

## REVIEW

**Pinning the Blame**

By Elizabeth Drew

*The 9/11 Commission Report:  
Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States*  
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## 1.

Since 1794, when George Washington formed a commission to advise him on the Whiskey Rebellion, presidents have appointed commissions to investigate, obfuscate, recommend action, or delay it—or because they couldn't think of anything else to do. The reports of some of them, such as the Warren Commission, remain open to skepticism to this day; others have been totally ignored. The National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, known as the 9/11 Commission, has shared some of the traditional characteristics of commissions. Appointed by the President and Congress, most of its members had been prominent legislators or government officials. But in several ways the 9/11 Commission was strikingly different from any of its predecessors. The most important difference was that it had a specific and vigilant constituency, made up of the people who had lost family members on September 11, 2001, who had forced the creation of the commission through a reluctant Congress, and who overcame the opposition of President Bush.

Moreover, the commission decided at the outset that in order to gain the public's trust it would be as "transparent" as possible. It not only held public hearings but, something very rare, its members commented publicly on its work while they were still deliberating. Even more unusual, the eighty members of the committee staff, including experienced prosecutors and former intelligence officials, issued interim staff reports on various aspects of the events surrounding the September 11 attacks. These seventeen reports provided factual material for the commission's open hearings and for the final report itself, and helped the commission bring to light new evidence—from the government, the families, and others. The reports were read to the commissioners in a dry monotone; the lack of public drama made them all the more effective, especially since they were clearly written and contained a great deal of new information, some of it astonishing. Along with television appearances by the commission members, they stimulated public interest in the commission's work. The commissioners believe that the staff reports and their own public comments put pressure on the Bush administration and helped them to obtain sensitive government documents that would otherwise have been withheld.

The administration fought the commission at nearly every turn—at first denying it sufficient funds, then opposing an extension of time, refusing it documents, trying to prevent Condoleezza Rice from testifying in public. The White House, in a preemptive move, told the commission that Bush would not testify under oath, and insisted that he appear along with Vice President Cheney. The main partisan division within the commission, I was told, was over how hard to press the White House for information that it was holding back. In its effort to achieve a unanimous, bipartisan report, the commission decided not to assign "individual blame" and avoided overt criticism of the President himself. Still, the report is a powerful indictment of the Bush administration for its behavior before and after the attacks of September 11.

The biggest obstacle the administration placed before the commissioners was CIA Director George Tenet's refusal to let them interview detainees directly, including key figures in the September 11 plot—despite the strong objections of some of the commissioners. They were forbidden to talk to, among others, the plot's mastermind, Khalid Sheikh Mohammed (called KSM in the report), who had been captured in Pakistan. The report observed that assessing the truth of statements by such witnesses was “challenging”:

Our access to them has been limited to the review of intelligence reports based on communications received from the locations where the actual interrogations take place. We submitted questions for use in the interrogations, but had no control over whether, when, or how questions of particular interest would be asked. Nor were we allowed to talk to the interrogators so that we could better judge the credibility of the detainees and clarify ambiguities in the reporting. We were told that our requests might disrupt the sensitive interrogation process.

The latter claim seemed dubious, but the commissioners were unable to effectively challenge it. The commissioners were allowed to send follow-up questions, but were prevented from observing in person the emotional and physical reactions of the detainees or from pursuing a particular line of questioning on the spot. The commission had to take into account the possibility that some witnesses may have lied to the interrogators. But they received valuable information from KSM, whom the report depicts as “plainly a capable coordinator.” They cite, for example, his claim that Osama bin Laden “could assess new trainees very quickly, in about ten minutes, and that many of the 9/11 hijackers were selected in this manner.” KSM describes how bin Laden urged him to “advance the date of the attacks”:

In 2000, for instance, KSM remembers Bin Laden pushing him to launch the attacks amid the controversy after then-Israeli opposition party leader Ariel Sharon's visit to the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. KSM claims Bin Laden told him it would be enough for the hijackers simply to down planes rather than crash them into specific targets. KSM says he resisted the pressure.

Adding to the difficulty of deciding whether to believe the detainees, the commissioners were forbidden to see the conditions in which they were held or to investigate how they were treated by their interrogators. On May 15, 2004, *The New York Times* reported that in questioning KSM,

CIA investigators used graduated levels of force, including a technique called “waterboarding,” in which a prisoner is strapped down, forcibly pushed under water and made to believe he might drown.

