

*How did the U.S. government lead its people to war?*

## Items of Note

### A Transforming Moment

#### Before 9/11

On July 10, 2001, two months before the September 11th attacks, CIA director George Tenet met with his counter-terrorism chief, J. Cofer Black, at CIA headquarters. Based on communication intercepts and other top-secret intelligence, Black laid out the case that there was an increasing likelihood that al-Qaeda would soon attack the United States.



The threat was so compelling that Tenet decided that Black and he should go to the White House immediately; Tenet hoped his abrupt request for an emergency meeting would get the administration's attention.

Despite the urgency of this disturbing intelligence, the Bush administration did not actively respond to these warnings.

Further, the administration did not act on specific recommendations made by the CIA at that meeting, nor on additional steps recommended by the CIA in subsequent days.

On August 6, 2001, just five weeks before the 9/11 attacks, President Bush, on vacation at his ranch in Crawford, Texas, received a classified, presidential briefing entitled "Bin Laden Determined to Strike in U.S." The entire briefing focused on the possibility of terrorist attacks inside the U.S. According to one account, Bush listened to the presentation and then dismissed the CIA briefer, saying "All right. You've covered your ass, now." The *New York Times* later reported that after the briefing, Bush "broke off from work early and spent most of that day fishing." In fact, Bush would spend most of August 2001 on his ranch in Texas; he was out of Washington from August 3 to September 3, 2001.

The American public was unaware of these warnings and would not find out about the administration's passive reaction for a number of years.

#### After 9/11

After the attacks of September 11, the Bush administration dramatically changed its posture, assuming a position of decisiveness and strength. After a short, widely-supported military campaign in Afghanistan against the Taliban and al-Qaeda – an enemy who had actually attacked America – the administration continued its aggressive stance and shifted the nation's focus onto Iraq and Saddam Hussein, who was now portrayed as an imminent danger.

In the 14 month lead-up to the invasion of Iraq, President Bush continued with this bold new persona: active, assertive, aggressive, but now against a country that had not attacked the United States and was not even a credible threat.

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**Video: I WILL NOT STAND BY**

The Bush administration transformed its identity by assuming the strong stance that it should have taken *prior* to the historic attacks on America. This new identity – along with military action and the ‘global war on terror’ – was so commanding that it overshadowed the administration’s soon-to-be revealed history of passivity and ignored warnings.

**BUSH: I will not wait on events while dangers gather. I will not stand by as peril draws closer and closer.**

**Bush pledges not to “wait” or “stand by” in the face of danger: *exactly* what he and his administration had done *prior* to September 11th.**

**BUSH: In the world we have entered, the only path to safety is the path of action. And this nation will act.**

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**BUSH: My job is to protect America, and that’s exactly what I’m going to do.**

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**BUSH: America will act deliberately. America will act decisively.**

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**BUSH: The only way to treat them is like they are, cold-blooded killers, and run them down.**

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**BUSH: It doesn’t matter how long it takes. When it comes to the defense of our freedoms, we will stay the course.**

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