



(CBS) *(Editor's Note: In his book, "At the Center of the Storm," and on Sunday's broadcast of **60 Minutes**, George Tenet said he encountered Pentagon advisor Richard Perle outside the White House on Sept. 12, 2001, the day after the 9/11 attacks. **Perle disputes Tenet's account**, saying the encounter never happened because he was stranded in France that day, and was not able to return to the country until September 15. George Tenet told Tom Brokaw Monday, April 30, 2007, "I may have been off by a couple of days," but says the conversation did happen.)*

As director of the CIA, George Tenet has kept America's most important secrets. And until now, his lips were sealed.

Tenet's CIA has been blamed for failing to stop 9/11, praised for the fall of the Taliban, and vilified for predicting that Iraq held chemical and biological weapons.

Now, three years after leaving the CIA, Tenet has written a book, aptly named, "At the Center of the Storm." This month, **correspondent Scott Pelley** sat down with Tenet. **60 Minutes** wanted to know how he got "weapons of mass destruction" wrong. Are we using torture in the war on terror? And who was it at the White House who finally put the knife in his back?

60 Minutes found him passionate, combative, apologetic, defiant, and fiercely loyal to the people of the CIA and their fight against terrorism.

"People don't understand us, you know, they think we're a bunch of faceless bureaucrats with no feelings, no families, no sense of what it's like to be passionate about running these bastards down. There was nobody else in this government that felt what we felt before or after 9/11. Of course, after 9/11, everybody had that feeling. Nobody felt like we felt on that day. This was personal," Tenet tells Pelley.

His story erupts after a silence of three years. **60 Minutes** spoke with Tenet at Georgetown University.

In a sense, his career began and ended there. He's a professor now, but he first came as a student from Queens, New York. After college, he worked on Capitol Hill and in the Clinton White House, rising to lead the CIA at the age of 44. Tenet served seven years, all that time hunting Osama bin Laden.

"I still lie awake at night thinking about everything that could have been, that wasn't done to stop 9/11. To the 9/11 families, I said, you deserve better from your entire government. All of us," Tenet says.

If he lies awake, men like Nawaf al-Hazmi and Khalid al-Midhar, two of the 9/11 hijackers, are among the reasons. Before 9/11, Tenet's CIA headquarters knew that they were al Qaeda and in America. But the information was filed, not passed to the FBI.

"Two of the 19 hijackers, in your files, in Langley, Virginia, a year and a half before 9/11 ... they don't get on a watch list. They don't get on a no-fly list. You know these are bad guys," Pelley remarks.

"Scott, they don't. And honest people doing honest work, for whatever you know, all of these people who are doing the best that they can, and understand this in great granularity, understand all of this and feel this pain, we all know this. I can't dress this up for you," Tenet replies.

What happened?

"People were inundated with data and operations. And they missed it," Tenet acknowledges. "We're not trying to intentionally withhold—human beings made mistakes."

But the 9/11 Commission accused Tenet's CIA of being bureaucratic and failing to recognize al Qaeda for the threat that it was.

"All these commissions, and all these reports never got underneath the feeling of my people. You know, to see us written about as if we're idiots. Or if we didn't understand this threat. As if we didn't understand what happened on that day. To impugn our integrity, our operational savvy. You know, the American people need to know that's just not so," Tenet says. "We're the ones that stand up and tell you the truth about when we're wrong. It's a great thing about this government. The only people that ever stand up and tell the truth are who? Intelligence officers. Because our culture is, never break faith with the truth. We'll tell you, you don't have to drag it out of us. You didn't have to serve me a subpoena to tell me I didn't watch list Hazmi and Midhar. We knew right away; and we told everybody. Truth matters to us."

(CBS) The truth of the CIA and al Qaeda starts before 9/11. Two years before the attacks, the CIA had officers on the ground in Afghanistan laying plans to overthrow the Taliban and take out bin Laden. But Tenet says neither Clinton nor President Bush would give him the go ahead. Then, by the summer of 2001, Tenet says he was so alarmed by intelligence that an attack was coming, he asked for an immediate meeting to brief then-National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice.

