

**EPISODE 500**

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**[00:00:00] AH:** I think it's quite fitting that this is the first and studio podcast that I'm doing with you, as the very first historian and curator here at the International Spy Museum. Yeah, thanks for taking the time.

**[00:00:14] AA:** I'm more than happy to do so, Andrew, and it's nice to see you in the flesh.

**[00:00:19] AH:** So, I think the first thing, I guess it's one of those classic 9/11 questions. Where was Alexis Albion on the morning of Tuesday, September 11, 2001?

**[00:00:31] AA:** Well, of course, I do remember it very well. I think one thing that most people remember about the day was an absolutely gorgeous, beautiful day. I was in Cambridge, Massachusetts. I was in graduate school at the time, working on a PhD in international history. I had a friend, a fellow grad student staying with me at the time, actually. And we went for a run together by the Charles River. I remember it being absolutely beautiful, perfect sort of day, early, full day for a run.

We got back to my apartment, I took a shower, and then when I got out of the shower, it was probably around nine o'clock, 9 AM, something like that. My friend said, "I heard something on the radio about plane flying into the World Trade Center. I remember thinking, "Gosh, that sounds very visual. Let's turn on the TV." And then of course, we spent the next three hours or so just watching TV and watching it unfold.

One of the things that I recall is I really had no idea who Osama bin Laden was. My colleague, who is actually a fellow historian, and he did Middle Eastern history, Middle East and legal history, I think she actually knew something about Al-Qaeda and Bin Laden. I just say that because I guess I thought of myself as a pretty informed person. But I had never heard of Bin Laden than I think most Americans really hadn't. So, that kind of shock of what was happening, and then just to be learning about this threat that apparently had been around for a while, was

really – it was sort of overwhelming, and as I think it was, for many Americans, many people around the world.

**[00:02:05] AH:** How did you live out the rest of that day as a student of international history, as a human being, or as an American, or all of the above?

**[00:02:15] AA:** Yeah, I remember sort of around midday sort of thinking, “Okay, it looks like it's over.” Because as anyone remembers, things kept happening and we didn't know how, if there was going to be another attack in another location. But I remember around noon, it seemed like the attack was over, the towers had both fallen. I was supposed to have a lunch, a brown bag, sort of lunch discussion that day. I remember thinking, Should I go? Or shouldn't I? I don't know. I think it seemed like the world have changed. So, is my regular schedule still happening?

I remember thinking well, so I think I'll go. I remember walking outside, I remember the streets seems so empty in Cambridge. I believe they had fighter planes over Boston, and you could kind of hear them in the sky. I remember sort of walking to this lunch point, I think a few of us turned up, as actually a group of people involved in the Center for National Affairs. And I think we just kind of sat around and ate our sandwiches and taught, and everyone was kind of in a bit of shock. I do remember getting together with some friends that evening, to have a drink in a bar. It seemed important, I think, to kind of keep those human connections and do that kind of thing that day.

**[00:03:33] AH:** When did you find out about the connection to Boston Logan airport?

**[00:03:38] AA:** I don't know. That's a good question. I don't remember. I actually do not remember. I don't remember if that came out that day, or I think we were all sort of pinned to the news over the next week or so as more information came out. I honestly just don't remember when those kinds of specific details did start to come out when we started to learn the name, Muhammad Otter, and so on, and the people connected with the flight from Boston. I don't remember those details exactly. But you're right. Yeah. So it was that connection with where I was living, which made it all sort of seem more personal and more eerie.

**[00:04:12] AH:** Did you have any friends or family in New York?

**[00:04:14] AA:** I did have friends in New York. I remember trying to make a call that day, to see if he was alright. People I went to college with who died that day in New York City. I think actually, the closest connection in a way was one of my students who I was her thesis advisor that year. She was a senior at Harvard. Her cousin died that day, and she had been very, very close to her. They were almost like sisters. She was really devastated. I remember I we kept our meetings when we would meet to talk about her thesis and she really wasn't sure if she wanted to do a thesis that year and I said, "That's fine. Let's just meet. Let's just chat. Let's just talk."

We were quite close and we got along very well. I mean, I just I think that was really my closest connection of just seeing somebody who had been really, really affected by that and like did convince her to carry on and do her thesis and that was important in that she, her cousin, would we want her to do that.

**[00:05:16] AH:** besides being charming and intelligent, which is a good enough reason to chat, one of the reasons that we're having this particular conversation is with regards to intelligence in 9/11. And what the listeners can't see, as at the moment, a copy of the 9/11 Commission Report is on the table between Alexis and I. So, can you just walk us up to how you get involved with 9/11 commission?

**[00:05:44] AA:** Well, I left graduate school in 2002, a year later, actually to take a job at the International Spy Museum, which had just been built, and it just opened and they were looking for a historian and I was the very first historian. So, I'd moved to DC in 2002. The 9/11 Commission was sort of just getting set up in, I think early – there was a lot of discussions about it, obviously, and the legislation went forth and just set that up. I think, in early 2003. It was in February 2003, that I got an email, actually from Philip Zelikow, who had been appointed the executive director of the Commission.

He had been a professor at Harvard at the Kennedy School of Public Policy, who I had gotten to know. I'd actually done one of my fields of study with him at the Kennedy School. I was in history department, but I was really interested in policy. So, I wanted to do a field of study outside of the history department. I studied with him doing a field in American Foreign Policy. Philip is a historian himself. He was very close to one of my advisors, Professor Ernest May,

who had also sort of had one foot in the world of academia and the world of policy, and had been very interested in intelligence.

So, I think my association with both of those men helped put my name in the heart as somebody who might be good to work on the commission. I got an email from Philip, actually happened to be in Cambridge at that time. I said, "Yeah, let's talk." I went over and met in a coffee shop, he asked me if I'd like to serve on the Commission, told me something about it, something about what I would be doing. I remember taking the train back to DC and calling him back the next day and saying, "Yes, I'd certainly like to be considered. I'd be very interested in doing that."

I don't know why it took so long to think about it, but I think it was sort of a shock. I hadn't expected that to happen. But it was kind of a no brainer, when you get an opportunity to take part in something like that. Yes, of course, I was going to do it. But I think, apart from my association with Philip Zelikow, I think one of the interesting things about the Commission and about the Commission's report was that, from the very beginning, it had been the vision of the chair and vice chair of the Commission, that was Tom Kane, and Lee Hamilton to produce a report that would be read. That sounds like something very obvious, but it wasn't at the time. You have to remember that Commission reports and Blue Ribbon reports and all this kind of thing, often produced – these Commission's produce reports that then sat on shelves and accumulated dust and we're not written really with the public in mind.

