NYC 9/11 Public Portal Document

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Mayor Giuliani, his voice breaking, told the group at yesterday's FDNY promotion ceremonies: "I want you to know the prayers of every single New Yorker, I believe every single American, are with you." Reuters

The Next Intelligence Test

What is there to say about America's far-flung, incredibly expensive intelligence-gathering apparatus, other than that last week — when it truly mattered — the spooks were out to lunch?

Literally *billions* of tax dollars each year go to support America's vast spying network — a primary purpose of which is to avert just the kind of calamity that prevailed last week.

How is it possible that the CIA and FBI, with such tremendous resources, had no clue that 19 terrorists were planning for years — on American soil, under the very noses of the supposed watchdogs — such an intricate attack as was carried out last Tuesday?

Surely, in the course of executing their plan, the perpetrators would have done *something* to blow their cover and tip off the G-men.

Think about it:

■ The hijackers actually attended flight school in America.

■ And they managed to board and overpower crews of four separate planes, each carefully selected for their large quantities of fuel and relatively light passenger loads as they flew to their targets, arriving almost simultaneously.

Incredible.

What's more, terror chief Osama bin Laden actually made *public* threats hinting of the attack just three weeks before it happened.

It's true, as Vice President Cheney said yesterday, that "our intelligence is never going to be 100 percent effective."

But 0 percent just doesn't cut it.

Yes, it is far too early to know what specific mistakes were made and whether *any* intelligence operation could have uncovered this particular plot and prevented the disaster.

And, most important, this catastrophic failure shouldn't diminish the numerous, tremendous successes it's racked up. It's in the nature of covert operations that the losses often become all too public, while the wins are shrouded in secrecy.

It's also important to place the colossal intelligence mess-up into perspective.

Gradually, over the past three decades, covert intelligence gathering fell from favor in America. Satellite surveillance yes; on-the-ground spying, no.

In the '70s, monitoring of anti-war protesters roused fierce political attacks by the left against federal agents. The CIA's role in trying to destabilize pro-Soviet regimes during the Cold War drew more resentment.

During the '90s, with the end of that war and expectations of a "peace dividend," support for spies further drooped.

The result: A number of "reforms" that hamstrung intelligence agents.

President Ford ruled out assassinations of foreign leaders. In 1995, Congress passed a law requiring spies to deal only with "clean" sources — that is, those with no serious criminal records. (Thank New Jersey Democratic Sen. Robert Torricelli for *that* bit of nonsense, of course.)

Last week's horror surely pointed up the utter folly in America's treatment of spying. And intelligence is only going to become more important now, as villains seek to top the enormous feat pulled off last week.

Washington needs to repudiate its self-imposed restrictions in this realm — before there's another intelligence "failure."

Power to the spooks.

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