

Closing Statement at 9-11 Commission Hearing
Chair Thomas H. Kean and Vice Chair Lee H. Hamilton

January 26, 2004

Commission investigators have significantly advanced our understanding of the events of 9/11. What have we learned today?

We learned that the disruption of terrorist travel needs to be a vital part of our counterterrorism strategy. Before 9/11 it was not central. So work on terrorist travel documents languished and older methods for training people to spot them were not sustained. So the visa system operated without adequate input from the national security agencies. And terrorism was not a major priority in our immigration policy or enforcement efforts.

We also learned that the problems of watchlisting and tracking potential terrorists go well beyond working-level failings. As the staff statement pointed out, those problems raise issues about responsibility in the senior management of the intelligence community. Some of the tragic results in the 9/11 story were detailed today. We are concerned about whether the management of transnational intelligence has adapted adequately to the war on terror today.

In the past the Immigration and Naturalization Service, and the Consular Service at the Department of State, were not full partners in the war on terrorism. Clearly they did not have enough resources to perform their mission, and did not apply those resources sufficiently against the counterterrorism priority.

We learned that there was an apparent lack of urgency with respect to counterterrorism. Senior officials performed their duties with dedication, to the best of their ability, but the world looked very different to them at the time than it does to us now.

The system is different now. Yet you could hear in the Commissioners' questions that we are still concerned about whether old problems in sharing information are being solved, or just replaced by new ones. For example, the Terrorist Threat Integration Center only coordinates analysis, not operations. Then we heard the Terrorist Threat Integration Center does not sift the information from domestic agencies like the FBI, just information from international sources. So the domestic-foreign divide takes a new form.

In other words, 9/11 is in the past. But the questions revealed by our analysis of the past remain relevant today.

We, as a government, have a profound tendency to fight the last war. After the Embassy bombings, we improved Embassy security. After Khobar Towers and U.S.S. Cole, we improved force protection. We knew a threat was coming in summer of 2001, but we thought the threat was abroad, not at home.

We heard today from a highly dedicated professional who performed his duty with great professionalism, who prevented a terrible catastrophe from becoming worse. What we need are systems in place that will enable the many dedicated professionals in the U.S. government to maximize their ability to make America safer and more secure.