of evidence, the FBI should have made those connections and acknowledged that Bayoumi was suspicious enough to conduct a follow-up investigation.

ZACARIAS MOUSSAOUI

In addition to lingering concerns about Hazmi and Mihdhar attending aviation school in the US, along with recovered aircraft hijacking plans, the FBI was also made aware of Zacarias Moussaoui, a French member of al Qaeda. Moussaoui's actions and behavior at the Pan Am International Flight Academy in Minneapolis, Minnesota was brought to the attention of the Minnesota FBI field office. In August of 2001, the Pan Am manager was very concerned about Moussaoui's jihadist beliefs and lack of aviation experience.³⁷ Additionally, he paid for his training in cash, raising more eyebrows as it is unusual and omits financial tracking. Henry, an FBI agent in the Minneapolis international and domestic terrorism squad, believed that this act was "something in furtherance of terrorism."³⁸ As the FBI was investigating the concerning reports on Moussaoui, they discovered some flaws in his ambitions to fly a plane. For instance, he claimed he wanted to learn how to fly a plane to be able to take an aircraft on a "joy ride"; however, he was more concerned about learning how to navigate the

³⁷ Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, *The 9/11 Commission Report*, 246.

³⁸ Office of the Inspector General, *A Review of the FBI's Handling of Intelligence Information Prior to the September 11 Attacks*.

computer system on a commercial plane. The root behind his determination to fly a plane was confusing for flight instructors at the Pan Am International Flight Academy, which is why a report to the FBI followed. Additionally, Moussaoui refused to talk about his background, continuously denying that he was Muslim.

In correlation to the concerns from the Pan Am Academy, the FBI had enough evidence to arrest Moussaoui in August of 2001 for overstaying his 90-day visa permission.³⁹ While Moussaoui did not admit his connection to al Qaeda until 2005, upon investigating his hotel room in Minneapolis, Moussaoui was found to be in connection with Ramzi Binalshibh, a large contributor to the 9/11 attacks and a participant of the Summit meeting in Malaysia. Despite Moussaoui not having committed a crime, like Hazmi, Mihdhar, and Bayoumi, Moussaoui should have been thoroughly investigated for his connections to several al Qaeda members. Moussaoui's arrest brought an analysis of how the FBI should have handled his case properly. In Amy Zegart's report on *9/11 and the FBI: The organizational roots of failure*, "it seems the agent never seriously considered the possibility that Moussaoui was more valuable under surveillance than in jail or that arresting him would freeze the FBI more than the enemy."⁴⁰ Contrary to my analysis on how the FBI should have thoroughly investigated al Qaeda terrorists based on the intelligence that they had; the Moussaoui case was a different mistake on the FBI's part. Instead of arresting Moussaoui for his suspicious behaviors, the FBI failed to thoroughly investigate his connections and his value to the

³⁹ Office of the Inspector General, A Review of the FBI's Handling of Intelligence Information Prior to the September 11 Attacks.

⁴⁰ Zegart, *9/11 and the FBI: The organizational roots of failure*, 177.

al Qaeda investigation. While there was no misconduct made by FBI agents involved in this case, the Department of Justice declared a poor performance made by the agents involved. According to the Department of Justice,

“This case evidenced systemic problems in how the FBI handled intelligence cases and provided guidance to the field...these systemic problems were a more important cause of the deficiencies we found in the Moussaoui case. In addition, the systemic problems hindered the FBI’s ability to detect and deter terrorism.”⁴¹

It was quite evident that in the Moussaoui case, FBI headquarters were not helpful to their field offices. They didn’t value how urgent and important Moussaoui was to their investigation on al Qaeda. While it is difficult to see if there would be any differences if the FBI had gone another route in handling this case, the threats and information regarding the 9/11 attacks were evident and neglected by the FBI.

USS COLE ATTACK

In addition to the aggressive threats of Hazmi and Mihdhar, the United States was under attack once again when al Qaeda attacked a U.S. Navy destroyer, *USS Cole*, in Yemen on October 12th, 2000. Given the nature of the attack, it was evident, immediately, that it was a terrorist attack. The following day, the FBI sent 100 Counterterrorism agents to Yemen. At this time, Mihdhar had gone back to Yemen to ‘visit his wife’.⁴² The FBI failed to acknowledge and connect the attack to Mihdhar who was traveling to the very same city at the same time of the attack.

