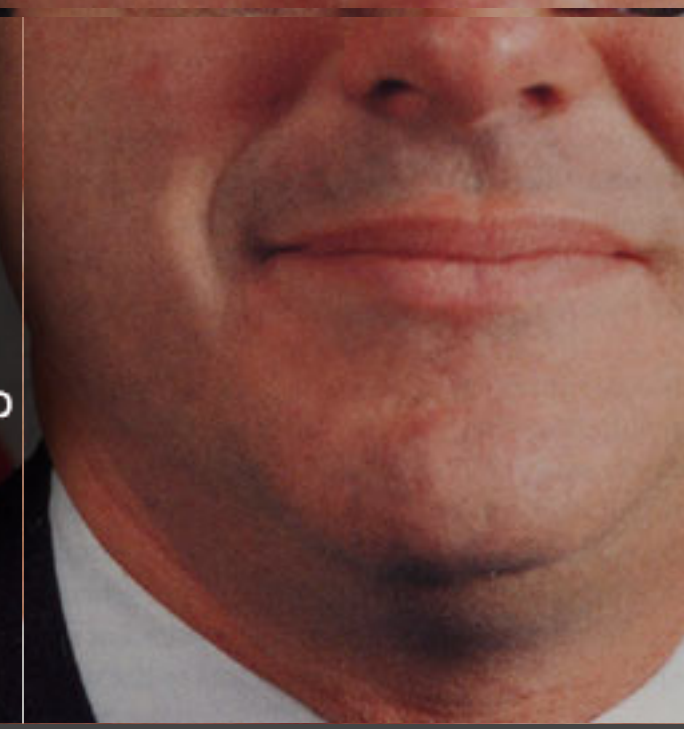
FRONTLINE | inside 20 years of FRONTLINE

For six years, John O'Neill was the FBI's leading expert on Al Qaeda. He warned of its reach. He warned of its threat to the U.S. But to the people at FBI headquarters, O'Neill was too much of a maverick, and they stopped listening to him. He left the FBI in the summer of 2001 and took a new job as head of security at the World Trade Center.

Update

John O'Neill and the 9/11 Commission Investigation

the man who knew



INTRODUCTION

EXCLUSIVE
VIDEO: VIEW A 1997 INTERVIEW WITH O'NEILL

VIDEO: WATCH "THE MAN WHO KNEW" ONLINE

- ★ O'Neill's Life and Career
- ★ What If...
- ★ "Connecting the Dots" - Map
- ★ Interviews

TIMELINE: AL QAEDA'S GLOBAL CONTEXT | JOIN THE DISCUSSION | READINGS & LINKS

PRODUCER'S CHAT | TAPES AND TRANSCRIPTS | CREDITS | PRESS REACTION | PRIVACY POLICY

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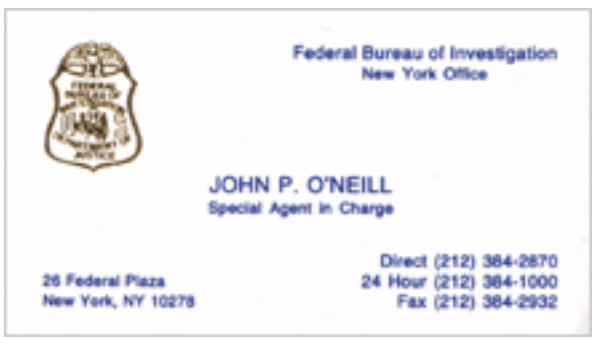
Introduction

Oct. 3, 2002

an update

>>John O'Neill and the 9/11 Commission Investigation

Update- April 12, 2004: In the week that the 9/11 Commission holds hearings scrutinizing the FBI's actions in the years prior to the terrorist attack, FRONTLINE rebroadcasts the remarkable story of John P. O'Neill, the FBI's counterterrorism expert who long warned of Al Qaeda's threat. A summary of this FRONTLINE report follows: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When the Twin Towers fell on Sept. 11, 2001, among the thousands killed was the one man who may have known more about Osama bin Laden and Al Qaeda than any other person in America: John O'Neill.

The former head of the FBI's flagship antiterrorism unit in New York City, O'Neill had investigated the bombings of the U.S. embassies in Africa and the USS Cole in Yemen. For six years, he led the fight to track down and prosecute Al Qaeda operatives throughout the world. But his flamboyant, James Bond style and obsession with Osama bin Laden made him a controversial figure inside the buttoned-down world of the FBI. Just two weeks before Sept. 11, O'Neill left the bureau for a job in the private sector -- as head of security at the World Trade Center. He died there after rushing back into the burning towers to aid in the rescue efforts.

FRONTLINE's "The Man Who Knew," chronicles John O'Neill's story -- a story that embraces the clash of personalities, politics and intelligence, offering important insights into both the successes and failures of America's fight against terrorism.

Drawing on exclusive interviews with many of O'Neill's closest friends and associates, this report opens with O'Neill's introduction into the new world of terrorism -- the capture in 1995 of one of the world's most wanted terrorists -- Ramzi Yousef, the ringleader of the group that bombed the World Trade Center in 1993.

Former U.S. Attorney Mary Jo White credits O'Neill with quickly grasping the danger Yousef and other terrorists represented to America.

"Yousef is one of the most dangerous people on the planet -- also very smart," she says. "Getting and incapacitating him was a significant public safety issue. And John O'Neill recognized that and was not about to take 'no' for an answer before he was taken into custody."

O'Neill immersed himself into learning everything he could about global terrorism and Islamic fundamentalist militancy. In 1997, O'Neill was promoted to special agent in charge of the national security division in the bureau's New York office. Observers say O'Neill grabbed at the chance to head the team that was investigating and prosecuting most major international terrorism cases. The job would also be the perfect base from which to continue his pursuit of bin Laden and Al Qaeda.

But while John O'Neill had succeeded in winning allies among CIA and international intelligence agencies, not everyone within the FBI was so enamored of him. A fixture on New York's celebrity social circuit, O'Neill's flamboyant style and his unconventional personal life -- he had several longtime girlfriends and a wife he never divorced -- had long raised eyebrows within the FBI.

"The Man Who Knew," gives viewers an insider's perspective on O'Neill's investigations as well as the internal territorial debates among the FBI, the State Department, and the White House over how to deal with U.S. terrorist investigations in East Africa in August 1998 and the Yemen in October 2000.

"[O'Neill] believed the New York field office had the greatest depth of expertise of anybody in the country on this issue, and if it's Al Qaeda, how could you send anybody else but the people who know the most?" recalls Fran Townsend, former head of the U.S. Justice Department's office of intelligence policy.

O'Neill's New York FBI team was at the center of bureacratic arm-wrestling over who would head the 1998 investigation into the embassy bombings in East Africa. O'Neill again was the focus of a heated political battle over the investigation of the 2000 attack against the USS Cole in Yemen. Current and former government officials such as Richard Clarke, counterterrorism chief in the Clinton administration and Barry Mawn, former head of the New York FBI office, recount how O'Neill's desire to show the Yemeni security forces -- which he viewed as being less than cooperative -- that the FBI meant business was one of many issues in the investigation which angered U.S. Ambassador Barbara Bodine.

Finally, when O'Neill made a brief trip home to New York for Thanksgiving, Bodine denied his re-entry visa, preventing him from returning to the investigation. Insiders tell FRONTLINE that O'Neill's removal from the scene in Yemen may have seriously limited the Cole investigation -- an inquiry that some speculate might have led O'Neill to the Sept. 11 hijackers in time to foil their plans.

"The Man Who Knew" also chronicles O'Neill's increasing frustration with Washington's lax attitude toward the threat posed by bin Laden, including the possibility that Al Qaeda sleeper cells were already operating within the United States.

"What John O'Neill was trying to do was get a momentum going in the FBI to look seriously for those cells," Clarke says. "It was not one of the priorities in most FBI field offices."

By the summer of 2001, O'Neill had been so marginalized by FBI officials that key clues of the looming Sept. 11 plot apparently were never passed on to him. His 25-year career with the FBI would come to an end following bureau investigations into his temporary loss of a briefcase containing a classified report and charges that he used an FBI car to give a ride to his girlfriend. In August 2001, while the allegations were pending, O'Neill opted to retire from the bureau at age 49. Just eight days after he started his new job as director of security at the World Trade Center, the terrorists he had long pursued struck the towers.

O'Neill's critics contend that his personal failings proved fatal to his FBI career. His supporters, however, believe his main failing was refusing to conform to the standard-issue FBI mold.

"John was somebody that bureaucrats were not always pleased with because they felt he wasn't marching to their tune -- that he was too ambitious and that he operated out of the box too often," ABC producer Chris Isham tells FRONTLINE. "And this was an FBI that believed very much under the [FBI Director Louis] Freeh regime of operating within the box. This was a guy that was constantly pushing the envelope when the envelope didn't want to be pushed. So the envelope fought back."

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An Update: John O'Neill and the 9/11 Commission

FRONTLINE's story on John O'Neill spotlights two central issues that emerged during the 9/11 Commission hearings held in the spring of 2004 investigating why the U.S. intelligence community failed to prevent the Sept. 11th terrorist attack:

- The 9/11 Commission's investigation revealed that America's $30 billion intelligence community, spread over more than a dozen agencies, was disorganized, fractured and impaired by organizational and legal restrictions on the sharing of information.

These disclosures directly relate to John O'Neill's story. He came tantalizingly close to possibly uncovering the 9/11 plot. But his investigations into the *USS Cole* terrorist attack and into Al Qaeda's presence in the United States were both undermined by the CIA and FBI's failure to share information with each other. Read FRONTLINE's "What If" report for details.

- The 9/11 Commission hearings also revealed how the FBI was not capable of functioning as a domestic intelligence service because of limited resources as well as a culture and organization that emphasized a traditional law enforcement approach to counterterrorism. FBI agents were trained to build criminal cases that could be prosecuted. As the 9/11 Commission's Staff Statement noted, "The Bureau rewarded agents based on statistics reflecting arrests, indictments and prosecutions. As a result, fields such as counterterrorism and counterintelligence, where investigations generally result in fewer prosecutions, were viewed as backwaters."

John O'Neill had run up against this FBI culture; his counterterrorism efforts directly threatened the dominance of the group who held sway over the bureau - the criminal division. O'Neill also fought to improve the FBI's resources and capabilities to fight the new terrorism, arguing for a plan that represented a seismic shift in the way the FBI had always operated. One example: He would have given authority to a new more analytic agent who would have enhanced technology to fight terrorism. As the 9/11 Commission hearings disclosed, "66 percent of the bureau analysts were not qualified to perform analytic duties."

Some selections from the 9/11 Commission's Staff Statement No. 9 (April 13, 2004) relating to the FBI's problems in fighting terrorism:

Counter Intelligence Not a Priority--"The FBI took a traditional law enforcement approach to counterterrorism. Its agents were trained to build cases. Its management was deliberately decentralized to empower the individual field offices and agents on the street." ... "The Bureau rewarded agents based on statistics reflecting arrests, indictments, and prosecutions. As a result, fields such as counterterrorism and counterintelligence, where investigations generally result in fewer prosecutions, were viewed as backwaters." ... "Agents developed information in support of their own cases, not as part of a broader more strategic effort. Given the poor state of the FBI's information systems, field agents usually did not know what investigations agents in their own office, let alone in other field offices, were working on. Nor did analysts have easy access to this information. As a result, it was almost impossible to develop an understanding of the threat from a particular international terrorist group."

Reno Told Freeh to Shift Resources to Counterterrorism--"Reno told us that the Bureau never seemed to have sufficient resources given the broad scope of its responsibilities. She said in light of the appropriations FBI received, it needed to prioritize and put counterterrorism first. She also said that Director Freeh seemed unwilling to shift resources to terrorism from other areas such as violent crime. Freeh said that it was difficult to tell field executives that they needed to do additional counterterrorism work without additional resources."

FBI Statistically Driven--"Collection of useful intelligence from human sources was limited. By the mid-1990s senior FBI managers became concerned that the Bureau's statistically-driven performance system had resulted in a roster of mediocre sources. The FBI did not have a formal mechanism for validating source reporting, nor did it have a system for adequately tracking and sharing such reporting, either internally or externally."

Problem of Rotation Through Headquarters--"Additionally, the career path for agents necessitated rotations between headquarters and the field in a variety of work areas, making it difficult for agents to develop expertise in any particular area, especially counterterrorism and counterintelligence."

No Ability to Know What It Knew--"Prior to 9/11, the FBI did not have an adequate ability to know what it knew. In other words, the FBI did not have an effective mechanism for capturing or sharing its institutional knowledge. FBI agents did create records of interviews and other investigative efforts, but there were no reports officers to condense the information into meaningful intelligence that could be retrieved and disseminated."

Reno Warned FBI to Strengthen Intelligence--"Reno told us that she was very concerned about the Bureau's information sharing and intelligence capabilities. In 2000, Reno sent several memoranda to Director Freeh expressing these concerns. One memo stated that 'it is imperative that the FBI immediately develop the capacity to fully assimilate and utilize intelligence information currently collected and contained in FBI files and use that knowledge to work proactively to identify and protect against emerging national security threats.' Reno's requirements involved improved information sharing, improved counterterrorism training, a threat assessment, and a strategy to counter that threat. It is not clear what actions the FBI took in response to these directives from the Attorney General."

Related Readings:

» The 9/11 Commission Report (July 2004)
This is the full and final report of the 9/11 Commission which is officially called the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States. It was created in late 2002 to produce a full and complete account of the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, including America's preparedness and immediate response to the attacks. The commission was also charged with providing recommendations designed to guard against future attacks.

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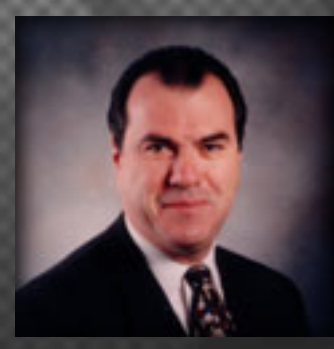
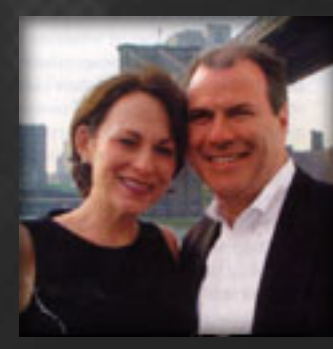

O'Neill's Life and Career

A Chronology of His Life

O'Neill's story, as drawn from FRONTLINE's research, reporting, and interviews with O'Neill's friends and colleagues.

Excerpt from a 1997 Interview

In this 1997 video interview, John O'Neill talks about the work of FBI agents, how he handles the emotional challenges of his job, and what he calls "ordered liberty" -- the delicate balance of national security and civil liberties.

Anecdotes

Memories of O'Neill, recounted by friends and colleagues Clint Guenther, Fran Townsend, Barry Mawn, and Richard Clarke, offering glimpses of his personality, character, and working style.

O'Neill and the FBI

In many ways, John O'Neill was always engaged in a double war, says Valerie James. "He was fighting terrorism, and fighting his own people too." Here, friends and colleagues talk about the clash of personalities and politics that persisted throughout O'Neill's FBI career.

The John O'Neill I Knew

Impressions of a life, offered by seven of O'Neill's friends and colleagues.

Pursuing Al Qaeda

Friends and colleagues discuss O'Neill's passionate pursuit of the Al Qaeda terrorist network, from 1995 and the capture of Ramzi Yousef to the summer of 2001.

The USS Cole Investigation

Colleagues describe the obstacles O'Neill faced as on-scene commander in Yemen: a U.S. ambassador, uncooperative Yemeni officials, a hostile environment, and ultimately, the lack of support from FBI headquarters.

related features

A Letter to Lou Gunn
On his last day at the FBI, O'Neill sent this e-mail to the father of one of the sailors killed in the USS Cole attack.

His Congressional Testimony
In November 1995, O'Neill testified about the terrorist threat posed by weapons of mass destruction.

Cooperation and Teamwork in a Multi-police Environment
In this speech to the Spanish Police Foundation on July 10, 2001, O'Neill asked the audience, "How much more successful could we all be if we really knew what our agencies really knew?"

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The Hunt for Al-Qaeda
A Chronology of John O'Neill's Life and FBI Career

1952

John Patrick O'Neill Born in Atlantic City, New Jersey

Even as a young boy, O'Neill knows he wants to be a special agent for the FBI, although he often flirts with the idea of being either a priest or an archeologist. One of his favorite television shows is The FBI. When he grows up, he will tell friends that he was inspired by Efrem Zimbalist, the star of the show.

1971

Marriage . . . New Family . . . FBI Job . . . Graduation

During his first college semester, O'Neill meets Maureen Christine O'Neill, who had been his high school girlfriend. While in college, O'Neill takes his first job with the FBI, working as a janitor during the summer at the field guide at FBI headquarters in Washington. In 1974, O'Neill graduates with a degree in administration of justice from American University and a few weeks later marries his sweetheart from George Washington University.

1976

FBI Special Agent

In 1976, O'Neill is hired as an FBI agent. Over the next 15 years, he gains experience in various FBI areas, including organized crime, white-collar crime, counterintelligence, and terrorism. He is appointed chief of the government fraud unit at FBI headquarters.

July 1984

Promoted to Chicago Field Office

A few months after being named in the government fraud unit, O'Neill is appointed assistant special agent in charge (ASAC) in Chicago. There he supervises the violent crime, white collar crime, and organized crime programs. The move is an important promotion, but he will tell his friends decades later on an joke. In Chicago, O'Neill establishes the reputation for being an aggressive investigator, group that brings together federal agents and local police.

1985 (approx.)

Meets Valerie James

Valerie James meets O'Neill after sending him a drink in a bar. O'Neill, who tends to keep different parts of his life compartmentalized, does not tell James about his family. She learns about them two years later from the wife of one of O'Neill's co-workers.

May 19, 1992

World Trade Center Bombing – Six Killed, Hundreds Injured

The FBI tracks and arrests several suspects and names Ramzi Yousef as the plot's mastermind. Still in Chicago, O'Neill is not directly involved in the initial investigation.

August 1993

UNPOM Appointment

O'Neill's first major chance to prove his talent to FBI brass in Washington comes when he is appointed to supervise VAPOLIN, a task force investigating violence against Haitian presidential candidates.

January 1994

Chief of Counterterrorism Section, FBI Headquarters

With this appointment in Washington, O'Neill coordinates and oversees counterterrorism investigations worldwide. He is the FBI's main liaison with other agencies, including the NSC and CIA.

February 1995

Ramzi Yousef's Capture

Assistant to top FBI brass, O'Neill is called upon to go to Manila to fly back to the U.S. in a Sunday morning. At the same morning, Richard Clarke, head of counterterrorism at the National Security Council, discovers that Ramzi Yousef has been located in Pakistan. Clarke calls the FBI's headquarters to inform them of the location and capture plan. O'Neill, Clarke asks who's monitoring the phone. O'Neill claims, "Oh, I guess, the bell are you? Tale John O'Neill." O'Neill spends the next few days working around the clock on Yousef's successful capture by FBI, DEA, and State Department agents.

Spring 1995

A Self-Education on The New Terrorism

After Yousef's capture, O'Neill begins immersing himself in everything he can learn about the 1993 World Trade Center bombing, Ramzi Yousef and Islamic militants.

June 23, 1996

Khobar Towers Bombing, Dhahran, Saudi Arabia

The blast kills 19 American soldiers and injures 500 others. At first his Ladies is a suspect, but U.S. officials later conclude the plotters were probably linked to Iranian government.

Both O'Neill and FBI Director Louis Freeh are directly involved in the investigation. Initially, O'Neill is tasked with gathering information on whether the Saudis are cooperating. According to FBI sources, O'Neill tells Freeh bluntly that the Saudis were "blowing smoke up your ass." Chris Isham, who was the FBI's lead agent in the Khobar Towers bombing, Chris Isham reports that O'Neill was frustrated with the investigation, and the Saudis were definitely playing games and that the senior officials in the U.S. government, including Louis Freeh, just didn't get it.

December 1996

O'Neill's Warning

In a speech at the Explosives Detection Symposium and Aviation Security Technology Conference in New Orleans, O'Neill tells his audience that "interesting times lie ahead" and that the main terrorist threat now comes from transnational groups not backed by national governments. He also warns, "We see the threat in far a large number of casualties."

Dec. 1, 1997

Promotion: Ass't Special Agent in Charge of Counterterrorism and National Security

O'Neill's new position at the FBI's New York office puts him in charge of the bureau's efforts against Osama bin Laden and his al-Qaeda terror scum – assistant director in charge of the New York field office. He moves down into New York City's robust with Valerie James, who has moved there from Chicago. While he has many friends in the New York City Fire Department, Valerie's restaurant catering to the famous and powerful. O'Neill also develops a reputation for being a tough but fair-minded visiting overseas law enforcement and intelligence officers.

May and June, 1998

O'Neill on the Ground

A May Associated Press article on Islamic terrorism quotes O'Neill as saying that various terrorist groups are operating within the U.S. "A lot of these groups now have the capacity and the support infrastructure in the United States to attack us here if they want to," he warns.

In June, in a speech in Chicago at the National Strategy Forum, O'Neill describes the Afghanistan insurgency against the Soviets as "a model for what we do now." He says that Afghanistan "became a sanctuary for a major security threat." They were trained in terrorist activity, and now they are back in their various countries around the world with the training and having the network capabilities to know either jihad groups around the world who have the same idea, the same fundamentalist thinking and the same type of training."

1998

Call for Reorganizing the FBI

FBI Deputy Director Robert "Bear" Bryant, consulting with O'Neill and others, writes a report calling for major changes in the FBI's fight against terrorism. The report advocates a centralized information system to collect data and help produce future attacks. Bryant also endorses assigning some agents to spend their entire working counterterrorism cases, because it was never funded. It was put on the backburner somewhere," Bryant tells PBOND1.DOC.

Jan. 1998

John Miller of ABC News interviews Bin Ladin

O'Neill's friend, ABC producer Chris Isham, arranges the interview. Some of the tapes are used in the documentary "Bin Ladin: Prime Suspect" for Fox Lakes. Isham tells FRONTLINE that O'Neill was desperate to watch the footage of the entire interview, even though ABC had a policy against reviewing the material. "He wasn't taking no for an answer," he says. Isham ultimately compromised by putting the entire interview on the ABC News Web site.