But from the very beginning, the Chair and Vice Chair knew that the work of the Commission was important for informing the public. Obviously, a Commission reported to the President, but I think they really saw this as a Commission whose work really needed to serve the American public. So, there was a vision of producing a report that would be read by Americans, that would be studied in every high school in America, that would be in every library that people would buy in a bookstore and read.

So, Philip Zelikow, who was the executive director, when he was looking for staff, I think he was really thinking about staffers who could write, who could do research and write a compelling narrative. As a historian himself, that's something he did. I think he was attracted to people who had that kind of training as well, as I did as a historian. I had another colleague of mine, who I worked with was also had a PhD in history and in journalism, and we bore a lot of the burden of

the writing of the report. So, I think that emphasis on writing and writing clear, compelling narrative was there from the very, very beginning.

**[00:09:51] AH:** I wanted, again to your work on the report, a little bit more, but before that, how did you first get interested in studying intelligence and what did you study?

**[00:10:00] AA:** I actually ended up writing a dissertation on Anglo American relations during the 1960s. I was particularly interested in the perception of intelligence. So, what the British public and American public knew and thought about, what their intelligence agencies were doing, and responded to that, and how the intelligence agencies responded to the public as well. How did I get interested in that? Again, I think I was kind of serendipitous.

I went to Harvard to study with a wonderful Professor of International Relations **[inaudible 00:10:34]**. And then again, Ernest May, was also my advisor, and he was very interested in intelligence. I did a seminar with him. I knew about his interest in intelligence. It seemed interesting to me. I had done a seminar where I kind of dug into that, and I really had so much fun, I think, learning about that topic, and the sources and so on. I kind of got interested in that. I was really interested in the decade of the 1960s, which seemed such a fascinating period to me. I'm an American, but I actually grew up in England, and I thought, "Anglo American relations. Yes, that's interesting, because that's really me." So, I kind of connected the US-British area with the intelligence and the 1960s and just kind of kept running with it.

**[00:11:24] AH:** Where did you come out on the other side, the main findings or the main conclusions of your research?

**[00:11:29] AA:** Yeah, I mean, I was really interested in this idea of the perception of intelligence. I think one of the interesting conclusions was looking at how the extent to which the CIA cared about their reputation, about their image, and MI6, as well, and how they might try to actually shape that perception. I think what came out of it for me, was that a real importance, I think, of public oversight of intelligence in a democracy to kind of have a really, really big theme, which ended up fitting in unbelievably well with actually the work of the 9/11 Commission, one of these area things where you sort of think it was my fate to do this.

But I got very, very interested, I think, in this idea of how important it is for the public to understand what their government is doing in terms of intelligence. It's important for a democracy to recognize that that public support of intelligence activities is really essential.

**[00:12:30] AH:** Just pivoting back to the 9/11 Commission Report, so you were brought in specifically to look at the intelligence angle?

**[00:12:38] AA:** The mandate that the Commission was given. I mean, it was very specific what the Commission was asked to do, and at the same time, incredibly broad. They were asked to look at the 9/11 tax, but the circumstances surrounding it, why'd it happened. They were supposed to be looking at the context in which it happened. So, looking both before and actually a little bit after the 9/11 attacks, and the law that actually authorized the commission to do this specified specific areas in which the commission was supposed to do investigations, everything. So, from border security, to aviation, to the work of the FBI, all sorts of areas.

The way that the Commission staff was organized was in a number of different teams to look at these very different areas. I was assigned to a team that was looking at counterterrorism policy, US counterterrorism policy before 9/11. The way we organize ourselves on that team, was different individuals were put in charge of looking at different agencies, different departments. I was assigned, I was given the CIA. So, what was the CIA doing before 9/11 to counter the threat from Al-Qaeda and Bin Laden? So, that was really my portfolio.

Yes, I was given this and I think, because I had already done some, obviously research and intelligence in the 1960s, not in the 1990s, that was different. But I guess I was sort of familiar with structures and jargon and vocabulary and things like that.

**[00:14:08] AH:** So, you're focusing on the CIA. You mentioned the '90s there, it's mainly the '90s things that you're looking at?

**[00:14:14] AA:** Why did this happen? We were supposed to be looking when did the CIA, when was the agency aware of this threat from Al-Qaeda? When did they learn about Bin Laden? What did they know about him? So yes, I think we started looking kind of in the early to mid-1990s, which, I believe, the CIA had set up a particular unit within the Counter-Terrorism

Center focused on Bin Laden. Sorry, I can't remember exactly the date. It was the mid-1990s, so you had to pick a starting point at some place. So, it was that obviously, going all the way up into the 9/11 itself, and then again, we also looked a little bit after 9/11 as well, the response to it.

**[00:14:58] AH:** For our listeners that either were born at the time or his memories are rusty, just give us like a primer, what was the CIA up to before 9/11 in the time period that you've discussed?

**[00:15:11] AA:** The agency was really, on top of this, I think more than any other part of the US government. As I said, the agency was aware of Bin Laden in the mid-1990s. They saw him mostly as a financier of terrorism. He was obviously a wealthy Saudi, who had the money to finance terrorism. They had their eyes on him, and actually set up a special unit within the Counter-Terrorism Center, which already existed to specifically look at Bin Laden. It was a bit of an experimental station, they call it Alec Station. But they were really focused on Bin Laden.

So, they were investigating, keeping their eyes on him, looking for connections. And of course, that grew and they were following him to the extent that they were able to follow his movements. When he moved to Afghanistan, for example, they had his eyes on him. So, the agency was on top of this, I said, I think more than any other agency and actually did start to even target him in the second half of the 1990s, and came up with a number of different operations to try to target him to either capture or at a later point even kill him. These obviously didn't happen for a number of different reasons. But there was quite a bit of activity going on in the agency on that front.

**[00:16:40] AH:** What did you find? Did you find that the people in Alec Station were obviously just by definition of their purpose, they were very focused on this issue? How far up the hierarchy did you find this interest going?

**[00:16:56] AA:** It went all the way up to Director of Central Intelligence with George Tenet at the time. Of course, even over at the National Security Council, where Richard Clarke was the counterterrorism chief there. He had been working with counterterrorism for the Clinton administration and stayed on actually during the Bush administration as well. We certainly see

that focus on terrorism on transnational terrorism, and then increasingly, the focus on Al-Qaeda and on Bin Laden himself increasing during the late '90s. It certainly became the interest of George Tenet and Richard Clarke, and yes, became an obsession, I would say, leading up to 9/11.

Leading up to 9/11, George Tenet, in fact announced the agency was at war with Al-Qaeda. They certainly saw that as a primary, if not the primary threat.

**[00:17:52] AH:** George Tenet has got quite an interesting take on all of this in his book *At the Center of the Storm*, but he's quite an interesting figure, because he's there for the transition from Clinton over to Bush. So, as someone that studied this and looked into it, what's your read on George Tenet? I mean, the Director of Central Intelligence, obviously has a very important role in all of this. So, what's your take on him?