"Essentially, the briefing says, there are gonna be multiple spectacular attacks against the United States. We believe these attacks are imminent. Mass casualties are a likelihood," Tenet remembers.

"You're telling Condoleezza Rice in that meeting in the White House in July that we should take offensive action, in Afghanistan, now. Before 9/11," Pelley remarks.

"We need to consider immediate action inside Afghanistan now. We need to move to the offensive," Tenet says.

In his book, Tenet says that even though he told Rice an attack on Americans was imminent, she took his request to launch pre-emptive action in Afghanistan and delegated it to third-tier officials.

"You're meeting with the president every morning. Why aren't you telling the president, 'Mr. President, this is terrifying. We have to do this now. Forget about the bureaucracy. I need this authority this afternoon,?'" Pelley asks.

"Right. Because the United States government doesn't work that way. The president is not the action officer. You bring the action to the national security advisor and people who set the table for the president to decide on policies they're gonna implement," Tenet says.

"You thought you had some time," Pelley remarks.

"Well, you didn't know. Yeah, you thought you might have time," Tenet says. "You can second guess me until the cows come home. That's the way I did my job."

On Sept. 11, Tenet was at breakfast near the White House when the first plane hit. He thought instantly of his old nemesis.

"I knew immediately this was bin Laden. I excused myself from breakfast. I jumped in the car," he remembers.

"What do you mean you knew immediately? I mean, most people in the country thought there had been a terrible accident," Pelley asks.

"Listen, when you've been following this as long as I've been following this, when you've been thinking about multiple spectacular attacks. There was no doubt what had happened in my mind immediately," Tenet explains.

At the CIA headquarters, as the towers burned and the Pentagon was hit, Tenet got the aircraft passenger manifest; Hazmi and Mihdhar were listed.

"After all these years of planning and plotting and wanting to capture or kill Osama bin Laden, you must have thought, 'The SOB got me first,'" Pelley remarks.

"Um, yeah. But I had another thought. 'I'm gonna run you and all your bastards down. And here we come. Because the rules are about to change. Here we come; our turn now. Unleashed, authorities, money, direction, leadership; here we come, pal.' That's what I thought," Tenet says.

Immediately, Tenet got the authority he had been asking for in Afghanistan. And for the first time, the CIA led an American war. Tenet calls it the agency's finest hour, except, perhaps, for just one thing.

"Was Osama bin Laden at Tora Bora?" Pelley asks.

"We believe that he was," Tenet says.

"And, the question is, 'How did he get away?' If this plan of yours is so great ... and Afghanistan went so well.... How does Osama bin Laden get away, when we've got him cornered at Tora Bora?" Pelley asks.

"Well, have you ever seen the geography in Tora Bora?" Tenet asks.

"I have," Pelley replies.

"You don't have anybody cornered in Tora Bora," Tenet says.

Tenet says our forces were too light to stop bin Laden's escape. "We played with what we had. 'Cause you didn't have a big force presence on the ground. We caught a lot of people, we didn't catch the one we wanted," he says.

But they did catch others, including Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, the man who planned 9/11. He was captured in Pakistan.

"When Khalid Sheikh Mohammed ended up in the hands of CIA interrogators, what did he say?" Pelley says.

"I'll talk to you guys when you take me to New York and I can see my lawyer," Tenet replies.

(CBS) But the CIA had something else in mind. Khalid Sheikh Mohammed and others were swept up in the "high value detainee" program. Secret prisons were set up, and several suspects were questioned under new, so-called "enhanced interrogation techniques," said to include sleep deprivation, extreme cold and water boarding, which causes a severe gag reflex, as water is continuously

poured over the face.

"The image that's been portrayed is, we sat around the campfire and said, 'Oh, boy, now we go get to torture people.' Well, we don't torture people. Let me say that again to you. We don't torture people. Okay?" Tenet says.

"Come on, George," Pelley says.