Later reports said such practices had been “suspended.” Philip Zelikow, the staff director, told me that the staff tried to find out about the treatment of the prisoners but could not. Some of the information that KSM gave the interrogators could be checked against documents that were found when he was arrested. In any event, whenever they could, I was told, the commissioners sought verification from second sources, some of them also in custody—often in different locations—and under interrogation.

Zelikow and the commissioners I talked to say that when faced with questions about the accuracy of some information, they did what a historian or journalist does: search for confirmation wherever they could, and, when necessary, simply use their best judgment. In some 110,000 words of footnotes, the commission cites its sources, and in some instances presents its doubts in the report. For example, it doubted the statement by

KSM that when two of the hijackers briefly stayed in California, al-Qaeda had no agents there to help them. “We do not credit this denial,” the commission says, arguing that it is unlikely that those two hijackers, who were “ill-prepared” for their mission, would have been sent to California if arrangements had not been made to look after them. (In a footnote the report says that, according to the CIA, “protecting operatives in the United States appeared to be a ‘major part’ of KSM’s resistance efforts.”) Zelikow told me that the commission and its staff rejected much other information for which they could not find support.

The commissioners worked under considerable pressures. The families pressed them to explore hundreds of specific questions, such as why there were no rooftop exits on the World Trade Center buildings, or where Defense Secretary Rumsfeld was on the morning of the 11th. The White House brought pressure in several ways. Stung by the charges of Richard Clarke, the former Clinton and Bush adviser on terrorism, that the Bush White House was lax in not heeding his warnings about the dangers presented by al-Qaeda, the White House sought to discredit Clarke as well as the commission, but it didn’t succeed. Public opinion was on the commission’s side, and, as the polls showed, it believed Clarke. The commission’s report essentially supports his charge that, by the summer of 2001, the administration had many warnings of possible al-Qaeda attacks and failed to respond to them.

In an attempt to discredit the commission, the White House charged that some of its Democratic members were “partisan,” a view some Bush officials expressed in interviews with an obviously phony show of sorrow. “Partisan” meant that certain commissioners, in particular Richard Ben-Veniste, a Democrat and a skilled trial attorney, asked tough questions—as if somehow tough questions weren’t in order. Some Republican commissioners—in particular Jim Thompson, Fred Fielding, and John Lehman—in appearances on television or in the commission’s deliberations, sometimes seemed to be doing the White House’s bidding, repeating some of its “talking points.” But in the end they didn’t attempt to block damning information about the Bush administration’s performance from appearing in the final report.

The administration also attempted to put pressure on the commission through the process of clearing the staff reports—by a committee set up by the White House. Several commissioners told me that the clearance process sometimes elicited new facts, which they accepted. Sometimes the administration questioned the staff’s conclusions or inferences, but the commissioners insist that they made changes only on the basis of new facts, and that they did not negotiate with the administration.

## 2.

The strongest objection lodged by the administration was to the staff report (Number 17) about how the administration performed on the morning of September 11, which clearly suggested that Dick Cheney decided on his own, without first clearing it with the President, that the hijacked planes should be shot down. Neither the staff report nor the final report explicitly charges Bush and Cheney with lying about this when they told the commission that Cheney had first gotten permission from the President to give the order; but the implication that they were doing so is clear.

Both reports observe that though Lynne Cheney and Scooter Libby, the vice-president’s chief of staff, were in the White House bunker with Cheney that morning and kept logs of the calls and conversations that took place there, they made no record of any conversation between Bush and Cheney on this subject before Cheney issued the order. There was also, apparently, no record of any such call in the phone logs of the White House switchboard, or the Secret Service and White House Situation Room logs. The staff report said, “There is no documentary evidence for this call.” The staff report also sug-

gested that in his appearance before the commission Cheney may have been misleading when he was asked when he reached the bunker that morning, a question that would have a bearing on whether this particular conversation with the President had taken place.

The chronology given in the report shows that Cheney gave the order to shoot down a plane—which was believed to be headed to Washington but in fact had already crashed in Pennsylvania—“probably between 10:12 and 10:18.” At that point, the report says, Joshua Bolten, the White House deputy chief of staff, also in the bunker,

watched the exchanges and, after what he called “a quiet moment,” suggested that the Vice President get in touch with the President and confirm the engage order. . . . He said he had not heard any prior discussion on the subject with the President.

