

[page 130] network against the United States, but largely without the benefit of an alert, mobilized and committed American public. Despite intelligence information on the immediacy of the threat level in the spring and summer of 2001, the assumption prevailed in the U.S. Government that attacks of the magnitude of September 11 could not happen here. As a result, there was insufficient effort to alert the American public to the reality and gravity of the threat.

Discussion: The record of this Joint Inquiry indicates that, prior to September 11, 2001, the U.S. Intelligence Community was involved in fighting a “war” against Bin Ladin largely without the benefit of what some would call its most potent weapon in that effort: an alert and committed American public. Senior levels of the Intelligence Community, as well as senior U.S. Government policymakers, were aware of the danger posed by Bin Ladin. Information that was shared with senior U.S. Government officials, but was not made available to the American public because of its national security classification, was explicit about the gravity and immediacy of the threat posed by Bin Ladin. For example:

- In December 1998, as noted earlier, the DCI wrote: “We must now enter a new phase in our effort against Bin Ladin...We are at war...I want no resources or people spared in this effort, either inside CIA or the [Intelligence] Community.”
- A classified document signed by the President in December 1998 read in part: “The Intelligence Community has strong indications that Bin Ladin intends to conduct or sponsor attacks inside the United States”; and
- A classified document signed by the President in July 1999 characterized a February 1998 statement by Bin Ladin statement as a “de facto declaration of war” on the United States.

In addition, numerous classified intelligence reports were produced and disseminated by the Intelligence Community prior to September 11, based upon information obtained from a variety of sources, about possible terrorist attacks being planned by Usama Bin Ladin’s terrorist network. Some of this information was summarized and released, in declassified form, in the Joint Inquiry’s September 18, 2002 hearing, including: [page 131]

- In June 1998, the Intelligence Community obtained information from several sources that Usama Bin Ladin was considering attacks in the United States, including against Washington, D. C. and New York;