"We don't torture people," Tenet maintains.

"Khalid Sheikh Mohammad?" Pelley asks.

"We don't torture people," Tenet says.

"Water boarding?" Pelley asks.

"We do not – I don't talk about techniques," Tenet replies.

"It's torture," Pelley says.

"And we don't torture people. Now, listen to me. Now, listen to me. I want you to listen to me," Tenet says. "The context is it's post-9/11. I've got reports of nuclear weapons in New York City, apartment buildings that are gonna be blown up, planes that are gonna fly into airports all over again. Plot lines that I don't know – I don't know what's going on inside the United States. And I'm struggling to find out where the next disaster is going to occur. Everybody forgets one central context of what we lived through. The palpable fear that we felt on the basis of the fact that there was so much we did not know."

"I know that this program has saved lives. I know we've disrupted plots," Tenet says.

"But what you're essentially saying is some people need to be tortured," Pelley remarks.

"No, I did not say that. I did not say that," Tenet says.

"You're telling me that... the enhanced interrogation..." Pelley says.

"I did not say that. I did not say that. We do not tor.... Listen to me. You're, you're making....," Tenet says.

"You call it in the book, 'enhanced interrogation,'" Pelley remarks.

"...an assumption. Well, that's what we call it," Tenet says.

"And that's a euphemism," Pelley says.

"I'm not having a semantic debate with you. I'm telling you what I believe," Tenet says.

Asked if anyone ever died in the interrogation program, Tenet says, "No."

Asked if he's sure of that, the former director tells Pelley, "Yeah. In this program that you and I are talking about? No."

"Have you ever seen any of these interrogations done?" Pelley asks.

"No," Tenet replies.

"Didn't you feel like it was your responsibility to know what's going on?" Pelley asks.

"I understood. I'm not a voyeur. I understand what I was signing off on," Tenet says.

Asked if he lost any sleep over it, Tenet tells Pelley, "Yeah, of course you do! Of course you lose sleep over it. You're on new territory. But that's not the point! What's this tension? The tension is, 'I've just lived through 3,000 people dying. This is not a clinical exercise.' Maybe for you guys it's a clinical exercise. Not for me! 3,000 people died. Friends died. Now I'm gonna sit back, and then everybody says, 'You idiots don't know how to connect the dots. You don't have imagination. You were unwilling to take risk to protect this country,'" Tenet says.

"Let me ask the question this way: why were enhanced interrogation techniques necessary?" Pelley asks.

"Cause these are people that will never, ever, ever tell you a thing. These are people who know who's responsible for the next terrorist attack. These are hardened people that would kill you and me 30 seconds after they got out of wherever they were being held and wouldn't blink an eyelash," Tenet says. "You can sit there after, you can sit there five years later, and have this debate with me, all I'm asking you to do, walk a mile in my shoes when I'm dealing with these realities."

Tenet says the interrogations uncovered networks and broke up plots in the U.S.

CBS) Asked if al Qaeda is in the United States right now, Tenet tells Pelley, "My operational presumption is that they infiltrated a second wave or a third wave into the United States at the time of 9/11. Now can I prove that to you? No. It's my operational intuition."

He told **60 Minutes** in 2003 terrorists were in the U.S. prepared to attack the New York City subways, when bin Laden's number two called them back.

"By 2003, the intelligence tells you that Zawahiri has called off an attack against the New York City subway system, in favor of something larger. What is that larger thing?" Tenet says.

One clue, Tenet says, is that bin Laden has been trying to get his hands on nuclear material, since 1993. "Are these people gonna have a nuclear capability? This confers superpower status on a networked organization that is not a state. Is it gonna happen?" Tenet wonders. "Look, I don't know. But I worry about it. Because I've seen enough to tell me that there's intent. And when there's intent, the question is, when does the capability show up? If al Qaeda were to acquire nuclear capability, the thousands of weapons we have would be irrelevant."

In the midst of the al Qaeda threat, Tenet says he was astonished and mystified when the White House turned its aim to Iraq.