Following that exchange with Bolten, the report says that Cheney spoke to Bush at 10:18 and “obtained the con-firmation” of his order. After that, Cheney ordered the shoot-down of another plane believed to be close to Washington. At 10:39 he told Rumsfeld that the aircraft he authorized to shoot down planes approaching Washington had “already taken a couple of aircraft out.” As it happened, by the time the order was given, all four hijacked planes had already crashed, and, though fighter planes were scrambled, the order never got to the pilots. Bush told the commissioners that his conversation with Cheney about shooting down the hijackers “reminded him of when he had been an interceptor pilot”—though Bush of course never saw combat.

In response to the staff report’s suggestion that Cheney took command and made the decision to shoot down the planes on his own, the White House reacted in a lengthy letter to the commission, stamped “Secret” in red, from the White House counsel, Alberto Gonzalez. In the letter’s last paragraph, Gonzalez proposed substitute language that portrayed the President’s performance that morning in a more positive light. This was a blunder; the commissioners unanimously found the letter offensive. But the White House didn’t leave it at that. Cheney, I was told, made a vehement phone call to the chairman, Thomas Kean, and vice-chairman, Lee Hamilton, protesting the staff report’s implication that he had taken charge and ordered the planes shot down. But despite all the pressure, the staff report and the final report leave the clear impression that he did so.

**I**n fact, the commission gives a devastating picture of the chaos within the Bush administration on the morning of the attacks, when the President famously remained in the Florida classroom for some five to seven minutes (according to the report) after learning of the second attack on the World Trade Center. But this is just one of several examples that morning of questionable judgment on the part of the President, as well as of the officials traveling with him, including his chief of staff, Andrew Card, and his political mentor, Karl Rove. Bush told the commission that he attributed the first crash, which he learned of before he entered the school classroom, to “pilot error,” but this seems strange, since it is unlikely that a pilot would accidentally stray into a very tall, prominent building in a highly controlled air space on a clear autumn day. Subtly but damningly, the report makes it clear that after Bush left the classroom, “the focus was on the President’s statement to the nation”—his “message”—rather than on taking charge of the nation’s response to the attacks.

The President didn’t convene a meeting of his National Security Council until after all of the planes had crashed. And though the chain of command for military actions runs from the president to the secretary of defense, Bush didn’t call Rumsfeld for nearly an hour after the second tower was hit, though more than a half-hour lapsed between the crash into the second tower in New York and the attack on the Pentagon. Moreover,

despite the established chain of command, Bush in that call didn't discuss with Rumsfeld the authorization to shoot down planes. Astonishingly, according to information the commission received between the writing of the staff reports and the final report, the secretary of defense, upon learning of the two attacks in New York, simply returned to the work he had already been doing in his Pentagon office.

The White House, I was told, pressed for two things about these hours to be included in the final report. First, it wanted the commission to publish Bush's statement, as it did, that he remained in the classroom because he "felt he should project strength and calm until he could better understand what was happening"—though the fact that a calamity had taken place wasn't exactly a secret. Second, the White House wanted the report to include Libby's description of Cheney's very quick decision—"in about the time it takes a batter to decide to swing"—that United Flight 93, which was believed to be headed toward Washington, should be shot down. Some commissioners found this description hardly flattering, but at the Republicans' insistence it remained in the final report.

The White House was apparently so upset by the staff report's account of Cheney's deciding on his own to give the order to shoot down the planes that it overlooked the statement in another staff report, presented at the same time, that though there had been "contacts" between Iraq and al-Qaeda—involving al-Qaeda representatives seeking help from Iraq but not receiving it—"they do not appear to have resulted in a collaborative relationship."

Once it received prominent attention in the press, this clear contradiction of one of the administration's principal arguments for going to war—which had been repeated only two days earlier by Cheney—could not be left unchallenged by the White House. Bush said that the staff report validated his claims of "ties" between Saddam and al-Qaeda. In a television interview the day after the staff report was published, Cheney attacked the press for reporting accurately what the commission had said. (One commissioner, Jim Thompson, made similar comments on Bill O'Reilly's show.) In the final report, the commission said there had been no "collaborative operational relationship." One commissioner told me the word "operational" was added for clarity; another said that it was intended to underscore the fact that Bush's and Cheney's assertions were wrong. In announcing on August 2 his proposals for acting on the commission's recommendations, Bush, ignoring the language of the report, repeated his vague claim that Saddam Hussein "had terrorist ties."

