
TESTIMONY OF
THE FORMER COMMISSIONER OF THE NEW YORK CITY POLICE DEPARTMENT
BERNARD B. KERIK
OPENING REMARKS BEFORE
THE NATIONAL COMMISSION ON TERRORIST ATTACKS
UPON THE UNITED STATES

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The New School
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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Commission:

I would like to thank the Commission for giving me the opportunity to be here this morning. I strongly believe that in order to adequately defend our nation, we need to learn from the events of September 11th and we need to understand why and how it happened. More importantly, we need to use what we learn to combat the terrorist threat that still exists against the United States.

We can all agree that September 11th was one of the darkest days in our country's history. For the men and women in the New York City Police Department (NYPD), it was a day marked by horror at what was occurring – sorrow for what we lost – and great pride for how we served and what we accomplished. We witnessed fearless dedication and unshakable courage in the face of death by the members of the NYPD and a response unparalleled and unprecedented by any local, state or federal law enforcement agency in this country. Members of my executive team like John Picciano and Joe Dunne, field commanders like Chief Joseph Esposito, Bill Morange, and Tom Purtell, and Deputy Commissioner Maureen Casey and so many others,

together with all of the men and women of the NYPD, gave their all on September 11th. And some gave their very lives.

Police Officers like Detective Joseph Vigiano, who before September 11th had been involved in two separate gun battles and was shot a total of seven times, responded to the towers knowing the perils ahead. He lost his life, as did his brother, John, of the New York City Fire Department. There was Sgt. John Coughlin, who once responded to my home when my six-month-old daughter was choking, he died as well. Others that died included Sgt. Mike Curtain, Police Officer Moira Smith, as well as Rodney Gillis, Timothy Roy, Claude Richards, John D'Allara, Vincent Danz, Jerome Dominguez, Stephen Driscoll, Mark Ellis, Robert Fazio, Ronald Kloepfer, Thomas Langone, James Leahy, Brian McDonnell, John Perry, Glen Petit, Ramon Suarez, Paul Talty, Santos Valentin and Walter Weaver.

The true mark of their heroism, however, should not be measured only by the lives that were lost, but in what was accomplished in their final hours. Along with their brothers and sisters in the New York City Police Department, their colleagues in the Port Authority Police, and their partners in the New York City Fire Department, they performed the greatest rescue mission in the history of our nation. Because of their courage and fortitude, over 25,000 mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, sons and daughters made it home to their families that evening, and I'd like to spend the remainder of my time today reviewing just how that job was accomplished.

In carrying out its mission to protect and improve the quality of life for all New Yorkers, the men and women in the NYPD respond to crises every day. And the Department has always done that to the best of its ability. In 1996, Mayor Rudolph W. Giuliani improved our overall ability to respond to major events or emergencies with the creation of the Mayor's Office of Emergency Management (OEM). Together with other city agencies like the Fire Department,

the Department of Transportation and the Department of Health, the NYPD now had a more formalized mechanism to better plan, coordinate and practice for just about any crisis you could imagine. The City, through its OEM, had coordinated plans for many types of emergencies; and those plans were tested frequently. Not only were drills and tabletop exercises conducted, like the one simulating a bio/chemical attack in the mass transit system, but actual emergencies like blackouts, building collapses, storms, plane crashes, and a West Nile Virus outbreak, all tested the effectiveness of the city's coordinated response system.

As we learned from each exercise, drill or actual emergency, we modified protocols, procedures and planned responses accordingly. Issues such as who was to respond, where they would come from, what equipment would be needed and how it would get there, were addressed in our plans. Not only did we learn how to better communicate and coordinate operations among the various city agencies, but we also learned how to better communicate with the stakeholders in the private sector, such as hospitals and utility companies, along with state and federal agencies. I believe that all of the planning, drills and actual emergencies that occurred prior to September 11th made us as prepared as we possibly could have been to handle the events of that day. We had established relationships with other agencies, both within and outside city government; we had established protocols; and we had the best-trained emergency response personnel in the country. I believe we did our best based upon what we knew at the time.

From the moment American Airlines Flight 11 crashed into the North Tower, the men and women of the NYPD moved into action. Within minutes, officers from the five boroughs began a massive response that would include more than 20,000 officers by day's end. Upon receiving the news from the field, I passed it on to Mayor Giuliani seconds later - that a plane of unknown size and origin had struck the North Tower of the World Trade Center - that as result

of that crash a fire was burning on the upper floors of One World Trade – that a substantial police, fire, and emergency medical response was en route to the site – that a frozen zone surrounding the World Trade Center was in the process of being established – and that an evacuation effort of the North Tower was underway.

It was clear from the earliest moments after the first crash that the FDNY was responsible for the fire and rescue and the NYPD was responsible for the safe evacuation of civilians from lower Manhattan as well as the security around the site and security for the rest of the City. Command posts and staging areas for emergency vehicles were immediately established at both ends of the World Trade Center. The Mayor and I had determined early on that the City's pre-designated Command and Control Center, located inside of 7 World Trade, was unsafe because of its proximity to the attack. The initial NYPD Command Post was established at Church and Vesey streets and Chief of Department Joe Esposito was commanding operations from that location. The NYPD also had personnel at the FDNY's Command Post that was located off West Street, south of the North Tower, in order to facilitate the exchange of information between the two departments. When the Mayor and I stopped at the FDNY command post minutes after the second plane hit Tower Two for an updated assessment of the situation, I spoke with the NYPD personnel present, including Sgt. John Coughlin, from Emergency Services.

