Exhibit 54

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‘The Attacks Will Be Spectacular’

An exclusive look at how the Bush administration ignored this warning from the CIA months before 9/11, along with others that were far more detailed than previously revealed.

By CHRIS WHIPPLE | November 12, 2015

Getty

“*Bin Laden Determined to Strike in U.S.*” The CIA’s famous Presidential Daily Brief, presented to George W. Bush on August 6, 2001, has always been Exhibit A in the case that his administration shrugged off warnings of an Al Qaeda attack. But months earlier, starting in the spring of 2001, the CIA repeatedly and urgently began to warn the White House that an attack was coming.

By May of 2001, says Cofer Black, then chief of the CIA’s counterterrorism center, “it was very

evident that we were going to be struck, we were gonna be struck hard and lots of Americans were going to die." "There were real plots being manifested," Cofer's former boss, George Tenet, told me in his first interview in eight years. "The world felt like it was on the edge of eruption. In this time period of June and July, the threat continues to rise. Terrorists were disappearing [as if in hiding, in preparation for an attack]. Camps were closing. Threat reportings on the rise." The crisis came to a head on July 10. The critical meeting that took place that day was first reported by Bob Woodward in 2006. Tenet also wrote about it in general terms in his 2007 memoir *At the Center of the Storm*.

But neither he nor Black has spoken about it publicly in such detail until now—or been so emphatic about how specific and pressing their warnings really were. Over the past eight months, in more than a hundred hours of interviews, my partners Jules and Gedeon Naudet and I talked with Tenet and the 11 other living former CIA directors for *The Spymasters,* a documentary set to air this month on Showtime.

The drama of failed warnings began when Tenet and Black pitched a plan, in the spring of 2001, called "the Blue Sky paper" to Bush's new national security team. It called for a covert CIA and military campaign to end the Al Qaeda threat—"getting into the Afghan sanctuary, launching a paramilitary operation, creating a bridge with Uzbekistan." "And the word back," says Tenet, "'was 'we're not quite ready to consider this. We don't want the clock to start ticking.'" (Translation: they did not want a paper trail to show that they'd been warned.) Black, a charismatic ex-operative who had helped the French arrest the terrorist known as Carlos the Jackal, says the Bush team just didn't get the new threat: "I think they were mentally stuck back eight years [before]. They were used to terrorists being Euro-lefties—they drink champagne by night, blow things up during the day, how bad can this be? And it was a very difficult sell to communicate the urgency to this."

That morning of July 10, the head of the agency's Al Qaeda unit, Richard Blee, burst into Black's office. "And he says, 'Chief, this is it. Roof's fallen in,'" recounts Black. "The information that we had compiled was absolutely compelling. It was multiple-sourced. And it was sort of the last straw." Black and his deputy rushed to the director's office to brief Tenet. All agreed an urgent meeting at the White House was needed. Tenet picked up the white phone to Bush's National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice. "I said, 'Condi, I have to come see you,'" Tenet remembers. "It was one of the rare times in my seven years as director where I said, 'I have to come see you. We're comin' right now. We have to get there.'"

Tenet vividly recalls the White House meeting with Rice and her team. (George W. Bush was on a trip to Boston.) "Rich [Blee] started by saying, 'There will be significant terrorist attacks against the

United States in the coming weeks or months. The attacks will be spectacular. They may be multiple. Al Qaeda's intention is the destruction of the United States.'" [Condi said:] 'What do you think we need to do?' Black responded by slamming his fist on the table, and saying, 'We need to go on a wartime footing now!'"

"What happened?" I ask Cofer Black. "Yeah. What *did* happen?" he replies. "To me it remains incomprehensible still. I mean, how is it that you could warn senior people so many times and nothing actually happened? It's kind of like *The Twilight Zone*." Remarkably, in her memoir, Condi Rice writes of the July 10 warnings: "My recollection of the meeting is not very crisp because we were discussing the threat every day." Having raised threat levels for U.S. personnel overseas, she adds: "I thought we were doing what needed to be done." (When I asked whether she had any further response to the comments that Tenet, Black and others made to me, her chief of staff said she stands by the account in her memoir.) Inexplicably, although Tenet brought up this meeting in his closed-door testimony before the 9/11 Commission, it was never mentioned in the committee's final report.

And there was one more chilling warning to come. At the end of July, Tenet and his deputies gathered in the director's conference room at CIA headquarters. "We were just thinking about all of this and trying to figure out how this attack might occur," he recalls. "And I'll never forget this until the day I die. Rich Blee looked at everybody and said, 'They're coming here.' And the silence that followed was deafening. You could feel the oxygen come out of the room. 'They're coming here.'"

Tenet, who is perhaps the agency's most embattled director ever, can barely contain himself when talking about the unheeded warnings he says he gave the White House. Twirling an unlit cigar and fidgeting in his chair at our studio in downtown Washington, D.C., he says with resignation: "I can only tell you what we did and what we said." And when asked about his own responsibility for the attacks on 9/11, he is visibly distraught. "There was never a moment in all this time when you blamed yourself?" I ask him. He shifts uncomfortably in his chair. "Well, look, there … I still look at the ceiling at night about a lot of things. And I'll keep them to myself forever. But we're all human beings."

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Only 12 men are alive today who have made the life-and-death decisions that come with running the CIA.