**[00:18:16] AA:** Yes. Well, he's a very interesting man. I think that fact that he stayed on the job was there for quite a long period of time, and after 9/11, as well, is really very important. I said that. I do believe that the CIA was doing more than any other part of the US government to counter the threat from Al-Qaeda and from Bin Laden. But I think it's important to say that, despite all of that, and despite all our activities, they still failed. In my opinion, they failed. Because is it not the job of our intelligence community, to protect us American citizens, from exactly what happened on 9/11, from attack? That is the job. It is to provide that warning to keep us safe.

That's, I think, what we expect our intelligence community to do, quite rightly. I'm not saying that's an easy thing to do at all. The fact that this country was attacked on 9/11, and around 3,000 people died, I think, means that we failed. It was an intelligence failure there. I think George Tenet would not see it that way. He did not see it that way. I think his argument was, but we were trying so much. Look at everything that we did. And that's absolutely true, that they were doing an enormous amount and they were putting a lot of effort into that. But I think they still failed.

Now, I think the contrast here, you might look at the FBI. So, the FBI certainly failed as well. With regard to 9/11 FBI is responsible for domestic intelligence. There were 9/11 hijackers who

were in the country, in the United States before 9/11. Some of them had been known by the Bureau, known about their terrorists' connections. Why did we not know they were there? Why were we not following them? Why did we not know about the plot? I think the FBI failed in that respect.

But Robert Mueller, who was the director of the FBI, came on board as director on September 4 of 2001, literally a week before the attacks, and I think it was much easier for him, I think, to say, "Look, the Bureau is going to make some changes." In fact, by the time the Commission was set up, in 2003, Mueller was able to come and talk to the commissioners and say, "These are the changes we're already making. We're shifting the focus of the Bureau, more toward counterterrorism, more toward domestic intelligence, much more focused on criminal activities."

So, I think in that way, Mueller was able to talk the commissioners and say, "Look, we're already focused on this." So, the recommendations of the report with regard to the bureau are actually quite few and basically say, "Keep doing what you're doing." There was a whole question out there, I think people may not remember or may not recognize, as to whether we needed to have – the Bureau needed to be completely reorganized. In fact, maybe we needed a new domestic intelligence organization, whether the Bureau was going to be basically taken apart. But I think Mueller was able to come in and say, "Look, those mistakes weren't my Bureau. I'm taking the bureau forward into this sort of new age of terrorist threat. And we're going to be focused on countering that threat."

George Tenet didn't have that same ability to do that. I know there was quite a lot of resentment with regard to the Commission's recommendations about the CIA and about the role of the DCI as well as the Director of Central Intelligence, exactly because George Tenet would have said, "Look, we were doing so much. What more could we have done?" I think that inability to admit failure, I think that was a failing of George Tenet to be able to sort of say, "Look, we made mistakes. There was more we should have done." And I think that kind of helps to explain why the recommendations of the report regarding the intelligence community, a lot of them actually are focused on the role of the DCI and creating this role of the Director of National Intelligence, which basically took away the role of the DCI in being in charge of the community, the intelligence community more generally.

I think that has something to do the personality of George Tenet, in wanting to stay on at the CIA, and in wanting to defend the activities of the agency, which are admirable, but at the same time not being, I think, to recognize that actually, there were real failures, and there were changes that needed to be made. He's an interesting character. I see him as somebody who wanted everybody to like him.

So, one of the interesting things in our investigations, and in the interviews, we were doing was, there were certain projects or certain operations, which had been proposed and then ended up not happening. It took some digging to figure out, why didn't they happen? Who made that decision? We often found is that the working level, people at the CIA, people thought that, an operation had been shut down at the White House level. I mean, the National Security Council, because George Tenet was telling them, "Look, I told them, you know, we got to do this, but they don't want to go ahead. You guys are great, but the higher ups aren't going to go with it."

And then when we talked to people at the National Security Council, it's like, "George told us it was too risky, we shouldn't go ahead." So, I think in many ways, Tenet was trying to sort of play it both ways that make everybody happy. Actually, through the work of the Commission, I think there were people at the working level at CIA whose opinion of George Tenet changed, and said, "Wow, I thought he was on our side, but find out that actually, he was saying something quite different, perhaps, to the policy guys over the White House." So, I think he's very charismatic, obviously, very bright guy, an interesting person, but yeah, I think in many ways, a flawed, flawed individual, as are we all, of course.

I have noticed that since he left that position, since the Bush administration has ended, he has been a little bit more candid, I would say, in some of the things he has said. Clearly, it might be easier to say that when you're out of office. I wouldn't say he's changed his story, exactly. But I think he's been a little bit more forthcoming and clearer in some of the things he has said.

**[00:24:51] AH:** One of the things that I'm trying to get a sense of here is, what was your read on where the buck would start? I'm just thinking like, if I was George Tenet, playing devil's advocate, and I hear this, I'm like, well, if I'm playing for a basketball team, and I'm out there sweating buckets and screaming out at my teammates, to help me win the game, and they just don't want to go along. There's only so much that I can do unless the coach steps in, i.e. the

President, and the President, he's the ultimate source of the person that's meant to protect the American people. So, does more of the blame really lie on the doorstep of Clinton and Bush as opposed to Tenet? I mean, like the scapegoat or someone, but I'm just trying to get a sense of Harry Truman's phrase like where there's a buck stop? Or is it just systemic failure? Or can it be both?

**[00:25:44] AA:** I think it can be both. I mean, these are all really interesting questions and I think things that you can discuss endlessly. I can sort of look at specific examples where, yeah, the buck stops at the president.

So, in the late 1990s, '98, '99, there are specific occasions when the CIA has eyes on Bin Laden, right? Or they actually had reporting coming from tribal sources in Afghanistan, that they had seen Bin Laden, they knew where he was. And when this intelligence is deemed to be, the sources are supposed to be good, are solid, this information gets spun up all the way, on a number of occasions, all the way to the White House. There's an emergency meeting of the principals to discuss whether or not they should lob a cruise missile, and try to take out Bin Laden. These are all documented in the report of a number of occasions.

There's discussion amongst the principals there that the Secretary of State, defense, George Tenet is at the table as well. Of course, Bill Clinton, this is during the Clinton administration. And ultimately, it is the President who gets to decide whether or not they should go ahead or not.