PHOENIX ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION

⁴¹ Office of the Inspector General, A Review of the FBI’s Handling of Intelligence Information Prior to the September 11 Attacks.

⁴² Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, *The 9/11 Commission Report*, 215.

An elaboration of how the FBI drastically failed to prevent the 9/11 attacks was evident when the Phoenix Electronic Communication (EC), an internal communication platform used by the FBI, was not handled properly. A special agent in the Phoenix division of the FBI sent an electronic message to the headquarters of suspicion that bin Laden was sending terrorists to take aviation classes. This communication was addressed to several members in the New York City FBI headquarters, outlining the suspicions of Hazmi and Mihdhar, and Moussaoui. The intentions of the memo were to “[advise] the Bureau and New York of the possibility of a coordinated effort by Osama Bin Laden to send students to the United States to attend civil aviation universities and colleges.”⁴³

There are two ways to receive an electronic message in the FBI office; the manual process and the electronic process. The manual process does not guarantee delivery to individuals listed on the recipient list. The electronic process does not notify the recipient, thus failing to provide recipients with the EC. The mishandling of the Phoenix EC was primarily at the fault of the system, rather than a human error. A systematic error caused the EC to fall into the cracks at the headquarters. Individuals who should have been assigned to analyze the data were not made aware of the EC until after 9/11. All electronic communications sent to the headquarters are analyzed by entry-level analysts at some point. The urgency of this EC was not highlighted by analysts as the agents focused on other priorities. Lastly, no supervisor or authoritative figure at the FBI headquarters was ever handed the transcript of the EC. This

⁴³ Office of the Inspector General, A Review of the FBI’s Handling of Intelligence Information Prior to the September 11 Attacks.

completely disregards the role and resources that the FBI has. Per the Department of Justice, the EC should have been placed on an urgent basis and brought to the attention of supervisors or higher authorities, rather than entry-level analysts. Upon investigation, the Department of Justice concluded that “this was a significant intelligence failure, which hindered the chances of the FBI being able to detect and prevent the September 11 attacks.”⁴⁴ It wasn’t until after 9/11 when higher-up officials such as President Bush’s Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Attorney General John Ashcroft were made aware of the Phoenix EC. Furthermore, the FBI claimed they did not share this information with the CIA because they believed that the men were not connected to al Qaeda; however, that was a false assumption as threats of Mihdhar and Hazmi had been increasing over the past 2 years.⁴⁵ In addition to the rising threats of al Qaeda, the Phoenix EC should have set off several red flags. Following the attacks in the 1993 WTC building, the *USS Cole*, and the Summit meeting, the FBI should have put Hazmi and Mihdhar, along with bin Laden, on a pedestal in their priorities. Because of the lack of urgency made by mid-level agents, the FBI failed to have the chance to look at Bayoumi, Moussaoui, Hazmi, and Mihdhar, who had been in the United States for the duration of the 9/11 planning.

Additionally, there was a conflict that transformed into a secret war between CIA’s Michael Scheuer, head of Alec Station, and FBI’s John O’Neill, chief of FBI counterterrorism division. The conflict led to Scheuer’s strong dislike towards O’Neill

⁴⁴ Office of the Inspector General, A Review of the FBI’s Handling of Intelligence Information Prior to the September 11 Attacks.

⁴⁵ Johnston and van Natta Jr., *Traces of Terror: the FBI Memo; Ashcroft Learned of Agent’s Alert Just After 9/11*.

because of an alleged missing briefcase of classified FBI information on counterterrorism. Along with losing classified information, O'Neill was also accused of revealing top-secret FBI intel in Russia while under the influence of alcohol. Declared as untrustworthy by Scheuer and his counterparts, O'Neill was not trusted with any sort of information that the CIA had.

