

Some Community personnel described the increase in threat reporting as unprecedented, at least in their own experience. The Intelligence Community advised senior policymakers of the likelihood of an attack but, given the non-specific nature of the reporting, could not identify when, where, and how an attack would take place. Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage, in his testimony, described his recollection of the threat and the U.S. Government's response:

We issued between January and September nine warnings, five of them global, because of the threat information we were receiving from the intelligence agencies in the summer, when [DCI] George Tenet was around town literally pounding on desks saying, something is happening, this is an unprecedented level of threat information. He didn't know where it was going to happen, but he knew that it was coming.

**3. Finding: Beginning in 1998 and continuing into the summer of 2001, the Intelligence Community received a modest, but relatively steady, stream of intelligence reporting that indicated the possibility of terrorist attacks within the United States. Nonetheless, testimony and interviews confirm that it was the general view of the Intelligence Community, in the spring and summer of 2001, that the threatened Bin Ladin attacks would most likely occur against U.S. interests overseas, despite indications of plans and intentions to attack in the domestic United States.**

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Discussion: Communications intercepts, the arrests of suspected terrorists in the Middle East and Europe, and a credible report of a plan to attack a U.S. Embassy in the Middle East shaped the Community's thinking about where an attack was likely to occur. While former FBI Director Louis Freeh testified that the FBI was "intensely focused" on terrorist targets within the United States, the FBI's Executive Assistant Director for Counterterrorism testified that in 2001 he thought there was a high probability – "98 percent" – that the attack would be overseas. The latter was the clear majority view, despite the fact that the Intelligence Community had information suggesting that Bin Ladin had planned, and was capable of, conducting attacks within the domestic United States.

This stream of reporting began as early as 1998 and continued during the time of heightened threat levels in 2001. For example, the Community received reporting in May 2001 that Bin Ladin supporters were planning to infiltrate the United States to conduct terrorist operations and, in late summer 2001, that an al-Qa'ida associate was considering mounting terrorist attacks within the United States.