An important point needs to be made here. Throughout my tenure as Police Commissioner, I had a great relationship with the Fire Commissioner and his department. I did not see or was ever made aware of an instance where there was a lack of coordination between our respective departments when it came to doing our jobs. There was a healthy competition between the two organizations but we always had a common goal; and we always came together

to achieve that goal – which was to save lives. It had been done before and it was certainly done on September 11th.

Within 10 minutes of the first plane crash, more than half of the NYPD's Special Operations Division was deployed, all in an effort to assist with the rescue. Under the direction of the FDNY, emergency service personnel began to equip themselves for crash site entry. Our Aviation Unit helicopters were airborne over Manhattan, our Harbor Unit launches were at riverside, and communication links were established between our commanders and those of the Fire Department, Port Authority and FBI. While personnel and equipment were being deployed to the location, Chief Esposito and I were making decisions regarding how the area was to be secured and evacuated. For example, not long after the first plane hit, the majority of the city's mass transit system was suspended south of 14th Street.

Tragically, less than fifteen minutes after Flight 11 crashed into the North Tower, before even the most suspicious of us on the scene could begin to confirm our worst thoughts, they were confirmed for us, as the second Boeing 767 crashed into the South Tower. We knew then our country was under attack. It was terrorism.

At that moment, as the crisis shifted from its initial horror to indisputable homeland warfare – the character, professionalism and bravery of New York's Finest was never more evident. As debris showered down to the ground, as fellow human beings jumped to their death from a hundred stories above, there was no retreat or hesitation. The officers that ran for cover as Flight 175 crashed above -- ran even faster back toward the two towers filled with strangers that desperately needed their help.

At this point, while the rescue efforts were ongoing, other plans were put into action by the NYPD in order to respond to the attack and to protect the city. For example, Operation

OMEGA, the city's highest state of alert at the time, was initiated. Simultaneously, we were going through a process of determining what other potential targets would require further attention or possible evacuation. We were trying to anticipate other possible secondary targets in and around the city, because at this point in time we did not know just how many planes were unaccounted for. Accordingly, potential secondary targets – including the UN, City Hall and Police Headquarters - were evacuated.

As the severity and enormity of the crisis escalated, so did the response. Together, teams of ESU officers and firefighters continued to climb the staircases in search of trapped victims. Rescue workers gave aid to the injured on the street; officers began establishing rescue routes for people exiting the towers as well as those evacuating other buildings in the area. Bridges and tunnels leading into Manhattan were all closed except to emergency vehicles. In coordination with the Federal Aviation Authority, the NYPD's Aviation Unit secured the airspace over Manhattan. Additional officers were mobilized to secure the rapidly extending perimeter. A makeshift executive command post was established several blocks away at an office building located at 75 Barclay Street, in order to give the Mayor, other agency heads and me an opportunity to regroup and re-strategize based on the latest developments. Hard-line phone contact was established with Washington and Albany.

At approximately 10:00 a.m., despite the most courageous and valiant of efforts, both the enormity and the dynamic of the catastrophe shifted once again. As the South Tower collapsed, hundreds of police and firefighters, and thousands of innocent civilians lost their lives. In that moment our isolation from the brutality of terrorism was gone, our landscape was altered and our nation was forever changed. Yet, even before the plumes of ash and pulverized concrete began to lift, before anyone could rationally assess what had just occurred and what the next blow

might be, the men and women of the NYPD, the Fire Department, and our city's emergency medical teams were racing back into the center of the disaster. They ran into the pile that had just claimed the lives of their brothers and sisters, and they didn't stop digging for eight months. Men like NYPD Deputy Chief James Hegarty wiped the dust out of their eyes and coughed it out of their lungs and then went right back to the rescue effort.

As the Mayor and I, along with the Fire Commissioner, the Director of OEM and others, attempted to locate a suitable interim command center where city government would regroup, my staff maintained constant contact with my field commanders.

Emergency workers continued to evacuate the North Tower. The perimeter around Ground Zero was extended even further in resigned acceptance that the second tower could at any minute follow the first. Any and all means of transporting the injured and those trying to escape were employed; hundreds were carried to Harbor Unit launches and ferried across the river to New Jersey and tens of thousands were guided over the Brooklyn Bridge into the waiting arms of police officers on the other side.

At 10:28 a.m. the same tragic events were cruelly repeated as the North Tower collapsed, claiming more lives, leveling more destruction, and again beating back the rescue effort. Again, though, the courageous returned, and the work continued. More personnel and resources were mobilized; heavy equipment was brought in to dig out those buried under the rubble. Lower Manhattan south of 14th Street from the Hudson to the East River was frozen to all but emergency personnel. The affected area south of Houston Street was divided into seven patrol zones in order to direct the evacuation, secure the crime scene, and stabilize the surrounding neighborhoods. Although the Mayor spoke to the media as we moved north on our search for

temporary headquarters, from a firehouse on Houston Street, he delivered one of the first status reports to the general public, calling for calm, for cooperation and for prayers.