Now, obviously, with the advice of all his advisors there, and George Tenet is an incredibly important source of advice at the table there. One of the big discussions about that role of the DCI, of the Director of Central Intelligence that was Tenet was is he acting in the capacity of a policy maker or not? George Tenet would always say, "I don't make policy, I just give information. That's why I'm the advisor to the President on intelligence." Yet, at the same time, it's really sort of hard to differentiate those two roles. If the President is turning to his director of CIA and saying, "What do you think is the likelihood that Bin Laden is in this location right now and it's going to be there for the next 24 to 48 hours? In the amount of time, I need to spin up those cruise missiles and try to take him out." And he says, "Yeah, you know, 50% chance, 25% chance." I mean, that is influencing actions.

So, I think, we had lots of discussions about those roles, and whether you can really differentiate them and Tenet was always saying, "Look, it's not my role. I don't make policy." In that situation you could say, "President is the one who said, don't go, it's too risky. Can't do it. I don't know if he's going to be there. I don't know if you trust the sources, collateral damage. Think about the international repercussions." All those many, many, many different considerations to be made. There are considerations that the President is making at his level, which somebody, Director of Central Intelligence isn't looking at, probably not thinking about the domestic repercussions, perhaps if we, and if United States tries to take out Bin Laden, he's not actually there. You end up killing hundreds of people in Afghanistan, and you take out a mosque.

I mean, there's lots of different risks that are involved and that is the role of the President to be weighing all those up and deciding. Because ultimately, the blame, or the glory, I suppose is going to be on him. So, I think it's a a complicated question. But I guess, there is some clarity of saying the buck stops on the President's desk. I think you can look at a situation like that, and say, and look at the different roles that individuals have in that situation, but it is the President who says, if he says, go do it, then Secretary of Defense goes back and tells people and they spin up the missiles and people are going to die. And the President says, "No, don't do it. Then it's not and perhaps the United States missed an opportunity to take out Bin Laden years before 9/11."

**[00:29:41] AH:** I mean, it's a really fascinating issue. One of the things that strikes me just when you were speaking there, like if you look at George Tenet, if you look at directors of Central Intelligence, a lot of the ones that we can think of just off the top of my head, they can fall into the Donovan's disciples camp people like, **[inaudible 00:30:05]**, people like Colby, people that were in this OSS, people that were in the war that, would later go on to be DCIS. Then there's like the senior military officers like Stansfield Turner, David Petraeus. But George Tenet is neither of those. For people that are a bit rusty on this, give us like a pen portrait of Tenet and more specifically, how does this figure become the DCI?

**[00:30:30] AA:** Yeah, I believe Tenet's background had been on Capitol Hill. His background has been as a staffer, I'm sorry, I'm trying to remember. I think he'd been staffed, the Senate and intelligence committee. So, someone who's much more probably than the individuals, you

mentioned, understanding how government works, right? And the legal side of things, and also sort of understanding the policy side of things, those relationships, the structures, the institutions, then he comes over to CI, believe he spends some time as Deputy Director of Central Intelligence and becomes the DCI.

I think he was very familiar with how policies work, right? So, he does have a very different background. And I think it's one that fits in very well with what we've been talking about as his understanding of how to – and the relationships with people, seems to be very important part, I think of his work. Clearly, somebody who had been kept on by George Bush, after having served in the Clinton administration, that doesn't happen so often. It's usually seen as more of a kind of a political position, and that the new president wants his or her, their own person in place at the CIA. I think, obviously speaks to George Tenet and his personality, that Bush had confidence in him and kept him on when he became president, and then after 9/11, as well.

I think it's important to talk about the CIA's role after 9/11. Obviously, within days after 9/11 attacks, Tenet was able to present a plan for invading Afghanistan to President Bush, they had plans on the table way before the Department of Defense. So, I mean, I think that's important to say, their understanding of a situation in Afghanistan, the knowledge, the history of the CIA. Again, I think the CIA and Tenet's focus on Al-Qaeda and Bin Laden is irrefutable.

So, I think, perhaps he was the right person at that time to understand how the government needed to work together. And yet, at the same time, there was a failure there. I think that's really important to acknowledge, to provide the warning that would have been needed to prevent those attacks. I think, I know, George Tenet would say he absolutely provided warning that his hair was on fire, that the system was blinking red, all these sorts of tropes that are in the report that we talk about these days. And absolutely, he was screaming about the threat from Al-Qaeda, and yet that tactical warning, which is so important, where an attack would happen, when, who and so on. Clearly, there was a failure there and the CIA bears responsibility there, as does the FBI, as to other areas of government as well.

**[00:33:24] AH:** Just thinking about some of the backstory of 9/11, so the embassy bombings in '98, USS call in 2000. I'm wondering if you can help us piece together the intelligence mosaic? You mentioned the FBI have a particular role when it comes to intelligence or

counterintelligence. We've got the CIA have a particular role. How does the CIA fit within this broader mosaic? So, thinking of the USS call NCIS, the FBI, help us understand the intelligence landscape that the CIA as a part of in that kind of period?

**[00:34:01] AA:** Well, I mean, obviously, the CIA is responsible for foreign intelligence. CIA is not supposed to operate within the United States. The FBI is responsible for domestic intelligence. Although FBI does have stations abroad, it is domestic focused in that sense. I think what's important to understand in this period is that this idea of transnational terrorism is something that is new in the 1990s is just kind of starting up. The Cold War ends in 1989, right? It's a whole new era and the post-Cold War. Terrorism, obviously, had been around for a long time, but it was mostly thought of in terms of state sponsored terrorism. So, their understanding of terrorism, from Iran, for example, and so on.

There's a growing understanding during the Clinton administration of this new idea of transnational terrorist network, something like Al-Qaeda. Al-Qaeda is a terrorist network. It's a group that is not sponsored by any particular state whatsoever. And you see that growing during the 1990s. What it means is that this kind of disconnect between foreign and domestic becomes increasingly sort of unrealistic, they become much more entwined. The US intelligence community hadn't really been set up, I guess, for this new transnational age.

Obviously, there's a growing understanding of it. Obviously, there is communication between these different elements in the intelligence community. But I think the extent to which they needed to work together, to which that threat was really entwined between the foreign domestic, that foreign domestic actually became sort of an unrealistic idea that they were separate. That is something I think, after 9/11 becomes absolutely obvious, there was a whole discussion that happened after 9/11, and during the course of the Commission about a so-called wall between the FBI and the CIA. They were not allowed to share information.

That's not actually true. But there are certain areas in which they weren't allowed to share information, and this has to do with the separate roles of these agencies. Obviously, the FBI is often looking at criminal matters, and they weren't allowed to share particular information with other agencies. But there obviously wasn't enough sharing of information, there was some misunderstanding within the agencies themselves about how much information they were

actually allowed to share. They were allowed to share information. I didn't know that they were. There were rivals, we read between them, and so on.