Once a year, the present and former CIA directors—ranging from George H.W. Bush, 91, to the

current boss, John Brennan, 60—meet in a conference room at CIA headquarters in Langley, Virginia. The ostensible reason: to receive a confidential briefing on the state of the world. (Robert Gates, who hates setting foot inside the Beltway, is a perennial no-show.) "They mostly tell us stuff we already know, and we pretend we're learning something," says Tenet, the longest-serving director (lasting seven years, under Presidents Clinton and Bush II). But the real point of their annual pilgrimage is to renew bonds forged in the trenches of the war on terror—and to debate the agency's purpose in the world.

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On the burning questions of the day, the directors are profoundly torn: over the CIA's mission, its brutal interrogation methods after 9/11, and the shifting "rules of engagement" in the battle against Al Qaeda and the Islamic State. What is fair game in the fight against terrorism: Torture? Indefinite detention? Setting up "black sites" in foreign countries for interrogation? Should the CIA be in the business of killing people with remotely piloted drones? Was the agency really to blame for 9/11? Or did the White House ignore its repeated warnings?

On these and other questions, the directors were surprisingly candid in the interviews they did with me—even straying into classified territory. (They often disagree about what is actually classified; it's complicated, as Hillary Clinton is learning.) A controversial case in point: drone strikes. "He can't talk publicly about *that*," protests Gen. David Petraeus when I tell him that one of his counterparts has opened up to me about "signature strikes." (These are lethal attacks on unidentified targets—a kind of profiling by drone—that several directors find deeply troubling.) Gen. Petraeus might have had good reason to be reticent; only a week before he had accepted a plea bargain to avoid prison time—for sharing classified information with his mistress, Paula Broadwell.

Here are some of the other secrets we learned from the surprisingly outspoken men who have run the world's most powerful intelligence agency.

Even CIA chiefs can't agree about "torture"

"In the period right after 9/11, we did some things wrong," said Barack Obama. "We tortured some folks. We did things that were contrary to our values." Jose Rodriguez, who oversaw the CIA's so-

called enhanced interrogation program (EIT), has a two-word reply: “That’s bullshit.” Tenet concurs. “People are throwing the word ‘torture’ around—as if we're *torturers*,” he complains. “Well, I'm not ever gonna accept the use of the word ‘torture’ for what happened here.” From sleep deprivation to waterboarding, Tenet and his lieutenant Rodriguez insist the techniques were all approved—by *everybody*.

“The attorney general of the United States told us that these techniques are legal under U.S. law,” says Tenet, “and do not in any way compromise our adherence to international torture statutes.” Contrary to the claim by the SSCI (Senate Select Committee on Intelligence) Majority Report, Tenet insists: “We briefed members of Congress fully on what we were doing at all times. There was never a hint of disapproval.” And Tenet says that George W. Bush was so hands-on, “he read the memo, looked at the techniques, and decided he was gonna take two techniques off the table himself.” Tenet says he does not recall which EITs the president rejected (Rodriguez believes one of them was “mock executions.”)

Tenet and his post-9/11 successors—Porter Goss, Michael Hayden and acting director Michael Morell (sometimes called the “wartime directors”)—say the techniques were a necessary evil, justified by the context of the times. It was an article of faith at the CIA that the United States was about to be struck again in a “second wave” attack. And that “high-value detainees,” beginning with Al Qaeda leader Abu Zubaydah, knew more than they were telling. “Every day,” says Rodriguez, “the president was asking George Tenet, ‘What is Abu Zubaydah saying about the second wave of attacks and about all these other plots?’ Well, he was not saying anything. We had to do something different.” Tenet says they had persuasive intelligence that indicated Osama bin Laden had met with Pakistani nuclear scientists—and was seeking the blueprint for a bomb. There was a credible report, he adds, that a nuke had already been planted in New York City. “People say, ‘didn’t you think about the moral and ethical consequences of your decision?’” says Tenet. “Yeah, we did. We thought that stopping the further loss of American life and protecting a just society was equally important.”

Did the techniques produce intelligence that disrupted plots or saved lives? The SSCI study looked at 20 cases and said no useful evidence was obtained. Tenet insists, “They are wrong in all 20 of the cases. The report is dead wrong on every account, period, end of paragraph.” But Tenet’s fellow spy chiefs are sharply—even passionately—divided about such procedures. “Our Constitution does prohibit ‘cruel and unusual’ treatment and if it’s cruel, we shouldn’t be doing it,” says William Webster, 91, regarded by his fellow spymasters as a voice of reason (and the only DCI who also served as FBI director). “You cross a line at some point in your effort to get the information when

you go that route. There have to be limitations and monitoring and they must be observed. Our country stands for something and it loses something when we don't." Stansfield Turner, now 91—who as Jimmy Carter's director authorized the ill-fated attempt to rescue American hostages in Tehran—agrees: "I just don't think a country like ours should be culpable of conducting torture. I just think it's beneath our dignity."

The directors who oppose torture are not just bleeding hearts. "Nobody was responsible for more detainees than I was," says Gen. Petraeus, who was commander of the multinational forces in Iraq. "We visit violence on our enemies, but we should not mistreat them, even though they have done unspeakable things to our soldiers and to civilians. That does not justify us doing it to them. You will pay a price for what you do, and it will be vastly greater than whatever it is you got out of taking this action." And Director Brennan sees no circumstance in which the CIA would torture again: "If a president tomorrow asked me to waterboard a terrorist, I would say, 'Mr. President, sorry—I do not believe that is in our best interest as a country.'" Hayden is even more emphatic. "If some future president is going to decide to waterboard," he says, "he'd better bring his own bucket—because he's going to have to do it himself."