Watch the full bin Ladin interview

Aug. 7, 1998

US Embassy Bombings — Nairobi, Kenya and Dar es Salaam, Tanzania

Truck bombs kill 224 and injure thousands in the two blasts. Within hours of learning of the news, O'Neill rushes to Assistant Director Louis Schiliro's office to argue that only Al Qaeda could have carried out such a sophisticated attack. He's urged to be named incident commander and fly the New York office to be designated the FBI team handling the investigation in Nairobi. Bryant, who had been overseeing the bombed crimes against embassies, is flown out of targets between New York and Washington. Washington is initially chosen to lead the investigation, but FBI headquarters reverses itself and a few weeks later gives the job to O'Neill's New York team. However Washington refuses to send O'Neill himself.

1999

A Reprimand

In the course of attending a FBI function, O'Neill's car breaks down near Washington, D.C. Instead of calling a tow truck, he commandeers and borrows a bureau car. When the incident is discovered, headquarters opened a formal inquiry and O'Neill is disciplined for a security breach and unauthorized use of government property.

April 1999

Career Problems

While in New York, O'Neill's clout in the FBI bureaucracy begins to stall as he is passed over time-honored promotions. First, he applies to be assistant director in Washington for the National security division. Bear Bryant tells FRONTLINE he recommended O'Neill for the job, but the incident was a problem. "I think that what happens in the FBI, it's very bureaucratic, and people don't like someone who rocks the boat," he says of Professional Responsibility, and there's a question, they're looking for a promoter somebody that's got a cloud over them, even a minor thing, like a vehicle."

He applies for a second position—this time for an opening as assistant director for the counterterrorism division, but he's turned down for the job. Finally, the one opening O'Neill really wants, the job of FBI New York office – becomes available. Again O'Neill is not chosen. Barry Mawn gets the post.

December 1999

The Millennium Threat

O'Neill is extremely worried about the millennium. Clint Greenhaw, a former agent who worked with O'Neill in the New York office, tells FRONTLINE, "He's being frustrated over the fact that he's not being promoted, and he's concerned that everything he could possibly think it may be important to cover. We had so many threats that were coming in."

On Dec. 14, Ahmed Ressam is intercepted at the Canadian border carrying CB grounds of explosives. O'Neill and the interagency Joint Terrorism Task Force work around the clock to monitor and arrest suspected terrorists. The Justice Department is concerned that Attorney General Janet Reno really approves intelligence warrants. "We believe for the first time in our history, that the Attorney General will not be there to sign the FISA warrant," FBI official Pete Yeromonl tells FRONTLINE. O'Neill urges his agents to monitor wiretaps real time and cancels Christmas leave.

New Year's Eve 2000

Watching the Bad Drug in Times Square

The tense of the millennium passes without incident. Lewis Schiliro recalls, "I remember talking to John shortly after midnight on that night, and there was a sense of accomplishment. We had kept that bad guy in Times Square out-of-bounds. And, you know, certainly we believed we got everybody that we were after. But you never really 100 percent know for sure."

In a July 2001 speech in Spain, O'Neill points to the millennium investigation as a model of law enforcement. It underscored his core belief that in the fight against terrorism, everyone had to work together "the coordinated approach of federal, state, and local law enforcement entities was integral to efforts to disrupt the alleged terrorist plot and to the successful gathering and presentation of evidence in the trial of Ahmed Ressam," he tells the gathering.

January 2000

Valerie James Ill

Along a FBI conference conference in Orlando, Florida, O'Neill learns a brief-case with documents from work in a room with other agents while he goes outside to take a cell phone call. The bag is missing when he returns, and he immediately alerts local police. The incident is embarrassing, but the bag had been recovered and only 24 hours later. Valerie James is diagnosed with a brain tumor. Her condition worsens, and she undergoes sensitive documents that are classified. O'Neill's friend Bear Bryant tells FRONTLINE, "I think he felt that some people were going to or it – as they did – as a wedge, as a way of putting him in a bad light."

O'Neill decides to return directly to New York and reports the incident. A Fingerprint dusting reveals no documents were touched, but the Justice Department opens an investigation. Although O'Neill is cleared of criminal wrongdoing, the incident shadows the rest of his FBI career.

Spring 2000

Bombing of the USS Cole – Aden Harbor, Yemen

Seventeen American sailors are killed in the attack on the naval destroyer. O'Neill immediately goes to Assistant Director Barry Mawn to convince him that New York needs to act quickly to be named the lead office in the investigation. Mawn agrees, O'Neill with the East Africa bombing, Mawn tabbies to be the on-scene commander. However, headquarters in Washington, D.C. ultimately assigns the case to the FBI's Norfolk, Virginia, Resident Agency. Mawn tells FRONTLINE that the Norfolk office should run the investigation with O'Neill as on-scene commander.

Summer 2000

Return to New York

Taking a break, O'Neill flies back to New York. Valerie James with FRONTLINE that he had lost over 20 pounds during his month-long stay in Yemen.

January 2001

Return to Yemen Revoked

When O'Neill tries to return to Yemen, Ambassador Theline denies the request, citing security concerns. The ambassador's relations with Theline are so bad that it is not worth fighting the O'Neill's return. Assistant Director Barry Mawn with FRONTLINE, "I actually think John was more disappointed that we didn't actually let him go up as he as sending him back, and taking a strong stand with the State Department. I think he felt that he could have contributed more." Mawn said "I felt that we didn't prepare adequate so we could have by-passed or going back. Again, John kind of held their feet to the fire. And he had developed the relationship with the board of Yemen." Lewis Schiliro of the FBI, by John not going back, we lost contact with the head of PSO.

Spring 2001

Continuing Terror Threats

From the spring through summer of 2001, the FBI receives a number of indications that there is a serious threat of another terrorist attack. O'Neill and other FBI agents are frustrated by the bureaucracy and by their inability to better understanding of Al Qaeda and the intelligence necessary to thwart another attack.

June 21, 2001

FBI Pulls Out of Yemen Due to Security Threat

O'Neill and Barry Mawn agree that agents in Yemen could not be protected. "We were operating with three SWAT personnel as support in the security posts, and at some point you just aren't going to work, you couldn't provide protection," says former FBI agent Chris Greenhaw.

Summer 2001

Intelligence Indicates Attack on U.S. Interests Likely

In June, O'Neill is more unsophisticated than ever at the FBI because of his deteriorating relationship with headquarters. He discusses the threats with his friend Chris Isham, who recalls that O'Neill: "He knew that there was a lot of noise out there and that there were a lot of warnings, a lot of red flags. He felt that there was something big, but he was frustrated with headquarters, which was an indication that there was something going on. Yet, he felt that he was frozen out, that he was not in a capacity to really do anything about it premature because of his relationship with the FBI. He is was a source of mid-upgrade for him."

June 22, 2001

Louis Freeh Resigns as FBI Director; Thomas Pickard Appointed Interim Director

Freeh's departure, which was unknown to most agents in Yemen could not be protected. "We were operating with three SWAT personnel as support in the security posts, and at some point you just aren't going to work, you couldn't provide protection," says former FBI agent Chris Greenhaw.

July 2001

O'Neill Decides to Retire From FBI

He hears about a job opening as head of security at the World Trade Center and decides to apply for it. Valerie James and Barry Mawn discourage him leaving the FBI. By this point, however, O'Neill realizes his chances for promotion were severely hurt by the Ressam incident. In addition to career problems, entertaining Russian visitors and COPPERHEAD investigation left him in debt. The job at the World Trade Center would give him a chance to pay off that debt.

July 23, 2001

Speech to Spanish Police Foundation

While vacationing in Spain with Valerie James and her son, O'Neill gives a speech to Spanish police on interagency cooperation. He warns audiences, "How much more successful could we all be if we really learn how to work together?"

July 24, 2001

Phoenix FBI Office Recommends Agency-Wide Investigation of Flight Schools

The memo makes its way to FBI headquarters but it is not passed on to O'Neill or Mawn in the New York office – or to the rotating of the following month of the Minneapolis FBI office to investigate the alleged 20th hijacker, Zacarias Moussaoui.

Aug. 19, 2001

The New York Times Reports on O'Neill's Birthman Incident and Resignation

The story, based on sources an anonymous source, whom O'Neill believes is Tom Pickard, O'Neill confronts Pickard who denies that he was the source of the leak.

Aug. 27, 2001

Last Day at the FBI

In his final lesson on the job, O'Neill urges an authorization for the FBI to hire more Arabic speakers. "We need people who understand the culture," he tells O'Neill explains. "I wasn't learning here until I did it, because I promised that we would send them back. When I pulled them out, I had to. But I was determined to be the one who signed the piece of paper to send them back."

O'Neill also awards Lou Conte, whose son had died in the Cole attack, to tell him that he was retiring, but that the FBI was returning to Yemen.

Late August 2001

New Job: The World Trade Center

According to Chris Isham, O'Neill recognized the threat still posed to the World Trade Center. "He was very concerned about the World Trade Center. He told me, 'I've got this great job. I'm head of security at the World Trade Center.' And I joked with him and said, 'Well, that will be easy job. They're not going to bomb that place again.' And he looked at me actually – he immediately came back and he said, 'actually they've always wanted to finish the job. I think they're going to try again.'"

Sept. 10, 2001

Celebrations

On the eve of Sept. 11, O'Neill is with friends on the town. According to Valerie James, O'Neill tells her that night, "We're on the brink of something." O'Neill explains, "I don't like the way things are lining up in Afghanistan." Still, O'Neill tells friends that a new message in Bin Laden's tape "I don't get better than this," he says.

In the minutes after the attack, O'Neill makes his way to the command center that had been set up. There he sees FBI agent Wesley Wong. Wong would tell Bayer magazine later, "He was in FBI mode. Then he stopped and kind of looked at me and went towards the interior of the complex. He was very, very, very determined. He was very, very determined. He was certainly not more than a half hour or 20 minutes." Wong is the last person to see him alive.

Sept. 18, 2001

Memorial Service for O'Neill

A week after his body is found in the rubble of the South Tower, about a thousand mourners attend John O'Neill's memorial service in Atlantic City. Barry Mawn, one of the speakers, tells the gathering that O'Neill didn't escape from the FBI because of the bureaucratic incident. Mawn says that he felt a sense of guilt because he had not been able to convince headquarters of O'Neill's importance. "He didn't run from a fight. He didn't retire because this was a serious matter. He retired because circumstances were tight and it was a good job," Mawn tells FRONTLINE.

Following the service, John O'Neill is buried in the churchyard of St. Nicholas of Tolentine Church, the church where he once served as an altar boy.

this page was printed from www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/hunt/chronology/oneill.html on 10/05/2005 20:50

the man who knew

video A 1997 Interview with O'Neill (excerpt)

ABOUT MY INTERVIEW WITH JOHN O'NEILL

By Barbara Newman

It was near Christmas in 1997 that I interviewed John O'Neill, the FBI's Special Agent in Charge of National Security Programs at the FBI's New York Office. He had recently been appointed to this post and was part of a two-hour program I produced on the FBI's New York Office for A&E's *Investigative Reports* series. When I first broached the idea of doing the program with John he immediately became its champion. He understood how intriguing a story like this could be. John introduced me to his boss, Jim Kallstrom, the Director of the New York Office. I still remember sitting outside Jim's office with Gayle Gilman, my Executive Producer from A&E, when Jim took a phone call from FBI Director Louis Freeh, hung the phone up and told us "Approved." In one fell swoop, John and Jim had short-circuited the sometimes ponderous FBI bureaucracy. It's an action I found later to be very natural to both of them.

Agents who weren't allowed to tell even their wives what they were doing talked about cases and themselves; why they joined the FBI, where they grew up, what their dreams and aspirations had been. The idea was to turn a red-hot beam on a very closed, but vital part of our government. Our host was John's National Security Division, the most secret of all parts of the FBI. I ended up spending almost an entire year filming the show, commuting to New York from Washington on Mondays and returning on Fridays. The piece was a total success from a journalistic point of view and a morale booster for the agents and their families.

It's pretty illustrative of John to go out on a limb and champion a documentary on the FBI, allowing access to its premises, including undercover and secret agents. It was one of the first projects he undertook with his new position in New York. He had arrived there only a few months after we started our research.

I knew John well before I interviewed him, from the time he was in Washington as a section chief in the National Security Division. I had first met him there after I produced a documentary called "The New Face of Terrorism" for A&E's *Investigative Reports* in 1993. I profiled the "Blind Sheik" Omar Abdel Rahman, and reported on the threat his teachings and followers posed to U.S. security. The day after I delivered the show to A&E, a bomb exploded at the World Trade Center. Rahman's protege, Ramzi Yousef, was the mastermind of this attack. An international hunt tracked down a group of Muslim extremists who executed the attack. A few years later, in October 1995, Rahman was convicted of conspiracy against the U.S. for his part in the plot to blow up bridges, tunnels, the U.N., and the FBI's New York office. Rahman, in prison, is a martyr to the cause of extremism, and his sons are leaders in Al Qaeda.

I had covered terrorism stemming from the Middle East since 1980, when I was a producer for ABC's 20/20. John and I shared an interest in this area and a belief that the U.S. could suffer a tremendous blow from those who espoused a hatred of us and our society. Some found his zeal shrill and annoying. I found it reassuring.

John could be utterly charming or totally devastating. He could wither with a look, suffering fools badly. He was openly contemptuous of people he didn't think pushed the envelope or themselves. He thought so quickly he often finished my sentences. I knew when he disagreed with me by catching an amused flicker in his eyes.

John had old-fashioned values. He was patriotic. He was religious, never missing a Sunday mass. He told me that he was so poor growing up, he had done every job, including cleaning bathrooms. He went to the FBI at age 18 and became a tour guide. The Bureau was his life; they sent him to college at American University.

Behind the bluster, John was a gentle soul. He might not admit it, but I think he would rather light a candle than curse the darkness.

John and I were friends. We were able to communicate directly, without artifice. We trusted each other and knew each other's limits. For years John had told me that Osama bin Laden was an enormous threat to the U. S. and that I should do a documentary about him. And for years I told him that Americans weren't interested. We were both right.

video excerpt

In this excerpt, O'Neill talks about the work of FBI agents, how he handles the emotional challenges of his job, and discusses "ordered liberty" - the delicate balancing of national security and civil liberties.

high (dsl) low (56k)

Note: Please be aware there is a high level of demand for this video, and you may not be able to access it on the first try due to a limited number of streams.

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Anecdotes

The observations and stories of friends and colleagues which offer a glimpse of John O'Neill's personality, character and working style. These are drawn from FRONTLINE's interviews with Clint Guenther, Fran Townsend, Barry Mawn and Richard Clarke.

Clint Guenther

Former FBI Agent NYC - Counterterrorism

read the interview>

John always had at least two telephones on him. He had a Nextel Worldphone, which was an FBI-issued phone, and he always carried his own personal little Motorola StarTAC. He spent probably more time on that phone than he did on any other. I think that he felt that, if he was under scrutiny by his superiors, he didn't want anybody misconstruing what any of his phone calls were. So he'd always pick up his own phone and make his phone calls that way.

But he spent an inordinate amount of time on that little phone. It seemed to be, like, affixed to his ear. I remember one time that we had the Royal Canadian Mounted Police down for a week-long meeting on our efforts with the Egypt Air disaster and TWA 800. They were investigating the SwissAir 101 disaster up in Nova Scotia. So we had a week-long working seminar with these folks, exchanging ideas and investigative techniques. At the end John decided that we were going to take the RCMP guys out to dinner, and he was going to take them to a steakhouse out of town. We were all supposed to meet at, say, 6:00, and we're all standing there at the bar. John shows up punctually at 6:00.

But he's standing out on the street, and here he's got this StarTAC glued to his ear, pacing back and forth. It was an hour and a half that everybody waited for John O'Neill to get off that telephone, because it was just one call after another, receiving or sending calls out. He had to get all that business out of the way . But then he came in and he was at the top of his game, really happy that he was able to once again take partners in law enforcement out and spend some quality time with them.

Fran Townsend

Deputy to the U.S. Attorney General 1995-2002

read the interview>

The night before his last day [at the FBI] -- and now we're in the end of August [2001] -- he called me. I was at my desk. It had to be 7:00, 8:00 at night. . He has composed an e-mail to Mr. Gunn, whose son had been killed on the Cole and who he kept in contact with throughout the course of the investigation. He asked if he could read it to me.

John didn't believe we did terribly well by the victims and survivors of these awful attacks, for all our focus on investigations and solving crimes and successful prosecutions. So he really was on a personal crusade, both with families of Khobar victims and TWA 800. The Cole was no different. He had developed this relationship with Mr. Gunn, who was frustrated with the lack of information he was getting.

He composed a long e-mail, talking to him about what the status of the investigation was, about pulling agents out, about the continued commitment of the case. At that point, John knew that the decision was made that they were going to put agents back in to continue the investigation. So in the e-mail, he tells Mr. Gunn about what a privilege it's been to have met him, to know him, to work with him, and that he'll keep in touch with him, and he will make sure that the bureau keeps Mr. Gunn apprised of developments.

The next day, his last day, very busy, lots of sort of administrative things he's got to do, people he wants to say goodbye to. He calls me; it's probably 6:00 at night, to which I say, "What in the world are you still doing there on your last day? What could conceivably keep you there?" He said, "Well, one I wanted to make sure that you were the last phone call from my desk, given all the cases we had worked on together. And the other thing, the real reason I'm still here, is there was a piece of paper, and I am determined that it will be my last official act in the FBI. I just signed the authorization to send the agents back into Yemen. I wasn't leaving here until I did it, because I promised that we would send them back. When I pulled them out, I had to, but I was determined to be the one who signed the piece of paper to send them back."

In that 24-hour snapshot, you see both the man who really cared about the victims, and yet who was so committed to that case that it was a point of personal pride that he was going to sign the piece of paper that allowed the agents to go back and continue the investigation.

Richard Clarke

NSC Coordinator for Counterterrorism, 1992-2001

read the interview>

Can you take us into a discussion at NSC when he would be there? What was he like?

Well, as you can imagine, the situation room, the conference room where they usually have these meetings, you know, it's a bunch of fairly gray bureaucrats sitting around the table. And more often than not, a bunch of guys, unfortunately, all guys, more often than not.

And John would come into the room and there would be a presence about him.
He would go around the room like it was a ward meeting and he was an Irish politician. He'd smash everybody on the back and grin and grip and pass out cigars and, you know, the atmosphere changed. He was building a team. I might have been chairing the meeting, but he was building a team and we were all on his team.

He wanted to get people beyond representing their agencies and have them be friends and have them feel like they were part of a team on which he was a key player. And then when you got around to the substance of any discussion, he always knew more about the CIA guy's brief than the CIA guy did. He knew more about the State Department guy's brief than the State Department guy. He prepared for meetings. He prepared in detail. He wanted to show everybody that his recommendation was well founded because he knew all the facts and he had considered all the facts. And he would continue to drive and press and press until people agreed with his recommendation.

Which they often did?

Which they almost always did.

Barry Mawn

Head of the FBI's New York office, 2000-2002

read the interview>

Did you go to John O'Neill's memorial service in Atlantic City?

Yes. It was very full. It was a good service. There were a number of speakers -- I was one. Actually, I think my remarks initially were questioned by some people, primarily because they didn't know the full extent of my relationship with John

Essentially, one of John's biggest concerns when he left the job was that he was running from the [FBI] inquiry. And he almost didn't retire because he said "I don't want it to look like I'm running. I've always stood up to a fight." I mean, he said, "You know, I'm going to ask for you to be supportive of me as to that whole incident, that it was minor and that it was not a big deal that everybody's trying to make of it." And he said "Essentially, down the road, I will make comments to that effect."

And what he was planning, I know, is at a retirement party that he would get up there and explain what happened and what occurred. So I think what I did is I said "I want to set the record straight for John O'Neill. He didn't run from a fight. He didn't retire because this was a serious matter. He retired because circumstances were right and it was a good job. It was the right decision for him and his family," and that in my view it was a really minor incident.

And I think some of the controversy is "Well, why are you bringing up that incident?" And I said that John would have wanted me to talk about it. And the people that really knew John came up to me afterwards and said "You definitely said the right thing there," you know, setting the record straight, and it was not that big a deal.

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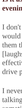
John O'Neill & the FBI

In many ways John O'Neill was always engaged in a double war, says his friend Valerie James -- "he was fighting terrorism, and fighting his own people too." Here are the observations of his friends and colleagues about the clash of personalities and politics throughout O'Neill's FBI career. Those interviewed: Chris Isham, Fran Townsend, Barry Mawn, Mary Jo White and Valerie James.

Chris Isham

Senior Producer, ABC News



read the interview»

Since I knew him, John always had a problematic relationship with the FBI hierarchy or FBI bureaucracy. He loved the FBI; he really, really loved the FBI. I think that everybody that knows John knows how much he really loved it since he was young. He just adored the FBI.

But at the same time, it used to make him really angry. The bureaucracy made him angry, and the bureaucrats made him angry. He felt that the bureaucrats were always trying, in some way, to crush good work. It was so hard for good work to get done in the FBI, because the bureaucrats were running the show, and that was a source of continuing frustration for him.

I think it was one of the reasons why John would sometimes rub people above him the wrong way. Sometimes people above him would get irritated with John, because he was irritated with them. There was always a lot of friction in that relationship. But he loved the FBI.

When he spoke to you about [the stolen briefcase incident in July 2000 and its consequences] how did he characterize what had happened?

This was, he felt, another example in a chain of incidents with the bureaucracy in which the bureaucracy was basically taking its revenge on John unfairly. He felt, once again, it was unfair.

It had been a mistake, but he had left a briefcase in a room unattended. It had been lifted by an employee. They recovered it very quickly, and all the contents were there. There was no indication that there was any kind of espionage or any kind of criminal activity whatsoever other than shoplifting. Apparently the employee who did the lifting of the briefcase was somebody who was known to be a kleptomaniac of some kind. So it was what it was. It was unfortunate, but it was in no way any kind of violation of national security, and in no way was any classified information compromised.

Yet he felt that he was getting clobbered by the bureau. He felt that it was another example, such as the suspension when he gave his girlfriend a ride in his bureau car, that were relatively minor infractions that did not [need] to be applied with as much vigor as they were.

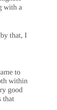
Is it as simple as interoffice politics? It's as simple as they didn't like Valentino suits and evenings at Elaine's and a guy who just didn't fit the mold?"

