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NATIONAL COMMISSION ON TERRORIST ATTACKS UPON THE UNITED STATES

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Second public hearing of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States

Statement of Christopher Shays to the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States May 22, 2003

An Opportunity to Restore Faith

Governor Kean, Congressman Hamilton and other members of the Commission, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today on the effect the events of September 11 have had on the constituents I represent in Connecticut's Fourth Congressional District.

In March, I submitted testimony describing your task as a difficult and urgent one. In the intervening months, your mission has not become any less pressing or any easier. Each day, louder calls by the living echo the voices of those who died asking why we still seek answers

Current News

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

Thomas H. Kean
Chair

Lee H. Hamilton
Vice Chair

to basic questions about the attacks of September 11, 2001.

For residents of Connecticut's Fourth Congressional District, these attacks had obvious and personal impact. Family, friends and neighbors lost loved ones. Seventy-eight people I represented perished that day. Their families lost a spouse, a parent, a child, a sibling. The impact of their loss was immediately felt by all of us.

September 11 was a wake up call from hell for all of us. Not just because of our losses; but because we as a country were previously warned, and September 11 exposed the extent to which we as a nation - our government and our people - failed to heed that warning.

We knew the terrorist threat was there. Prior to 2001 there were three national commissions - the Bremer, Gilmore and Hart/Rudman Commissions -- charged with assessing the terrorist threat. The National Security Subcommittee, which I chair, held 23 hearings on terrorism prior to September 2001. The jurisdiction of my subcommittee was rewritten in 1999 so we could examine the terrorist threat at home and abroad.

While we received cooperation from the departments of State and Defense, we received little cooperation from the intelligence community. We sought to look at how the intelligence agencies communicated with each other, but we were stonewalled. It is absolutely imperative this commission not be stonewalled as well.

It is also imperative we come to grips with the fact our nation knew of the threat. Terrorist attacks against the United States go back more than 20 years, but a particularly sentinel moment was the taking of our embassy in Tehran in 1979 and holding of our diplomats

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Fred F. Fielding
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Slade Gorton
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John F. Lehman
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James R. Thompson

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Philip D. Zelikow
Executive Director

Chris Kojm
Deputy Executive Director

Daniel Marcus
General Counsel

hostage for 444 days.

The World Trade Center was previously attacked by Al Qaeda - the same organization that ultimately destroyed it. We knew of Osama bin Laden's hatred of the West and his commitment to its destruction. And we knew where he ate, slept and trained.

In the course of the more than 40 hearings my subcommittee has held on this issue, we found a pervasive inability or unwillingness to counter terrorism aggressively. Sadly, the 23 hearings we held prior to September 2001 received almost no attention. The media was focused on other issues.

Well before 9/11, the Bremer, Gilmore and Hart-Rudman Commissions recommended the executive branch bring greater urgency and focus to federal efforts by establishing a national strategy to combat terrorism. All three agreed our government needed to better recognize the threat; develop a strategy to counter it; and reorganize the government to implement that strategy. The only disagreement they had was on how to implement such a strategy - in other words, how to reorganize the government.

Regrettably, there simply was no urgency in responding to these threats or recommendations. Deafened by our Western preconceptions and biases, we failed to listen to what the terrorists said in Arabic. Distracted by smaller matters at home, we failed to understand the magnitude of their commitment to global terror and our destruction.

September 11 answered the one question to which we did not know the answer: Terrorists had the capability for mass destruction, but would they ever use it? Tragically, we learned on September 11 there is no moral, political or geographic red line the terrorists would not cross.

Immediately after September 11, I felt our primary task was to respond to the terrorist threat with all our time, energy and resources, with no distractions. Now we need answers.

I don't believe this commission will find a "silver bullet" or a scapegoat, because I don't believe there is one. If we're honest with ourselves and each other, we will admit that all of us, in varying degrees, could have been more alert. The past Administration, this Administration, Congress and the media all could have done a better job. What my constituents ask now, particularly the families, is that we find and tell them the truth, whatever that is.

You can, and I know you will, be thorough and dispassionate in the vital work you have undertaken, and we, in turn, can trust the results of your investigation and learn from them.

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