Tenet told **60 Minutes** the war in Iraq is "a national tragedy." He says he realized it was the end of his career when he picked up The Washington Post and saw that he was being blamed for the decision to go to war. In classic Washington fashion, someone had leaked a story suggesting that the president decided to attack after Tenet said the evidence against Iraq was a "slam dunk."

In our interview, Tenet admits the CIA's mistakes and his own. But what makes him angry now is how the White House ignored CIA warnings, cooked the books on intelligence, and then used "slam dunk" to brand him with the failure.

"The hardest part of all of this has just been listening to this for almost three years. Listening to the vice president go on 'Meet The Press' on the fifth year of 9/11, and say, 'Well, George Tenet said, slam dunk.' As if he needed me to say slam dunk to go to war with Iraq," Tenet tells Pelley. "And they never let it go. I mean, I became campaign talk. I was a talking point. You know, 'Look at what the idiot told us, and we decided to go to war.' Well, let's not be so disingenuous. Let's stand up. This is why we did it. This is why, this is how we did it. And let's tell, let's everybody tell the truth."

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The truth of Iraq begins, according to Tenet, the day after the attack of Sept. 11, when he ran into Pentagon advisor Richard Perle at the White House.

"He said to me, 'Iraq has to pay a price for what happened yesterday, they bear responsibility.' It's September the 12th. I've got the manifest with me that tell me al Qaeda did this. Nothing in my head that says there is any Iraqi involvement in this in any way shape or form and I remember thinking to myself, as I'm about to go brief the president, 'What the hell is he talking about?'" Tenet remembers.

"You said Iraq made no sense to you in that moment. Does it make any sense to you today?" Pelley asks.

"In terms of complicity with 9/11, absolutely none," Tenet says. "It never made any sense. We could never verify that there was any Iraqi authority, direction and control, complicity with al Qaeda for 9/11 or any operational act against America. Period."

"The president, in October of 2002, quote: 'We need to think about Saddam Hussein using al Qaeda to do his dirty work.' Is that what you're telling the president?" Pelley asks.

"Well, we didn't believe al Qaeda was gonna do Saddam Hussein's dirty work," Tenet says.

"January '03, the president again, [said] quote: 'Imagine those 19 hijackers this time armed by Saddam Hussein.' Is that what you're telling the president?" Pelley asks.

"No," Tenet says.

The vice president upped the ante, claiming Saddam had nuclear weapons, when the CIA was saying he didn't.

"What's happening here?" Pelley asks.

"Well, I don't know what's happening here," Tenet says. "The intelligence community's judgment is 'He will not have a nuclear weapon until the year 2007, 2009.'"

"That's not what the vice president's saying," Pelley remarks.

"Well, I can't explain it," Tenet says.

Tenet says he sometimes warned the White House its statements were false, but he admits that he missed a big one in the 2003 State of the Union address, when the president said, "The British government has learned that Saddam Hussein

recently sought significant quantities of uranium from Africa."

(CBS) The CIA had knocked down that uranium claim months before. The agency even demanded it be taken out of two previous presidential speeches. How did it get through the third time?

"I didn't read the speech. I was involved in a bunch of other things," Tenet says.

"Wait a minute, the president's State of the Union," Pelley remarks. "You didn't read that?"

"Right, I didn't, farmed it out, got it at a principal's meeting, brought it down the hall, handed it to my executive assistant. I said, 'You guys go review this, and come back to me if I need to do anything,'" Tenet remembers.

"Nobody comes back to you?" Pelley asks.

"And therein lies why I ultimately have to take my share of responsibility," Tenet says.

"Did anyone at the White House, did anyone in the defense department ever ask you whether we should go to war in Iraq?" Pelley asks.

"The discussions that are on-going in 2002 in the spring and summer of 2002 are 'How you might do this?' Not whether you should do this," Tenet says.

"Nobody asks?" Pelley asks.