I don't think John was entirely blameless in all of this. John had a way of irritating people. He would not tolerate fools, and he would be in a meeting with people and would make it very clear to them that they were just so ignorant that it was a waste of time for him to be talking to them. So [laughs] I think that his own character -- a lot of the things that made John great and made him so effective and made him such a good manager in many ways were also the very things that used to drive people above him crazy.

I never worked for John, obviously. But one of the things that I was always very moved by was talking to people who worked for him -- and people who were not always treated that well sometimes by John, because John had a short fuse sometimes and he could blow up and did blow up -- yet the guys that worked for him, even the guys that sometimes got banged around by John, completely loved the guy. So he had something that people appreciated below him. Above him, those very qualities drove people nuts.

Barry Mawn

Head of the FBI's New York office, 2000-2002



read the interview»

He had supporters and he had non-supporters at the executive management ranks of the FBI. He had a number of people that probably did not want him to have that job, and I am sure they spoke against him.

Why?

John's personality. I think he, being aggressive, had probably ticked some people off along the way. I think some of them were of the opinion that they didn't want John to be an equal, which he would have been as an assistant director in New York. There, the assistant director is the highest you go, except for deputy director and director. So it would have put him on equal footing with a lot of people.

I just think it was his demeanor, his style. He could make people feel uncomfortable, and by that, I mean people in the executive ranks that probably did not have his background and his understanding.

John knew his topic or subject matter. He was probably our most learned expert when it came to Al Qaeda. He had been following them. He knew them. He was concentrating on them both within the agency as well as outside with his liaison contacts, the international. So John had a very good handle on it. He would sometimes speak up, "This is what we need to do," and sometimes that would embarrass higher-ups.

So in the end, it was his style which hurt him? Was O'Neill just way too James Bond for anybody's taste inside the FBI?

Probably it would be his James Bond-type style, as opposed to the substance. The sharp elbows and being abrasive, this didn't particularly bother me. But I think it bothered some people. John liked to be viewed as the guy in charge. I had heard stories, probably before I got there, that he was "Mr. New York." He was the FBI in New York. If you needed anything or wanted anything, you had to go through John. I think he also enjoyed having the contacts, liaison, being a power broker, the Elaine's.

I think some people were a little bit uncomfortable with that, and to a certain extent, I understand that. If you get a guy that becomes a little bit too flashy or too full of himself, then sometimes he will promote himself at the expense of the agency. By that, usually what happens is that an individual starts giving out information, or he starts doing favors that he shouldn't be doing -- he's compromising himself, as far as being an FBI agent. So I think there was, sometimes, concern and worry about that with John.

Fran Townsend

Deputy to the U.S. Attorney General 1995-2002

read the interview»

[Why was John O'Neill having trouble moving up the ladder at the FBI?]

At that level of government, it really is important that people are comfortable in working together. It's not just expertise. Expertise is very important, but it's not just that. People have got to really trust one another in the ability to speak their mind, speak freely, give their opinion and play, as the saying goes, get in the sandbox and not kick sand on one another, but play well together.

I think it was probably an unfair view of John that he didn't do that well, that he didn't play in the sandbox. I think Dick [Clarke], myself -- there were plenty of us who would say to you John was one of the most extraordinary team players you'll ever meet. But I don't think that was always his perception. He was very strong-willed and he was very opinionated, and didn't sort of roll over on something he felt strongly about very easily.

I think people misinterpreted that perhaps as him not being as good team player, and so maybe not ready for that next step. I'm not going to kid you. I think there were also those who thought that some of the sort of petty bureaucratic things that had happened were an indication that he wasn't ready to make the next step. I think that was ridiculous, frankly.

His view was people above him felt threatened by him, by his expertise, and so didn't really want him around; that it was personal; it was an insecurity thing. I don't know if that's true. But I think that it is certainly true he was a man who was very downed by the way the bureau had treated him after all he felt he had given to the bureau. I think it fair to say he was very bitter at the way the bureau treated him, and very down about it in that period of time that you're talking about.

Mary Jo White

U.S. Attorney, Southern District of New York, 1993-2002

read the interview»

He cut a kind of profile, as I understand it, that was different than a lot of the FBI agents.

Right. More elbows, more imposing in some ways. I think the fact that he did in order to make this contacts have what appeared to be a social life, too, is very unlike FBI, very unlike New York FBI, certainly. So he was different in that way. Again, that worked to his advantage a lot of the time. Sometimes it didn't, because people would say, "What's he up to, and is this really the way to go about it?" But I think from his point of view, and from what I could see, it was very effective.

Valerie James

John O'Neill's friend and companion

read the interview»

What was the attitude towards John O'Neill from headquarters?

... He was very controversial there. You've got to know that. He was very controversial at headquarters.

And he got that?

He got that, loud and clear.

Did he battle that?

Very much so.

Did he ever rant and rave about this? Did he fixate on this?

Yes.

What would he say?

John became very paranoid the last year, year and a half of his life. I would say to him, "John, I feel like you're paranoid." But you know what? He wasn't paranoid. They were out to get him. There were a handful of people in D.C. that were out to get John O'Neill.

But why? This guy knew so much. He was so good at what he did. Nobody says he did a lousy job. Why? Was it because of his demeanor?

O'Neill liked to do things his way. He was a little rough around the edges as far as politics. But I think is annoyed him when he knew the right way that something should be done and he couldn't get it done. Or he didn't care how he got it done.

And what we're talking about here is not a job.

We're talking about saving our country.

Tell me about after the decision for retirement.

Well, it was a very, very painful decision for John. John needed to make some money, too. Let's not forget that the FBI does not have the biggest entertainment budget in the world. One of John's greatest skills was liaison. He paid for a lot of that himself out of his own pocket. He needed to make some money. He had some debt to pay off.

John actually is not the happiest person in the world with this great new job. He wasn't excited about it. If John had his druthers, he would have stayed with the FBI. He [rather] would have still been assistant director in New York.

Tell me about *The New York Times* article and about the briefcase.

We knew before we got *The New York Times* that it was going to be in the paper. John was absolutely distraught over it. Number one, it was a ridiculous thing. He had to go to a retirement seminar. It is a mandatory seminar. You must go. It is in Florida. He went down for a few days, and then we were meeting for the weekend. So I flew down on a Friday afternoon. I was supposed to meet John.

We were meeting in Bal Harbor at the Marriott. John came in. I don't remember seeing John as distraught as he was this night. What has happened? He told me he left his briefcase in this room of 150 FBI agents and got a phone call. Couldn't hear on his cell phone, so he just walked outside to take his call.

Walked back in, his briefcase was gone. He was completely freaked. They found the briefcase within 20 minutes. There was nothing missing from the briefcase other than a Mont Blanc pen and a lighter. Anyhow, that story, interestingly enough, died for 18 months. John went to Yemen. All of that happened, and then, all of a sudden, this story was dragged up again.

And that was the final nail in John O'Neill's coffin that they were going to use to have him retire.

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The John O'Neill I Knew

The comments and observations of friends and colleagues, drawn from FRONTLINE's interviews with Clint Guenther, Chris Isham, Valerie James, Barry Mawn, Fran Townsend, Robert Bryant and Richard Clarke.

Clint Guenther

Former FBI Agent NYC - Counterterrorism

read the interview»

I would say John O'Neill probably should have been a leprechaun, because he always had that little bit of impishness about him. There was always that little twinkle in his eye that kind of indicated that he was about some mischief. But that was really him.

He was a good, fun-loving, hard-working person. He loved the people he worked with. He was what I would consider an agent's supervisor. His people loved him. At times, they could hate him, too, but there was always that love relationship there with him, because he always stood by his people. He was the type of person who didn't administer from behind a desk. He wanted to be out with the troops. If there was a hot investigation going, he wanted to be out there managing out and assisting in any way he possibly could. He was a perfectionist. He didn't like anybody that didn't want to go the full measure. He wanted to make sure that you did your job to the utmost.

I think that the one thing that he feared more than anything -- especially in the game of the war on terrorism -- was that we would make some mistake that would cost us dearly. John always feared that somehow we would miss something. He would be after his investigators to make sure they covered every base and he would leave no stone unturned. Woe be you if you failed to cover everything.

What would happen?

There was the dark side of John. He was a fiery Irishman and he would go after you with full measure. He'd just dress you down and start firing questions at you. "Why didn't you do this? How come this wasn't done? How come you didn't cover this?" But he didn't hold grudges. He would move on, as long as he realized that you realized your mistakes and went back and made the corrections.

Richard Clarke

NSC Coordinator for Counterterrorism, 1992-2001

read the interview»

He was, first of all, incredibly bright. He may not have had a Ph.D. from MIT or something like that, but his IQ was clearly off the charts. He had a stamina, an energy that was just unending. He worked virtually every moment when he wasn't sleeping. He didn't consider any job that he was doing a 9-5 job. He was on the job all the time, always working, always trying to get his goal -- which, in the time I knew him, was getting terrorists.

In addition to the drive, there was also an Irish blarney kind of charm. The combination worked. Frequently, he was in your face because you weren't doing a good enough job, or his subordinates weren't doing a good enough job, or somebody else wasn't living up to his standard. It would have been hard to take that all the time were it not for the charm that went along with it.

He was very demanding; he was demanding both up and down; both to his superiors and his subordinates. He set a very high standard of what should be done. Basically, if you didn't want the job done, you didn't give it to John O'Neill. If you did want the job done, you gave it to John O'Neill, and watch out, because it was going to get done; don't worry too much about stepping on people's toes along the way.

Frankly, a lot of the jobs that he did would never have gotten done, had he not stepped on toes. The real question I think you have to ask yourself is, when you're out in the world arresting terrorists, if the only way to do that is to ruffle some feathers -- and even before 9/11, it should have been obvious, and it was to me and it was to him -- that stepping on a few toes, breaking a little crockery was a price that we had to pay to get the job done. After all, the job wasn't a popularity contest; the job was protecting the American people.

Chris Isham

Senior Producer, ABC News

read the interview»

We met through other friends of mine who were in the FBI. We met at a dinner here in Washington. He struck me as unusual for an FBI agent, because he was direct, and he had a kind of a wit about him that was unusual, a bit of a playful side of his character, which was, again, unusual. He was also obviously highly informed by what he was doing. In our first meeting, he was very careful -- and was always careful -- but clearly informed, interesting, and interested.

He always made it very clear to me that there were certain red lines that he wouldn't cross and he never did, obviously pertaining to classified information. He understood very well that there were red lines. But he also understood that there was a great deal in the public record and public domain, and that one could discuss these things in such a way that could be helpful without crossing those red lines.

That was, I think, the basis of our relationship. He was one of those rare birds inside the government who had access to highly classified information, and yet also understood that talking to a journalist was not necessarily a violation of any rules. It could actually be helpful on both sides.

Valerie James

John O'Neill's friend and companion

read the interview»

Very first time I saw John, I did something I had never done before and will never do again. I sent him a drink. He was standing at the bar and he had the most compelling eyes I had ever seen. We both knew the bartender, although we didn't know each other. He asked who had sent him the drink. The bartender pointed to me. He walked over, introduced himself. We started talking. About 10 minutes later, you get into that "What do you do?" thing.

I said, "What did you do?" He said, "I'm with the FBI." I said, "I know, I'm with the CIA." He pulled out a business card. He was with the FBI, obviously. We went to five places that night. We went to a salsa place. We went to a jazz place. It was typical of John's frenetic life.

What did you think of him?

I thought he was an incredibly exciting, interesting person. He wasn't just a law enforcement person; he had many interests. He knew a lot about French Impressionism. He knew a lot about jazz. One thing about John that fascinated me was when he got into something, he learned everything about it.

Did he have a routine?

We had four newspapers delivered to the house. He would skim through every one of those immediately, with CNN on. He would make coffee. He would drink a cup of coffee, sometimes two cups of coffee, and read every paper while watching CNN every morning.

Saturday mornings, a big treat for him, and he loved this -- I know there are a lot of stories about how impeccably groomed John was -- he would go over to the local barber across the street, and for $10, he would have his hair cut every week and a hot shave. That was his Saturday treat for himself.

[He] used to say, "You have five seconds to make a first impression. It's all about grooming. It's all about your whole personal self, your first impression, right?"

So what was the image he was trying to portray?

Probably someone on top of his game. Which he was.

Fran Townsend

Deputy to the U.S. Attorney General 1995-2002

read the interview»

Dick Clarke talks about NSC meetings where O'Neill would show up, and suddenly take the meeting over. . Is that the way you remember him in Washington in that job?

Yes. It didn't always serve him well, but yes, that's right. And he was conscious of it. I mean, that was part of him; he was very good. He had precious little patience. Others would come to a meeting and not have, as he would say, worked it before. Before you walked into a meeting with John, by the time you walked in the room, the thing was done. The meeting was over before everybody ever got in the room. He would make those calls. He would see what people's positions were. He would cajole them, persuade them to a consensus. So by the time he walked in the room, everybody in the room knew they had spoken to John. Everybody in the room knew that John knew where this was going, and it was basically cooked by the time you got into the meeting.

That was good news and bad news. For people who didn't agree with him, it had to have been incredibly frustrating, because he had sort of gotten the thing arranged before he ever walked in the room, so there wasn't going to be any real big debate. He used to laugh at people after he left -- those who would go to the meetings instead of him then -- that, hey, they didn't understand how Washington [worked], how these things got decided, because the real work got done before the meeting started.

I think the thing that made him different was his passion. I say that because I believe it. I say that because I think that's what his answer would have been to you. And I believe with all my heart that was his answer, because of something that he wrote to me. These are his words, not mine: "My passion holds all of my wealth and all of my liabilities. It is the best and the worst of me. But it is me. It is my identity. Alas, I know of no more noble cause than to fight for that which one has the greatest of passion for. Rebellions left in the hands of good men will ultimately prevail, and the costs and sufferings of the rebels will be small indeed. "

Mary Jo White

U.S. Attorney, Southern District of New York, 1993-2002

read the interview»

I think why John was so unique in the counterterrorism arena is that he had both the headquarters experience and the field experience. By virtue of the headquarters experience, he not only knew how his bureacracy worked; he made lots of invaluable contacts in other branches of our government in Washington -- the White House, the intelligence agencies, the Defense Department.

But also, by virtue of having been in headquarters for a number of years in the terrorism arena, and that's the security arena, he made lots of contacts all around the world with his fellows in law enforcement and in the intelligence agencies -- building a coalition, year after year after year, to call upon when he needed them; when a terrorist plot was afoot, or he was trying to get the evidence to prosecute a terrorist. He brought all that to New York when he came, which was something that had not been there to that degree before. Then he continued to build on that.

He was right about how essential these worldwide contacts were. He spent a lot of time cultivating them around the world. He would bring over to my office, the U.S. Attorney's office, these countless visitors from around the world, just to make sure we all knew each other got to know each other. Then when the occasion presented itself, we could call on that person to help out an investigation.

Barry Lauth

Head of the FBI's New York office, 2000-2002

read the interview»

John was always, I guess in my view, very blunt. He pretty much said what he felt. He did not sugarcoat things much. I would even say that that sometimes would rub other people the wrong way. I personally would rather a guy tell me straight out what he thinks, as opposed to somebody that is trying to sugarcoat it and do it end run around.

John liked to be in the spotlight, and he did well in the spotlight. He sometimes would irritate some of his superiors, because he was very straightforward and wanted to get things done. I think some of his superiors -- he made them uneasy, actually. I think if they were not very confident or had the experience that either John did or some of the other agents, they'd get a little nervous.

But his expertise probably outweighed his lack of diplomacy at times in answering questions?

I think so. I'd say John knew how to be diplomatic if he needed to be. I would say that he saved that for people outside the agency as opposed to those inside the FBI. I think his method of operation is, again, to be very straightforward: "This is my thoughts. This is my opinion. Watch what you are asking for, I will give it to you straight." He never particularly sugarcoated anything. I mean, he obviously didn't do it in an insulting manner. He didn't necessarily try to show people up. It was just his style.

Robert W. "Bear" Bryant

Deputy Director of the FBI, 1997-1999

read the interview»

He was a person that I had immense personal regard for. We could argue like a couple of thieves in the night over issues, because we were both hardheaded. We were both a little bit Irish, he much more so than I. We had strong opinions about things, and we could get into it really quick. But it was never a personal issue, because there was always that professional respect, I think, for each other.

What kind of arguments would you have?

Tactical issues, about whether we should deploy people in harm's way, and how to do certain things. John always had a definitive plan and he was always professing this and that, and sometimes I told him, "Gee, I've got the gold pin and I'm responsible. And I don't do funerals well." And he said, "Neither do I."

So we basically would work out compromises on issues. Sometimes, if it was the agent's safety, he was like I was; he was very conservative. But sometimes you take risks. Sometimes it was a tactical issue on whether to approach a person to do something, to try to get information. We talked all the time.

Someone like O'Neill, they need a guy to champion the cause, or champion the work. Is that who you were?

Probably. Let's face it, John was a bit of a maverick. He had a lot of detractors, and he was a bit of a maverick. But I worked with John a lot of years, and had great personal regard for him. He always produced what I thought was an excellent product.

Pursuing Al Qaeda

Al Qaeda was a danger the U.S. couldn't ignore. And we were ill-equipped to deal with it.

These are two of the themes running through the following observations of colleagues and friends about John O'Neill's passionate pursuit of Al Qaeda. Those commenting are: Richard Clarke, Mary Jo White, Fran Townsend, Clint Guenther and Chris Isham.

Richard Clarke

NSC Coordinator for Counterterrorism, 1992-2001

read the interview»

I would go around the country to FBI offices and ask, "Is there an Al Qaeda presence in Chicago, in San Francisco, in Boston?" And typically the reaction I would get is, "What's Al Qaeda?"

But not with John. John knew what Al Qaeda was; he was among the first people to see the bin Laden threat. He believed there was a bin Laden network in the United States even if he couldn't prove it. So he was constantly trying to prove it, because of what he understood about the Al Qaeda network and the rest of the world, he said, "It's inconceivable that they're not here."

What did he understand that nobody else understood?

I think he understood, first of all, that Al Qaeda wasn't a nuisance -- that what Al Qaeda said in its documents and bin Laden's speeches was the truth. He said to me once, "You know, it's like *Mein Kampf*. Hitler wrote *Mein Kampf* when Hitler was just a jerk. No one took him seriously, so no one read the book, or if they read the book, they didn't believe he would try to do what was in the book. [Adm] said, 'Bin Laden's just like this. When you read what this guy says he's going to do, he's serious. He is going to try to do it in the Middle East, and there are a lot of people who support him. A lot of people are giving this guy money. We have to take him seriously, because what he says he's going to do is to go to war with the United States."

Was he, were you, listened to?

Yes, slowly. Certainly after the embassy bombing in Africa in 1998, it was very obvious that what John was saying, what I was saying, was right: that this was more than a nuisance; that this was a real threat. But I don't think everyone came to the understanding that it was an existential threat. The question was, "This group is more than a nuisance, but are they worth going to war with? After all, they've only attacked two embassies. Maybe that's a cost of doing business. This kind of thing happens. Yes, we should spend some time some energy trying to get them, but it's not the number one priority we have." ...

I think if you ask most terrorism experts in the mid-1990s, "Name the major terrorist organizations that might be a threat to the United States," they would have said Hezbollah, which had a relationship with Iran. They would have said Hamas, which is a Palestinian group. Most people would not have said Al Qaeda. Most people wouldn't have known that there was an Al Qaeda.

If you ask them, "Well, what about this man bin Laden?" most people in the mid-1990s would have said, "Ah, yes the terrorist financier." What O'Neill said was, "No, this man is not a financier. Yes, he's got some of his own money, and he's very good at raising money from other people. But that's not all he's about. The money is money for a purpose. The purpose is building a worldwide terrorist network based out of Afghanistan, initially based out of Sudan, but then moved to Afghanistan. A worldwide terrorist network, the point of which is going after the United States, after governments friendly to the United States, particularly in the Arab world." So O'Neill did see early on that this was more than just another terrorist group. It was a serious threat it was in the process of building. ...

In 1997, he gives the Chicago speech where he says, "We should expect an attack." He's talking in that same period of time -- at a little after -- about cells within the country. How common was this belief at FBI and NSA?

In 1997, I think there were only a handful of us who knew that there were Al Qaeda cells in the United States. When my boss, National Security Adviser Sandy Berger, would ask the FBI in a formal meeting, "Is there an Al Qaeda presence in the United States?" their formal answer would be, "We don't know of one, and we don't think there is one." But if you asked O'Neill, or you had asked me, a few others, including some people in the CIA, the answer would have been, "We can't prove it yet, but we see the smoke, and where there's smoke, there's fire." Sure, there were cells. We weren't able to prove it at the time.

But what John O'Neill was trying to do was to get a momentum going in the FBI to look seriously for those cells, to look for the connections which, frankly, most FBI offices were not doing. It was not one of the priorities in most FBI field offices.

Mary Jo White

U.S. Attorney, Southern District of New York, 1993-2002

read the interview»

One of the things that John and I shared was recognizing and never letting go of the view of how dangerous bin Laden was and is. You heard in the media and elsewhere, and in some quarters, that maybe he wasn't such a big force in terrorism. You heard that as late as during the embassy bombings trial, which didn't end until May 2001, that really we had made too much of him. He wasn't as big a player as law enforcement, John O'Neill, the U.S. Attorney's office, Director Freeh, and Attorney General Reno thought he was; that really, we were making too much of him. You don't want to raise his profile so that he has a greater following.

But in terms of how major a player he was and is, John O'Neill certainly recognized that as early as anyone, and maintained that view until John died. It was very sad.

Were you all becoming -- the word "obsessed" is not the right word -- but focused by him, in a big way, by then?

I think "obsessed" is perhaps the right word; very concerned. Very concerned about not the "if," but the "where, when, and what." Would it be future attacks? John O'Neill certainly lived and breathed that 24/7, as we would say, as did some of the rest of us, as well.

You're constantly trying to put more pieces together, so that you could learn more, stop more, prevent more, but clearly knowing -- and I think John O'Neill said it certainly before Sept. 11 -- we're due for a big one, and very worried about that. When you're as worried about that level of risk and danger, as he was, and we were, you spend most of your waking hours -- and most of your hours are waking -- worrying about that, and trying to learn more.

Did he ever indicate to you that he was frustrated at his inability to convince others of the importance of this?