Despite the FBI not being able to receive intelligence from the CIA, there was some flaws that the FBI acknowledged and investigated. In response to the failure of acting upon intelligence, the U.S. Department of Justice established several new initiatives that are meant to counteract the issues that arose before 9/11. First, several new units within the FBI were established, such as the National Security Branch, the National Joint Terrorism Task Force, a 24/7 Counterterrorism Watch, and a Terrorism Financing Operation Section. All these new strategies are a clear response to the acknowledged mistakes and failures made by the FBI. Strategies that eliminate a communication barrier within agencies and between agencies were emphasized in the new units within the FBI. Furthermore, emphasis on responding to intelligence and reports related to terrorism is a higher priority within the FBI than before. It is evident that this was an admitted mistake and that the flaws that occurred before 9/11 were a result of failure to share intelligence, record information, connect dots, and communicate within the agency and between agencies.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ The United States Department of Justice, Creating the Justice Department's National Security Division Transforming the FBI to Meet the New Threat.

CHAPTER 3 – PRESIDENTIAL ADMINISTRATIONS

In addition, the Wars Powers Resolution of 1973 has provided Presidents with the authority to escalate military actions in case of an emergency. During bin Laden’s active years, two U.S. Presidents, Bill Clinton, and George W. Bush, were in office and had experiences responding to al Qaeda’s terrorist threats and attacks. As commander-in-chief, Presidents Clinton and Bush had the leverage to respond to any sort of militarized threat that might need an armed force response. President Clinton acted on intelligence brought forth on al Qaeda and he responded as an executive leader, ranging from establishing a task force to large-scaled attacks on terrorist land. In his eight years as President, President Clinton endured some of the biggest attacks made on U.S. soil by terrorists: the 1993 WTC bombing, the 1998 bombings of U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, and the attack on *USS Cole*. President Bush, however, endured one of the biggest tragedies the U.S. had experienced since Pearl Harbor: the attacks on the WTC, Pentagon, and the plane crash in Pennsylvania. While President Bush was President at the time of 9/11, President Clinton was the President responsible for most executive orders that responded to al Qaeda’s aggression against the United States. Many of President Clinton’s missions to stop al Qaeda and bin Laden failed due to Clinton’s preferred military strategy: airstrikes. After 9/11, President Bush’s military strategy was seen to be objective and offensive, seizing a clearly defined objective.⁴⁷ The aftermath of 9/11 has left the U.S. government questioning who was responsible for allowing terrorists to create such mass destruction. In *Intelligence and National Security* by Amy Zegart,

“Everyone has someone to blame for 9/11. Democrats such as former Clinton National Security Advisor Samuel Berger and Secretary of State Madeline Albright have faulted President Bush and his administration for giving terrorism short shrift compared to

⁴⁷ Theiessen, “Bill Clinton’s terrorism strategy led to 9/11. Hillary Clinton’s is the exact same thing.”

missile defense and other foreign policy issues. Republicans, including Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Vice President Richard Cheney, have charged the Clinton Administration with failing to develop an effective counterterrorism strategy and emboldening bin Laden by responding weakly to earlier terrorist attacks.”⁴⁸

Upon a further understanding of how 9/11 happened, it was evident that both President Bush and President Clinton were found responsible for their lack of counterterrorism strategy and execution. President Bush failed to acknowledge the severity of al Qaeda and President Clinton didn't utilize his defense resources to initiate a proper counterterrorism strategy.

In an analysis of how Presidents Clinton and Bush endured some of the responsibility of 9/11, I will be looking into Presidential orders and executive orders that were incited in response to al Qaeda threats.

PRESIDENT BILL CLINTON

Given the lack of urgency on bin Laden intelligence on behalf of the CIA and FBI, President Clinton was not informed of any intelligence that was aggressively dangerous and necessary to respond to. It wasn't until 1998 when President Clinton was made aware of al Qaeda's aggression and heavy threat to the U.S. The FBI was able to immediately link the 1998 African embassy bombings to al Qaeda and bin Laden. This was reported to President Clinton who then ordered airstrikes on alleged bin Laden sites in Sudan and Afghanistan.⁴⁹ President Clinton's initiative, Operation Infinite Reach, was an emergent cruise missile attack that had intentions to destroy al Qaeda sites and kill its leaders in Sudan and Afghanistan. In this operation, the missiles were intended to destroy the al Shifa pharmaceutical plant that was allegedly manufacturing chemical weapons in connection to terrorism.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Zegart, *9/11 and the FBI: The organizational roots of failure*, 178.