"Well, I don't remember sitting down in a principles committee meeting and everybody saying, 'Okay, there's a deep concern about Iraq. Is this the right thing to do? What are the implications?' I don't ever remember that galvanizing moment when people sit around and honestly say 'Is this the right thing to do?'"

Still, at CIA headquarters, Tenet's team was about to make a historic blunder of its own. The CIA produced its evaluation of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction in a secret report called a "National Intelligence Estimate."

"The first key judgment in the national intelligence estimate says, quote, 'Baghdad has chemical and biological weapons.' Period," Pelley says.

"High confidence judgment," Tenet replies.

How could he make such a bold statement? Says Tenet, "We believed he had chemical and biological weapons."

"But there was no hard evidence," Pelley remarks.

"No, no. There was lots of data. There's lots of technical data," Tenet says. "So you put all of this together, it's not evidence in the court of law. Remember, when you write an estimate, when you estimate, you're writing what you don't know. You might win a civil case. Huh? You're not gonna win a criminal case, in terms of evidence."

"We are going to war. Tens of thousands of people are going to be killed. And you're telling me you had evidence to prove a civil case, not a criminal case?" Pelley asks,

"Well, as you know, hindsight is perfect. The public face on this what we wrote on weapons of mass destruction and for professionals, who pride themselves on being right, this is a very painful experience for us," Tenet acknowledges.

Perhaps the most painful experience for Tenet was the presentation of Secretary of State Colin Powell to the United Nations. Powell asked Tenet to sit behind him.

"Our conservative estimate is that Iraq today has a stockpile of between 100 and 500 tons of chemical weapons agent," Powell said at the U.N.

"Conservative estimate of 100 to 500 tons? I mean, how can you be so wrong?" Pelley asks.

"Scott, we've gone through this. It's what we believed, it's what we wrote," Tenet says.

"Where did these numbers come from?" Pelley asks.

"From our national intelligence estimate," Tenet says. "You don't make this kind of stuff up."

"Wait a minute, you did make this kind of stuff up," Pelley remarks.

"No, we didn't make it up, Scott, we just..." Tenet says.

"It's not true," Pelley remarks.

"Scott, you're doing it again, you're impugning the integrity of people who make analytical judgments and make their best judgments about what they believe of the Iraqis possessed. Intelligence, you know, my business is not always about the truth. It's about people's best judgments about what the truth may be. We believed it. We wrote it. We let the secretary down," Tenet says.

"These are not assertions, what we're giving you are facts and conclusions based on solid intelligence," Secretary of State Powell said.

"He didn't tell the United Nations, 'Look, we think this might be true.' This was laid out to the world as an iron-clad case," Pelley remarks. "Conservative estimate. Between 100 and 500...."

"I wish I could reel the tape back," Tenet says. "Do you think that the American intelligence community's gonna roll out the secretary of state in front of the entire world and consciously let him say things that are wrong? No."

Asked if he apologized to Colin Powell, Tenet says, "Well, Colin and I have talked about it. I'm not going to talk about what he and I have said to each other, but we've talked about it."

(CBS) When it became clear there were no weapons of mass destruction, a rift split the White House and CIA. A former ambassador named Joe Wilson wrote an article debunking the uranium claim that had slipped into the State of the Union address. The White House retaliated, leaking a story that exposed the identity of Joe Wilson's wife, Valerie Plame, as an undercover CIA officer.

"She's one of my officers. That's wrong. Big time wrong, you don't get to do that," Tenet says. "And the chilling effect that you have inside my work force is, 'Whoa, now officers names are being thrown out the door. Hold it. Not right.'"

Asked how much damage that did, Tenet says, "That's not the point. Just because there's a Washington bloodletting game going on here and just because her husband's out there saying what he's saying. The country's intelligence officers are not fair game. Period. That's all you need to know."

"They didn't seem to know that in the White House," Pelley remarks.

"I'm done with it. I've just told you what I think," Tenet says.