From time to time. But clearly a lot of people within the FBI and within our government did recognize how dangerous the risk was, and were working hard in close with John and others on that risk and trying to learn more. But occasionally he would express, "They don't seem to get it," without any specificity.

But for the most part, I think our government did grasp pretty early on, partly because John educated them about how serious the risk was. But no one I can think of breathed it, lived it, breathed it, worried about it more than John O'Neill.

From what I've read, speeches he's given he believed earlier than many and couldn't really convince as many people as he felt he needed to that Al Qaeda was here, that there were the sleeper cells in the United States. Is that your memory of it?

To an extent. But again, I wouldn't isolate it to sleeper cells in the United States. This is a global problem, a global risk. A lot was occurring from abroad, and not in the United States. I think John recognized that. What he wanted to be sure of is that everybody realized it could also be occurring in the United States. So whenever anyone flipped up on the radar screen of interest, we should pursue them very vigorously, even if major portions of the plot were being directed from abroad, which I think he recognized, too.

Again, if ever he confronted anyone who he thought was not taking this seriously enough, he would rattle that cage and make a believer of them.

Clint Guenther

Former FBI Agent NYC - Counterterrorism

read the interview»

He realized that there was probably going to be some sort of Middle Eastern terrorist organizations having the operational base in this country. And we didn't have very good relations, or we hadn't developed good sources within that community, where we could start to understand what was going on in the various Muslim communities.

He developed good working relationships with intelligence agencies in other countries like Great Britain, a lot of the Middle Eastern countries. He worked very hard at making sure that they knew exactly who he was and how he wanted to fight this. He wanted to make it a team effort.

One of the things Dick Clarke told us was that, early on, he got the fact of the danger of there being domestic cells of Al Qaeda and fundamentalists in the country, while the FBI and the rest of the world didn't believe it. The official line was that it wasn't a possibility. Was that true?

Yes. That was true. He fully believed that they had moved in and had cells here for a long time. On a daily basis, we were coming up with information that kind of leaned towards the fact that groups were coming in from various parts of the world. We couldn't really find out what they were about, but we could see movements of groups into this country.

Bin Laden -- how personal a fight was this?

I think what he realized is you have to know your enemy in order to be able to fight him well. I don't think that he was personalizing anything. He just realized that he really needed to know and understand this man's thoughts, his ideologies, and where he thought bin Laden would be looking and moving next. He was very academic about that.

It sounds like ... John O'Neill was a storehouse for all this information. He was good at three-dimensional chess and able to complete the pictures and see where the connections were.

I think John started to see the big picture and to see the connectivity, since his investigative team had been the first to investigate a lot of these cases. The Washington field office had also been involved in some of these investigations, but John was able to get process on a lot of these people, including bin Laden early on. Because of that, every time an incident thereafter occurred, John would fight with Washington to make sure that we constantly took the lead on these investigations. So we would build this intelligence base, and so we would have investigators that had the institutional knowledge and that was the way it was. New York agents had the most knowledge out there on these groups.

Why is that important?

It's important because then you don't have to go back and reinvent the wheel. We didn't have, and still don't have, the databases that we really need to do the job. Until those databases are in place, it's going to be very hard for an investigative team, say, from Los Angeles or Miami or anywhere else to grab ahold of one of these cases and be up to speed right away. It's the group and the grassroots -- those investigators who you send out there who've seen the picture before. Once they hear a name, they know the relationship that he has with all the other loosely affiliated groups.

Chris Isham

Senior Producer, ABC News

read the interview»

How would O'Neill work something like Al Qaeda from your perspective?

John was a guy who threw himself into something and he absorbed everything he could get his hands on. Obviously a lot of this had to do with intelligence that was coming in from sources in the U.S. intelligence community. But he reached out. John reached out to other services such as the Jordanians who knew a lot about this guy. He reached out to the British. He reached out to other services like the Egyptians, who knew about the Egyptian fundamentalist movement.

John would throw himself into trying to absorb as much information as he could from all sources, including myself, because he understood that as a journalist, there were certain things that I had access to that he didn't have access to. I could go to Afghanistan; he couldn't. So he reached out to everybody. I know he was, in that time period, trying to absorb as much information as he could.

By then, of course, he's completely obsessed with [bin Laden]. People tell us that he's sitting at home watching videotapes of him from everybody. True story?

Yes. He was obsessed by him; I think there's no question about it. He wanted to absorb as much information as he could about this guy. He wanted to know what made him tick. He wanted to know where he was, what he was doing, and what his approach was and where his assets were. He was completely obsessed by the guy; there's no question about that.

When you would sit around, have dinner

When he and I got together, we always talked about terrorism. What he was anguished by was how much he didn't know. He knew certain things and he saw certain pieces, but he always knew that there was so much more that he didn't know, and that's what spooked him. What spooked him and what really used to drive him crazy was what he didn't know, and how much was out there that he didn't know.

Fran Townsend

Deputy NSC Coordinator for Counterterrorism, 1995-2002

read the interview»

When does the light bulb go on for John O'Neill about Al Qaeda and Osama bin Laden?

From his time down in the international terrorism section at headquarters in Washington, as he begins to see the Ramzi Yousef case and World Trade Center, as things begin to progress, John completely throws himself into this. He's reading everything he can get his hands on about radical fundamentalism. So I think it was probably before World Trade Center that this issue of radical fundamentalism sort of raises itself on his scope. He's already beginning to focus on it before the first World Trade Center, and think about it and look at the implications of it.

By the time the first World Trade Center bombing happens, from things he said to me, he's already got in his mind this is a major and long-term problem for us that we are ill-equipped to deal with. Not because we lack the commitment to deal with it, but because it's a mindset he's now read, he's studied it. He really believes this is a mindset that will be so difficult to us to counter because it's so alien to us, the whole thinking of it, that he's not sure we're well prepared to deal with it.

FRONTLINE

the man who knew too little

Some his life and career are dire, "contesting the role" interviews

Richard Clarke
Former National Security Council official, 1992-2003

read the interview

But even there's friction between the U.S. ambassador in Yemen, Barbara Bodine, and O'Neill.

Initially, some of the main areas of disagreement were security, amounts of people that were over in Yemen, as well as, potentially, who was in charge and who was running it.

That being said, with the FBI and with John, there's no question that we recognize the ambassador is the person in charge, the primary representative in a foreign country; the person, overall, responsible for everything that happens with U.S. citizens over there.

But we also take a view recognizing that, if there's an investigation, that we're in charge of investigations. And that's a function of the law and of our system. And, to the extent, that we can, obviously, the ambassador should be briefed as to what's going on, what's happening and, in particular, if we're encountering any difficulties.

To a certain extent, some of the reporting that John told me is that the became very involved, and wanted to know exactly what we were doing, when and where. And that's kind of contrary to our thinking. If there's a need to know, or if it's something that's obviously going to impact on those country authorities then, obviously, we'd tell. So that's one issue.

There was also, in John's mind, security -- [sic] which I fully supported him -- that we got over as a big group. What we like to do in a situation where a hostage rescue team or some of our SWAT fellows to provide security for the agent investigators, for the bomb techs, for the folks doing the Evidence Response Team. We like to have an in-house security. So we go as a pretty big package.

When we initially responded, we were probably a couple hundred in strength. Being fair in the aftermath, that's probably too large. Obviously, the ambassador has an overwhelming U.S. government response to this particular incident, that we didn't need to be as strong as we were.

Again, I fully believed and supported John as far as security. Yemen is a tough country. I guess there's more guns than people. I don't know if it was particularly friendly to the U.S. investigators, so we wanted to be secure with our people. I didn't want to send anybody over there and get them hurt.

What is your sense of O'Neill's feelings as he comes up against these obstacles?

I think he was very frustrated in that he wasn't being allowed to do his job, that he wasn't getting support, and that he was getting, I'm sorry, I'm paraphrasing, contested in the investigative role himself. Of course, our view on that is you're the U.S. ambassador. We understand your position. We're going to do our job, and we're going to do it with respect to you. We're going to do it in a basically scanned fashion, a smaller contingent of people over there as possible. That's not how we operate. Things just continued to escalate.

I really think it became a personality conflict between the two of them. Whether she viewed John as coming in and trying to take over and was usurping the role of the U.S. person in charge, I don't know. But I think that was probably part of it. Again, I don't know. With these two individuals, I think from the get-go, they probably rubbed one another, and it went from bad to worse.

In the upper echelons of the FBI, this may be confronting people's worst fears about O'Neill?

There may have been people at FBI headquarters that were going, "Sad, I told you so. John does upset people, and gets them upset. And maybe he wasn't the right guy." But that's all childish gossip and rumoring, as far as I'm concerned.

But it proved to be true in some ways.

In some ways. But at the same time, I'd balance that against, "Who is the right guy to go? What do we need to get done, and who's going to know what to do?" In that regard, there are very few in the FBI that had the criteria to go out and do the job that he did.

I should tell you the story. When I went over there, one of the complaints against him is that John didn't have any knowledge, that he was a newbie, he was contesting the Yemenis; he didn't know how to get along, and that they were all making complaints about him. Initially, I heard that very hard to believe. I knew John from New York with a lot of people from the Arab countries come to and visit with him. I know he had gone over there. I know he was well thought of by Arab ambassadors. I know he had contacts in Yemen. He was well thought of by other U.S. ambassadors. So I had a hard time accepting this.

I was there for about a week and half. One of the evenings that I went -- [the head of the PSO], which is the equivalent of the director of the FBI that we're talking to -- the, unsolicited, said that when the USS Cole first happened, he said that the entire government response was pretty good. He was referring to not only the FBI, but the State Department, the agency, and primarily the military. He said the military response was, he thought, obviously, because the ship had been bombed. They had people there. They were in harm's way.

I said, "Did you have a problem with our presence?" He said, "No, I never cared about the FBI. You could have a thousand FBI here, because we're both working to the same thing. We're looking to get who's responsible for this. No, I have no problem with the FBI being here, and you can decide whatever you want as to how many you have here."

So that related anything that I heard. It was also said that they didn't like him. I mean, that was clearly not observed by me in going with these visits every night.

Three January 2001 cables, and O'Neill wants to go back to Yemen. But Ambassador Bodine wouldn't give him clearance.

What it told me is that, clearly, the ambassador had the upper hand, she was backed by the State Department, and that we had to find another way of addressing it.

How did O'Neill handle it?

I think John was upset. This didn't help him. She was badmouthing him. She had caused a stir at headquarters. I actually think John was most disappointed that our headquarters didn't back us as far as sending him back, and taking a stronger stand with the State Department. Eventually, our headquarters said, "Let's try and work around."

What did that say to you about headquarters and John O'Neill?

On that particular issue, they decided that they weren't going to take that on. They got to make that their other options, as opposed to forcing a tad battle with State Department. They may have been right; I'm not saying they were wrong there. But I felt the investigation was important.

read the interview

Dale Watson
Former Executive Assistant Director of the FBI, 1993-2003

read the interview

Do you remember his first phone call back to you where he mentioned [Ambassador] Bodine and that he wanted to all this over?

One of his first calls back where you know that he was having problems with the ambassador was when he had gotten his people into Aden and realized that there were no facilities available for them to stay. There was no hotel available. A lot of other government agencies had sent people over there. A lot of contractors had sent people over there. And John had gone over, as head of the FBI presumed to stay. The hotels were basically not available. He was sleeping on the floor in the ballroom, because we're not finding additional facilities for them.

And John, being a guy who always took care of his troops was just incensed that she would not try to find some sort of accommodation so that he could make his people as comfortable as possible also. Right then and there, you know that there was going to be strife between the two, because John was going to take care of his people, and he was going to do everything he possible could to make sure that they had what they needed to conduct their investigation.

So what was the next problem with Bodine?

The next thing with her was guns, weapons. She couldn't understand why our personnel needed to be armed. She wanted the weapons taken out of the country immediately. As a matter of fact, I think she wanted the people out of the country. She wanted the military flight crews out of the country, they would all be pulled out of the country. John wouldn't stand for that. He stood his ground on that and did win the fight.

The next battle that I recall that they had was over manpower. The ambassador decided that there were absolutely too many people involved in this investigation. She made an arbitrary decision as to how many she thought the O'Neill would need to conduct his investigation. If memory serves me, I think it was, I don't remember exactly, something like 35. She came up with this number. I don't know how she derived that number. She did it.

Therefore, John was only allowed to have 27 people in the country at a time and, if he wanted to bring in, say, five additional specialized investigators, well then five people would have to leave. This became impossible for John O'Neill to comprehend, because he wanted his people there. He wanted them there now. He didn't want to have to give up people. He didn't want to give up his people to go back to the United States. And that's what she was forcing him to do was to make those correspondence and he was incensed by that.

Tell us about the conversations you had with John O'Neill.

John O'Neill was very, very, very upset. He felt that he was being, he felt that he was being, I'm sorry, I'm paraphrasing, contested in the role of himself, the primary representative in a foreign country, the person, overall, responsible for everything that happens with U.S. citizens over there.

But we also take a view recognizing that, if there's an investigation, that we're in charge of investigations. And that's a function of the law and of our system. And, to the extent, that we can, obviously, the ambassador should be briefed as to what's going on, what's happening and, in particular, if we're encountering any difficulties.

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read the interview

Richard Clarke
Former National Security Council official, 1992-2003

read the interview

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John O'Neill was very, very, very upset. He felt that he was being, he felt that he was being, I'm sorry, I'm paraphrasing, contested in the role of himself, the primary representative in a foreign country, the person, overall, responsible for everything that happens with U.S. citizens over there.

But we also take a view recognizing that, if there's an investigation, that we're in charge of investigations. And that's a function of the law and of our system. And, to the extent, that we can, obviously, the ambassador should be briefed as to what's going on, what's happening and, in particular, if we're encountering any difficulties.

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When we initially responded, we were probably a couple hundred in strength. Being fair in the aftermath, that's probably too large. Obviously, the U.S. government response to this particular incident, that we didn't need to be as strong as we were.

Again, I fully believed and supported John as far as security. Yemen is a tough country. I guess there's more guns than people. I don't know if it was particularly friendly to the U.S. investigators, so we wanted to be secure with our people. I didn't want to send anybody over there and get them hurt.

read the interview

Dale Watson
Former Executive Assistant Director of the FBI, 1993-2003

read the interview

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read the interview

Chris Isham
Senior Producer, ABC News

read the interview

Now we know the connections. There were connections between some of the individuals there in Yemen and the Malaysian meetings and some of the 9/11/hijackers. There were dots to connect. Why didn't the FBI, why didn't the CIA, why didn't anybody put the best people together to investigate the case, having to pull them out of Yemen?

That's hard to say, what we lost. We could've lost a lot. We could've lost the intelligence that could've connected that dot to the World Trade Center. I don't know that to be a fact, but a lot of the Al Qaeda people are around Yemen. A lot of the Yemenis are involved. I think if we could have had better investigative effort over there, had been able to build the confidence of the local law enforcement, we could have been able to develop sources, intercept them, and get a lot more intelligence that would have shown us something going on.

To some extent, perhaps headquarters helped or didn't help enough in clearing it up and standing behind John O'Neill?

I think the stance in Washington at all levels was that Mr. Bodine was coming to the end of her tenure over there and would be coming out in August of last year, or actually, no, let's just cut them and have the transition occur normally. That didn't help O'Neill's case at all, because there was still a lot of investigative tension between posts, when they were having the problems, and when she was going to be leaving.

They were not for months?

They were not for a month or a little bit more than a month. Probably around July that we started focusing on coming up with a plan and working with the embassy over there to try to establish a entry. That's when John, O'Neill, I'm sorry, I'll go over and sit down with the ambassador and we'll work out the details," and she denied him entry into the country.

John kind of wrote that in, I think, a badge of some type. He was very amused that it was determined that he was persona non grata. He never got furious over it. He was kind of tickled by

read the interview

Richard Clarke
Former National Security Council official, 1992-2003

read the interview

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A Letter to Lou Gunn

From: John O'Neill
To: Lou Gunn
Subject: retirement
Date: Wed, 22 Aug 2001 10:03:05 -0400

Dear Mr. Gunn:

By now you may have heard that I am retiring from the FBI after 31 years of what I believe was loyal and dedicated service. Today is my last day.

I want you and those USS Cole family members you are in contact with, [to know] that the FBI has and will continue to work hard on the investigation in Yemen and where ever else the case takes them. There has been an assessment team which was in Yemen in early August and an advance team is about to depart to Yemen within the next week. The FBI will be back in Yemen with full resources by early September if all goes well.

In my 31 years of government service, my proudest moment was when I was selected to lead the investigation of the attack on the USS Cole. I have put my all into the investigation and truly believe that significant progress has been made. Unknown to you and the families is that I have cried with your loss. All Americans share your pain.

I will keep you and all the families in my prayers and will continue to track the investigation as a civilian. Mr. Kenneth Maxwell of the New York office will be heading the investigation and he can be reached at [deleted]. My personal e-mail is [deleted] if you want to stay in touch. I thank you for all your support.

God bless you, your loved ones, the families, and God bless America.

John

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O'Neill's Congressional Testimony

Statement of John P. O'Neill, Section Chief, National Security Division, Federal Bureau of Investigation

Hearing on Terrorist Use of Nuclear/Biological/Chemical Agents

Before the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations
United States Senate

November 1, 1995

Mr. Chairman,

Thank you for the opportunity to address your subcommittee on the threat caused by the proliferation of nuclear, biological, and chemical (NBC) weapons. I'd also like to tell you about the measures which have been taken by the Federal Bureau of Investigation to detect, prevent, and respond to the use of NBC in the United States.

As you know, special weapons proliferation concerns the spread of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and their delivery systems. The FBI is the primary agency for foreign counterintelligence and counterterrorism investigations within the United States. The FBI has developed and coordinates a special weapons proliferation program in order to prevent the malevolent use and/or proliferation of WMD, including nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons in the United States. The program relies on proactive domestic programs, foreign counterintelligence investigations in the United States, criminal investigations, counterterrorism investigations, close coordination with the intelligence community, and international cooperation. As we have seen in our recent investigations, the ramifications of a terrorist act committed in the United States are great. The potential for the loss of life and damaging psychological effects from a terrorist attack in the United States involving NBC are even greater. Simply put, we can't afford one such attack. Fortunately, to date, our investigations in the United States reveal no intelligence that rogue nations using terrorism, international terrorist groups, or domestic terrorist groups are planning to use these deadly weapons. We remain vigilant, however, to the possibility of NBC terrorism, by pursuing intelligence and countermeasures programs that are well coordinated and well exercised. Our first goal is to prevent such an incident from occurring. Secondly, we must ensure we have the capabilities to respond swiftly and decisively should an attack occur.

I'd like to speak about the threat of nuclear terrorism first.

Within the past few years, there have been hundreds of reports of international smuggling incidents involving nuclear material. The FBI has been involved in numerous nuclear smuggling investigations. In evaluating this threat to date, there are no known instances where such nuclear weapons or weapons-grade nuclear materials have actually existed or been purchased in the United States. However, the FBI continues to investigate vigorously all allegations related to nuclear threats within our jurisdiction.

One of our most recent successful initiatives in this area was the FBI-sponsored international law enforcement conference on nuclear smuggling, held from April 18 to April 20, 1995, at the FBI academy. Among the 150 participants were law enforcement representatives from 23 foreign countries, including the Russian Federation and the newly independent states. This conference displayed unparalleled cooperation between law enforcement and intelligence entities and culminated in an invaluable exchange, where participants examined the international criminal problem of nuclear smuggling and its counterintelligence and terrorism implications.

With regard to nuclear terrorism, it is acknowledged that the production of a nuclear weapon would entail considerable technical expertise and funding, thereby lessening the likelihood of such an incident at this time.

The ability of terrorists to obtain and employ C/B agents, however, is no longer subject to speculation. The sarin gas attacks in Japan earlier this year, allegedly carried out by Aum Shinrikyo, crossed the threshold with the use of a nerve agent to attack a civilian population. In response to the March 20, 1995 attack in the Tokyo subway system, the FBI opened a criminal investigation based upon a violation of Title 18, U.S. Code, Section 2331, which authorizes FBI extraterritorial investigation. As a result, we dispatched FBI agents to Japan. We have extraterritorial jurisdiction in this matter because two American citizens were victims of the sarin gas attack. Thankfully, both of them survived their injuries. The FBI is unable to confirm any additional investigations, if any, as this would be classified information.

Despite the fact that conventional methods of attack are the proven choice of terrorist organizations to date, the use of a C/B weapon or agent can no longer be ruled out, as the sarin gas attack in Tokyo demonstrated. Other groups may be inspired to employ C/B weapons for future terrorist attacks due to the worldwide attention the Japanese attacks received.

Low production cost, ease of concealment, and lethality make some C/B agents possible terrorist weapons. Due to the relative ease with which a C/B weapon could be acquired or constructed by a terrorist or terrorist group, the FBI remains vigilant to that possibility through our active investigations and close coordination with the intelligence community. In consideration of the magnitude and potential catastrophic consequences of the release of such a weapon, the FBI aggressively pursues countermeasures programs and the readiness to respond to and mitigate the consequences of such an attack.

However, the only documented C/B attack in the United States involves the use of a biological agent, which occurred in Oregon in 1984, when two members of a sect produced and dispensed salmonella bacteria in restaurants in order to affect the outcome of a local election. 715 persons were affected; fortunately there were no fatalities.

The FBI recently concluded a case involving subjects who had manufactured ricin, which is a deadly poison derived from castor bean seeds. This extremely toxic poison is easily prepared, and all of the materials necessary to produce it, as well as the instructions on its production, were acquired from publicly available sources. The four individuals investigated for producing the ricin espoused extremist antigovernment, anti-tax ideals, and advocated the violent overthrow of the government. For the ricin poisoning, they had specifically targeted a deputy U.S. marshal who had previously served papers on one of them for tax violations. To carry out the poisoning, the subjects mixed the ricin with a solvent which would allow its absorption into the bloodstream. They conspired to smear the ricin mixture on doorknobs or steering wheels in order to poison their victim.

The FBI intervened in time to prevent the attack. This case is the first biological weapons investigation brought to trial and successfully prosecuted under the biological weapons antiterrorism act of 1989. On Feb. 28, 1995, two defendants in the case were found guilty under Title 18, U.S. Code, Sections 175 and 2, naming them principals in the ricin poisoning conspiracy. Two additional subjects involved were recently convicted on Oct. 25, 1995, for violation of Title 18, U.S. Code, Sections 175 and 371, naming them co-conspirators.