By afternoon, a new command and control center was established at the NYPD Police Academy located on East 20th Street. With follow-up attacks still a critical concern, the location of the new center was not initially released to the general public. Nevertheless, literally within hours of first plane striking the North Tower, a fully functional, multi-agency command center was operating, manned by representatives from every federal, state and local agency and organization participating in the rescue and recovery effort. By mid-afternoon Mayor Giuliani and Governor Pataki were able to convene the first of what would become a steady stream of multi-agency meetings, with the heads of the City Police, Fire, and Health Departments, among others, sitting alongside relief agencies like FEMA to ensure that the response was immediate, coordinated and comprehensive.

Over the hours and days that followed, the news would remain grim, the emergency rooms would remain empty, our hope of finding survivors would dissipate, and we would learn that more than 2,700 people had lost their lives, including 23 members of the NYPD, 37 members of the Port Authority Police, and 343 members of the Fire Department. Yet the fierce determination to protect our city, our ideals and our American way of life that was so present in the first minutes of the attack grew to even larger dimensions, and led to additional accomplishments that few could have thought possible.

With no clear models to draw from and no similar events to glean guidance from, the NYPD began to devise ways of addressing the needs that confront a modern day city blown apart by military attack. The NYPD's Operation OMEGA remained in effect, and our officers were assigned to 12 hours shifts with no days off. Together with other city agencies, the massive

effort of compiling the actual list of the missing began. In conjunction with our partners throughout federal, state and local government, we helped establish a Family Assistance Center dedicated to providing guidance and up-to-the minute information to the loved ones of the 5,960 people originally reported missing. At the Fresh Kills Landfill in Staten Island we established an evidence collection site unequalled in size or capability, processed almost 3,000 truckloads of debris during the first 5 days and averaged more than 7,000 tons per day until the site was cleared in May of 2002. Along with the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, we helped to establish and secure an expanded morgue at Bellevue Hospital and the intricate DNA collection process that would eventually assist in identifying the remains of approximately 1,500 victims.

In truth, a complete list of what was accomplished by the men and women of the NYPD is simply too extensive to provide in this forum. But I thank you, Governor Kean and the members of this Commission for giving me the opportunity to highlight some of the stories and achievements of twenty three valiant heroes, who together with their 55,000 colleagues in the New York City Police Department defeated the very worst of humanity with their very best.

We have come so far in the past two and one half years in our war against terror, but there is still so far to go. As a nation, we must learn from the events of September 11th, and also from the terrorists themselves. Our lack of patience and our failure to remain vigilant could result in our demise. Al-Qaeda and those that support their holy war against us are depending on it. In their eyes, history will repeat itself if they just wait us out. We just need to look at the past - the World Trade Center in 1993, Riyadh, Al-Khobar, Kenya and Tanzania, the USS Cole and then September 11th. They believe that they can do it again and I believe that if we do not stay the course, we will prove them right. Our fight should be measured and consistent and fought on two fronts, both here and abroad.

In terms of lessons learned or recommendations, I think a few points should be made:

- First, emergency operations centers, with an Office of Emergency Management responsible for its operations, similar to the one in New York City, are essential for any jurisdiction. Such a facility is critical not only to coordinate operations in the event of a crisis but also for planning purposes. Relationships and response plans must be well established, before an emergency occurs – you just can't make them happen in the midst of a crisis.
- Second, success in securing our homeland requires accurate and real time intelligence that is shared with all necessary stakeholders, whether they are at the local, state or federal level. There must be internal monitoring systems that will insure efficiency and accountability with regard to information sharing and communications. A culture change in intelligence and information sharing is essential and those that refuse to change must be removed. There can be no compromise.
- Third, this culture change has begun, assisted through the provisions of the Patriot Act. This law contains many provisions, particularly with respect to information sharing, that provide law enforcement with necessary tools in its fight against terrorism. These tools should continue to be available through the extension of the Act.

- We should create a mechanism to hold countries accountable that promote terrorism against the United States. Such countries constitute a legitimate threat against Americans, both here and abroad.
- Finally, I believe our battles have only just begun. Removing the Taliban and the Al-Qaeda leadership from Afghanistan - and Saddam Hussein and his regime from Iraq - were just the beginning in addressing the real threats against us. We must stand firm, stay pre-emptive and never believe for one minute that this war is over. And to those who would say that our actions in Iraq or Afghanistan have only worsened the threats against us, or to the Spanish who believe their involvement in Iraq resulted in the train bombings in Madrid, I ask: Why us on September 11th, 2001.

They brought this war to us, and it is a war we cannot afford to lose. I ask the members of this Commission to put politics aside, put our freedom first and give us the ammunition we need to continue the battle before us. For without it – we lose.

Thank you.