⁴⁹ Clinton Digital Library, East African Embassy Bombings.

⁵⁰ Clinton Presidential Library, Records on the Nairobi and Dar es Salaam Embassy Bombings on August 7, 1998 and the Air Strikes against Afghanistan and Sudan on August 20, 1998, 2.

Unfortunately, Operation Infinite Reach didn't succeed as expected. While several al Qaeda sites were destroyed, many of its leaders were not present at the time of the attack. Additionally, President Clinton destroyed the al Shifa pharmacy under incorrect intelligence that it was producing chemical weapons. Consequentially, President Clinton destroyed a pharmacy that served pharmaceuticals for half of Sudan. Unfortunately, the repercussions of this mistake were that the failure ended up being a propaganda victory for al Qaeda. The missile attacks brought attention to al Qaeda, allowing for new recruitments of al Qaeda members who were infatuated by bin Laden's ability to outsmart the U.S. military. Instead, the attacks strengthened al Qaeda and brought a powerful boost to their propaganda and confidence as a terrorist group.⁵¹

Given that President Clinton went ahead and ordered this missile strike, "this [was] the first time the U.S. [had] unreservedly acknowledged a preemptive military strike against a terrorist organization or network."⁵² President's Clinton's mistake for initiating a preemptive strike was that he didn't thoroughly investigate the premises of the infrastructure and its community that was targeted. One of President Clinton's preferences in combating terrorism was to use airstrikes instead of facing the issue on the ground. Clinton's unique preference in using airstrikes might be correlated to distracting the public from his impeachment proceedings that was taking place around the same time. Additionally, Congress was not on the same page about responding to the intelligence found on bin Laden's location in Shifa. President Clinton might have ordered the strikes under his Presidential executive powers that wouldn't require Congressional support. Because he resorted to airstrikes, he missed out on the opportunity to pinpoint bin Laden's movements and his associates. The results of an airstrike can be a hit or miss and fail to successfully combat the issue of terrorism. If President Clinton had deployed troops to the grounds of Afghanistan and Sudan, there would be more ground covered by armed

⁵¹ Reeve, "The New Jackals: Osama Bin Laden and the Future of Terrorism," 202.

⁵² Perl, "Terrorism: U.S. Response to Bombings in Kenya and Tanzania: A New Policy Direction?"

individuals. It would prevent a disastrous massacre of innocent villagers who were not affiliated to al Qaeda, and it would save the U.S. from embarrassment and government spending.⁵³

President Clinton's mistakes in capturing bin Laden were followed with a series of miscommunication, failure to recognize the urgency of intelligence, and conflict over militarized action. Following Operation Infinite Reach, President Clinton received intelligence from the CIA that bin Laden would be in the Haji Habash House, an al Qaeda safe house, in Kandahar. On December 20th, 1998, President Clinton and his advisors discussed several invasive actions that would capture bin Laden and his co-conspirators. Similarly, to Operation Infinite Reach, a missile strike was recommended by President Clinton's advisors; however, moral conflict rose. The missile strike would likely strike bin Laden, however the location of the Haji Habash House would put over 200 innocent people at risk. While this is an incredibly difficult decision for any President, at the time, committing the massacre of 200 innocent Afghan people would put the U.S. in a disastrous position in the eyes of the world.⁵⁴ Because of the possibility that mass casualties would occur, President Clinton did not order the airstrike.

President Clinton should have learned his lesson from Operation Infinite Reach and utilized a different military tactic that wouldn't put innocent individuals at risk. Instead, President Clinton should have approached a military strategy from the ground. This would allow for a precise location of bin Laden's tracks, and more insider intelligence. By utilizing locals who speak Arabic, President Clinton would have been able to pinpoint al Qaeda's tracks. This would avoid mass military spending on airstrikes, more casualties, and a successful military strategy. Contrary to this analysis, a downside to using ground strategy is that more U.S. individuals would be put in harm's way as they're placed on the same grounds as some of the world's most violent terrorists.

⁵³ Phinney, "Airpower versus Terrorism," 25.

⁵⁴ Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, *The 9/11 Commission Report*, 111.