So, that is part of this intelligence landscape. But it has to do more with the understanding of the national security, national security threats in general and the way that the world was changing. So, after 9/11, we live in an age now where information sharing became just a huge matter, where we've got something like the NCTC. It was set up after 9/11, the National Counterterrorism Center where we literally had analysts from all different parts of the national security, in the government, FBI, CIA, Homeland Security, sitting in the same space, actually, sharing information, able to work together. That was something that was immediately recognized, needed to be done, before 9/11, who saw the benefits of that. But really, the threat landscape changed and our government needed to change as well, to respond to that.

**[00:37:33] AH:** One of the things that struck me when you were talking there was your training as a historian. Do you think that in the future, people are just going to look back on this? And say, well, I mean, it's so obvious in retrospect, the whole structure of the world was changing, increasingly interconnected, not information, society and knowledge, economy, and these structures that were set up during the Cold War. Of course, they were lagging behind. Of course, they weren't sharing information. I guess I'm trying to say how much do you think some of the individuals that are maybe part of the story that actions that didn't take lead to the series of events? And how much of it do you think can just be more on the structures?

**[00:38:26] AA:** I think there are arguments to be made for both of those. There was institutional failure and individual failure as well. Obviously, they're linked. I think one of the interesting things is that when the Bush administration comes in, they're certainly aware of Al-Qaeda. They are briefed about that, briefed about Bin Laden by the outgoing Clinton administration. And yet, they have a different view about terrorism and they want to go through the motions of actually building up their own national security, priorities and so on.

So, this was a big argument, obviously, with the 9/11 attacks. Did the Bush administration drop the ball? We look very closely at these briefing sessions during that transition from the Clinton to the Bush administration. What did Richard Clarke, the counterterrorism czar at the NSC, what did he actually say to Condoleezza Rice? He told her, "Al-Qaeda is your number one priority

here.” Did Condoleezza Rice accept that? Did she believe that? Did they go along with that, and so on?

Actually, something interesting happened to me on the Commission. There was sort of tasking that came down from Lee Hamilton. I'm not sure how it came to me, but it did, which was to look at speeches that President Clinton had made about terrorism, and look at speeches that President Bush, candidate Bush, humorously, had made about terrorism, and sort of look at the way in which they talked about that threat.

So, I spent a couple days reading all these speeches and writing up sort of a memo about it. There was actually, was a very, very clear difference. You could see through the Clinton administration, a growing understanding, again of that transnational threat that we weren't talking about, so much talking about Iran and North Korea. We're really talking about a group like Al-Qaeda, and a non-state sponsored threat. You can see that in his speeches, and the way that he talks about threat.

If you look at the speeches of candidate, George W. Bush, he is really talking about state sponsored terrorism, Iraq, obviously, Iran, North Korea, and so on. It makes sense because his national security advisors are mostly from his father's administration, Dick Cheney, Don Rumsfeld, again, this isn't post right after the Cold War '88 to '92. This is a time when that was in the state sponsored threat, that was really the way in which terrorism was much more characterized. He, kind of, his administration, saw the world through that lens.

Now, I think, you can see obviously, throughout the administration, a growing understanding of the importance of transnational threats and so on. But to a large extent, that was their starting point when they came into office, which also, there was a delay, because of the extraordinary election of 2000, such that the transition period was shortened. The Bush administration was not able to get key people in place until a little bit later. So, by the time they're really kind of in play, starting to have these discussions at the deputy's level, at the principal's level, about their foreign policy and national security, priorities coming right up against 9/11. In fact, the first meeting of the principals, for secretaries of state, defense, those positions, happens on September 4, 2001, right before 9/11.

So, I think, they did see the world a little bit differently, or they're getting up to speed, happened in a different way. Their starting point was different. So, I'm trying to remember your question now. Going back, institutions versus individuals, right?

**[00:42:10] AH:** Not even institutions, even larger, much longer term, like processes, globalization. We've went from an era of, I should say, state sponsors, terrorism to this transnational threat that's almost – yeah, it's metamorphosize, from something to something else. And of course, the institutions never saw it, because no one really did.

**[00:42:34] AA:** I mean, it's a good point. I think, for me, because I'm so focused on our investigation, but absolutely, as time goes by, we look at this event, this extraordinary event in the broader sort of scope of history. Yeah, it fits in with that trend, quite perfectly in a way, yes. I think it probably is maybe almost easier for us to understand why it took time to adapt to a new world now than it maybe it was at the time when this sort of, you know, seems like such a – something that was so new, and happens so quickly. But you're right, you can see it developing over decades, and continuing to do so.

**[00:43:09] AH:** I know that you're really interested in ancient history and ancient Rome. I guess, I'm just like, trying to think about the Commission Report as a historical document. So, imagine this was produced when Augustus takes power, and then it's like, how do we go from the Old Republic to Augustus? And it looks the period from Cesar to Augustus. But actually, if you take a bigger lens, you can see the political instability that Rome was under, was something that had been a problem for a longer period of time. The way that generals would weaponize the political process for their own advancement was also a longer-term trend. So, there is these longer-term things that lead up to all the things that Caesar's had done with the – let's compress, say, 30-year period that we're maybe talking about, where you see this slight pivot. But actually, that's just the speeding up of something that's been happening for a much longer timeframe. So, I guess I'm just trying to kind of zoom out at the moment and think about the commission report as like a historical document. I know, it's difficult, and I'm not really sure where I'm going with some of this as well.

**[00:44:30] AA:** So, it's making me feel very old. I think you're absolutely right. I think there are also other ways to think about the report as a historical document. I mean, one of the

extraordinary things that happened with the report, in the Commission was we had – the Commission had public hearings televised where you could hear for example, Director of Central Intelligence, George Tenet, being questioned by the commissioners about covert action. That's really unprecedented. Asking the Director of Central Intelligence, again, anybody could watch this on TV anywhere in the world, by the way, we know that, for example, there was a lot of people watching, let's say, in the Middle East, about efforts by the CIA to capture or kill Osama Bin Laden.

That's pretty extraordinary to have that. I think, and against me this question of public oversight in a democracy of our intelligence, to what extent does the American public have that right, have that responsibility to question the actions of their intelligence community? Even about, the most secret of activities like covert action, to put the Director of Central Intelligence there in front of the commissioners that have asked them questions about these incredibly secret classified operations? That's really unprecedented. I think, how do you go back after something like that? How do you go back to we don't want to ask questions and secret? American public doesn't need to know.

I think, I happen to be – it's a really great service that the Commission did, that we need to ask questions about this. We should expect our public servants even in the intelligence community, to be ultimately responsible with American public about our actions. I think that's incredibly important, and I think the Commission's work has really opened up that door.

