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## NATIONAL COMMISSION ON TERRORIST ATTACKS UPON THE UNITED STATES

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### **First public hearing of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States**

#### **Statement of Randall J. Larsen to the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States April 1, 2003**

Mr. Chairman, distinguished members, I appreciate the opportunity to appear before this committee. Let me begin with my bottom line.

My first recommendation is that your focus should be on the future, not the past. And when I say the future, I am not talking about next year. That will not allow sufficient time to make the substantial changes that are required. Furthermore, your focus should be on how America failed, not which individuals or even which organizations failed. Let me explain.

Whenever people ask me why I went to Vietnam, I answer, "Why did you send me?" I did not volunteer, and I was not old enough to

### **Current News**

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The Commission has released its final report. [\[more\]](#)

The Chair and Vice Chair have released a statement regarding the Commission's closing. [\[more\]](#)

The Commission closed August 21, 2004. [\[more\]](#)

### **Commission Members**

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Thomas H. Kean  
*Chair*

Lee H. Hamilton  
*Vice Chair*

vote. I actually had little to do with it.

The same type of response might be appropriate for why our systems failed to prevent the attacks of 9-11. You should not seek to assign blame to those who worked within the system. We, the American people, gave them a system that was terribly flawed for the mission required.

We did not intend to give them a flawed system. The system began with the creation of the Central Intelligence Group by President Truman, and evolved through the National Security Act of 1947, the covert actions of the 1950s, the domestic intelligence abuses of the 1960's, and the reforms that came out the Church hearings. It was designed for the Cold War. But in 1993, at the World Trade Center, international terrorism came to America, and the nature of the threat changed. Unfortunately we did not change the apparatus meant to protect us.

As the former CEO of General Electric, Jack Welch, has noted, "When the outside is changing faster than the inside, the end is near." On 9-11, we reached the end of an era-- an era when we could afford to have a solid firewall between intelligence and law enforcement, and an era where battlefields were "over there."

Even though I have been studying homeland security for nearly a decade, I did not fully understand how seriously flawed this system had become. Last year I spent six months working on the follow-up to the DARK WINTER exercise. Many of you have probably heard of DARK WINTER. The effort was led by John Hamre from CSIS, Tara O'Toole from Johns Hopkins, and me. It was a two-day exercise in June 2001 that simulated a smallpox attack on the United States homeland. Senior national security figures such as Sam Nunn, David Gergan, Jim Woolsey, Bill Sessions, and Governor Frank Keating played key roles in this

Richard Ben-Veniste  
Fred F. Fielding  
Jamie S. Gorelick  
Slade Gorton  
Bob Kerrey  
John F. Lehman  
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#### **Commission Staff**

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Philip D. Zelikow  
*Executive Director*

Chris Kojm  
*Deputy Executive Director*

Daniel Marcus  
*General Counsel*

exercise. We have briefed the results of this exercise to key leaders including Vice President Cheney, Secretary Ridge, and numerous members of Congress.

Many of these same senior national security leaders participated in the two-day SILENT VECTOR exercise in October 2002. SILENT VECTOR was a joint effort led by John Hamre and Phil Anderson from the Center for Strategic and International Studies and Dave McIntyre and me for the ANSER Institute for Homeland Security. SILENT VECTOR was a unique homeland security exercise, because in the scenario, the attack never occurred.

The participants, who were acting as the Homeland Security Council, were provided increasingly specific and credible information of an impending attack. We wanted to see what actions these senior participants would take. What would be the economic impact of these attacks? In some of the scenarios we examined during our preparation; we discovered that over-reactions by the government could cause more economic damage than the actual attacks. In the exercise, we learned that it is very difficult to estimate the economic impact of these actions.

The terrorists were planning an attack on critical energy and chemical infrastructure on the East Coast of the United States. Intelligence information, primarily focused on activities outside the United States, provided a continuing stream of details from numerous sources and methods in several countries and regions. Law enforcement information, from the Federal and local levels was provided to the decision makers and even included one "walk-in" who had developed cold feet. A third stream of information was provided to the participants. This information assessed the vulnerabilities of various types of infrastructure and the potential consequences of various types of attacks.

What the organizers and participants of SILENT VECTOR found so surprising is that there is no agency within the US government that serves as a fusion center for these three data streams. Yet, it is this type of fusion that would be required to allow senior elected and appointed officials to decide how to use their limited resources to defend our homeland.

Should extra security be placed at nuclear power plants or chemical storage facilities? Could attacks on gas pipelines turn off the heat on the East Coast during a very cold winter? What about liquefied natural gas storage facilities--are they more of a threat than a nuclear power plant or several rail cars filled with chlorine gas? Which would be easiest to attack? Which would be the most significant threat to the most people?

Since an organization to fuse information from three independent data streams did not exist last spring, the planners of SILENT VECTOR created one for the exercise. Could the attacks have been detected and thwarted if this type of organization existed prior to 9-11? America had intelligence information of training classes in an old airliner in Salmon Pak, south of Baghdad. At this site, terrorists were trained how to hijack airliners using only short knives. Had this intelligence information been fused with information from the FBI and FAA, America might have had the opportunity to thwart the 9-11 attacks.