There is a valid concern over the relative ease with which biological materials and chemical precursors can be obtained. For example, in May 1995 an individual is alleged to have acquired three vials of yersina pestis, the organism which causes bubonic plague, from a bio-medical supply company. The material was recovered, unopened, by law enforcement officials, and the individual was arrested and charged with fraud. On June 27, 1995, the individual was indicted by a federal grand jury on three counts of fraud by wire for opening the account by phone, faxing letterhead memo with an fraudulent environmental protection agency number and ordering the three vials, which had been shipped via federal express.

To date, these are the only cases involving the potential use of biological agents that the FBI has investigated where prosecution has been sought. On recent occasions, the FBI has responded to communicated threats of NBC terrorist attacks; to include the initiation of threat credibility assessments in accordance with guidelines set forth in our operational NBC contingency plans. The threat credibility assessment process entails coordination with other entities of the U.S. government to examine available information on the threat and determine its viability from a technical, operational, and behavioral standpoint. To date, all of these alleged threats have been determined to be hoaxes.

As the lead law enforcement agency in responding to acts of NBC terrorism or criminal related NBC incidents in the United States, the FBI has taken many actions in order to deal with this emerging threat. For example, we have developed and maintain crisis management plans to respond to a domestic NBC terrorist threat or incident, to include procedures for assessing threat credibility, operational federal law enforcement response, notifying pertinent agencies, and deploying the necessary technical resources to assist FBI field operations and local authorities in investigating, containing, and minimizing the consequences of the threat.

Operational plans for response to a C/B terrorist threat or incident are delineated in the FBI's C/B incident contingency plan; and, for a nuclear or radiological threat or incident, the nuclear incident response plan. These plans, which have been in effect since the late 1980s, are continually updated and revised, most recently, in June, 1995. The contingency plans have been constructed to provide a blueprint for a federal law enforcement crisis management response to an NBC incident. These plans outline and clarify the operational procedures that we will follow if faced with an NBC threat or incident.

The plans are also designed to marshall the appropriate federal tactical, technical, scientific, and medical support to bolster the FBI's investigative and crisis management abilities and to augment local and state resources in addressing the threat inherent in an NBC incident. The contingency plans emphasize coordination between all participants and are particularly concerned with the bridge between the law enforcement crisis management activities and the management of the consequences of the crisis.

The first priority of the plans are public safety and the preservation of life. In a terrorist or criminal-related NBC incident, the FBI will assume the lead investigative and crisis management role, in association with local law enforcement authorities, to successfully resolve the incident.

Based on the specific details of an incident, law enforcement responsibilities will be resolved or no longer a priority, and the federal emergency management agency (FEMA) will subsequently assume consequence management responsibility for the incident. The FBI's NBC incident contingency plans clarify and address this issue and provides guidance regarding the federal management transition from the FBI to FEMA in this context.

Earlier this year, FBI headquarters tasked the 56 domestic FBI field offices to conduct C/B terrorism exercises in each of their regions in accordance with guidelines set forth in the C/B incident contingency plan. This includes coordination and participation by other public safety agencies who would be involved in a C/B incident; including first responders, regional offices of supporting federal agencies, and state emergency management agencies who would be involved in consequence management at such an incident. Each of the 56 field offices has taken action in response to this tasking and are in the process of planning and conducting C/B exercises.

Through vigilance in our investigations and active cooperative exchanges with the intelligence community, we remain alert for terrorist intentions to acquire or employ weapons of mass destruction. We continue to improve our capabilities to respond to threats of NBC through active coordination with supporting federal agencies. We continue to develop, plan, and deliver NBC-related training for our personnel. We continue the analysis of exercises conducted to date, which have been devoted to crisis management of NBC threats and continue to develop new exercises.

In conclusion, the FBI continues to be vigilant both in its intelligence collection/analysis to prevent an NBC incident, and in our plan for a response should an NBC incident occur in the United States.

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Cooperation and Teamwork in a Multi-Police Environment

FBI NEW YORK DIVISION
FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION
Spanish Police Foundation
July 10, 2001

Introduction

Good morning. Thank you for your invitation to the beautiful city of Madrid. It is a pleasure to be with you today to discuss law enforcement coordination, cooperation, how it functions, and in particular, how it works in the multi-police environment of the United States and how it is agencies joined to the private sector to work together to reduce crime.

As a representative of the federal branch of the U.S. Government's law enforcement community, I want to thank the Spanish Police Foundation and Telefonica for this opportunity to come together with law enforcement colleagues and share experiences and best practices. I am very interested to learn from your experiences here in Europe and my colleagues in the U.S. countries study the dramatic changes occurring in European Law Enforcement as a result of the European Union.

In 1998, Thomas Friedman wrote an opinion article in *The New York Times* editorial section, in which he said that the greatest contribution a multi-ethnic, multi-racial country in the world would have to develop be successful in the New Millennium.

First, he discussed the importance of information management – the need to not only collect information but the need to analyze, store, and retrieve this information in a usable format. How much more valuable could an office if we really knew what we were doing collectively?

Second, he discussed the critical need for self-inspection and analysis and the ability to reinvent institutions and organizations to meet changing environments. He talked about the need for addressing new crime patterns and the new ways criminals, terrorists, hate groups and crime against persons and properties. We continue to perfect new ways to more rapidly identify emerging crime trends and reverse a new pattern or organized crime more effectively and efficiently than before.

And lastly, Friedman discussed in his article the need for companies and countries to strategically partner. This is what we are here to discuss here. All United States law enforcement, Police Authorities and Bureau Airlines can partner with American Airlines and Carlsup Pacific Airlines, why can't we partner with Telefonica and the Spanish Police Foundation? Why can't we be the countries of Europe and throughout the free world? We can learn from each other and develop partnerships between the public and private sector in many areas.

Crime fears Europe is now the emerging crossroads of criminal and national security investigations, partnering in the centerpiece of how we in the U.S. function in accomplishing our mission. Terrorism, drug trafficking, organized crime, and violent crime are the top priorities of the U.S. law enforcement structure and cooperation in the United States, partnering between the public and private sector, and coordination with police in other countries.

The New Crime Environment Emerging in the United States

It is important to realize that the United States does NOT have a national police force. Rather, we maintain a decentralized police system in line with core American values which would be in contrast to European and other international governmental structures. In the U.S., we have 50 state governments and approximately about a dozen agencies which are comparable to the European level ministries and the President of the United States, with oversight by Congress. Many of these agencies are similar to the Spanish Ministries of Interior, Justice, Transportation, Commerce, with enforcement of laws, the Bureau of Justice Statistics, which investigates crimes, and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, charged with enforcement of federal firearms statutes and the investigation of arson incidents and bombings. The United States Secret Service is responsible for the protection of the President, Vice President, and other official heads of state. The Secret Service is also charged with the protection of the U.S. currency. The primary investigative agency for the U.S. Government, charged with enforcement of over 225 federal violations.

The U.S. has many other agencies that have nationwide police agencies that are independent of the federal government. Some police departments are accountable to their governor and the legislative guidelines of their states. It is important to remember that there is some variance from state to state on a number of investigative thresholds such as when constitutes drunk driving, for example. Some states have laws that are more restrictive than others. Some states have laws that are more liberal than others. Some states, including country and the United States, have laws that are special category police forces tasked with single interest authority, such as university campus police or park police.

U.S. law enforcement agencies at all three levels – national, state, and local – are increasingly partnering with private sector companies and organizations. Many of these companies are in the national news, which is the case rather than the exception, companies must be the centerpiece of our effort and cooperative investigative resources are pooled to meet an more cases.

Cooperative Efforts

Federal law enforcement works fully side with state and local law enforcement in a number of ways. We make tremendous use of liaison as it is clear that we must all work together to accomplish our mission. Liaison is key. We have to know what each other is doing, what we are working, what our strategies and tactics are. We have to always have a successful way of pooling resources and specialization and ensuring everyone gets credit for the good work that is done. Cooperation is critical. Federal law enforcement agencies have the ability to investigate topics such as drugs, violent crime, terrorism, organized crime, organized crime, and terrorism.

As an example, in the area of terrorism, federal law enforcement works with state and local law enforcement through Joint Terrorism Task Forces (JTTFs) to maximize interagency cooperation and coordination in addressing terrorism matters. There are 103 JTTFs spread across the U.S. with over 30 U.S. cities where FBI Special Agents work side-by-side with over 400 local, state, and federal law enforcement officers, including Customs and Immigration Enforcement officers, intelligence analysts, and the agency to obtain arrests and convictions in terrorism investigations. Experts from all agencies are mandated together for maximum results and the system of task forces has enhanced interagency fighting on a daily basis.

Even a violent crime perspective, U.S. federal law enforcement agencies work with state and local police in a variety of ways. Violent Crime Task Forces (VCTFs) are similar to the JTTFs and are responsible for violence through burglaries, prison escapes, multi-agency efforts focusing on crimes of violence, and violent fugitives. There are 18 VCTFs in the U.S. with over 300 U.S. Marshals, FBI officers, Firearms Agents, DEA agents with 125 other federal agents and some 125 state and local law enforcement officers. Since the inception of VCTFs in 1992, violent crime rates in the cities where the VCTFs are located have dropped 40% and the VCTFs have contributed to over 3,000 convictions or pretrial diversions.

Our work on crossing the U.S. continents to be refined, however, much more work must be done. We have relied on formal Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) that are signed between federal and state/local police departments. These agreements cover departments – where all state and local law enforcement officers are first subjected to a detailed background check, are sworn federal officers, and are deputized by the U.S. Marshals Service, they are deputized as federal officers to establish the authority to work across U.S. borders. Issues. There are issues of compensation of overtime for state and local officers; on report writing requirements, on the use of informants, on the use of U.S. Government vehicles, and on what can and can't be done in U.S. Jurisdiction. Is then exchanged with the state and local agencies, and on the issues of supervision, of conflict resolution, and even the issue of which agency will provide the vehicles and who will pay for the gasoline, are covered by MOUs.

Training is an area where additional refinement is needed. When bringing multiple agency personnel together, we must ensure that agents receive equal training in various degrees differently. Enforcement actions such as car stops, and building entrance/exits must be practiced by all agencies. Training is key. We have to have a common understanding of our respective training and legal instructions. We have seen categorical instructions running needs.

When it comes time to take credit for the success of the task force's actions, even if an agency has only one officer on the task force, I believe all agencies must be given equal public credit. This can be accomplished through internal press conferences and/or ceremonies.

Having said all of that, I will believe that it is personal relationships that make the success of these task forces and cooperative efforts work. Personal relationships are critical. Cooperation at every level is the top issue and of radio in between; personal relationships and personal relationships are common goal are the ingredients of success. For those of us at senior levels, I believe it is a critical element of leadership to foster excellent personal relationships with our colleagues and to our subordinates emulate our example.

Outreach to Other Countries

State and local law enforcement also interact frequently with various federal service organizations. In the increasingly globalized and high-tech environment in which modern law enforcement agencies must operate, information sharing, training, and technical assistance programs are an important part of the cooperation between federal, state, and local law enforcement and investigation activities. Various law enforcement agencies provide a wide array of training and assistance programs ranging from criminal investigative issues, forensics, and technological assistance. Many of these programs are offered free of charge to state and local law enforcement and task force is used. Participation is then exchanged with the state and local agencies in the form of supervision, of conflict resolution, and even the issue of which agency will provide the vehicles and who will pay for the gasoline, are covered by MOUs.

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Outreach to Other Countries

The FBI Training Division operates the FBI National Academy (NA) at Quantico, Virginia, which provides professional development training and education to international, drug, and local law enforcement organizations. The NA is one of the oldest law enforcement training programs in the world. The FBI National Academy Program is a 10-week program for mid-level law enforcement management courses. The 2558 NA class graduated on June 29, 2001. The FBI also trains over 120,210 state and local police officers annually in the 3,59 courses it conducts in the United States.

The FBI Laboratory, which provides forensic and other scientific investigative support services, has second responsibility to support with over 16,000 U.S. particular. Evidence Response Teams specialize in organizing and conducting major evidence recovery operations and have made significant contributions to international investigations such as the bombings of the U.S. Embassy Bombings. The Laboratory also manages a national DNA indexing system that enables forensic laboratories throughout the country to exchange and compare DNA profiles electronically, thereby linking unsolved crimes to each other and known offenders.

The Criminal Justice Information Services (CJIS) is also an important link between the FBI and state and local law enforcement. It provides fingerprint identification services, criminal history information, and other investigative information and automated communication networks. The CJIS Integrated Automated Fingerprint Identification System (IAFIS) provides two hour turnaround for research, criminal submissions and 15 hour turnaround for civil fingerprint submissions. During the year 2000, 15,521,339 fingerprint cards were processed, resulting in 1,000,000 hits. Approximately 1,000,000 fingerprint cards were processed, resulting in 1,000,000 Crime 2000 DNA CODIS, a national computer index of documented crime and criminal data. The benefit of the International Association of Chiefs of Police, never mind the National Association of Chiefs of Police, the International Association of Chiefs of Police, the National Institute Criminal Background Systems (NICS), processed over 3m. 28,1000, has facilitated more than 19 million checks, resulting in over 100,000 gun purchases being denied.

Case Example

An excellent illustration of the advantages and necessity of a cooperative law enforcement approach is counterterrorism in the immediate aftermath of the September 11 terrorist attacks against the apparent referential bomb plot in December 1999. On Dec. 14, Ahmed Ressam was arrested at the U.S.-Canada border while attempting to enter the United States at Port Angeles, Washington (near Seattle). In Ressam's rented vehicle, U.S. Customs Agents found items that could be used to make explosive devices. Ressam, a Canadian, was a member of a terrorist cell that was planning to conduct terrorist attacks against U.S. interests throughout the United States. Ressam and his cohorts have had information potentially helpful to ongoing counterterrorism investigations.

Ressam's arrest, his subsequent detention of several other individuals attempting to enter the United States via Canada, and events in other parts of the world triggered a broad-based effort by the U.S. Government to identify and disrupt terrorist activities and plots. Ressam's arrest led to the identification of a cell in Seattle, Washington, and the arrest of several individuals who were involved in the millennium Police officers across the United States assigned to the terrorism task forces conducted many of the initial interviews, as they are full partners in our combined efforts to prevent acts of terrorism. The coordinated approach of federal, state, and local law enforcement officers and agents in the Seattle area resulted in the arrest of several individuals involved in the presentation of attempts to raid al Ahmed Ressam, which occurred on December 14, 1999. Los Angeles jury found him guilty on nine federal counts. He has now agreed to cooperate and is currently giving testimony against other conspirators in a trial in New York City.

Cooperation with Our Private Business and Public Sectors

Law enforcement also maintains frequent contact with the public in any one day it will range of issues and potential threats, working with both activists and even militia groups to try to maintain communications and to prevent violence. Many of our field offices have established and are the target of hate crimes. Our ability to deal with these growing crime problems is directly related to the support of both the business community and international law enforcement partners. The Lone Wolf Task Force, for example, is a joint effort between the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the CNN, Bacon, and other corporate sites in Denver, Colorado, and provides the threats to information infrastructure. From these examples, you can see that there is a "marriage" between the public and the private sector, and that the private sector is an important partner in our efforts to prevent crime and terrorism, Partnering with businesses, and even with activists and hate groups, along with community groups and ethnic and religious leaders, has paid large dividends in our efforts to reduce crime in America.

Outreach

Here are just a few examples of what we are doing: The U.S. government's interagency National Infrastructure Protection Center (NIPC), currently operating out of the FBI, has two programs to reach out to the private sector. Infragard is a joint FBI-NIPC effort to work with the private sector to protect critical infrastructure by building liaison and communication links with the owners and operators of individual companies in the critical infrastructure sectors and enabling contingency planning.

The second is the InfoGard initiative. This is an initiative that was developed in concert with private companies and academia to encourage information sharing about cyber intrusions, exploited vulnerabilities, and physical infrastructure threats. A vital component of InfoGard is the ability to provide information to the private sector in a timely fashion. We have found that we need *trail communications* to be "sanitized" and distributed. We can use the detailed version to initiate an investigation; while NIPC can analyze that information in conjunction with other information, and then provide a sanitized version to the private sector. The private sector then has the NIPC can coordinate with the national victims to obtain more information without compromising the confidentiality of the reporting company.

Case Example

The damage that cyber intruders can do is enormous and underscores the importance of networks strong the law enforcement community and private sector to combat emerging high tech threats. In the case of the Melissa virus, the damage was $80 million. The Love Bug, a virus that was the world attacks so fast and hit hard with the "Love Bug", a virus that traveled as an attachment to an e-mail message and propagated itself extremely rapidly through the address book of Microsoft Outlook, the damage was $10 billion. The Code Red virus, the damage was $2.5 billion. The Slow Motion Computer worm, such as the Washington Post, and ABC news, international organizations such as the International Monetary Fund, the British Parliament, and Belgium's Ministry of Defense, and the Pentagon, Microsoft, and Intel, and Lockheed Martin, and Boeing Facing those so-called worms, the system ensures that vital information regarding networks have groups of $10 billion and illustrate the importance of a coordinated and rapid response to cyber intrusions, with law enforcement and the business community working side by side.

Operations

A statutory new function in law enforcement community that illustrates the need for information sharing is the process of providing warnings of violent crime, particularly terrorism. Warning is critical to the prevention of terrorist acts. Rapid and efficient exchange of information among law enforcement and intelligence agencies can make an enormous difference in identifying, detecting, and deterring potential attacks before they occur.

Proactive threat warning is an area where federal law enforcement is taking a leadership role. Proactive threat warning is a coordinated approach between the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Warning System (NWS). This system ensures that vital information regarding terrorism threats those in the U.S. Counterterrorism and law enforcement communities responsible for counterring terrorist threats.

The NTWS provides warnings to over 60 U.S. government agencies and subcomponents and to over 17,000 law enforcement agencies in the United States and Canada via the National Law Enforcement Telecommunications System (NLETS). Warnings are also provided to over 100,000 private sector entities through the "Awareness of National Security Issues and Responses" (ANSIR) program.

Case Example

In its effort to facilitate an agency-wide understanding of terrorist organizations, motivations, and potential dates of attacks the U.S. law enforcement community collects, analyzes, and disseminates a wide variety of threat assessment and warning communications to interagency partners.

Recent examples of threat warnings provided to interagency partners include an assessment of the threat posed by the Al Qaeda terrorist organization, a warning of the threat posed by individuals surrounding the April 2000 bombings charged in connection with the East Africa Embassy bombings, an assessment concerning the conviction of suspected international terrorist Ahmed Ressam, and an assessment regarding a call for militant "direct action" targeting U.S. interests by eco-terrorists.

Cooperation with Police Other Countries

As you are aware, both criminal and national security threats are increasingly transcending traditional investigative boundaries and becoming more interconnected, multicultural, and technical in nature. Various developments, to include the expansion of global trade, the vulnerability of critical infrastructure, the rapid growth of international communications have contributed to the globalization of crime and terrorism.

The rise of the unprecedented society has further compounded the internationalization of crime and terrorism as foreign governments have become the capacity to exploit communications and systems and target a country's interests while operating within their own national borders. The increase in the number of international travelers, the growth of international commerce and transportation systems, and the more increasingly complex cyber intrusions. Advances in information technology and global communications have also made access to the materials and information necessary to conduct physical attacks more readily available and provided a vehicle for mobilizing support.

As you know, the continental reach of all of this is that our national boundaries are becoming increasingly vulnerable and virtually irrelevant. As an example, organized criminal enterprises that have traditionally operated in Europe have established operations in the United States, Canada, Japan, Asia, Japan, Spain, and Israel, and they are finding new ways to exploit people and market crimes all over the world. Our nations are grappling with international drug rings and the epidemic of narcotics that flows not only in the United States but in Europe and elsewhere.

Terrorists have become perhaps the most dangerous criminals, willing to travel around the globe to commit acts of violence to express their radical beliefs. As we saw in Yemen in October 2000, they sometimes even turn themselves into suicide bombers, taking their own lives to inflict maximum casualties on innocent people. None of our nations are immune from this type of indication.

U.S. law enforcement is committed to doing its share internationally to preserve and facilitate the rule of law. In fact, it is a key part of the mission we have been given by our government – to support free enterprise and liberty and protect the world.

We look forward to working with you in the future. The relationships between all international law enforcement agencies are critical. We have to continue to work on them. We have to be more absolutely certain, from the executive level down, that we have to make these several years, that our success in protecting the people of the United States is directly related to your success, to the strength and effectiveness of law enforcement efforts and vice versa.

Let me tell you why that's so true. You know about the various U.S. federal law enforcement officers we have in your world. We work in partnership with many different nations. As I can speak to the work of the FBI in this office, our offices, called Legal Attaches, pursued more than 15,000 cases. The Legal Attaches managed by Special Agents around the United States. We have a number of tools that allow us to do that.

These numbers, though, don't begin to tell the story of how important and critical these legal attache offices mean and are to partnership in mutual investigations.

They don't tell the story of the bombing of the U.S. Embassies in East Africa in the summer of 1998 and how interagency law enforcement presented in Pretoria and Cairo tried to the disaster and the aftermath of the crime scenes – a critical component in the eventual success of the investigation.

They don't tell from our interagency and international partners in Manila helped track down within hours the Philippine student who unleashed the deadly "love bug" virus earlier this year that rang up roughly one billion worth of damage worldwide. What a virus.

They don't tell how three different overseas offices and interagency partners around the world – in Germany, Hong Kong, and Malaysia – helped track down the Melissa virus author, a computer whiz-kid named Scott Ellis, a North Carolina man who had mistakenly boasted his exploits online and was threatening to blow up some. The work of these abroad turned up vital information on computer equipment and software that was used in the crime, information that was of prosecutorial value to our colleagues, and, I understand, was used to convict the author of the virus.

The U.S. law enforcement community and FBI were successful in each of these investigations only because of your help. That is why U.S. law enforcement is so committed to building positive relationships with you and other law enforcement professionals around the world.

Case Example: The 9/11 Terrorist Attacks Against Our Nation

A good way for me to illustrate my presentation is with an example of what I mean by everything we have discussing today certain together. There is perhaps no better illustration of the importance of a cooperative approach than the recent terrorist attacks against our country, the most devastating terrorist attacks that Congress and our nation have ever experienced. And how appropriate it is to look at these events as we approach the 30th anniversary of the attacks in Munich, Germany in 1972.