**[00:46:23] AH:** This is a thread that I wanted to pull on anyway. But just thinking about that as a historical document. Imagine, I am a historian 300 years in the future, and I've come across this and a history class, we're going to study 9/11. So, one of the things I want you to look at is this report where they ask these questions, and so forth. So, historian question 101, well, who was the executive director? This guy called Philip Zelikow. Who was Philip Zelikow? While he happened to be someone that had co-published with the National Security Advisor, who may or may not have not paid full attention to a series of important memos, seeing the the system was blinking red and America was going to be attacked. Or and by the way, that same executive director who went on to be Condoleezza Rice's counselor, when she became the Secretary of State.

I mean, 300 years in the future, that's one of the first things – I was like, just to go back to the ancient world, you look at Caesars, the Gallic wars. Now, there is history on there, but there's also something else going on. So, I guess the question is, as a historian, but also someone that was involved in the Commission report, help us get a sense of it.

**[00:47:45] AA:** I mean, I was very aware of that fact, and I think we were all very aware of that fact of that potential conflict of interests. Let's say, Philips role and so on, to take just a small step back, I think it's quite difficult to staff up something like this with qualified people. And very often, somebody who has some real important depth of knowledge about policymaking, about national security apparatus in the United States, is going to have served in an administration, for example.

So, I think, it's maybe impossible to find the perfect candidate who has no connections with anybody involved in this. That may have been – probably it's way too much to ask. Then again, obviously, the fact that he had served with Condi Rice, who happens to be National Security Advisor, you think, “Well, goodness, couldn't you avoid that?” I mean, yes, we were all very aware of that fact. And, I mean, the only thing I can tell you, I will tell you is that I know that I – and I feel pretty confident and actually speaking, at least for my colleagues, who are on my team, who I serve with, felt an enormous responsibility to try to get this right. I think we all remember 9/11. We're all affected by 9/11. The opportunity to get to investigate this attack, and to write a narrative to inform the American people about what happened. Obviously, this incredibly seriously.

This was a very, very stressful period of my life. I have to tell you, at recognizing that what I wrote, what I researched, the notes that I took, the questions I asked to people, this was important that we had to get it right. We had really one chance here to get it right and we took that seriously and we're absolutely, absolutely determined to make sure that everything that came out whether it was a staff statement that came out to the public during the public hearings, or made it into the report was something that we considered to be accurate and not biased in one way or another.

My team had public hearings, which I mentioned where we had these principal figures, Secretary of Defense in both the Clinton and the Bush administration, Security of State, National

Security Advisor, and so on, where they had to go to be questioned by the commissioners in these public hearings. We put out these staff statements as part of these hearings, which were sort of where we've come in our research basically now, and those sessions working on those went perhaps all night, and we wrangled over every single word. I'm not kidding. Every single word that was in those, and that would be between my team, between Philip Zelikow, our executive director, maybe other people who seen your figures. And of course, these were statements that came from the staff themselves, not from the commissioner's report. It comes from the commissioners, but this was the staff's findings.

Yeah, there were many sleepless nights, and really feelings of like, I don't know, if I can live with myself, if we let that phrase, go into the staff statement, I'm going to go back, and I'm going to have it out with Philip and we're going to change that. And all I can say to you is there is nothing that came out in those staff statements or in the report itself that I feel I'm uncomfortable with, which I don't think is accurate, that I think gives a wrong or warped sense of our research, our findings on how things happened. So, I guess that's all I can say.

I guess historians, historian of the future, looking back and saying, "Boy, look at Philip Zelikow, I would say, Commission isn't just Philip Zelikow. It's also about 85 members of staff, who were also very committed to making sure that this was done properly.

**[00:51:37] AH:** And just on that, I don't want to spend too much longer on this. But as an interesting issue that people have asked me. Yeah, I guess, did you ever feel like anyone's spiked your copy in journalism? Did anyone will lean on you? Or did you feel like you are, that's kind of inconvenient. Let's sweep that under the carpet?

**[00:52:00] AA:** Not at all. No, I did not feel like that. As I said, I was doing research on the CIA, that for a period of time, I was going into CIA headquarters every day, and sitting in an office, by myself and going through boxes and boxes and boxes of documents. I don't want to say the CIA was uncooperative, that's not true at all. But I think they weren't going to give me anything if I didn't ask for it. So, I don't think that's uncooperative. I think that was just there was caution there. But I don't remember there being any sort of documents that we asked for that we didn't get. I don't remember thinking that there were holes in document caches that I was getting. There were certain individuals who were a bit more closed than others, who were a bit more

careful in what they said, and others. Some quite understandably. There were some who insisted that they had their personal lawyers sitting in the room at the time.

But I don't feel that there was information that we didn't get. And I have to say that since the report came out the last 16 or so, 16, 17 years. I don't feel that there is really significant information that has come out that changes the story in any real way. I think there was some nuances. As I said, I think there have been some individuals who have been a bit more forthcoming and what they've said, but I don't think that's true. So, I would be very surprised, to be honest, if more information comes out, that really changes the story. Some documents or set of documents that was completely hidden or something like that. Some individual who says, "I wasn't allowed to say." There have been some of those stories. And I think when you look into it, there's really not much there.

So no, I don't feel that. Again, I think one of the extraordinary things about the report is that maybe people don't quite fully recognize this is – the report is a completely declassified report. There is no classified version and then declassified version as there is with most reports. There is only one version of the 9/11 Commission Report. You can buy it at any bookstore, find it at any library, and it is completely declassified. And that was done very deliberately not to want to come out with the reports that people thought, "Oh, there's stuff that's hidden that I'll never know." It was very important to the commissioners that report come out that everybody could read.

In a really, I think, probably unprecedented situation, when we were finishing the report, and there was quite a time crunch, by the way, we actually had representatives from each of the agencies involved, who came to our offices, and we're doing sort of real time declassification. And so, something I had written came back to me where they said, "No, you can't say that. You're not allowed to say that." I could actually go and sit down with that person and say, "Okay, you won't let me say this. How about this?" "Nope, you can't say that." "But how about this? What if we change the sentence around? What if we change a different word?"

So, literally, anything that had to be changed classification purposes in the published report, members of staff had been able to sit down and go through that. And I don't recall anybody sort of who wasn't pleased with the final result, or felt that what actually came out in the report that

there was anything that was hidden, anything significant and that was important. Obviously, there are names of individuals that had to be – weren't disclosed at the time, that are now out. But those weren't things that were so important that they change the story or change the story about what actually happened there. So no, I feel that what you get in that report is very much represents what we researched what people told us, and so on.

**[00:55:39] AH:** Yeah, I think just finally, on the Zelikow thing, I think that for those historians in the future, I think that I hear what you're saying about, there's a limited amount of people that can do this sort of stuff. But the optics aren't – when it's someone that's investigating the current sitting National Security Advisor. But anyway –

**[00:56:00] AA:** Actually, there was an interview with Philip Zelikow, actually, as well. I'm not sure what level of classification that is. It's in the National Archives. I don't know when that will come out. But that conflict of interest issue was certainly there. It was known. It was widely known. The commissioners knew about it and we did try to deal with it in the best way we possibly could. But yeah, I acknowledge that. But I would just say, I think you can focus so much on Philip, that you ignore everybody else.

