

A good example of comments that gave prominence to this subject is that of Richard Clarke, the National Security Council counter-terrorism coordinator from 1993 to October, 2001, who discussed in a JIS briefing on June 11, 2002 the atmosphere he would like to see engendered within our intelligence agencies. Mr. Clarke said the ethos should be: “Don’t be afraid to make mistakes. Encourage a climate in the military and in the law-enforcement communities and in the CIA that says, perfection is not the goal here; and if you have good intentions and you mess up along the way, you will not be punished as an organization or as an individual. Get away from this risk-averse culture, where one mistake and you are out.” He added that “we need a thousand more Colleen Rowleys, and you are never going to get them until you provide them with some encouragement, both from the Director of the FBI, from the President of the United States and, most importantly, from the Congress. . . . [B]elieve it or not, a lot of people in the executive branch are scared stiff about being up in front of a congressional committee.”⁷

Changing the culture of risk aversion in these agencies is a major undertaking. It should be a central focus of any corrective actions we may attempt following this investigation. Yet the Report seems only to document the “fact” of risk aversion, rather than get at why it existed. Without knowing the causes, how can we be certain the conditions that led to it in the 1990s have been corrected? The two congressional intelligence committees should be very careful when it comes to recommending that individuals who were “to blame” for 9/11-related failures be aggressively punished, lest we promote the scapegoating of junior government employees by those who actually bore more responsibility. (See Recommendation #16.)

Insufficient Resources

Throughout this investigation, top intelligence officials cited a lack of money and people, in the years before the 9/11 attacks. One CIA witness described intelligence resources fighting terrorism as “a platoon in a brigade-sized field and doing the best they can.”⁸ This was known, yet little was done to correct it.

⁷ Richard Clarke, testimony before the joint committees, June 11, 2002.

⁸ Statements of a CIA witness before the joint committees, September 20, 2002.