The terrorist attacks on September 11 were the most devastating and the most massive amount of interagency communication and cooperation is critical to ensuring the success and safety of Olympic Events. You can see that on outstanding job of Salt Lake City. We in the United States hope to emulate your efforts with our upcoming 2002 Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City, Utah. Already, the Federal Government has provided over $100 million in grants to the state of Utah to assist with security and international concerns, such as preparations for the Winter Olympics and the Summer Olympics. The United States was a delegation from our law enforcement community to assist with the Olympics in Sydney, Australia, in September 2000. We will be in Athens, Greece, and there to use our events, in preparation for future Olympics. Salt Lake. National Police Officer is currently assigned to the Salt Lake City law enforcement efforts.

Planning for the public safety and security of the Games has already required an unprecedented level of interagency communication and cooperation. Over 1,000 Federal, state, and local law enforcement officers with responsibilities associated with the Games. There remain unprecedented consensus among these agencies that it is impossible for any single law enforcement agency to possess all the resources required to prevent and respond to a major incident. Thus,

Train factors, by design, are excellent vehicles by bringing to bear the specialized resources of multiple agencies to bear on the security and safety of the Olympic Games. The Salt Lake Fire Office Salt Lake City, Office of Emergency Services, Emergency Medical Services, Emergency Medical Services, which is composed of over 40 full and part-time local, state, and federal law enforcement officers and agents representing 12 agencies and departments. Intelligence, Public Safety, Intelligence and analyzing intelligence and investigating matters is certainly pay dividends at any level. This is a critical element of leadership to foster excellent personal relationships with our colleagues and to our subordinates emulate our example.

At the international level, the FBI and the Utah Olympic Public Safety Command have invited foreign law enforcement officers to participate in the various Centers of Excellence (COE) (respectively) to participate in all aspects of Olympic security planning. The Salt Lake FBI Office continues to receive important communications from foreign law enforcement entities requesting information and assistance regarding the Games. The FBI will continue to facilitate their inclusion in the Olympic security planning process. Our Legal Attaches, in fact, have been tasked to coordinate International Olympic committee, the U.S. Olympic Committee, the host Olympic Committee, various major sponsors, all of the venues, Salt Lake City, and will service the Olympic Games. Our Legal Attaches will also be tasked to provide information to our foreign law enforcement partners and understanding of, and of the success of the public safety efforts at these Olympic Games. The public and private sectors are married at these games.

Planning for the public safety and security essential for hosting a safe and successful Games has long been recognized as every agency's primary objective. However, in the process of planning for the realization of large and diverse lists of the ways in which the Olympic Games could be already accomplished something of equal importance. I am speaking of the partnerships that have developed and the lessons learned from the cooperation, the sharing of resources, and the mutual public safety and security planning process. These partnerships will exist as a legacy long after the 17 days of the XXI Olympiad have passed.

Group Partnerships

Crime is a global phenomenon, and it demands a global response. Yes, that is making our jobs more difficult, dangerous, and overwhelming. But it's also having a positive impact on our profession. It's bringing us closer together. It's giving us the chance to exchange ideas and strategies and build relationships and partnerships that are essential to combating crime. We can do it because we want to see a tighter, more-close community. The result is that law enforcement around the globe has never been more professional and effective.

So, on behalf of the U.S. Government FBI, I want to wish you all a productive conference. Thank you for being here and for all that is yours to contribute.

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Dondoo - the map who frame: Sky 100 cold cases: congression and treasurer in a south yellow concessioner. PNN

What if...

by Jim Gilmore, co-producer of "The Man Who Knew," with research by Mike Wiser

What if the CIA had shared information with the FBI back in Jan. 2001 about a meeting in Malaysia and a participant named Khallad? It was information that might have helped O'Neill connect the dots to the 9/11 conspirators.

And what if O'Neill had been able to return to Yemen and the FBI's Cole investigation back in Jan. 2001 to interrograte Fahad al-Quso. Al-Quso had been picked up early in the Cole probe--and al-Quso also had connections to that Malaysia meeting and had met with 9/11 hijackers who had attended it.

an update

>>John O'Neill and the 9/11 Commission investigation

related feature

>>CIA-FBI Cooperation -- Some Recent History

A look at efforts in the 1990s to build teamwork

In September 2002, agents and officials from the CIA and FBI testified before a joint congressional panel about how their security agencies failed to fully share information about suspected terrorists and their activities in the months leading up to the Sept. 11 attacks.

As much as anyone working in counterterrorism, John O'Neill knew about this communication breakdown. In fact, just two months before Sept. 11, in a speech to Spanish police on interagency cooperation, he had asked his audience, "How much more successful could we all be if we really knew what our agencies really knew?" O'Neill's last major FBI investigation -- the attack on the USS Cole on Oct. 12, 2000 -- was a case study of just how bad inter-agency communication had become.

The Critical Meeting in Malaysia

The story of this intelligence failure begins with a 1999 CIA breakthrough -- the interception of communications from an Al Qaeda logistics center in Yemen about a meeting of operatives that would take place in January 2000 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. The names of two of the participants were mentioned: Khalid Almidhar and Nawaf Alhazmi.

The CIA tracked Almidhar on his way to Malaysia. An agent told FRONTLINE that during a passport check at a stopover, the CIA even got access to his Saudi Arabian passport and learned Almidhar had been issued a multiple-entry visa to the U.S.

Once in Kuala Lumpur, the Al Qaeda operatives were photographed -- at the CIA's request -- by Malaysian authorities at a series of meetings. Reportedly, no sound recordings were made, but intelligence sources now believe the meetings were held to plan future Al Qaeda attacks. Among the men captured in the surveillance photos were:

- Almidhar and Alhazmi (later hijackers of American Flight 77 which flew into the Pentagon on Sept. 11);
- Ramzi bin al-Shibh (a Sept. 11 co-conspirator and Mohamed Atta's roommate. It would not be until after Sept. 11 that bin al-Shibh would be identified in the Malaysia surveillance photos);
- Tawfiq bin-Atash -- AKA "Khallad" (a suspected intermediary between bin Laden and plotters of the October 2000 USS Cole attack).

The CIA maintains that *it did* notify the FBI by e-mail of the Malaysia meetings soon after they occurred -- and that *it did* mention Almidhar had a U.S. visa. The FBI, however, states they have no record of this notification.

The CIA admits that *it did not* inform the bureau that after the Malaysia meetings ended, it tracked Almidhar and Alhazmi to Los Angeles. The CIA further admits that it failed to warn the INS or the State Department, and as a result, the men's names were not added to a terrorist watch list.

Not one of the men who attended the Malaysia meetings was, at the time, known to have been involved in any crime against the United States, so it is perhaps understandable that the CIA missed the full significance of the meetings. This changed, however, in October 2000, when the USS Cole was attacked in Yemen and 17 sailors were killed. The FBI's subsequent investigation into the Cole attack would uncover evidence that would make the CIA's continued withholding of information incomprehensible.

The USS Cole Investigation

John O'Neill and his FBI investigators were on the scene in Yemen within days of the attack on the Cole. For O'Neill, it was obvious that the attack was an Al Qaeda operation. Within weeks, the investigation led to the arrests of several men.

One young man from an elite Yemeni family, Fahad al-Quso, had been tied to the plot with physical evidence found in an Al Qaeda safe house. At the FBI's urgings, Yemeni authorities arrested al-Quso in December 2000.

Meanwhile, the search continued for bigger fish in the conspiracy. One was a man known as "Khallad" (real name: Tafiq bin-Atash). The FBI believed Khallad helped plan and run the Cole operation. At this point, what O'Neill and investigators did not know was that Khallad had been on the CIA's radar screen for about a year because of the surveillance photos taken at the January 2000 Malaysia meeting.

If the CIA now knew -- as a result of the Cole probe -- that Khallad was an Al Qaeda operative tied to a deadly attack against the U.S., the questions begging to be asked were: Who then were the other Al Qaeda representatives with him at that Malaysia meeting? Where were they now? And were they planning additional attacks?

It appears the CIA never asked those questions.

"Someday, someone will die and the public will not understand."

Not until June 11, 2001 did the CIA sit down with those in charge of the Cole investigation at the New York office and show them some of the photos taken at the Malaysia meeting. They asked for help in identifying the men. (John O'Neill was not at that meeting.) A high-ranking FBI official at this meeting told FRONTLINE that when they asked the CIA representatives for more information about Almidhar and Alhazmi -- men the FBI had until then never heard of -- they were told they were not cleared to know more. It was an astonishing meeting -- reportedly, it turned into a shouting match.

Two days later, in Saudi Arabia, Khalid Almidhar received a new American visa. He got on a plane and returned to the United States on July 4, 2001.

According to the September 2002 CIA testimony before the joint congressional panel looking into the Sept. 11 intelligence failures, the agency had not conducted a review of cables in their files concerning the Malaysia meetings until July 13, 2001. This time FBI agents were allowed to participate in the review. When this group found the information concerning Almidhar and Alhazmi's travels to the United States, their names were at last added to terrorist watch lists. But it was too late; they were already in the United States.

Meanwhile, Washington was on high alert. There were warning signs that Al Qaeda was planning some type of attack but no one could put the puzzle pieces together. In New York, the Cole investigation was at a standstill. The FBI had been pulled out of Yemen in June due to security concerns, and John O'Neill, preparing to retire, was no longer actively involved in the investigation.

Finally, on Aug. 23, 2001, the CIA sent an urgent memo to the New York FBI office seeking help in tracking down Almidhar and Alhazmi. At long last, the significance of the information in its files seems to have dawned on the agency. A quick check of hotels listed by the terrorists as places of residence on their travel entry cards came up empty. One New York FBI agent testified before Congress in September 2002 that he had requested use of "full criminal investigative resources" to find Almidhar. But headquarters denied his request. The reason given was that Almidhar was not under criminal investigation, and headquarters cited the wall between prosecution and intelligence as posing a problem. The agent's e-mail response to FBI headquarters, dated Aug. 29, 2001, was that "Someday someone will die and the public will not understand why we were not more effective and throwing every resource we had at certain problems."

Postscript: Reconsidering the Yemen Investigation

Following Sept. 11, Fahad al-Quso was interrogated again in Yemen on Sept. 12, 13 and 14 by FBI and Navy investigators, who had only just returned to Yemen a few days earlier. One of O'Neill's last acts at the FBI in late August 2001 was to sign the authorization for that return.

Interrogators showed al-Quso the CIA surveillance photos taken at the critical January 2000 Malaysia meetings. Al-Quso identified Alhazmi and Almidhar and admitted he was a bagman for Al Qaeda, presumably to fund the conspirators' future operations. He claims he wasn't at the meetings, but that Alhazmi and Almidhar met with him soon after the meetings concluded.

One investigator admitted to FRONTLINE that al-Quso's connections to the 9/11 conspirators was a staggering revelation, and he still had nightmares about it. When asked what might have been discovered if they'd learned of al-Quso's connections earlier, he responded, "the possibilities are mind-boggling."

So there was the trail -- the pieces of information linking the Malaysia meetings in January 2000, to the USS Cole attack of October 2000, to the 9/11 plot. At those meetings in Malaysia, it's believed both the 9/11 and Cole plots were planned, their operatives met with each other, and investigators suspect one or more Al Qaeda operatives at the meetings worked both the Cole and 9/11 plots.

The stunning and logical question that hangs in the air about John O'Neill's compromised USS Cole investigation in Yemen is, "What if?"

What if FBI headquarters had backed O'Neill and pushed the State Department to allow him to return to Yemen in January 2001 (over the objections of U.S. Ambassador Barbara Bodine) to continue his investigation?

If O'Neill had been allowed to go back, what could he have done that wasn't already being done? Given his aggressiveness in investigations, it would have meant more wiretaps, more surveillance of suspects, and pushing the government for more arrests. And as his colleagues like Barry Mawn, Clint Guenther and Mary Jo White knew so well, it all would have been done in the John O'Neill style:

-- wining and dining the head of Yemen's PSO, Yemen's equivalent to the FBI...

-- working with the CIA agents in Yemen and building on those past relationships from his Station Alex days...

-- holding the Yemeni officials' feet to the fire to get more access to those detained, and using the interrogations to slowly unravel the Al Qaeda network in Yemen -- especially, Fahad al-Quso, who O'Neill knew had been holding back ...

This is the scenario that might have played out in Yemen and the one that still bothers O'Neill's former allies and supporters. For them, it is conceivable that, in the end, John O'Neill would have been able to learn about that critical January 2000 meeting in Malaysia, and to start connecting the dots that ultimately led to Sept. 11, 2001.

Read this April 2004 update on Fahad al-Quso and Tawfiq bin-Atash.

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CIA-FBI Cooperation - Some Recent History

by Jim Gilmore, co-producer of "The Man Who Knew"

Building Teamwork

In the 1990s, attempts were made to revamp America's intelligence gathering and law enforcement agencies so that they could better respond to the threat posed by post-Cold War enemies such as Al Qaeda. The reformers, however, had to fight a deep-rooted competitiveness between the FBI and the CIA, dating back to J. Edgar Hoover's days, when the two agencies competed for each other's turf. They also had to contend with vastly different goals. For the FBI, intelligence is the fodder of prosecutions, while the CIA's focus is on intelligence as a stepping stone to more knowledge. Legal walls built to protect intelligence sources and defendants, over time, also added to the general lack of cooperation between agencies.

At first, even John O'Neill -- who eventually became a key proponent of interagency cooperation -- had to be convinced that the two agencies could work together on counter-terrorism. His mentor, Robert "Bear" Bryant, former deputy director of the FBI, argued it was the only way this new threat could effectively be fought. Bryant told FRONTLINE, "We put an FBI agent in as the deputy out at Langley, and we did this in 1995, so there wouldn't be anything to slip through the cracks. We brought in some CIA people. And John initially opposed that, and then basically they became friends and it worked very well... We basically leveraged our resources."

Another sign of cooperation between the agencies was "Station Alex." When the White House pressured the CIA to get a handle on bin Laden and his organization the agency set up a virtual station in Virginia, because they deemed it impossible to infiltrate Al Qaeda itself. This was done with the cooperation of the FBI and John O'Neill, then the head of counterterrorism at FBI headquarters. Station Alex's purpose was to intellectually dissect Al Qaeda: to learn its philosophies and goals, identify its financiers and command structure, and track its cadre of supporters through its training camps.

Richard Clarke, the former chief of the National Security Council's counterterrorism office, explained to FRONTLINE that Station Alex revealed how widespread Al Qaeda had become, "We were able, over the course of about 18 months, to go from thinking there was a bin Laden network to seeing it in 56 countries."

A congressional mandate in 1994 enabled the FBI to help deal with this threat by expanding its international presence. New FBI offices were opened in 23 countries. A total of 129 FBI agents were now assigned to the FBI's foreign posts with the purpose of working with foreign intelligence and law enforcement offices on issues of counterterrorism and international crime.

Renewed Rifts

But it would be a mistake to believe the 1990s brought the type of cooperation between federal agencies that was envisioned or truly needed. Serious institutional rifts and petty competitiveness continued. For example, some in the CIA saw the FBI's foreign activities as encroaching on their territory and a slap in the face meant to penalize the agency for its inability to root out its major spy, Aldrich Ames.

And even John O'Neill sometimes had his doubts. According to one agent who worked for him, he counseled wariness of the CIA, which he suspected was often working behind the bureau's back.

His instincts proved correct. It is now clear the CIA withheld information from the FBI -- information that could possibly have helped them connect the dots to the Sept. 11 conspirators -- and saved O'Neill's life. This is, quite possibly, the most egregious example of how far short attempts came in the 1990s to adequately revamp government agencies to deal with the terrorist threat.

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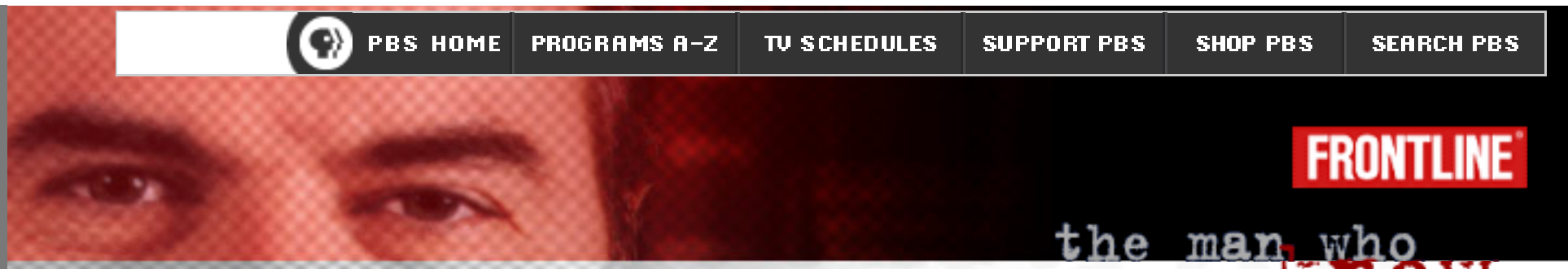

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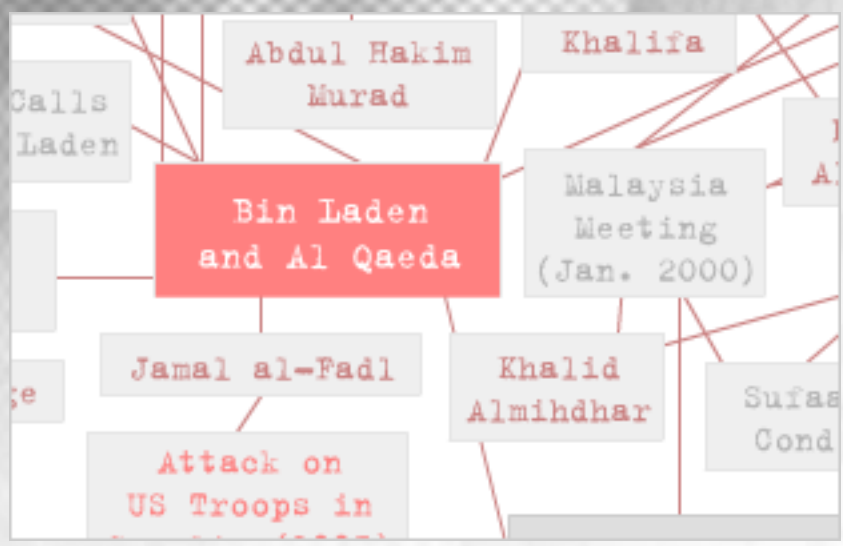

map "Connecting the Dots"

How Al Qaeda's global network slowly came into focus for U.S. intelligence (1993-2001)

Click on a box at the top of map to reveal what U.S. intelligence knew at a particular point in time. Then, roll over individual events and names for details. (You'll need the Flash 3 player or later and an 800x600 monitor to see the interactive Flash version.)

This interactive map, while not intended to be comprehensive, highlights what U.S. intelligence knew at particular points in time, beginning with the 1993 World Trade Center attack. (The capture of the plot's organizer, Ramzi Yousef, launched John O'Neill into his pursuit of Al Qaeda.)

Obviously, at the time pieces of information surfaced, much of it could not be fully understood and connected. Moreover, some clues simply weren't pursued and the CIA and FBI didn't always share information.

But this map does lay out some striking links between the 9/11 attack and Al Qaeda's previous plans, operatives, and conspiracies over the eight years leading up to 9/11.

Also explore a full timeline of Al Qaeda's global reach, with more details--such as the first time bin Laden's name became linked to suspected terrorists.

Two Examples of What This Map Highlights:

- **Khalid Shaikh Mohammed**
Suspected (as of September 2002) to be Al Qaeda chief of operations and key planner of 9/11 attacks. See how he was known to U.S. intelligence since the 1995 Bojinka plot. Discover how he also connects back to Ramzi Yousef and the 1993 World Trade Center bombing.

- **Fahad Al-Quso**
Conspirator in October 2000 USS Cole attack and in custody for months before 9/11. He links back to January 2000 Malaysia meeting attended by two 9/11 hijackers at which Cole and 9/11 plots were planned.

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Knew the man who

Timeline: Al Qaeda's Global Context

An overview of Osama bin Laden's ties and international reach gradually gave rise to his fatal U.S. intelligence.

Note: This chronology is drawn from news and government information that could not prove to, and who, the Saudi U.S attacks.

1957

Osama Bin Laden Born

Born in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, his family originally came from Yemen.

1984

Office of Services Established

Sheik Abdullah Azzam, a Palestinian religious scholar, establishes the Makhtab al Khadamat – the Office of Services – in Peshawar, Pakistan to recruit an Islamic army to fight the Soviets in Afghanistan. Osama bin Laden provides financial support to Azzam's organization.

1986

Bin Laden Sets Up Camp, Builds Ties

Bin Laden establishes Al Masadah ("The Lion's Den"), a training camp for Persian Gulf Arabs. Bin Laden begins associating with Egyptian radicals – who, unlike Sheik Abdullah Azzam, advocate a global jihad beyond Afghanistan – and befriends Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri of the Egyptian Islamic Jihad.

1988

Office of Services Reaches U.S.

The journal published by the Office of Services is distributed in the U.S. by the Islamic Center of Tucson, Arizona.

1988

Al Qaeda Established

Osama bin Laden — along with Muhammad Atef and Abu Ubaidah al Banshiri — founds Al Qaeda ("The Base"). The organization operates out of Afghanistan and Peshawar, Pakistan.

Read more about Al Qaeda's establishment in the U.S. indictment of Osama bin Laden.

November 1989

Battle for Control of Office of Services

After a car bomb kills Sheik Abdullah Azzam, a battle for control of the Office of Services breaks out between those who believe the jihad should focus on the overthrow of an Islamic state in Afghanistan, and extremists sympathetic to Osama bin Laden, who want to expand the struggle worldwide. The extremist faction eventually takes control.

December 1989

Oklahoma Meeting of Future Terrorists

At a conference of Muslims held in Oklahoma City, Wadih el-Hage, a U.S. citizen later convicted in the 1998 U.S. embassy bombings trial, meets with Egyptian Mahmud Abouhalima, who is later convicted for his role in the 1993 World Trade Center Bombing. Abouhalima later tries to buy guns from el-Hage.

For more details on el-Hage's Al Qaeda connections, see our FRONTLINE's "A Portrait of Wadih el-Hage".