**[00:56:31] AH:** So, you mentioned the amount of people on the commission, how many of you were though?

**[00:56:34] AA:** I think by the time we finished, I think it had grown to somewhere around 80-ish, 85, whatever. People did get added as we went along, as there were areas where we knew that we needed to put people on, but it ended up somewhere around that.

**[00:56:49] AH:** And tell us a little bit more about that. Like, where were you all best? Did you all go out for drinks? How long did it last?

**[00:56:57] AA:** So, we did have a – there was an office in New York City, where certain people were based, where it made more sense. So again, there was a team there that was investigating the emergency response on the actual day of 9/11. For example, I think members of those team were based there. Most people were based in Washington, DC, we had two offices, just the space, government buildings, where we were. But again, we had these teams,

so there were certain teams, in one office where I was, obviously the teams that may be needed to work together more were in the same location, and so on.

A lot of the members of the staff were detailed from different areas of government. All agencies that was important to have. People obviously had that knowledge. And then there were people like me, who were sort of outsiders came from academia, and so on. It was an extraordinary group of people. Obviously, it was one of the great privileges for me to work with those people and to get to meet really interesting people from all different areas with incredible sort of knowledge and, and work side by side with them.

**[00:57:57] AH:** How long did the work last?

**[00:58:00] AA:** A little bit more than a year. But I think the entire life of the Commission was probably about 18 months or something like that, then eventually did go back to the spy museum.

**[00:58:08] AH:** I'm glad you came back.

**[00:58:09] AA:** Thank you.

**[00:58:10] AH:** I can't believe we've been sitting on this story this whole time. I don't know why this hasn't been a podcast like 10 years ago. But anyway, one of the things I was just thinking there, a lot of my research has looked at the Soviet Afghan war, and there was this argument about 9/11 and being blowback. So, as the unintended consequences of funding the Mujahideen and during the 1980s, and that whole argument. You've sown the dragon's teeth, and now, Afghanistan, the fields there, and America and the West, ignore Afghanistan after it's done what they needed to do, and they will leave and they walk away. And then they come back. George W. Bush even talks about this and has memoirs, *Decision Points*, America, we just walked away and left Afghanistan.

So anyway, one of the things that I've thought a lot about as what thread we can draw from the Afghanistan war, the Soviet Union was involved and through to 9/11, and also this idea of blowback. So, this is stuff that I have had to deal with all the time. There's a whole variety of

some people willfully misinformed. Some people, I think, drawing the wrong conclusions from the evidence, and so forth. But I just wonder if you had thought about that, or if that's something that you looked up because the CIA were obviously very heavily involved in the Soviet Afghan war. And then, after 9/11, the CIA are heavily involved again. In fact, one of the few parts of the US government that still has some kind of eyes on Afghanistan, as the CIA. So, the CIA is one of the few constants in the story. Just help us walk through the connections between the CIA on the Soviet Afghan war, and the CIA afterwards and the idea of blowback.

**[01:00:06] AA:** Again, it's sort of how far back does the 9/11 story begin? That's basically what you're talking about. And going back to the Commission, we had to pick a starting date. We had to sort of making those very initial document requests, everything you've got about Bin Laden starting at this date, where do you start? And we had to make a decision about when to start, and we didn't go all the way back. We had to pick a time.

**[01:00:34] AH:** You should go back to the –

**[01:00:35] AA:** We had to pick a time. That's kind of a specific question they're asking about, we just weren't able to go back that far. Although, others have and there was actually, we had a side sort of contractor who was actually looking at the history, American counterterrorism efforts and looked into that, and that was sort of a bigger project that could accompany the report and put it in bigger context. They were looking more at that question.

But I think one of the things you mentioned was important that the one reason why the CIA actually was able to go into Afghanistan so quickly after 9/11 and have people on the ground there, was because they had deep roots, actually in Afghanistan that went all the way back to the 1980s. That there were relationships there with tribal leaders, and someone that had been ongoing, and there were individuals like Hank Crompton, for example, who had spent time with these people, and that there was trust, was a relationship there even during the '90s, that the CIA was able to draw on. It's because of that experience that they had during the 1980s.

I think the record is pretty clear that after the fall of the Soviet Union, after the end of the Afghan Soviet war, to a large extent, this CIA with the United States withdrew. I think, in retrospect, was that a good idea? But at the time, it seemed like that was not a priority threat area for the United

States anymore. The Cold War was over. The Soviet Union had collapsed. United States only has so many resources. In fact, the resources of the CIA were diminished, because it seemed like the threat had diminished, and there could be other priorities. It didn't take too long to recognize that there were still threats in the world, but they were in different areas, with Somalia, for example. We had Yugoslavia, remember in 1990s.

So, I think it's understandable, my sort of broader perspective why Afghanistan wasn't a place where the United States would want to invest resources and people as it had done. And yet, yes, we can see the consequences of us withdrawal, the rise of the Taliban and so on. I believe a lot of work has been done not by the Commission, knowing looking into whether the CIA directly – or CIA funding in Afghanistan directly benefited, Bin Laden directly benefited that rise of Al-Qaeda and so on. I don't believe that direct links have been found there. But I think it's inevitable to see that the Afghan successes against the Soviet Union, against a great power like that, obviously, left lots of people who were all fired up, had been fired up by that war, had been supported by the United States, and that the fight wasn't over necessarily for them. And we can see links between there and the rise of Islamic extremism and groups like Al-Qaeda, and so on.

Again, that longer historian's perspective is important in that sense. And this is the blowback that you're talking about, that there are unintended consequences, longer term consequences to the CIA's involvement in Afghanistan in the 1990s. Could anybody have anticipated where that would go? And then that blowback would come directly to New York City in the Pentagon in 2001. But democracies are not known for being that long sighted, in their policy decisions, and so on. There are many good reasons for that, and resources are certainly one of them. I don't believe that United States CIA directly funded Osama Bin Laden and therefore bears responsibility for the attacks on 9/11. I'm pretty confident in saying, no, I don't believe that to be so. But obviously, there's a much bigger context there aAnd there are nuances and so on, of unintended consequences that did happen,

**[01:04:38] AH:** Help us understand a little bit more of that landscape, just looking at Afghanistan before 9/11 at the CIA, or that's looking at counterterrorism. So, we've got Alec Station. We've got George Tenet, the Director of Central Intelligence. Who are some of the other dramatic personae that are part of the story?

