

The DCI did not develop a management strategy for a war against Islamist terrorism before 9/11. Such a management strategy would define the capabilities the intelligence community must acquire for such a war—from language training to collection systems to analysts. Such a management strategy would necessarily extend beyond the CTC to the components that feed its expertise and support its operations, linked transparently to counterterrorism objectives. It would then detail the proposed expenditures and organizational changes required to acquire and implement these capabilities.

DCI Tenet and his deputy director for operations told us they did have a management strategy for a war on terrorism. It was to rebuild the CIA. They said the CIA as a whole had been badly damaged by prior budget constraints and that capabilities needed to be restored across the board. Indeed, the CTC budget had not been cut while the budgets had been slashed in many other parts of the Agency. By restoring funding across the CIA, a rising tide would lift all boats. They also stressed the synergy between improvements of every part of the Agency and the capabilities that the CTC or stations overseas could draw on in the war on terror.⁴¹

As some officials pointed out to us, there is a tradeoff in this management approach. In an attempt to rebuild everything at once, the highest priority efforts might not get the maximum support that they need. Furthermore, this approach attempted to channel relatively strong outside support for combating terrorism into backing for across-the-board funding increases. Proponents of the counterterrorism agenda might respond by being less inclined to loosen the purse strings than they would have been if offered a convincing counterterrorism budget strategy. The DCI's management strategy was also focused mainly on the CIA.

Lacking a management strategy for the war on terrorism or ways to see how funds were being spent across the community, DCI Tenet and his aides found it difficult to develop an overall intelligence community budget for a war on terrorism.

Responsibility for domestic intelligence gathering on terrorism was vested solely in the FBI, yet during almost all of the Clinton administration the relationship between the FBI Director and the President was nearly nonexistent. The FBI Director would not communicate directly with the President. His key personnel shared very little information with the National Security Council and the rest of the national security community. As a consequence, one of the critical working relationships in the counterterrorism effort was broken.

The Millennium Exception

Before concluding our narrative, we offer a reminder, and an explanation, of the one period in which the government as a whole seemed to be acting in concert to deal with terrorism—the last weeks of December 1999 preceding the millennium.