

Qa'ida. Although the FBI made counterterrorism a "Tier One" priority, not all of its field offices responded consistently to this FBI Headquarters decision. The New York Field Office did make terrorism a high priority and was given substantial responsibility for the al-Qa'ida target following the first attack on the World Trade Center in 1993. However, many other FBI offices were not focused on al-Qa'ida and had little understanding of the extent of the threat it posed within this country prior to September 11.

The combination of these factors seriously handicapped efforts to identify and defend against the foreign terrorist threat to the domestic United States. It is not surprising, in the absence of more focused intelligence, that senior policymakers told this Inquiry that, prior to September 11, they believed the terrorist threat was focused on U.S. interests overseas. Deputy Secretary of State Armitage, for example, testified that "... I don't think we really had made the leap in our mind that we are no longer safe behind these two great oceans. . . ." Former Deputy Secretary of Defense John Hamre said in a Joint Inquiry interview that he could not remember ever seeing an intelligence report on the existence of terrorist sleeper cells in the United States. In retrospect, he recalled: "... we thought we were dealing in important things, but we missed the domestic threat from international terrorism."

2. Finding: Prior to September 11, 2001, neither the U.S. Government as a whole nor the Intelligence Community had a comprehensive counterterrorist strategy for combating the threat posed by Usama Bin Ladin. Furthermore, the Director of Central Intelligence (DCI) was either unwilling or unable to marshal the full range of Intelligence Community resources necessary to combat the growing threat to the United States.

Discussion: The Intelligence Community is a large distributed organism. It encompasses 14 agencies and tens of thousands of employees. The number of people [page 42] employed exclusively in the effort against Usama Bin Ladin and al-Qa'ida was relatively small. In addition, these people were operating in geographically dispersed locations, often not connected by secure information technologies, and within established bureaucracies that were not culturally or organizationally attuned to one another's requirements. Many of them had limited experience against the target, and did not know one another. To achieve success in such an environment, leadership is a critical factor. The Joint Inquiry found that the Intelligence Community's structure made leadership difficult.