**[01:04:59] AA:** Obviously, Counterterrorism Center – CTC is looking at terrorism issues globally, not just in South Asia, not just in Afghanistan. So, they've got a much sort of broader view. But Alec Station is within that. So, again, **[inaudible 01:05:14]** who was the head of that before him, a gentleman named Jeff O'Connell. Yeah, I think that name is out there, all these names are out there now. So, that's a really important center, and their support for Alec Station, the relationship between those individuals and George Tenet. And then of course, they're within the directorate of operations. So that's another important area that CIA is basically operations and analysis and CTC and the head of the DDO, the director for operations is Jim Pavitt, at the time. So, that relationship between all these individuals, Tenet, and Jim Pavitt, Jeff O'Connell, and then **[inaudible 01:05:53]**, Mike Scheuer, there are all the important individuals.

Again, it's the role of Richard Clarke over NSC, the so-called counterterrorism czar, that's really important as well. And his relationship with George Tenet is really key to understanding all of what's happening before 9/11. He's an extraordinary person, real sense of melodrama, and a really powerful person, but extremely smart and important in this area. Big part of the story as well. There was a really dramatic moment, during the course of the commission during a public hearing when Richard Clarke is part of the hearing and makes a wonderful television worthy moment where, in his statement to the commissioner says, "You're specifically speaking to the families of 9/11", and he says, "Your government failed you and I failed you." It was a six o'clock news made moments. But I remember seeing that and feeling like sort of a shiver go down my spine. But for a senior sort of government official to say that publicly, was really quite a moment, and I think it meant a lot to the families. It was really, really quite something and I think it was important. A lot of people did not like, which apart from doing that. But I think that was one of the most dramatic moments of this whole investigation.

**[01:07:20] AH:** Is there a 9/11 Commission alumni network in Washington, DC up for drinks occasionally or something?

**[01:07:28] AA:** Yeah, we do. We do. My team, we were team three and we're really quite close. And we used to have a little team three kind of reunions and get together. Yeah, we do have a little network of people and we sort of keep up with each other. One of my colleagues on team three is actually moving back to DC over the next couple of weeks. I just talked to him last night, and I'm so excited to have him here. It'd be great to sort of get the gang back together again.

So, yeah, we do have reunions. We had a reunion, actually, on the 10th anniversary of the Commission Report coming out in 2014, which was wonderful with the commissioners as well. That was really was great to see. Some people have gone on to do some fascinating things in and out of government. And yeah, it was really great.

The commissioners are a part of this as well, which is incredibly important. Two of them passed away last year, which is really, really very sad, because they were some great individuals and was great to have knowledge of the Commission and in general. So unfortunately, we're losing some of these people as they get older. I think we're really lucky to have them. So yeah, I think there's something amongst all of us commissioners and staff that we still sort of feel we had a shared experience. I think we're always happy, happy to hear from each other.

**[01:08:48] AH:** Because we're talking about Lee Hamilton and Thomas Kean, I want to come back to the issue of should there be a Commission style report for the pandemic that we're in at the moment. But just when you mentioned those names, Lee Hamilton, I mean, I interviewed him a couple of years ago, and he was a real old school class act, bipartisan, lots of integrity. I mean, that's better than me. But yeah, it just struck me that I don't know, could a bunch of commissioners of a similar outcome together today to work on something collaboratively? I mean, everything just seems so divided and partisan. I mean, the Lee Hamilton's of the world are kind of falling by the wayside and now, the way to get ahead is just to sort of go as far out on whatever wing you're on.

**[01:09:43] AA:** Yeah, it is hard to imagine that type of bipartisanship happening these days. It's incredibly sad, because I think it's needed so much, so much. I've thought about this because they've been a lot of talk about a 9/11 style Commission looking into the January 6 events. And thinking about the lasting legacy of Commission, there are the recommendations which had an impact as well. But I think the narrative that the Commission was able to produce, the actual report, the book, which was written in readable language for the American public so that you could go to a bookstore and pick it up.

I remember right after the report came out during the summer of 2004, seeing somebody reading the 9/11 Commission report on the beach, like summer reading, I was like, "Wow, it's amazing." But the fact that I think for me, it showed like people wanted to read this. They

wanted to read a compelling clear narrative of what happened, why 9/11 happened? What happened before? What was our government doing? What happened on the day? How did we respond? I think there were a lot of questions that needed to be answered. And I think, to a large extent, the Commission's report, fed that, that need and fulfilled it. I'm not saying there aren't still questions open, but they provided a clear, compelling narrative for the American people to understand this dramatic event.

Is it possible to produce that same kind of thing? Because the only way that narrative is really going to fulfill the role, fill the hole that I think is there, is if people trust the people who are producing that, if they think that this is an unbiased report, done by people who just really wanted to find out the facts and what happened. And then that goes back to who's going to serve on this, who the commissioner is going to be, who's going to head it up, and so on. So, I like to think that we can find those people and that, and that they can produce a narrative that can be trusted, because I do think it's needed.

**[01:11:49] AH:** On the Commission, what is the rest of the intelligence landscape like on the Commission? So, you mentioned you're doing the CIA, you mentioned the NSC and State. I'm being slightly flippant here, but is there one representative for every intelligence agency or someone have, okay, you're doing the NSA and the DIA and someone's doing NCIS and OSI. Did you have intelligence? Were you for intelligence?

**[01:12:20] AA:** So, I mean, it goes back to the story that we were trying to tell. I was on a team that was looking at – I was on the policy team. So we were really supposed to be trying to tell the policy story of what the US government was doing. So, I was looking at CIA policy terms, what the CIA doing to support counterterrorism efforts by the US government. There was a completely separate team, actually, that was looking at the intelligence community in a different way, with an eye to where their institutional problems, very much with an eye to the recommendations with regard to the intelligence community, or that were out there, that were being – as I said, there were calls for him. Do we need to dismantle the FBI? Does the CIA need to be completely revamped, and so on?

So, that was a completely separate tea. I did work with them, because of course, there were all kinds of things or people that we interviewed in common and so on. But on that team, there was

somebody who was looking at NSA, obviously, they're looking at CIA. They're looking at different parts of the community. Actually, it was a totally separate team that was focused on the FBI, looking at their story, and looking at their structure, and so on. So, I worked with them as well where appropriate, so we sort of – and it actually goes back to the mandate of the Commission. It's all sort of delineated as to all the different areas and the teams were structured to address those different areas. So, there were different individuals who were looking at different parts of the community. But again, my story was much more to do with the policy, the storyline and not so much to do with looking at the institutions and so on, and other people were focused on that.

**[01:13:57] AH:** Okay. Wow, that's fascinating, and I'm glad I asked that. That's the launch point for part 2.

**[01:14:03] AA:** Maybe.

[END]