If a fusion center had been equipped with sophisticated data-mining capabilities, that Florida State Trooper who stopped Mohammad Atta in July 2001 for a routine traffic violation might have discovered that Atta was a person of interest to the CIA, the Treasury Department, and FAA. Even as late as the morning of 9-11, appropriate information systems and data-mining technologies could have identified three of the hijackers who were on terrorist watch lists, four more who listed the same address as

those on watch lists, three more who had made frequent phone calls to those addresses, and two more who had previously used Mohammad Atta's frequent flier number.

Would a fusion center armed with this type of technology have prevented 9-11? No one can know. But this we do know--and this is not from Randy Larsen, but General Dwight David Eisenhower: "The right system will not guarantee success, but the wrong system will guarantee failure."

On 9-11, America had the wrong system in place to defend our homeland.

My advice: do not focus your efforts on the individuals or organizations that were given the wrong system. Fix the system. Do not focus your efforts on next year. Look five years down the road. Describe which threats you will address. You cannot build a system capable of protecting America from all threats. If we do not establish priorities, the greatest threat will become uncontrolled spending. Do not waste your time on systems that could prevent car bombings. They will not threaten the survival of our nation. Your two top priorities should be nuclear weapons and sophisticated biological weapons. Genetically engineered biological weapons will be the greatest threat America faces in the coming decades.

Your goal should be to design for America a system that will fuse intelligence information, law enforcement information, and vulnerability assessments along with the enormous amount of data in the commercial sector that is available to banks and other corporations, but not necessarily to those who are charged with defending America. This system will also need to deliver timely information to its users--everyone from the President to the police officer on the beat in New York City and the public health officer in Hays County, Texas. And without question, the information provided to various

users must be acceptable within our constitutional and cultural values--no easy challenge, but it will be our best investment in security.

Furthermore, this system will be of great value not only in the prevention mode, but also for mitigation and response. This system will be critically important for the Department of Homeland Security in determining where and how to best spend their funds for training, education, and equipment. These decisions should be based on threats and vulnerabilities, not politics as usual.

Today, I see no organization within the new Department of Homeland Security or the Terrorism Threat Intelligence Center that can perform this function. Start with a blank piece of paper.

Thank you, and I look forward to your questions.

*Randy Larsen is an ANSER Vice President and the Director of the Institute for Homeland Security, a not-for-profit public-service research institute. He is a member of the Defense Science Board (2003, DoD's Role in Homeland Security), and serves as a member of the editorial board for the quarterly journal Bioterrorism and Biosecurity: Biodefense Strategy, Practice, and Science (Johns Hopkins University).*

*Since September 11, 2001, numerous senior government officials, including Vice President Cheney and Governor Ridge, have sought his advice and counsel. He has served as an expert witness in hearings held by the Senate and the House of Representatives and provided informational briefings to numerous Members of Congress, the military, the Intelligence Community, and business audiences. His recent speaking engagements include the Council on*

*Foreign Relations, the Foreign Policy Association, the International Institute for Security Studies (London), the German Marshall Fund (Brussels), the Young Presidents' Organization, the Washington State Police Chiefs Annual Conference, numerous universities, and World Affairs Councils. He is also a frequent guest commentator on national television and radio, including the Jim Lehrer NewsHour, CBS News, ABC World News Tonight, MSNBC, and Larry King Live, plus NPR, CNN, ABC, NBC, CBC and BBC radio.*

*He is a co-author of The Executive's Desk Book on Corporate Risks and Response for Homeland Security, published by the National Legal Center for the Public Interest (March 2003). He and his staff developed and teach graduate courses in homeland security at George Washington University, Johns Hopkins School of Arts and Sciences, and the National War College. During the past eight years, he has written and lectured extensively on the subjects of asymmetric and biological warfare and the 21st-century challenges of homeland security. He previously served as the Chairman of the Department of Military Strategy and Operations at the National War College, as a government advisor to the Defense Science Board (2000, Intelligence Requirements for Homeland Defense), as a research fellow at the Matthew B. Ridgway Center for International Security Studies (1994-1995), and as a fellow in the Massachusetts Institute of Technology Seminar XXI program (1999-2000).*

*He was a co-developer of the nationally acclaimed Dark Winter exercise. Key players in this exercise included the Governor of Oklahoma, Frank Keating; former Senator Sam Nunn; special assistant to four presidents David Gergen; former Director of Central Intelligence Jim Woolsey; and former FBI Director William Sessions.*

*In June 2000, Colonel Larsen retired following*

*32 years of military service in the Army and Air Force. His assignments included 400 combat missions in Cobra gunships in Vietnam and duties as a military attaché, legislative assistant, and commander of America's fleet of VIP aircraft at Andrews Air Force Base in Maryland. His military decorations include the Defense Superior Service Medal, the Legion of Merit, the Distinguished Flying Cross, the Bronze Star, 17 Air Medals, and the South Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry. He has a Master of Arts degree in National Security Studies from the Naval Post Graduate School.*

National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States  
The Commission closed on August 21, 2004. This site is archived.