The most important strategic decision the commission made was to avoid offering an explicit opinion on whether the September 11 attacks could have been prevented. But it was apparent that some commissioners believed this to be the case. Earlier in the year, in several television interviews, Thomas Kean said that the attacks might well have been prevented. And Lee Hamilton said on *Meet the Press* in April, "If you'd had a little luck, it probably could have been prevented." According to some of Kean's colleagues, the "blowback" from the administration to these statements was ferocious. Kean and Hamilton backed away from their earlier statements. The commissioners who believed that the attacks might have been prevented knew that they couldn't get unanimous agreement on this question. There was no way to prove that the attacks could have been prevented—al-Qaeda had shown it could adapt to setbacks, such as the inability of some of the hijackers to get to the United States. But the commissioners could and did make the case that this was a strong possibility. They believed that the account in their report would speak for itself.

They also knew that if they explicitly blamed Bush and his administration for failing to prevent the attacks, the energies of the White House and its political allies, including those in the press and television, would have been devoted to discrediting their work. Instead, the commission laid out in its narrative considerable evidence that the September

11 attacks might well have been prevented. The final report presents a clear picture of the Bush administration in the months leading up to September 11 as not much engaged with the problem of terrorism and unresponsive to clear warnings that something was afoot. In Chapter 8, about the events of that summer, it says:

As Tenet told us, “the system was blinking red” [with warnings] during the summer of 2001. Officials were alerted across the world. Many were doing everything they possibly could to respond to the threats.

Yet no one working on these late leads in the summer of 2001 connected the case in his or her in-box to the threat reports agitating senior officials and being briefed to the President. Thus, these individual cases did not become national priorities. As the CIA supervisor “John” told us, no one looked at the bigger picture; no analytic work foresaw the lightning that could connect the thundercloud to the ground.

We see little evidence that the progress of the plot was disturbed by any government action. The US government was unable to capitalize on mistakes made by al Qaeda. Time ran out.

In one of its more astonishing discoveries, the commission found that George Tenet spoke to President Bush, who was at his ranch in Texas for six weeks during the summer, only twice during the month of August (once in a routine briefing after Bush had returned to Washington).

There’s another question, less frequently discussed than whether the attacks could have been prevented, but arguably as important: Did the Bush administration fail to take actions it should have taken to combat al-Qaeda, and to respond to the warnings about possible attacks? In straining to achieve bipartisanship, the commissioners cited ten opportunities that the Clinton and Bush administrations failed to seize—to emphasize the point, it included them in a box.

But the opportunities missed by the Clinton and Bush administrations were of a different order, and occurred in different contexts. Clinton and his top aides are depicted as having been alert to the al-Qaeda threat—if erratic in their attention to it—particularly after the simultaneous bombings of two American embassies in East Africa in 1998, which were quickly traced to bin Laden. In the weeks leading up to the millennium, the Clinton White House counterterrorism team met daily. But Clinton took only hesitant actions against al-Qaeda—for example, bombing a suspected bin Laden camp in Afghanistan but missing him—and he or his advisers turned down other schemes to bomb, kidnap, or kill bin Laden, for fear of causing “collateral damage,” or failing and leaving themselves open to criticism, even ridicule. The Pentagon was hesitant about taking military action. Clinton, as we know, was not much of a risk-taker when it came to government action. He told the commission that he didn’t alert the public to the danger posed by bin Laden because he didn’t want to build him up—and also that he didn’t take more aggressive action against Afghanistan because there was no public support for it.

The commission suggests that the thinking of the incoming Bush officials was frozen in the cold war, and that they viewed the al-Qaeda threat in connection with nations. Thus consideration of the problem of al-Qaeda was submerged—and delayed—in a months-long study of policy toward Afghanistan and Pakistan. Moreover, the Bush administration was fiercely determined to do everything it possibly could differently from the Clinton administration.

3.

As presented by the commission, the evidence of signals missed by the Bush administration is more startling than we had known. To take one example, a memorandum written in July 2001 to headquarters by an FBI agent in Phoenix, Arizona, specifically warned of the “‘possibility of a coordinated effort by Usama bin Laden’ to send students to the United States to attend civil aviation schools.”