Bin Laden orchestrated several attacks and meetings in Kandahar, a city in Afghanistan where several al Qaeda safe houses are also located. In the first half of 1999, President Clinton had several opportunities to react to intelligence that put bin Laden in Kandahar, several times. In May of 1999, President Clinton received intelligence with detailed information of bin Laden's whereabouts and the duration of his stay in Kandahar. The number of intelligence sources that confirmed the same information should have sparked a confident military strategy or a response to where bin Laden is. The intelligence agency and the military on the ground have been ready for President Clinton's command; however, he did not approve of any military action. Commanders on the ground were disappointed in President Clinton's response, but the President and his advisors believed that a strike might inflict too much collateral damage, kill innocent people, and create a retaliation by the Taliban. We now know that this was a mistake given that 9/11 was a disastrous event that killed over 3,000 Americans. Contrary to what was believed to be safer and better for the U.S. then, President Clinton did receive a briefing from the Counterterrorism Center that outlined the intelligence on bin Laden, along with what they suspected he was capable of. They recommended a plan of action that paralleled with the threatening intelligence that they've been investigating. The 9/11 Commission Report summarized the briefing statement that President Clinton received:

“Briefing papers prepared by the Counterterrorist Center acknowledged that hitches might develop. People might be killed, and Bin Laden's supporters might retaliate, perhaps taking U.S. citizens in Kandahar hostage. But the briefing papers also noted that there was risk in not acting. ‘Sooner or later,’ they said, ‘Bin Laden will attack U.S. interests, perhaps using weapons of mass destruction.’”⁵⁵

President Clinton's intelligence team has been hired to exclusively investigate bin Laden and come up with a deterrent. In their briefing, they believed that bin Laden was capable of

⁵⁵ Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, *The 9/11 Commission Report*, 112.

something deadly, dangerous, and disastrous. President Clinton didn't consider the urgency of the intelligence and feared collateral damage, which would have been the best-case scenario given that 9/11 happened. Intelligence agents believed that this plan was the best possible scenario for capturing or killing bin Laden. Military officials believed that this would have been the least dangerous and safest method for putting an end to bin Laden and al Qaeda. President Clinton believed otherwise.⁵⁶

Al Qaeda was linked to attacks on U.S. Navy ship, *USS Cole*, on October 12th, 2000, during the final months of President Clinton's presidency. 15 Americans were killed and 37 were injured. After attacking the *USS Cole* bin Laden expected U.S. retaliation and executed an escape plan. This plan put bin Laden and his associates in several different safe houses across Afghanistan so that they would not be killed in a retaliation attack by the U.S. However, it wasn't until a month after the attacks when President Clinton was made aware of al Qaeda as the determined aggressor behind the attack. Assumingly, intelligence and the military would expect a more urgent response to the attacks by President Clinton, but he avoided yet another strike against bin Laden. Military officials were ready to use the Infinite Resolve plans, a military strategy that was not utilized to attack bin Laden after the U.S. Embassy Bombings, to extradite bin Laden and his associates. For President Clinton, the intelligence regarding bin Laden's connection to the *USS Cole* was not enough to incite an air attack or the potential of going to war. He wanted a definitive answer about bin Laden and al Qaeda's connection to the *USS Cole* attacks, despite several intelligence confirming bin Laden's involvement. President Clinton and his Secretary, Madeline Albright, believed any military action could inflame al Qaeda and the Taliban. Like many other omitted airstrike opportunities, President Clinton's advisors feared of the repercussions of an airstrike on innocent families and communities. It was at this time when State Department's Coordinator for Counterterrorism, Michael Sheehan said "does al Qaeda have to

⁵⁶ Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, *The 9/11 Commission Report*, Chapter 3.

attack the Pentagon to get [President Clinton's] attention?"⁵⁷ Given that bin Laden has been connected to several attacks on the U.S. – *USS Cole*, 1993 WTC bombings, and the U.S. Embassy bombings – this should have been a wakeup call for the President and his advisors that bin Laden was not backing down and that he was only going to be more aggressive in his next attack. President Clinton already omitted several airstrikes on bin Laden and al Qaeda; however, this time intelligence confirmed bin Laden's connections to the *USS Cole* attacks and placed him in Kandahar.

