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## **GENERAL MICHAEL V. HAYDEN: REMEMBERING OUR HEROES ON 9/11**

By Michael V. Hayden with Larry Pfeiffer

Many words have been written or spoken over the past days and weeks memorializing the tragic events of 20 years ago, when al-Qa'ida terrorists under the direction of Osama bin Laden flew four planes into the now hallowed grounds at the World Trade Center, the Pentagon, and the field in Shanksville, Pennsylvania, killing over 2,600 of our fellow countrymen and over 350 souls from other countries. We rightly remember those innocent lives taken from us so violently, the gallantry of the police, firefighters, first responders, and civilians who rushed to their aid, many making the ultimate sacrifice and others suffering trauma to this day. We think of those left behind—moms and dads, husbands and wives, children and grandchildren, friends and colleagues—with a gaping hole in their hearts that can never be filled. We still grieve and honor them.

When I look back to that day 20 years ago, what I remember most is the grit and resilience of those charged with warning of foreign attack, the men and women of our intelligence services. I was Director of the National Security Agency, the element responsible for monitoring foreign terrorist communications and one of those established in the wake of the Japanese assault on Pearl Harbor to prevent just such surprise attacks from ever occurring again. For those working counterterrorism issues, 9/11 was a punch to the gut. Yes, we had been warning for years of such attacks. We had contributed information that led to President George W. Bush being warned in his Presidential Daily Briefing just weeks earlier of bin Laden's determination to strike in the United States. But we had not uncovered the specific plot and had not prevented the attack.

Fearing a subsequent airplane attack against NSA, we sent most employees home that day. I went to visit the folks who were working counterterrorism expecting I would need to rally their spirits in such a dreadful moment. Instead, I found a group of patriots doing what Americans have done for generations in the face of adversity. They dusted themselves off, rolled up their sleeves, and doubled down—even as they tacked blackout curtains over the windows. Damned if they weren't going to identify and bring those behind the 9/11 attack to justice, and make sure such an attack never occurred again.

Similar vignettes played out across the Intelligence Community that day and for days and years after. I cannot emphasize enough the sense of duty and patriotism felt by those officers. Years later when I became Director of the Central Intelligence Agency I visited a very operational element of its Counterterrorism Center—as you entered the room there was a sign saying, “Today is

September 12, 2001.” That sign was clearly not a public calendar, but instead a touchstone, a reminder, of the conviction you could feel among those present. The greatest measure of that conviction was given by those who lost lives in the fight—from remote bases in Afghanistan to the streets of Yemen or the Philippines, in ambushes in Iraq and Jordan, at diplomatic or intelligence outposts in Libya, and other undisclosed locations across the globe. Some have been publicly recognized, but many of those sacrifices remain known only to their colleagues and families.

Two decades without another 9/11-caliber attack was never a guarantee—remember, we had to be perfect 100 percent of the time; the bad guys only had to succeed once. So today on 9/11 I want to offer my thanks to those in the US Intelligence Community for doing such a remarkable job protecting us these past 20 years, for working such long hours, and sacrificing time with their own families to ensure others remained free and safe. I want to thank the men and women who took tours at great personal risk to warzones and other unsafe spots far from home, many of them multiple times. I want to thank the families they left behind who carried on without them and the officers who supported those families during those absences. We honor those who perished in the struggle against these enemies and vow to care for those they left behind. We also vow to care for those injured in the line of duty.

I want to thank the men and women of the Intelligence Community for their assiduous work in bringing Osama bin Laden to justice and for decimating and keeping al-Qa’ida on its back heels for these two decades. Thank you for following terrorism to other safe havens, ensuring that they would not export their evil to our shores. To the brilliant minds in the intelligence agencies, military services, and corporate America who invented new techniques and technologies that allowed us to prosecute the fight more efficiently, we thank you. Thanks also to those that came out of a comfortable retirement to return to the fight and to those who left lucrative careers for public service. Special thanks to the young people who answered the call and joined the fight across these 20 years and who will carry the mission forward—especially those joining our service today who know 9/11 as only a story told by their parents or history teachers. I extend my gratitude to the legions of lawyers and legal professionals who ensured that we met the full measure of the law in all we did and helped modify tactics as the legal landscape changed—we owed it to the American people to do everything we could within the law, even if it meant getting some chalk on our cleats. To our brilliant analysts, targeters, and collectors who worked day and night to ensure policy makers and warfighters had a solid understanding of the left, right, upper and lower bounds of reality within which to operate and decide, thank you. And special thanks to the support staffs, logisticians, IT experts, security specialists and others who made sure we had the tools in hand and protection to conduct the mission, often at great risk themselves.

America, these intelligence professionals are your heroes. They have kept you safe. They have preserved your life and liberty, working in the shadows without expectation or even want of public adulation. Today, 20 years after that fateful day, I honor them and offer my deepest gratitude. Please join me and send a quiet thank you to those men and women who make up our silent service.

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