

**Testimony for Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage
Hearing Before the Joint Intelligence Committee
19 September 2002**

This year on September 11th, I had the opportunity to hold a commemoration ceremony for State Department employees – a small remembrance for our Department and our posts overseas. It was a difficult day for us all, as Americans and just as human beings. But it was also a difficult day for us as government employees. First, we all heard the explosion at the Pentagon and we knew those people – they were our colleagues and our friends.

But we all felt this personally in another way, as well. Every person who works at the Department of State is in the service because we believe that this nation, our people and our ideals are worth protecting and are worth promulgating in the world. Just as our men and women in uniform risk their lives every day, the employees at the Department of State put their lives on the line – and we do it to prevent such tragedies from happening.

Every day, we hear the echo of September 11th and we feel the impact of the more than 3,000 killed, but we also think of the sacrifice of members of our Department of State family who have died for this nation. We think of Foreign Service Officer Barbara Green and her teenaged daughter, Kristin, who were killed in terrorist attacks in Islamabad in March. We think of our employees -- American, Kenyan and Tanzanian – who perished in the al-Qaida attacks on our embassies in 1998. Far too many of our officers have died at the hands of terrorists in the last three decades.

So, if you ask the question, are we satisfied that we did all we could have to prevent the attacks on 9/11 from happening? The answer is, of course, no. Because they did happen. We are in business to promote this nation, but also to protect it and all its citizens, at home and abroad. Obviously, we did not succeed on September 11th. I for one welcome this Committee's efforts to examine why we failed and to help us put into place the measures to prevent this kind of failure from happening again. We all, all of us who serve in my Department and in public service, are motivated by the desire to do all that is humanly possible to prevent such an attack from ever recurring.

Having said that, can I tell you that the reason this happened to us is that people were doing a bad job? Can I tell you that we will punish those who failed, fix it, and know that this will never happen again? I cannot tell you that; to do so would be dishonest, at best. As Eleanor Hill told you yesterday, there is no question that we could have done better; and I believe we are doing better. And there are more improvements we could and should and will be making. Again, we appreciate the assistance our partners in Congress and on the staff of this Committee are offering us in that regard. But I simply cannot guarantee that we could prevent this from ever happening again; no one can. No one should. Let me explain why.

Before September 11th, our intelligence on the threat from al-Qaida was excellent – at a strategic level. In the summer of 2001, we made several key policy changes at the

Department of State. In brief, we demarched the Taliban and demanded unequivocally and authoritatively that they cease support for terrorism; we told them we would hold them responsible for attacks perpetrated by Afghanistan-based terrorists. We resumed material assistance to the forces of the Northern Alliance. And we fundamentally shifted the focus of our policy in South Asia to counter-terrorism. These actions were not taken in a vacuum: they were based on the intelligence reporting we were getting at the time. Basically, we knew that bin Laden had the means and the intent to attack Americans – both at home and abroad. We knew that the Taliban was not only sheltering but effectively aiding and abetting him. And we knew that we needed to act to change this equation, and to act immediately. We knew the urgency of the threat. Our strategic intelligence continues to be excellent.

What we did not know was at a tactical level. We did not know exactly what target al-Qaida intended to attack and how and when. The Department of State analysis in the immediate aftermath of the attacks, the so-called “culpability cable,” found that the intelligence community had linked two of the hijackers to al-Qaida, had transmitted that information to the Department of State’s system for alerting consular officers on the 23rd of August, 2001. The next day, every consular office in the world had the information via our TIPOFF system that these individuals were a concern, but by that time, they had already received visas and were in the United States. If we had had the information sooner, it is reasonable to believe these two criminals would never have entered the country in the first place. If we had had these two pieces to the jigsaw puzzle in advance, could we have seen the whole picture and prevented the attacks? Perhaps. But I don’t believe that is a question we will be able to answer with any certainty.

We have, however, taken steps to improve information sharing within the intelligence community, including our diplomatic reporting from overseas. We had some track record of improvement in information sharing with the FBI and law enforcement following the attacks on our embassies in 1998; we have put in place measures to improve that cooperation. But our level of interaction – including with local law enforcement – is still not where it needs to be. The channels for sharing information are not well-established. That is a function of the past legal framework, changed by the Patriot Act, a function of the historical record on such cooperation, and a function of culture. This will take time and effort to change. Our coordination with the CIA was good before 9/11, but it is better now. In addition to increasing the numbers of meetings and formal liaison positions between our staff and leadership, we are also trading a much higher volume of information. CIA contributions to our TIPOFF database, for example, have increased by 450 percent since 9/11. Again, we still need to improve the process for sharing and to increase the amounts of information shared, but the channels do exist and are being used.

Probably the most dramatic improvement in our intelligence collection and sharing has come in bilateral cooperation with other nations – those we considered friendly before 9/11, and some we considered less friendly. This is a marked change, and one that I believe results not just from collective revulsion at the nature of the attacks, but

also the common recognition that such groups present a risk to any nation with an investment in the rule of law.

Streamlining information-sharing and improving tactical intelligence – the actual penetration of terrorist cells – will continue to be challenges for the US government and for other nations, as well. A particular challenge for the Department of State will continue to be to how to comb through hundreds of thousands of visa applications looking for a small number of terrorists in a way that doesn't estrange us from the rest of the world. One of the great competitive advantages this nation has always had is the robust exchange of people and brain power from other nations. We simply cannot afford to lose that openness.

The Department of State has long focussed its energy on improving our visa process to protect national security while continuing to capitalize on our ability to attract visitors, foreign workers, and new immigrants. In little more than a decade, we have gone from keeping adverse information about potential visa applicants on index cards, to diskettes, to real-time information available on the desktop computer of every consular officer in the world. But we still lack the capacity to quickly distinguish the dangerous applicants from the desirable, and we must fix this. We must fix this by enhancing the quality of the underlying information from the intelligence community and our consular officers, but also by continuing to streamline our coordination.

I believe that we do have important successes, although it will always be difficult to give you metrics. Unfortunately, when it comes to the threat of terrorism, we are in the position of measuring our success by what has not happened. Consider, for example, that on this September 11th, we closed several of our missions around the world, including in Djakarta, based on credible information about planned attacks. Did we actually prevent an attack on that day? We have no way of knowing for certain. But our quick analysis and action in that case may well have saved lives. Unfortunately, collecting, evaluating and acting on tactical intelligence about terrorists will continue to be difficult. After all, we have to be vigilant and cautious at all times, and evaluate well every single one of the thousands of threat warnings we get every week. We have to be right, all the time, in order to prevent an attack. And the terrorists only need to be right once.