It is quite clear that some of al Qaeda's aggression was a result of President Clinton's failure to respond to any of their threats and attacks, giving this prolonged history between the U.S. and bin Laden. A fair response to the *USS Cole* attacks would have been to respond with military force, emphasizing to al Qaeda that the U.S. will not allow for further attacks. The obvious answer would be to capture bin Laden and other al Qaeda leaders; however, a military strike or a ground movement would also be deescalating the terrorist group until the U.S. can formulate a larger response to terrorism.

PRESIDENT GEORGE W. BUSH

As the investigation of the *USS Cole* was unfolding, so was the transition of the Presidential administrations from President Clinton to President George Bush. President Bush took office on January 20th, 2001, and during his first few months, he had a new approach for terrorism. However, the investigation on the *USS Cole* was unfolding during his first few months and a response was necessary for the conviction of the terrorists involved. According to Condoleezza Rice, "I do not believe to this day that it would have been a good thing to respond to the Cole, given the kinds of options that we were going to have... We really thought that the Cole incident was passed, that you didn't want to respond tit-for-tat."⁵⁸ Rice's response to the

⁵⁷ Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, *The 9/11 Commission Report*, 196.

⁵⁸ CNN, "Clarke vs. Rice: Excerpts from testimony."

investigation on the *USS Cole* is evident that President Bush's administration didn't connect the *USS Cole* attack to the heightened threats of al Qaeda that was investigated under the Clinton Administration. The *USS Cole* attack was the last attack on the U.S. before 9/11 and it went unhinged in the Bush administration as it was not an urgent matter. The response to this attack shows the same correlation to President Bush's response to the abundance of intelligence and investigations done against al Qaeda as he didn't emphasize the urgent matter of terrorism until 9/11 happened.

Despite President Bush only having 9 months to tackle terrorism before 9/11, he did not emphasize the threat of al Qaeda in the short time. He was slower to respond to the threats of terrorism and didn't revive President Clinton's intelligence files on bin Laden. Because of the lack of urgency, President Bush failed to inherit a large terrorism problem from President Clinton. While it is difficult to continue a project during the transition of administrations, President Bush did not review the true threats that the U.S. was under.⁵⁹ National Security Council counterterrorism advisor, Richard Clarke, emphasized to President Bush the grave threat that al Qaeda has been imposing on the U.S. and outlined what he believed would be best to respond to the threats. Clarke's briefing of freezing the network's assets and fiscal support to Uzbekistan, Yemen and the Philippines would covert al Qaeda operations and increase aid to the Northern Alliance was shared with Secretary of State, Rice. Rice stated that President Bush has acknowledged the threats of al Qaeda, but "did not want to respond to al Qaeda one attack at a time. He told me he was tired of swatting flies."⁶⁰ Instead, the negligent response from the Bush Administration frustrated the counterterrorist directors who pleaded for urgency.

President Bush's new strategy was drafted in December of 2000 and implemented the day of his Inauguration. Despite not having much time to establish a task force before 9/11,

⁵⁹ Lindsay and Daalder, "America Unbound: The Bush Revolution: The Remaking of America's Foreign Policy," 14.

⁶⁰ CNN, "Clarke vs. Rice: Excerpts from testimony."

President Bush's new initiatives were to increase funding for the CIA to continue to keep tabs on al Qaeda and bin Laden, but also to increase cybersecurity. President Bush's approach to al Qaeda was like that of President Clinton, however, his military strategy was more ground focused. He preferred to have troops on the ground to avoid mass casualties and any mass-casualty military mistakes. Like Clinton, his initiative was to capture and kill bin Laden and not escalate into a war.⁶¹ Given that he only had a few months in office before 9/11, his theory on preventing terrorism could have prevented the disastrous attacks of 9/11 had he been given more time, but his priorities were elsewhere.

A large factor to the occurrence of 9/11 wasn't just mistakes made on the CIA or FBI's part, but also on President Clinton's failure to incite aggressive responses to al Qaeda's threats and attacks. During the time bin Laden was an active terrorist, President Clinton was made aware of his ambitions; however, it wasn't until 1998 when bin Laden started a string of attacks on the US. Given the intelligence on bin Laden and his history with the US, President Clinton was not an aggressive responder. U.S. intelligence believed that they were able to use military airstrikes to capture and kill bin Laden; however, President Clinton refused to engage in any military escalation with al Qaeda. Despite being recommended to respond aggressively to confirmed intelligence on bin Laden, President Clinton still did not engage in any airstrikes. During the transition of President Clinton's administration to President Bush's, the intelligence and plot to capture bin Laden was not transferred between administrations as well. The attacks on the *USS Cole* occurred during the transferring of presidency and bin Laden's capture plots were stalled until President Bush established his own counterterrorism strategy as President. Unfortunately for the US, it was too late, and al Qaeda aggressively attacked the U.S. on 9/11 killing over 3,000 people.