What Tenet didn't know was that the next bloodletting would be his. It came in another White House leak, this time to reporter Bob Woodward. An unnamed source described to Woodward a pre-war meeting in the Oval Office. The CIA was showing the president how to present to the public the case for weapons of mass destruction. Woodward wrote "Tenet rose up, threw his arms in the air. 'It's a slam dunk case!'"

"I never got off the couch, I never jumped up, there was no pantomime. I didn't do my Michael Jordan, Air Jordan routine for the president that morning," Tenet tells Pelley.

"What did you mean by slam dunk?" Pelley asks.

"I guess I meant that we could do better," Tenet says.

"Do better?" Pelley asks.

"We can put a better case together for a public case, that's what I meant. That's what this was about," Tenet explains.

Tenet says the president wasn't happy with the presentation. So he was telling Mr. Bush that improving the presentation would be a slam dunk. But Tenet says the leak to Woodward made the remark look like the decisive moment in the decision to go to war.

"I'll never believe that what happened that day, informed the president's view or belief of the legitimacy or the timing of this war. Never," Tenet insists.

In addition to five from the CIA, the only people in the room were the president, vice president, Condoleezza Rice, and Chief of Staff Andrew Card.

"Somebody who was in the Oval Office that day decided to throw you off the train. Was it the president?" Pelley asks.

"I don't know," Tenet says.

"Was it the vice president?" Pelley asks.

"I don't know," Tenet says.

"Who was out to get you, George?" Pelley asks.

"Scott, you know, I'm Greek, and we're conspiratorial by nature. But, you know, who knows?" Tenet says. "I haven't let myself go there, but as a human being it didn't feel very good."

Tenet says, when he saw "slam dunk" in The Washington Post he knew the breach with the White House was total. He called his principal contact in the president's office.

(CBS) "And I remember picking up the phone and calling Andy Card, who is a terrific human being and somebody I've always trusted ... I call Andy and I said 'You know I believe he had weapons of mass destruction. And now what's happened here is you've gone out and made me look stupid. It's the most despicable thing I've ever heard in my life. Men of honor don't do this,'" Tenet recalls.

"Men of honor don't do this?" Pelley asks.

"You don't do this. You don't throw people overboard. You don't do this you don't

call somebody in, you work your heart out, you show up everyday. You're gonna throw somebody overboard just because it's a deflection? Is that honorable? It's not honorable to me. You know, at the end of the day, the only thing you have is trust and honor in this world. It's all you have. All you have is your reputation built on trust and your personal honor. And when you don't have that anymore, well, there you go. Trust was broken," Tenet says.

"Between you and the White House?" Pelley asks,

"You bet. You bet," Tenet says.

Still, the president awarded Tenet the nation's highest honor for a civilian, the Medal of Freedom.

Asked if he was conflicted about accepting the medal, Tenet says, "Well, there was conflict."

At Georgetown, he told **60 Minutes** he accepted the medal because the citation was for the CIA's work in Afghanistan, not for Iraq. Some have asked whether the medal is why Tenet has withheld criticism of President Bush.

"Some people have wondered whether the Medal of Freedom is the reason you tend to give the president a pass," Pelley remarks.

"Well, that's the most outrageous thing I have ever heard in my life," Tenet replies. "The notion that I would trade in my integrity to pull punches with anybody is just ridiculous."

He had the second longest tenure at the agency, but on July 11, 2004, Tenet took a cigar, and walked the grounds of the CIA one last time.

"You know that there are people watching this interview, they're gonna say to themselves, 'That's the guy that missed 9/11. That's the guy who got it wrong on Iraq.' To them, you say what?" Pelley asks.

"You know, history'll judge who this guy is. All I would say to them is I'm also the guy that was privileged to lead men and women that saved thousands of lives. I'm also the guy that was privileged to lead men and women who get up every day to try and keep them safe. I'm also the guy that knows that my report card is a heck of a lot better than the bad things, and there a lot of good things, and I would hope that the American people believe that here's a guy who tried to serve his country as best as he knew how, is an honest man, and led his people as well as he possibly could," Tenet says. "And, the rest is for other people to judge."