February 1989

Soviet Forces Withdraw from Afghanistan

The Soviets' humiliating defeat by mujahedeen forces in their 10-year long war inspires Osama bin Ladens and other Islamic radicals to believe their victory in Afghanistan can be replicated around the world. At the end of the war, many of the "Afghan Arabs," as the radicals were called, returned home. Osama bin Ladens returns to Saudi Arabia.

November 1990

Bomb Manuals, Photos Discovered

During an investigation into the assassination of the right-wing rabbi Meir Kahane, authorities discover bomb manuals and photographs of the World Trade Center and the Empire State Building in the apartment of an Egyptian, El-Sayyid Nosair. Nosair reportedly is an associate of Wadih el-Hage.

It is later learned that Nosair's legal bills in the WTC bombing trial were paid for by bin Ladens. This is the earliest known intelligence information linking bin Ladens to terrorism.

1991

Bin Ladens Flees to Sudan

Bin Ladens leaves Saudi Arabia and travels to Afghanistan with some of his supporters. By 1992, they finally settle in Khartoum, Sudan.

Read more on FRONTLINE's "Hunting bin Ladens" chronology.

November 1991

Bin Ladens Organizes Attacks on U.S. Forces in Somalia

According to a document released by the British government after the Sept. 11 attacks, between 1992 and 1993, Muhammad Atef, an Egyptian aide to bin Ladens, travels frequently to Somalia to organize violent attacks on U.S. and UN troops stationed there. Atef reports back to bin Ladens in Khartoum.

1992

Expanding the Terror Network

According to the U.S. indictment of bin Ladens, between 1992 and 1996 Al Qaeda makes overtures to Iraqi, Iranian, Sudanese, Libyan, Syrian, Yemeni, Egyptian, Saudi Arabian, Pakistani, and Palestinian Muslimah Salim, an Al Qaeda leader, met with Iranian officials and that Al Qaeda sent members to Lebanon to receive training from members of Hezbollah. American officials also claim that around this time bin Ladens's group begins an effort to secure components for chemical and nuclear weapons.

Dec. 29, 1992

Al Qaeda's First Attack

In an apparent plot to kill U.S. servicemen headed to Somalia, a bomb explodes at a hotel in Aden, Yemen and kills two Austrian tourists. Two Yemeni Muslims — who had been trained in Afghanistan — are injured and later arrested. Intelligence officials believe this is Al Qaeda's first attack.

The Associated Press later reports that two of the Yemenis detained for the 2000 attack on the USS Cole were involved both in this 1992 Aden bombing, and a series of other attacks in 1993.

Feb. 26, 1993

World Trade Center Bombing

A truck bomb explodes in the parking garage of the World Trade Center (WTC) killing six and injuring hundreds. Investigators discover the suspects have links to a network of Islamic extremists. Several people eventually convicted in the bombing are linked to the Office of Service's Al Kifah Center in Brooklyn. Some of these men are connected to Sheik Omar Abdel Rahman. Rahman, a blind Egyptian cleric who was the spiritual leader of the Egyptian Islamic Jihad, is later convicted of conspiracy for his involvement in a plot to blow up New York City landmarks. He is sentenced to life in prison.

Investigators charge Ramzi Yousef as the mastermind behind the WTC bombing and begin a worldwide manhunt. They discover immigration officials had already detained Ahmed Ajaj, a Yousef associate, when he entered the U.S. carrying terrorist training manuals.

Osama bin Ladens's name surfaces during the 1993 WTC investigation as a financier of the Office of Services. His name is also found on a list of individuals who was called from a safe house used by the conspirators. During the WTC bombing trial, bin Ladens's name appears on a list of potential unindicted co-conspirators, but Al Qaeda is never mentioned.

April 1993

Final Training of Somali Forces

According to a document published by the British government, Muhammad Atef, Saif al Adel and other members of Al Qaeda return to Somalia to train Somali forces to attack U.N. troops.

Dec 1993

Future Bojinka Conspirators Meet

Pakistani Abdul Hakim Murad — later convicted for his role in the 1995 Bojinka ("Big Bang") plot to blow up twelve airliners — meets Khalid Shaikh Mohammed at Mohammed's home in Kuwait. Pakistani terrorist recruiter Wali Khan Amin Shah, who is later convicted for his role in the Bojinka plot, also meets Mohammed — suspected of helping to plan the Sept. 11 attacks — had an "intense" interest in gas attacks.

Oct. 3-4, 1993

"Black Hawk Down"

Eighteen American soldiers are attacked and killed in Mogadishu, Somalia. A U.S. indictment later charges bin Ladens and his followers with training the attackers.

Read more about the incident on FRONTLINE's "Ambush in Mogadishu" Web site.

Late 1993

Al Qaeda Contemplates Nairobi Attack

Members of an Al Qaeda cell in Kenya discuss attacking the U.S. embassy there. Ali Mohamed, a U.S. citizen, later admits to investigators that he took photographs and sketches of the embassy and presented them to bin Ladens in the Sudan.

1994

Air France Flight Hijacked

A group of Algerian hijackers seize an Air France flight headed for Paris. The crisis ends after French commandos storm the plane. According to some French investigators, the hijackers planned to blow up the plane above Paris or crash it into the Eiffel Tower.

1994-1995

Ramzi Yousef Hides

Ramzi Yousef, suspected mastermind of the 1993 WTC attack, hides out in the Philippines with Khalid Shaikh Mohammed, believed to be his uncle. The two reportedly plan a number of potential terrorist attacks.

January 1994

Bin Ladens Funds Sudan Terrorist Camps

By January 1994, bin Ladens is reportedly supporting at least three Sudan training camps.

July 11, 1994

Al Qaeda's London Office

According to a later U.S. indictment, bin Ladens sets up a media information office in London which will serve as a message center and provide cover for Al Qaeda operations. The center is run by Khalid al-Fawwaz.

August 1994

Marrakesh Hotel Attack

In Marrakesh, Morocco, two Spaniards are killed when three French Muslims open fire on tourists in a hotel lobby. European investigators reportedly discover phone calls between the suspects and the Office of Services. They also start to uncover a network of Afghan jihad war veterans in Europe.

December 1994

Konosiguya Established in Malaysia

Investigators come to suspect that a company named Konosiguya is a front for funneling money from bin Ladens to regional operatives. Wali Khan Amin Shah, a Pakistani, and an Indonesian cleric named Riduan Isamuddin (AKA "Hambali") established the company. A member of phone calls are made from Konosiguya offices to Mohammed Jamal Khalifa, a bin Ladens in-law, who allegedly ran a charity front for Al Qaeda. The Hambali connection to this group is only discovered after Sept. 11.

2004 Update: "Hambali" now in U.S. custody - see details.

December 1994

Bojinka Plot — A Test Run

Ramzi Yousef plants a small bomb on a Philippine Airlines plane. The bomb explodes during the second leg of the trip and kills a Japanese businessman. Authorities later discover the bombing is a test run for the planned Bojinka attack.

January 1995

Bojinka Plot Discovered

Following an explosion in a Manila apartment, Philippine police uncover a plot – code-named Bojinka or "Big Bang" – to blow up 12 airplanes bound for the U.S. Authorities arrest Abdul Hakim Murad, a Pakistani who is an associate of Ramzi Yousef. Yousef flees to Pakistan.

Investigators also discover that Khalid Shaikh Mohammed had visited the apartment frequently. His name is found on documents inside a computer that contain details of the Bojinka plot.

Jan. 20, 1995

Planes as Weapons

In the Bojinka investigation, Manila police interview Abdul Hakim Murad. According to their report, Murad describes his discussions with Ramzi Yousef about hijacking a commercial aircraft and flying it into the headquarters of the CIA.

Yousef and Murad also reportedly discuss the idea of using a small airplane loaded with explosives to bomb targets in the U.S.

Feb. 5, 1995

Ramzi Yousef Captured in Pakistan

Just as FBI Agent John O'Neill begins his new job as section chief of the FBI's Counterterrorism Section, Yousef is located in Pakistan. O'Neill helps coordinate his capture. Afterwards, authorities learn Yousef spent part of the previous three years living in a Bin Ladens-funded guesthouse.

August 1995

Bin Ladens's Letter to King Fahd

Bin Ladens sends an open letter to King Fahd of Saudi Arabia calling for a campaign against U.S. forces in Saudi Arabia.

December 1995

Bojinka Plotter Arrested

Wali Khan Amin Shah is arrested in Malaysia and rendered to the United States. He is later convicted for his role in the Bojinka plot.

1995

Authorities Focus In On Bin Ladens

The U.S. State Department issues a dossier on bin Ladens that claims he is a financier of radical Islamic causes and connects him to the 1992 bomb bombing in Aden, Yemen and the training of the Somalis who attacked U.S. troops in Mogadishu. At the same time, a grand jury investigation of Osama bin Ladens is initiated in New York.

January 1996

Station "Alex" Confirms Scale of Al Qaeda

The FBI and CIA create a joint station, code-named "Alex," with the mission of tracking down bin Ladens. Richard Clarke would later tell FRONTLINE that with the establishment of Station Alex, "We were able over the course of about 18 months to go from thinking there was a bin Ladens network to seeing it in 56 countries."

May 1996

Sudan Expels Bin Ladens

Under international pressure, Sudan expels bin Ladens. He and his followers return to Afghanistan.

Spring 1996

An Al Qaeda Informer

Jamal Ahmed al-Fadl leaves Al Qaeda after he's discovered embezzling money from the organization. Al-Fadl begins cooperating with the U.S., providing information on Al Qaeda's organization and how it operates.

June 25, 1996

Khobar Towers Bombing, Dhahran, Saudi Arabia

Nineteen American soldiers are killed and 500 people injured in the bombing. Investigators will eventually conclude that the most likely scenario is that the Iranian government commissioned Saudi Hezbollah terrorists to carry out the attack. Over Richard Clarke interview, 3 Others, however, are convinced bin Ladens played some role in the attack.

Sept. 5, 1996

Bojinka Convictions

Ramzi Ahmed Yousef, Abdul Hakim Murad, and Wali Khan Amin Shah are convicted for their role in the Bojinka plot.

May 22, 1997

Terrorists Reported To Be Operating in U.S.

The Associated Press reports that senior FBI officials have determined terrorist groups are operating in the Americas. The AP quotes John O'Neill, who is now special agent in charge of the national security division in New York as saying, "Almost every one of these groups has a presence in the United States today. A lot of these groups now have the capacity and the support infrastructure in the United States to attack us here if they choose to."

Aug. 21, 1997

Evidence of Nairobi Al Qaeda Cell

Police search Wadih el-Hage's home in Nairobi, Kenya. On his computer they discover documents, which outline the presence of an Al Qaeda cell in Nairobi. Read more on FRONTLINE's "Hunting bin Ladens: Warnings to the FBI"

After the raid, el-Hage is questioned but not detained, and he returns to America. In the fall, el-Hage denies his involvement in terrorism to a New York grand jury.

Feb. 23, 1998

Al Qaeda Calls for Killing Americans

Bin Ladens and Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri issue a declaration with other extremist groups calling on Muslims to kill Americans anywhere in the world.

Read their statement on FRONTLINE's "Hunting bin Ladens" chronology.

June 9, 1998

Bin Ladens Indicted

A U.S. grand jury issues a sealed indictment charging bin Ladens with conspiracy to attack "defense utilities of the United States." The indictment alleges bin Ladens is involved in the October 1993 attack on U.S. soldiers in Somalia.

June 10, 1998

Interview with Bin Ladens

John Miller of ABC News interviews bin Ladens in his mountaintop camp in Afghanistan. During the interview bin Ladens admits to knowing Wali Khan Amin Shah, one of the Bojinka plotters, but denies having met Ramzi Yousef. He also denies knowledge of the "Bojinka plot" or a related plot to assassinate Clinton.

Watch the interview on FRONTLINE's "Hunting bin Ladens" Web site.

August 1998

FAA Warns of Hijackings

The Federal Aviation Administration warns airlines to be on a "high degree of alertness" for possible hijackings by Al Qaeda.

Sept. 9, 1998

Egyptian Jihad's Warning

The group, led by Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri, warns of a "message" they will be sending to Americans, "which we hope they read with care, because we will write it, with God's help, in a language they will understand."

Sept. 7, 1998

Bombing of U.S. Embassies

American embassies in Nairobi, Kenya and Dar es Salaam, Tanzania are bombed almost simultaneously. The Kenya bombing kills 213 and injures 4,500; the Dar es Salaam bombing kills 11 and injures 85. One of the bombers, Mohamed Al-Owhali, a Saudi, flees the scene.

During the investigation, a search of the apartment of Khalid al-Fawwaz, the head of Al Qaeda's London office, reveals manuals virtually identical to those found in the hoppage of Ahmad Ajaj, who was connected to Ramzi Yousef and the 1993 World Trade Center bombing.

Mohamed Sadeek Odeh, a Jordanian who would later be convicted in the embassy bombings trial, is arrested in Pakistan when he tries to enter from Kenya with a false passport.

A group calling itself the Islamic Army for the Liberation of the Holy Places faxes claims of responsibility for the attack to different media organizations in France, Qatar, and the UAE. According to a document published by the British government, a later investigation reveals that the fax was sent from a telephone number linked to Osama bin Ladens.

Progress in Embassy Investigation

Mohamed al-Owhali is arrested by Kenyan detectives and confesses to his role in the embassy bombing. Intelligence officials intercept calls between two bin Ladens lieutenants implicating them in the embassy bombing. Advisors also warn President Clinton that they have evidence that bin Ladens is attempting to purchase weapons of mass destruction.

Sept. 20, 1998

Tomahawk Missile Attack

President Clinton orders Tomahawk missiles fired at a suspected Al Qaeda camp in Afghanistan and a pharmaceutical plant in Sudan, which was suspected of producing chemical weapons for bin Ladens. The effectiveness of the strikes is later questioned.

second page

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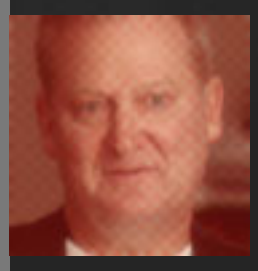
Interviews

Robert M. "Bear" Bryant

As deputy director of the FBI under Louis Freeh from 1997 to 1999, he initiated a strategic plan in 1998 to overhaul the FBI so it could better address counterintelligence and counterterrorism. He talks about his working relationship with John O'Neill, O'Neill's contributions to the counterterrorism effort, and O'Neill's career problems within the FBI. This interview was conducted on July 2, 2002.

Richard A. Clarke

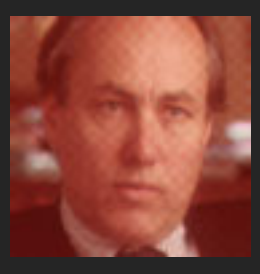
President Clinton's national coordinator for counterterrorism, he is currently President Bush's special adviser for cyberspace security. In this interview he talks about the attributes which made John O'Neill stand apart in the world of counterterrorism, sketches Al Qaeda's threat and how it came into focus for U.S. intelligence, and discusses some of John O'Neill's battles, including the USS Cole investigation. This interview was conducted March 20, 2002.



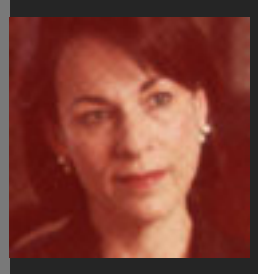
Clint Guenther

He was an FBI agent in the New York office for 22 years and worked under John O'Neill in the counterterrorism division. In this interview he describes the problems O'Neill encountered in Yemen while investigating the bombing of the USS Cole. This interview was conducted on June 28, 2002.

Chris Isham



A close friend of John O'Neill, Isham is a senior producer at ABC News, and head of its investigative unit. He set up a 1998 interview for ABC's John Miller with Osama bin Laden in Afghanistan. In this interview he recounts O'Neill's pleas to see the footage of the entire bin Laden interview. He calls O'Neill "one of those rare birds inside the government who had access to highly classified information, and yet also understood that talking to a journalist was not necessarily a violation of any rules. It could actually be helpful on both sides." This interview was conducted on May 31, 2002.

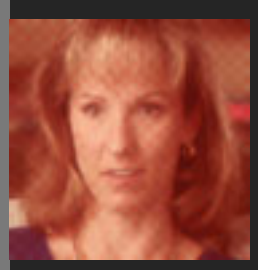


Valerie James

Since 1991, Valerie James was John O'Neill's friend and companion. In this interview she describes daily life with O'Neill. "He is working on this incredible stuff day after day that he can basically talk to none of us about," she tells FRONTLINE. "He can't even tell other of his peers about what he's working on; it's that intense. Does a man like that come home to roast chicken and mashed potatoes every night?" This interview was conducted on July 11, 2002.

Barry Mawn

He headed the FBI's New York office from 2000 to 2002. Mawn sums up the O'Neill he knew and discusses the battles they both encountered in the USS Cole and East Africa embassy bombing investigations. He also discusses the controversy over his statements at O'Neill's memorial service. This interview was conducted on May 17, 2002.



Fran Townsend

She served as deputy to U.S. Attorney General Janet Reno from 1995 to 1998 and headed the Justice Department's office of intelligence policy and review from 1998 to 2002. In this interview she describes the FBI infighting over the 1998 embassy bombings investigation and the conflict between O'Neill and the U.S. ambassador to Yemen during the probe of the USS Cole attack. Townsend also recounts how high the fear was of a potential terrorist attack at the millennium after the arrest of Ahmed Ressam at the Canadian border. This interview was conducted on May 30, 2002.

Mary Jo White

As the U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of New York from 1993-2002, White prosecuted the 1993 World Trade Center bombing, the 1993 "day of terror" plot against New York landmarks, and the 1998 embassy bombings in East Africa. In this interview she describes working on the capture of 1993 World Trade Center bomber Ramzi Yousef and investigating the embassy and USS Cole bombings with John O'Neill. This interview was conducted on May 2, 2002.

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The man who knew too much

Robert M. "Bear" Bryant

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Richard A. Clarke

Richard A. Clarke is the President's special assistant for cyber-security. He has served in the Pentagon, the State Department, and the White House under Presidents Reagan, Bush, Clinton and Bush. He has been the President's counterterrorism coordinator since 1992. He was the President's point man for the Pentagon, and he coordinated the phase of the Iran-Contra scandal that was the most damaging to President Reagan. He was the President's point man for the Pentagon, and he coordinated the phase of the Iran-Contra scandal that was the most damaging to President Reagan. Together with six four-star generals, he was responsible for the military response to the Persian Gulf War, the invasion of Iraq, the Balkans, and the Afghanistan war. He

The Knew

Clint Guenther

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Introduction
Interviews: Clint Guenther, Ron Ronzio, Jim Kolb, Jerry Dunn, Ed Cox, Jim Ellis, Jim Kolb, Jerry Dunn, Ed Cox, Jim Ellis, Jerry Dunn, Ed Cox, Jim Ellis, Jerry Dunn, Ed Cox, Jim Ellis

Chris Lehman

"The cost of war" interviews
Chris Lehman
interviews
Chris Lehman
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Chris Lehman

Interviews

Tricia Cast - Dawson

Tricia Cast - Dawson's Creek - Interviews - Tricia Cast - Dawson's Creek - Interviews - Tricia Cast - Dawson's Creek - Interviews -

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Interviews

Jump to:
Intro
Part 1
Part 2
Part 3
Continue to the Interview

Part 1 - Intro

Can you describe the Jim Crow 1950's/ 1960's/ 1970's/80's/ 90's/ 2000's/ 2010's/ 2020's?

Jim Crow is a 1950 century American acronym. Jim Crow was a minstrel show character, a stereotype of a black man, used as a derogatory term for the African American people in the United States. Jim Crow laws were a collection of state and local laws that were in effect from the 1880s to the 1950s. Jim Crow laws were a collection of state and local laws that were in effect from the 1880s to the 1950s. Jim Crow laws were a collection of state and local laws that were in effect from the 1880s to the 1950s.

Dr. Carl Hayes is a Jazz Pianist, Composer, Author, Lecturer, Recording Artist, Producer, Arranger, Music Director, Music Supervisor, Music Consultant, Music Teacher, Vocal Coach, Entertainer, Actor, Dancer, Choreographer, Stuntman, Stuntman Coordinator, Stunt Performer, Stunt Coordinator, Stunt Director, Stunt Supervisor, Stunt Consultant, Stunt Teacher

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https://www.ebay.com/sg/gallery/Gambling-the-man-who-beaten-Jackpot-Jones-Jones-Lil-author-1966/-/1-of-1/4/1/2/1/2/1/2

Al Qaeda's Global Context

An overview of Al Qaeda's ties and international reach (probably dating into Nixon-led U.S. intelligence.

Note: This chronology is drawn from news and government information that could not proof by, and after, the Sept. 11 attacks.

click page

September 1993

Al Mohamed Arrested

Ali Mohamed, a U.S. citizen and Al Qaeda member, is arrested in the U.S. Soon after, he begins cooperating and admits he took pictures of the Nairobi embassy and showed them to bin Laden. On Oct. 20, 2000, Mohamed tells a judge, "Bin Laden looked at the picture of the American embassy and pointed to where a truck could go in a suicide bomber."

Sept. 23, 1993

Links Between East Africa and 1993 WTC Bombing

As a bail hearing for Wadih el-Hage, the U.S. Attorney claims el-Hage had links to El Sayyid Nosair and Mahmoud Abouhalima, both convicted in the 1993 World Trade Center bombing.

November 4 1994

Bin Laden Indictment Released

The U.S. government releases its indictment against bin Laden, Muhammad Atef and other members of Al Qaeda.

1995

Khalid Mohammed Visits Germany

Khalid Shaikh Mohammed allegedly visits Hamburg, Germany. After Sept. 11, 2001, U.S. officials suspect he might have met with an Al Qaeda cell in Hamburg.

June 7, 1999

Bin Laden Added to FBI's "Ten Most Wanted" List

Bin Laden is wanted for murder of U.S. nationals outside the U.S.; conspiracy to murder U.S. nationals outside the U.S.; and attack on a federal facility resulting in death.

View the FBI's Most Wanted poster.

Nov. 30, 1999

Jordan Millennium Plot Discovered

Jordanian officials intercept a phone conversation between Abu Zubaydah, a senior Al Qaeda lieutenant, and members of a Jordanian cell planning a plot referred to as "the day of the millennium." The Jordanian conduct raids and discover explosives and a plan to blow up the Radisson Hotel in Amman and other sites.