Though Bush administration officials said after the fact that no one could have imagined that terrorists would use planes to fly into buildings, the report shows that there had been warnings of attacks very much along those lines before September 11—including information from an informant in East Asia of the possibility of al-Qaeda’s hijacking planes, filling them with explosives, and using them to crash into US cities. Richard Clarke had worried about this very possibility in connection with the Atlanta Olympics in 1996. In the commission’s words, the “possibility” of this sort of terrorist attack “was unimaginable, and imagined.”

The most arresting document is the Presidential Daily Brief of August 6, 2001, which, until it was finally made public, had been described by the White House as “historical in nature.” A single question by Ben-Veniste to Condoleezza Rice, asking her to state the title of the PDB, exposed that fiction. The title was “bin Laden Determined to Strike in US.” That the commission was able to see the President’s daily briefings by the CIA during the Clinton and Bush administrations at all was unprecedented. They could only do so, however, under strict rules set by the administration: only two commissioners were allowed to read the PDBs, and—for reasons that later became clear—they were forbidden to copy down their titles.

After the September 11 attacks, administration officials claimed that the information they’d received wasn’t specific enough for them to act on it. But it was much more specific than they suggested. The government even received evidence in July 2001 that an al-Qaeda attack had been put off for two months but hadn’t been abandoned. And the August 6 PDB itself was far more detailed than the administration admitted. It cited evidence, including reports in the press as well as clandestine information, that bin Laden had “wanted to conduct terrorist attacks in the US” since 1997; that al-Qaeda members had lived in or traveled to the United States for years, “and the group apparently maintains a support structure that could aid attacks”; that FBI information “indicates patterns of suspicious activity in this country consistent with preparations for hijacking or other types of attacks, including recent surveillance of federal buildings in New York.” It cited a call to the US embassy in the United Arab Emirates in May 2001, “saying that a group of bin Laden supporters was in the US planning attacks with explosives.” It said that the FBI had seventy “bin Laden—related” investigations underway. The President told the commission that he’d found this last point “heartening.” Others might have been alarmed. (The commission concluded that the FBI had exaggerated the extent of its investigations.)

The origins of this particular PDB remain something of a mystery. Bush made a point of telling the commission that he had asked on several occasions whether there was an al-Qaeda threat to the United States. In response to a draft of the staff report on the PDB of August 6, the CIA sent an e-mail to the commission taking exception to Rice’s statement that the PDB had been produced in response to the President’s asking whether there was an al-Qaeda threat to the US. It said, “The author of this piece, and others familiar with it, say they have no information to suggest that this piece was written in response to a question from the President,” and that claims to the contrary weren’t accurate. Tenet, for his part, told the commission both that the President had asked about the possibility of an attack on the US and that the CIA had produced the brief on its own initiative.

In the week before the final report was to go to the printer, at the urging of Richard Ben-Veniste two commissioners talked directly with the CIA authors of the PDB, who confirmed that they had intended to write such a PDB before they were told about the President's question. The final report states,

Two CIA analysts involved in preparing this briefing article believed it represented an opportunity to communicate their view that the threat of a bin Laden attack in the United States remained both current and serious.

The CIA analysts told the commissioners that they put all the relevant information they could into the PDB in order to get the President's attention. The report tells us that this was the thirty-sixth Presidential Daily Brief so far that year related to bin Laden and al-Qaeda—though the first to warn of a possible attack on the United States itself.

After the alarming PDB was presented to the President, nothing happened. The commission reports dryly,

We have found no indication of any further discussion before September 11 among the President and his top advisers of the possibility of a threat of an al Qaeda attack in the United States.

No meetings were convened to demand that the relevant intelligence officials search for pertinent evidence that might be found within their agencies—such as the Phoenix memo or the various conversations between the FBI's Washington headquarters and an FBI agent in Minneapolis, who warned that he was concerned that Zacarias Moussaoui was planning to hijack a plane and crash it into a major building.