⁶¹ Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, *The 9/11 Commission Report*, Chapter 7.

CONCLUSION

The disastrous attacks on the WTC buildings, the Pentagon, and the plane crash in Shanksville, Pennsylvania raised questions about how National Security in the U.S. is protected. Many Americans questioned how 9/11 could have happened and why it happened. In the moments after the planes crashed into the towers, Americans thought it was a coincidental tragedy only to realize that four planes crashed on U.S. soil within the span of 2 hours and the country was under attack. It wasn't until the evening of September 11th, 2001, at 9:30 pm EST when George Tenet, Director of the CIA, determined that it was bin Laden and al Qaeda who was responsible for the tragedy.⁶² Once determined, the FBI established Operation PENTTBOM to investigate the hijackers, and were able to identify 19 hijackers. As a response to the disastrous tragedy, President Bush's Administration, the CIA, and the FBI investigated the attacks to determine where the U.S. government went wrong in protecting the safety of Americans. In an official investigation by the Department of Justice and the FBI, a series of mistakes and miscommunication between the CIA and the FBI was revealed and the U.S. intelligence agencies were further investigated.

The investigation on events leading up to 9/11 started with the FBI and then in 2002, the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States did a full account of the circumstances. In a separate investigation done by several political scientists and the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, Presidents Bush and Clinton's response to terrorism were also analyzed in depth. There

⁶² Jacobsen, "Surprise, Kill, Vanish: The Secret History of the CIA Paramilitary Armies, Operators and Assassins," 343.

were several intelligences that was poorly analyzed by CIA analysts and supervisors, and investigations done by the FBI that was not thoroughly looked into, as revealed in The 9/11 Commission Report and in the *Looming Tower*.

The CIA's lack of intelligence sharing, and neglect of a further analysis into the growing body of evidence was seen in the events leading up to 9/11. Starting as early as 1990, the CIA was made aware of the concerning growth of the Taliban, that escalated into al Qaeda, that had anger towards the US. The CIA collected several intelligence information from the investigations of the U.S. Embassy attacks, the *USS Cole* attacks, the 1993 WTC attacks, and the Summit meeting, that was not transmitted to the FBI. An efficient response to the threats could have prevented the growing aggression of al Qaeda, but intelligence on the threats were withheld. The U.S. Embassy attacks in Kenya and Tanzania could have been prevented as the CIA received information from a whistleblower, Mustafa Ahmed. Furthermore, the concerning connections between al Qaeda and the attack on the *USS Cole* in Yemen was not emphasized as a serious threat. Additionally, the attacks weren't escalated into a higher-scale investigation in addition to the already growing threats of terrorism against the U.S. The Summit meeting should have been the tipping point that jeopardized the safety of the U.S., but the CIA didn't look past the lost audio. Lastly, the concerning reports of Hazmi and Mihdhar in the U.S. should have warranted a response that could have halted their preparation and participation in 9/11. Instead, the didn't initiate a further investigation into any of the larger threats and attacks.

After the first series of attacks and threats on the US, starting in 1993, the CIA should have modified the limitations that they found in communication with the FBI. A