December 1999

Ahri: A Malaysia Meeting

The CIA intercepts a phone conversation at a Yemeni house that is an Al Qaeda logistics center, which they had learned about from Mohamed al-Owhali, who was convicted in the embassy bombing case. The house is owned by Ahmed Al-Hada, a Yemeni citizen.

The callers discuss an upcoming January 2000 meeting in Kuala Lumpur. Officials learn that Khalid Almidhar, a Yemeni citizen believed to be the son-in-law of Al-Hada, and Nawaf Alhazmi, thought to be a Saudi national, will be attending the meeting. Both Almidhar and Alhazmi will lose hijackers of American Airlines Flight 77 on Sept. 11.

Dec. 14, 1999

Ressam Interrogated at Canadian Border

Algerian native Ahmed Ressam is caught entering the U.S. with 130 pounds of explosives at the Canadian border at Port Angeles, Washington. Ressam had links to other Al Qaeda militants and trained in an Afghanistan Al Qaeda camp. Authorities eventually learn his intended target was Los Angeles International Airport.

Read more about Ahmed Ressam on FRONTLINE's "Trail of a Terrorist" Web site.

January 2000

The Malaysia Meeting

Several individuals linked to Al Qaeda meet in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. At the CIA's request, Malaysian agents photograph the meeting. Nawaf Alhazmi and Khalid Almidhar (both later hijackers on Sept. 11) attend the meeting at the condo of Yazid Sufaat. Tawfiq bin-Atash (AKA "Khallad") – who once hosted bin Laden's bodyguards and would become a suspect in the attack on the USS Cole – also attends the meeting.

It is later reported that Riduan Isamuddin (AKA "Hambali"), a militant Islamic preacher – who would eventually be suspected of having had a role in the "Bojinka" plot – also attends the meeting. Officials later also claim Ramzi bin al-Shibh – a former roommate of Sept. 11 hijacker Mohamed Atta – was also photographed at the meeting.

Fahad al-Quso, who is later arrested for his role in the 2000 USS Cole attack, is a suspected "bag man" who carried money to finance the meeting. After Sept. 11, al-Quso denies having attended the Malaysia meeting. However, he would admit he met at other times with bin Atash, Alhazmi and others who were at the Malaysia meeting.

[Note: All the individuals in the photographs are not be identified by intelligence officials until later, and the importance of this Malaysia meeting would not be known until after the Cole investigation began to focus on bin-Atash. It's unclear at what point the CIA began to recognize the meeting's importance. Sources would later tell FRONTLINE that FBI agents looking into the Cole attack were not fully told about the meeting's importance or shown photographs of those photographed until the summer of 2001.

Read more about the CIA and FBI communication failure.]

2004 Update: "Hambali" and Tawfiq bin-Atash now in U.S. custody; Fahad Al-Quso now in Yemeni custody – see details.

Sept. 8, 2000

Attack on USS The Sullivans Fails

A cell of Yemeni terrorists try bombing the USS The Sullivans in Yemen's Aden Harbor, but fail when their overloaded skiff sinks. Investigators do not discover the attempt on the USS The Sullivans until after the USS Cole had been successfully attacked by the same cell in October of 2000.

Jan. 15, 2000

Alhazmi and Almidhar Enter the U.S.

Nawaf Alhazmi and Khalid Almidhar fly into Los Angeles from Bangkok. A later article in Newsweek reports that the CIA knew that Alhazmi was on the plane, but did not know about Almidhar. Neither individual is tracked once they entered the country. Both become suicide hijackers on Sept. 11.

April 17, 2000

FBI Investigates a Flight School

The Phoenix office of the FBI begins to investigate Zacaria Moustapha Soubra, a Phoenix flight school student suspected of having ties to bin Laden.

August 2000

Italy Hears about Planes as Weapons

Between August 2000 and early 2001, Italian investigators begin to record the conversations of Abdelkader El Ali Abdelrahman. According to a later report by the Los Angeles Times, in one of the conversations Abdelrahman tells Abdelnasir Mustafa Ali Sorour, a suspected Al Qaeda terrorist, that planes could be used as weapons against the U.S. According to the article, the FBI was aware of the conversations, but did not receive any reference to planes being used as weapons.

Fall 2000

Bin al-Shibh Denied Visa

Ramzi bin al-Shibh, a Yemeni who was Mohamed Atta's former roommate, applies four times for a visa to enter the U.S., but is denied each time. U.S. officials later claim that he was supposed to take part in the Sept. 11 plot, but at the last minute was slotted to be replaced by Zacarias Moussaoui.

October 2000

Moussaoui Visits Malaysia

Zacarias Moussaoui, a French national, visits Malaysia and stays at Yazid Sufaat's condo after Riduan Isamuddin, (AKA "Hambali") asks Sufaat to put up Moussaoui. Sufaat, a Malaysian, also provides Moussaoui with false identification papers. Also at Hambali's request, a company owned by Sufaat purchases explosives for an attack on foreign embassies and other targets in Southeast Asia. The plot is foiled after Sept. 11, when a videotape of potential targets is found in an Afghanistan safe house.

Oct. 12, 2000

Attack on the USS Cole – More Revelations

Two men in a skiff pull alongside the American destroyer and detonate an explosive that rips through the hull and kills 17 U.S. sailors. Yemeni authorities quickly capture and start identifying suspects. Among them is Tawfiq bin-Atash, former head of bin Laden's bodyguards. The CIA eventually comes to realize that bin-Atash had been photographed at the earlier Malaysia meeting and begins to reexamine those photographs. A few document released by the British government would claim that Mohamed al-Owhali, convicted for his role in the 1998 embassy bombings, links two of the Cole suspects to the embassy bombings.

2004 Update: Tawfiq bin-Atash now in U.S. custody – see details.

Dec. 8, 2000

Cole Links to Bin Laden

ABC News' John Miller reports authorities have found a number of connections between the Cole attack and Osama bin Laden, including telephone records of calls between the bombers of the Cole and an Al Qaeda cell in East Africa. Yemeni officials arrest Gamal Al Badawi, a suspect who admits he fought with Al Qaeda forces in Bosnia. Fahad al-Quso, in custody, apparently carried $5,000 from an associate of Bin Laden to Cole conspirators. Lastly, Miller reports Yemeni authorities suspect Abdul Al-Nasir both organized the Cole attack and also recruited bombers for the attack on the embassies in East Africa in 1998.

2004 Update: The Fahad Al-Quso case – see details.

January 2001

FAA Warns of Hijackings

Between January and August of 2001, the Federal Aviation Administration issues 15 advisories to airlines and airports warning that terrorists could try to hijack or destroy American aircraft.

Jan. 24, 2001

"The Brothers Going to America"

Italian authorities record Abdelkader Mahmoud Es Sayed, an imam in Italy, talking about fraudulent documents for "the brothers going to America."

Jan. 26, 2001

Clarke Warns of Sleeper Cells

Richard Clarke, the National Security Council counterterrorism chief, sends a memo to Deputy National Security Advisor Stephen Hadley warning that Al Qaeda sleeper cells within the U.S. are "a major threat." Clarke also warns investigating Al Qaeda training camps in response to the Cole bombing.

Jan. 27, 2001

Cole Links to Al Qaeda Confirmed

The *Washington Post* reports on this date that investigators in Yemen believe that people in custody are tied closely to Al Qaeda. An anonymous Bush administration official tells the *Post*, "There is no question that Al Qaeda was involved in this attack."

February 2001

Suspicious Flight School Student

Instructors at an Arizona flight school become suspicious about a students who speaks English poorly and has limited flying skills. They report him to the FAA. The student, Hani Hanjour, a Saudi, later pilots a plane into the Pentagon on Sept. 11.

April 2001

Specific Threat On U.S. Targets

Washington repeatedly receives a "specific threat" that Al Qaeda may attempt to attack American targets in the Middle East or Europe.

April 18, 2001

Another FAA Warning

This warning to airlines states: "The FAA does not have any credible information regarding specific plans by terrorist groups to attack U.S. civil aviation interests... Nevertheless some of the current active groups are known to plan and train for hijackings... The FAA encourages U.S. carriers to demonstrate a high degree of alertness."

May 11, 2001

State Dept. Warns Americans Overseas

The State Department warns that American citizens overseas may be targeted by Al Qaeda.

May 28, 2001

East Africa Convictions

Mohamed al-Owhali, Khalfan Khamis Mohamed, Mohammed Saddiq Odeh, and Wadih el-Hage are convicted on charges including conspiracy to kill Americans, which stem from the 1998 embassy bombings.

June 2001

Visa Issued to Almidhar

The State Department re-issues a visa to Khalid Almidhar, a Sept. 11 hijacker who was present at the January 2000 Malaysia meeting.

June 2001

FBI Withdraws from Yemen:More FAA Warnings

Citing a security threat, the FBI pulls investigators out of Yemen. This same month, the FAA issues more warnings to airlines. The NSC's Richard Clarke later tells FRONTLINE that these warnings were "absolutely" related to Al Qaeda operations discussing what would eventually become the Sept. 11 attacks.

By late June, intelligence experts are extremely concerned about the possibility of an imminent attack.

June 2001

State Department Closes Embassies

The U.S. embassies in Senegal and Bahrain are shut down and the State Department issues a new worldwide caution.

July/June

Attack on Yemen Embassy Thwarted

Yemeni authorities thwart an attack on the U.S. embassy in Sana, Yemen.

June 22, 2001

"Condition Delta"

U.S. Central and European Command impose "Force Protection Condition Delta" because of concerns about a terrorist attack.

June 28, 2001

Attack "Highly Likely"

National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice is warned during an intelligence briefing that an Al Qaeda attack is "highly likely."

Summer 2001

FBI Investigates 10 Cole Suspects at Malaysia Meeting

Sources close to the Cole investigation tell FRONTLINE that during the summer of 2001 the CIA informs the FBI about the Malaysia meeting and shows them a picture of one or two of the Cole suspects. The FBI reportedly identifies Cole suspects Tawfiq bin-Attash and Fahad al-Quso. Al-Quso would later deny that he made it to the meeting and claims that the individual in the picture just looked like him.

July 4, 2001

Almidhar Re-enters U.S.

Khalid Almidhar re-enters the U.S. through JFK airport. He later meets with Mohamed Atta.

July 10, 2001

Spain Meeting

Mohamed Atta meets with his former roommate Ramzi bin al-Shibh in Spain along with a number of other Arab men. Only after Sept. 11 do officials discover the meeting and conclude that bin al-Shibh also may have been at the January 2000 Malaysia meeting.

July 16, 2001

Request for Flight School Investigation

The FBI's Phoenix office sends a memo to FBI headquarters requesting officials initiate a nationwide investigation of flight schools. The memo warns that bin Laden supporters may be attending flight schools in the United States.

July 18, 2001

Hussain Convicted

The jury finds that the conviction of Ahmed Ressam for the millennium plot to detonate a bomb at Los Angeles airport could lead to retaliatory terrorist attacks.

July 31, 2001

Another FAA Alert

The FAA issues yet another warning to airlines that terrorists could be planning to hijack American airlines.

August 2001

Bin Laden Operatives Return to Afghanistan

According to a later report by the British government, "In August and early September [2001] close associates of bin Laden were warned to return to Afghanistan from other parts of the world by Sept. 10."

July 16, 2001

FAA Warns of Weapons from Everyday Objects

The FAA warns airlines that terrorists may use weapons modified from everyday objects.

August 16, 2001

Moussaoui Arrested

Minneapolis FBI agent pick up and arrest Zacarias Moussaoui on immigration charges for overstaying his visa, but agents are concerned he could be a terrorist. The Minneapolis office tries unsuccessfully to secure either a criminal search warrant or an intelligence warrant to search Moussaoui's belongings. After Sept. 11, a federal indictment would claim that Moussaoui was in possession of two knives, a flight manual for a 747-400, lighting gloves and shin guards, and an aviation radio.

Aug. 27, 2001

CIA Calms FBI: Names of Almidhar and Alhazmi

The CIA calms the FBI, warning that Khalid Almidhar and Nawaf Alhazmi are inside the U.S. and are suspected terrorists because of their presence at the January 2000 Malaysia meeting.

Aug. 28, 2001

French Brief FBI on Moussaoui

They say Moussaoui has been linked to Al Qaeda.

Sept. 6, 2001

Bin al-Shibh Leaves for Afghanistan

Ramzi bin al-Shibh, the former roommate of Mohamed Atta, who had attended both the July meeting in Spain and the January 2000 Malaysia meeting, leaves Germany for Afghanistan.

Sept. 11, 2001

Sept. 11 Attacks

Hijackers alleged to be members of Al Qaeda take control of four airliners and crash two into the World Trade Center, and one into the Pentagon. A fourth hijacked plane crashes into the Pennsylvania countryside. The attacks kill more than 3,000 people.

Post-Sept. 11, 2001

Postscript: Links to 1995 Bojinka Plotter: al-Shibh Captured

U.S. investigators discover evidence they believe links Khalid Shaikh Mohammed – wanted and still at large for his role in the 1995 Bojinka plot – to the Sept. 11 hijackings. A few weeks later, U. S. officials say they believe that Khalid Shaikh Mohammed is the operations chief of Al Qaeda. It is also later reported that the National Security Agency had intercepted telephone conversations between Mohamed Atta and Khalid Shaikh Mohammed before Sept. 11, but had not "properly" translated them at the time. Officials quoted in one story refused to describe the content of those conversations.

On Sept. 11, 2002, Ramzi bin al-Shibh is captured by Pakistani police in a shootout in Karachi. He is currently in U.S. custody and, according to a U.S. Defense Department official, is "providing valuable information." Bin al-Shibh is believed to have knowledge of Al Qaeda operations in Europe and Southeast Asia.

2004 Update: Khalid Shaikh Mohammed now in U.S. custody – see details.

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Main menu

Press Briefing: 11am Wednesday 30 April 2003

Briefing from the Prime Minister's Official Spokesman on: EU Defence, Russia/Iraq/International Relations, Middle East, Northern Ireland, Iraq and Foundation Hospitals.

EU Defence

Questioned as to whether the Prime Minister and Prime Minister Berlusconi of Italy would use their dinner this evening to discuss yesterday's meeting on EU defence issues in Brussels attended by France, Germany, Belgium and Luxembourg, the Prime Minister's Official Spokesman (PMOS) said that, for the record, tonight's dinner had been in the diary for some time. It had not been set up quickly as a result of yesterday's events. The two Prime Ministers would have wide-ranging discussion, as you would expect, in which it was very possible that the meeting in Brussels would be raised.

Asked about the Brussels meeting, the PMOS said that as the Prime Minister had underlined yesterday, it was important not to do anything which would undermine NATO. We were continuing to seek to enhance European capabilities to strengthen our defences, but equally were taking great care not to do anything which would cut across NATO, thereby weakening it. That was precisely what all fifteen ESDP partners had signed up to. Obviously we would look at the proposals which had been put forward yesterday. However, as the Prime Minister had pointed out on Monday, they were the views of four of fifteen EU member states. Any decisions or changes would have to be agreed at the European Council by unanimity. A number of issues contained in yesterday's statement repeated previously stated positions. There were other issues with which we did not instinctively agree - for example, the formation of a European Security and Defence union (ESDU). Obviously we supported practical co-operation between members states. However, we were not in favour of a self-elected inner core with an organisation created for members who wanted to go faster. In answer to further questions, the PMOS took the opportunity to draw journalists' attention to comments made by other EU Foreign Ministers which supported the position we were taking. For example, the Spanish Foreign Minister had said yesterday that "European security and defence policy cannot be set by three or four member states". The Italian Foreign Minister had said on Monday that "If the number of increased military co-operation was developed in Brussels, I regard it with a very critical eye". The Portuguese Defence Minister had said, "With respect to military capacity, we and the generality of European nations are in favour of complementarity and not duplication of means with NATO". Yesterday's statement had talked about further central planning. In our view, there was already assured access to NATO planning through Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE). We were not clear what the purpose of duplicating such a planning centre would be. It seemed more sensible to us to put extra investment into increasing capabilities rather than another HQ.

Asked if the Prime Minister believed that France and Germany were taking the position they were taking on this matter in order to embarrass him, the PMOS said that it was perfectly reasonable for countries to meet up and discuss issues of mutual interest. However, the UK had been at the heart of the formulation of ESDP and would continue to be heavily involved. We were involved in the issue from a position of genuine strength. A meeting of four countries was not a substitute for decision-making at the European Council. We were perfectly sanguine about people meeting up and expressing their views. Equally, however, we were entitled to express our own opinions regarding areas where we did not agree and would continue to do so.

Russia/Iraq/International Relations

Asked if the Prime Minister had been surprised at President Putin's treatment of him in Moscow yesterday, the PMOS said that the Prime Minister was perfectly relaxed and unfazed about yesterday. Given the significant differences within the international community regarding the issue of Iraq, it should come as no surprise that different leaders wanted to set out their differing views. We had no problem with that whatsoever. The PMOS said he would not dispute the fact that yesterday's joint press conference in Moscow was one of the more interesting ones he had sat through. However, it should be noted that the talks the Prime Minister had had privately with President Putin had been very productive and that the last time the Prime Minister had visited the President in October 2002, the write-ups from the press conference at the time were, in many ways, of the same order as today, with journalists predicting that we wouldn't be able to reach agreement on Resolution 1441. Well we had, although he added that that was not to make any predictions at this point as to what might happen in the future regarding UN Resolutions. As the Prime Minister had said, we were seeking, through diplomatic conversations, to reach a point where the UN and Coalition were working in partnership to a post-Saddam Iraq and where neither was subservient to the other. President Bush himself had said that the UN should have a vital role to play in a post-conflict Iraq. We wanted that partnership to work. There was a deal to be done if people wanted to do it. However, as the Prime Minister had said in a briefing en route to Moscow yesterday, we were not going to engage in the diplomatic rigmarole of the type we had seen during the failed attempts to reach a second UN Resolution. Certainly had no intention of indulging in another diplomatic dance of the nine veils. If people wanted a deal on the issues, there was a deal to be done. Intensive dialogue would be taking place over the coming weeks through which we hoped an agreement could be reached. Through good will and common sense, we remained firmly of the view that a partnership could be found. We would have to see.

Put to him that yesterday's meeting in Brussels and the Prime Minister's visit to Moscow showed that the countries with which the UK had fallen out in the run-up to the Iraq conflict were far from being willing to 'repent' and that the fact that the Prime Minister was 'relaxed' and 'unfazed' about what had happened had made him look complacent, the PMOS said that he would disagree. In the Commons debate on Iraq the day before the conflict had started, the Prime Minister had said that there were big geo-political issues which the world needed to address. It should therefore come as no surprise that these issues were being ventilated in public. Over the next few weeks, important decisions would have to be taken and people would have to understand what was at stake. We hoped that agreement could be found on post-conflict issues. The Prime Minister believed that there was a deal which could be done. However, the reality on the ground was that there were around 250,000 Coalition forces inside Iraq. It was simply not possible - or practical - to expect them to hand over everything lock, stock and barrel to the UN. It was important for people to be patient and wait and see how these things were shaken out. For example, decisions would have to be taken about the issue of sanctions and Iraq. It was a bizarre argument that sanctions should remain when the regime had gone. Questioned further, the PMOS said that there would clearly need to be some straight-talking between global leaders in the weeks and months ahead. These issues would be addressed and shaken out. The Prime Minister had set out his thoughts on this matter very clearly. We were focussing our attention on post-conflict issues which we hoped could be dealt with and worked through together. Asked if the Prime Minister was concerned that the choices had not yet been made, the PMOS said that we would wait and see how matters progressed in the weeks to come. The Prime Minister had made very clear what he saw as the dangers of a multi-polar world and why he believed that a strategic partnership was the way forward. There was clearly a need for plain talking. The Prime Minister had made this clear. You could not do that and, when views were expressed, blanch when it happened. The Prime Minister had a good and mature relationship with President Putin. They were due to see each other in St Petersburg, then at the G8 Summit in France in June, after which the President would be making a State visit to the UK.

Middle East

Asked to confirm reports that the Middle East 'road map' would be published today, the PMOS said that the new Palestinian Cabinet was being sworn in today, following which the road map would be handed to the parties. It was not impossible that it would be published today. We would have to wait and see how things panned out. It went without saying that publication would be a significant moment to which the UK Government would doubtless wish to respond. As his colleague had underlined in yesterday's briefing, it was important to recognise that the road map was not the US's road map. It had been agreed by the Quartet compromising the EU, UN, Russia and the US.

Northern Ireland

Asked for a reaction to today's Times' report which had published details of leaked transcripts of conversations between Martin McGuinness and the Prime Minister's Chief of Staff, Jonathan Powell, and whether he would agree that they called into question Mr Powell's impartiality over Northern Ireland, the PMOS said that it wasn't our policy to comment on either intelligence issues or alleged leaked documents. The Government's energies, as ever, were focussed on trying to find a way forward on Northern Ireland. The Prime Minister was meeting David Trimble again later today as part of the ongoing contacts between the parties. As all the parties in Northern Ireland recognised, Mr Powell was someone who had put a huge amount of energy and effort into the process, along with other members of the British and Irish Governments. Asked if he would agree that the revelations were embarrassing given we were at such a critical stage in the process, the PMOS said that from the very outset everyone had been focussing their attention on trying to implement the Good Friday Agreement (GFA) in its entirety. That remained our focus. While we had made significant progress, 'acts of completion' were still required.

Asked if a definitive statement on the status of the Assembly elections would be made, the PMOS said that May 29 was the date in the diary. There was no other date.

Iraq

Asked for a reaction to yesterday's incident in Falluja yesterday in which a number of Iraqis were reported to have been killed, the PMOS said that the matter was being looked into. He had nothing further to add to what had been said about this matter yesterday.

Foundation Hospitals

Asked how significant the Prime Minister believed the forthcoming vote on foundation hospitals to be, the PMOS said the Prime Minister believed passionately that, at a time when record resources were going into the NHS, that money had to be tied to reform. If reform was not allied to the additional investment, it was clear that the change which everyone wanted to see would not come about. The Prime Minister would continue to put the argument for this policy, which he believed was right. Foundation hospitals should also be seen alongside a range of other reforms to the health service, such as the extension of choice for cardiac patients, diagnostic and treatment centres and the expansion in the numbers of doctors and nurses. He was obviously very passionate about public service reform and, as he had said on Monday, he did not believe that now was the time to trim on reform. On the contrary - it was the time to push ahead.

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