The administration later offered the excuse that the “wall” between the FBI and the CIA kept this information from being shared, and that some of it didn't even get to the top levels of the FBI. But the “wall” didn't prevent the FBI from sharing one of the most important warning signals that occurred in the months leading up to September 11: the arrest of Moussaoui, on August 16, on immigration charges after a flight instructor reported to the FBI on his odd behavior at a flight school. Moussaoui said he wanted the training as an “ego boosting thing.” After talking to him, the FBI agent in Minneapolis concluded he was “an Islamic extremist preparing for some future act in furtherance of radical fundamentalist goals.” The FBI's report to Tenet and other CIA officials about Moussaoui, on August 23, was headed “Islamic Extremist Learns to Fly.” Tenet told the commission that since he saw the report on Moussaoui “as an FBI case, he did not discuss the matter with anyone at the White House or the FBI.” However, according to Bob Woodward and Dan Balz of *The Washington Post*, Tenet, on being told of the September 11 attack at a breakfast with former Senator David Boren of Oklahoma, remarked, “I wonder if it has anything to do with this guy taking pilot training.”

No meetings were called to assess the capacities of the government for responding to a hijacking crisis or to check on its communications systems. The numerous failures of communication between the CIA, the FBI, the Secret Service, the FAA, the military, and the municipal police on the morning of September 11 indicate that such preparations were badly needed. The President himself complained to the commission about the poor communications that morning. (For some time after being informed of the attack, he was reduced to using a cell phone.)

The process of closely examining the harrowing events of September 11, under considerable pressure and sometimes under attack, had the effect of binding the commissioners in a common effort; they became, they say, close friends. There was, several of them told me, an understanding among them that in order to have a strong public impact the report had to be unanimous; the matter didn't have to be discussed. In approving the final report, which was drafted by the staff, the commissioners went over it

page by page, much of it four to six times, for days at a stretch. They decided on conflicts over wording not by taking votes but through discussion. Aware of the necessity for unanimity, Democrats refrained from pushing for an explicit indictment of the Bush administration's performance, allowing the narrative to make the case; and Republicans did not try to block the commission's refutation of one of the administration's principal arguments for going to war in Iraq.

But some important questions remain unanswered. KSM told his interrogators that the attacks cost about \$500,000; but the commissioners never found out where the money came from. Nor is it clear whether the hijackers had a support network within the United States. Senator Bob Graham, former chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, believes that the attack scheme had help from Saudi Arabia. In a new book he asks whether such a network involving the Saudis has been identified and destroyed.<sup>1</sup> I think it's doubtful that the commissioners, with the press and the families watching, with their reputations at stake, and with many staff members who would be aware of the evidence, would have chosen to suppress important but sensitive information. Some members, however, were more concerned than others about possible Saudi support.

The commission's proposals for reorganizing the government's intelligence structure are already the subject of an intense debate. Its proposal to establish a new national intelligence director in the White House, with budget and hiring authority over almost all of the intelligence agencies, set off a predictable power struggle in Washington. The CIA and the Pentagon, both of which would lose power under the proposal, and their allies on Capitol Hill, are opposing it. Deferring to the Pentagon, which controls 80 percent of the government's intelligence budget, Bush didn't include in his proposal the budget authority for the new director. But without this authority, the position would be virtually powerless. Another important issue is whether the new director should be in the White House, as the commission proposed, or have more independent status.

Bush, saying that he didn't wish intelligence to be politicized, proposed the creation of a new agency, with the president having the authority to hire and fire the director. Some observers think the office of national intelligence director should be still more independent than that—more along the lines of the Federal Reserve. Such a post, or something like it, has been proposed in the past by other commissions and committees, but I think there's a real question whether almost all of the government's intelligence should be siphoned through one person. (The State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research, which—though its report was largely ignored—got the Iraq weapons issue right, is left outside the new directorate in the commission's proposal.) The commission simply said, "We hope" that the President would look past the director's reports and question those who report to him or her. (The commission's proposal to consolidate the eighty-eight congressional committees with authority over the intelligence agencies into one joint committee—another threat to established powers—hasn't been received enthusiastically on Capitol Hill.)

In any event, the character and attentiveness and persistence of the president remain the crucial factors in determining how intelligence is to be collected and used, and how threats are to be dealt with. Only he can insist that the agencies present objective information, whatever its consequences for the president's policy. But the power of the commission's remarkable report, its dispassionate marshaling of the facts, and the respect that the public came to have for it stirred an extraordinary amount of attention and forced hesitant politicians, in the White House and on Capitol Hill, to consider and debate its recommendations. Against all odds, this is no small achievement.

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<sup>1</sup>See his *Intelligence Matters: The CIA, the FBI, Saudi Arabia, and the Failure of America's War on Terror*, written with Jeff Nussbaum (Random House, 2004).