proper response would have been to engage in proxies, the utilization of militant organizations in a respective country to fight on behalf of the U.S., in Afghanistan and Saudi Arabia.⁶³ Looking back on the lack of preparedness of a large-scaled terrorist attack, the CIA should have established a computerized system that profiles high-risk individuals who are a threat to the country, essentially, improving the no-fly list to add people who are under investigation. Given that Hazmi and Mihdhar was able to travel to and from the U.S. with little to no restrictions, despite the investigation and heightened concerns, the CIA should also have established a security standard for government issued IDs. By having a database of flagged IDs and visas, the CIA will be able to detect threatening terrorists as they travel within and from the U.S. If enforced prior to 9/11, Hazmi, Mihdhar, Bayoumi, and other terrorists involved would have been easily tracked, especially when their names are already flagged in active terrorist investigations. Finally, a set of expectations of the sharing of intelligence between agencies should have been issued after the “secret war” between Michael Scheuer and John O’Neill. A position where an individual can oversee all intelligence agencies, including the CIA and FBI, would have prevented this issue. This would improve accountability on all ends and create for a more effective community of intelligence sharing. A similar position, the Director of National Intelligence, was established in 2005 and has been extremely effective as the role serves as an advisor to the President, National Security, Homeland Security Council, the CIA, and the FBI.⁶⁴ The Director of National Intelligence will fill in the miscommunication gaps and enforce the sharing of

⁶³ Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, *The 9/11 Commission Report*, 12-13.

⁶⁴ Office of the Director of National Intelligence, “What We Do.”

intelligence as they justify as needed.

In addition to the CIA's mishandling of intelligence, the FBI had their fair share of failing to prevent the 9/11 attacks with their poor investigation and handling of intelligence on their analyst and supervisor levels. As the agency that investigates attacks on U.S. soil and U.S. individuals, abroad, the FBI was involved in collecting intelligence on the several attacks incited by al Qaeda. While some of the FBI's mistakes were not acknowledged until after 9/11, there were several mishandlings of intelligence and investigations that led to the fate of the U.S. on September 11th. The FBI is a highly ranked and nationally recognized law enforcement agency, and their poor resources were inadequate for protecting our country. Intelligence brought forth to the FBI headquarters was not properly analyzed by entry-level agents who prioritized other investigations. This eventually led to the failure to bring intelligence up to higher level authorities within the agency. If the FBI had a proper system of thoroughly analyzing the intelligence from the Phoenix EC, the 1993 WTC attack, the U.S. Embassy attacks in Africa, to the *USS Cole* attack, intelligence could have been flagged as high threat and the terrorists involved could have been stopped well before 9/11.

A needed response to intelligence that jeopardizes the safety of Americans often warrant the response of the Presidential administration at the time. Al Qaeda's most active era was during the Clinton Administration, which failed to order an effective military response to the terrorist groups in the Middle East. President Clinton's first airstrike on al Qaeda, Operation Infinite Reach, created mass casualties, destroyed a large portion of Sudan's pharmaceuticals, and failed to kill bin Laden or any members of al Qaeda. President Clinton's judgement calls on the Operation Infinite Reach

airstrikes was not an effective strategy given that he did not initiate a follow-up strike or implement another order to pursue bin Laden. It seemed as if he was done and moved on. Furthermore, President Clinton feared to order any airstrikes that would target bin Laden, despite strongly confirmed intelligence putting al Qaeda in said locations, because of the mass casualties and international critique that might result. President Clinton feared the publicity stunt that might follow from al Qaeda and failed to capture bin Laden. Instead of a laissez-faire response, President Clinton should have initiated a better military strategy, focusing on ground combat in Afghanistan. This would effectively eliminate President Clinton's worries about airstrikes and accurately pinpoint the terrorists. The lack of military response to al Qaeda's threats led to more threats and attacks on the U.S. following the strike: *USS Cole* and bin Laden's 1998 fatwa.

On the other hand, President Bush's administration did not emphasize the urgent threats of al Qaeda, despite the alerts provided to them by intelligence directors and President Clinton's previous strategies and responses. While he only had 9 months in office before 9/11, he endured the Presidential position while the investigation on *USS Cole* was ongoing and did not warrant a follow-up response.

Ultimately, the intelligence agencies of the U.S. failed to respond to the struggles within their agencies and the acknowledged miscommunication within agencies. An effective standard for all government agencies is to initiate a follow-up investigation and response of the current systemic failures that are caught as they happen. Considering the miscommunication and mistakes made by the U.S. intelligence community prior to 9/11, the responses we have seen to correct those mistakes and

close the gaps of miscommunication has restored my faith in the government's ability to handle intelligence. The implementation of heightened security at airports and the new Department of National Intelligence position are to name a few of the restorations seen in the U.S. government that helps prevent terrorism.

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