

case pointing conclusively to the Libyan government. Eventually Libya acknowledged its responsibility.¹⁷ Pan Am 103 became a cautionary tale against rushing to judgment in attributing responsibility for a terrorist act. It also showed again how—given a case to solve—the FBI remained capable of extraordinary investigative success.

FBI Organization and Priorities

In 1993, President Clinton chose Louis Freeh as the Director of the Bureau. Freeh, who would remain Director until June 2001, believed that the FBI's work should be done primarily by the field offices. To emphasize this view he cut headquarters staff and decentralized operations. The special agents in charge gained power, influence, and independence.¹⁸

Freeh recognized terrorism as a major threat. He increased the number of legal attaché offices abroad, focusing in particular on the Middle East. He also urged agents not to wait for terrorist acts to occur before taking action. In his first budget request to Congress after the 1993 World Trade Center bombing, he stated 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.” Within headquarters, he created a Counterterrorism Division that would complement the Counterterrorist Center at the CIA and arranged for exchanges of senior FBI and CIA counterterrorism officials. He pressed for more cooperation between legal attachés and CIA stations abroad.¹⁹

Freeh's efforts did not, however, translate into a significant shift of resources to counterterrorism. FBI, Justice, and Office of Management and Budget officials said that FBI leadership seemed unwilling to shift resources to terrorism from other areas such as violent crime and drug enforcement; other FBI officials blamed Congress and the OMB for a lack of political will and failure to understand the FBI's counterterrorism resource needs. In addition, Freeh did not impose his views on the field offices. With a few notable exceptions, the field offices did not apply significant resources to terrorism and often reprogrammed funds for other priorities.²⁰

In 1998, the FBI issued a five-year strategic plan led by its deputy director, Robert “Bear” Bryant. For the first time, the FBI designated national and economic security, including counterterrorism, as its top priority. Dale Watson, who would later become the head of the new Counterterrorism Division, said that after the East Africa bombings, “the light came on” that cultural change had to occur within the FBI. The plan mandated a stronger intelligence collection effort. It called for a nationwide automated system to facilitate information collection, analysis, and dissemination. It envisioned the creation of a professional intelligence cadre of experienced and trained agents and analysts. If successfully implemented, this would have been a major step toward addressing terrorism systematically, rather than as individual unrelated cases. But the plan did not succeed.²¹

First, the plan did not obtain the necessary human resources. Despite des-