



A Conversation with FBI Director Christopher Wray (10/2/17)

- 00:00:19 Craig Stapleton: Good evening. My name is Craig Stapleton. I'm a member of the 9/11 Memorial & Museum board of directors. It is my pleasure to welcome you to tonight's program. We also are joined this evening by my fellow board member Andy Senchak, who is here, and the FBI assistant director in charge of the New York office, William Sweeney, and his executive management team.
- 00:00:42 The museum's exhibitions tell the story of what happened on 9/11 here at the World Trade Center, and at the Pentagon in Virginia, and aboard the four hijacked aircraft. They explain how the attacks came to be and what occurred in their aftermath. Without the FBI's support and assistance, the museum would not be able to present the narrative as comprehensively as we do.
- 00:01:04 Our historical exhibition incorporates elements of and artifacts documenting the bureau's own story, including its pre-9/11 investigations in response to the bombing of the World Trade Center in 1993, U.S. embassies in Africa in 1998, and the U.S.S. Cole in 2000. The exhibition also documents the service of FBI agents as first responders and recovery workers and, of course, references to the PENTTBOM investigation following the 9/11 attacks. You may not be aware that the bureau made sure that its agents and its evidence would be available to the museum so we could show, not merely describe, what happened.
- 00:01:42 And since the museum opened in 2014, this relationship has only grown as groups of FBI agents, analysts, and professional staff-- sometimes joined by the bureau's foreign partners-- come regularly to the museum for customized tours and training programs.

These programs-- which serve, in addition to the FBI, a number of other intelligence and law enforcement agencies and military organizations-- have become central to our mission and our testament to our shared commitment to remember the nearly 3,000 victims of the 9/11 attacks and learn from this history.

00:02:13 This is why I have the distinct honor tonight of introducing Federal Bureau of Investigation director Christopher Wray. A New York City native, Director Wray began his Department of Justice career in 1997 as an assistant U.S. attorney for the Northern District of Georgia, where he prosecuted cases ranging from public corruption to gun trafficking and financial fraud.

00:02:36 In 2001, he joined the Office of the Deputy Attorney General, where he served as associate deputy attorney general and then principal associate deputy attorney general with oversight responsibilities spanning the full department. And he explained to us this afternoon exactly where he was on 9/11, which was a dangerous place to be, but he'll speak for himself.

00:02:59 In 2003, Mr. Wray was nominated by President George W. Bush to serve as assistant attorney general for the Criminal Division. In addition to overseeing criminal matters, Mr. Wray played a key role in the evolving national security mission of the Justice Department. He also served on the president's Corporate Fraud Task Force and supervised the Enron Task Force and other major national and international fraud investigations.

00:03:22 At the conclusion of his tenure, Mr. Wray was awarded the Edwin J. Randolph Award, the Department of Justice's highest award for leadership and public service. After leaving the Department of Justice in 2005, Mr. Wray returned to private practice, and on August 2, 2017, he became the eighth director of the FBI.

We're extremely fortunate and deeply honored to have Director Wray here this evening to reflect the bureau's ever-evolving fight against terrorism and the challenges that lie ahead. Director Wray's remarks will be followed by Q&A, led by Memorial & Museum executive vice president deputy Clifford Chanin. Thank you very much.

00:04:01 (applause)

(laughter)

00:04:16 Director Christopher Wray: I'm not going to start yelling, but... So this evening, it's an honor to be here. I thought I'd take some time this evening to talk both about how the terrorist threat has been evolving and about how we at the FBI are evolving to combat that threat. I thought I'd also talk a little bit about what September 11 means to us as Americans and as a nation, and how it's changed us over the years.

00:04:44 And first let me just say a few things about my own frame of reference, given my background, and some of my observations since coming back to government. I also think I would be remiss if I didn't start with a comment about the events in Las Vegas. I will tell you, because I know everybody's wondering, we don't know yet what this man's motive was and why he chose to do what he did.

00:05:10 We do know that these horrific events are happening all too often. And we know that we all need to work together, to stand together, if we're going to find and stop these people from inflicting this kind of damage and destruction. So the FBI, we are working with our partners in Las Vegas to provide whatever assistance they might need, and we will provide more information as we learn more. But for now, our hearts are with the families of all those who were killed and those who were injured in the shooting. And we are determined to do whatever we can and what we must to prevent these mass shootings.

00:05:53 Since starting this latest position in August, I've been working hard to try to meet everyone and get up to speed on all the great work that's been under way. And I've always known through my career how outstanding and dedicated the people of the FBI were. But I have to say that from this perch over the past few weeks, I feel even more honored, if that's possible, to be their director.

I've been lucky to work with the men and women of the FBI for a huge chunk of my professional career. As a line prosecutor in the field, I got to work with agents on all manner of cases, whether it's bank robberies, gun trafficking, financial fraud, kidnapping-- you name it.

00:06:37 Later, I saw a different side of the bureau when I was in D.O.J.'s senior leadership and specifically focused on the national security mission, and seeing the inspiring way that agents and analysts and others tackled the national security threats, both on the day of 9/11 itself and in the first several years afterwards, was a moving and kind of galvanizing experience for me personally.

00:07:05 So I could not be more excited to be back and part of the bureau's next chapter. I had my installation ceremony at FBI headquarters last Thursday, and it was a classic DC thing with all kinds of pomp and circumstance and so forth, but to me, the real heart of it was an opportunity to recognize what a unique and phenomenal place the FBI is.

00:07:27 And I was looking for a way to try to share that sense of admiration with my colleagues and my friends and family who were there-- people who believed in me, supported me, guided me, and inspired me over the years, people who have kept my feet firmly planted on the ground.

And I wanted to particularly highlight to them, just like I want to highlight to you, what I consider the magic ingredient or the secret sauce of the FBI, of its success, which is a drive that is unparalleled and a passion for service that runs throughout the entire organization.

00:08:00 You see it in every division, every office, every investigation, every assignment. And it's that drive that inspires me every day in this job. And I know my wife and kids have gotten a little bit tired of me talking about it all the time, but I wake up every day fired up to come to work and to be part of this extraordinary group and to see where we can go next.

00:08:26 Standing here on this particular site takes me right back to the morning of September 11, and I'm sure, like everybody in this room, we can all remember exactly where we were when that first plane struck the World Trade Center. We can all remember how we felt as the horror of that morning unfolded. And that day is indelibly inked in our mind as part of who we are. In many ways, it's made us who we are. It's why we're all here today.

00:08:58 On the afternoon of the attacks, I was at FBI headquarters in SIOC, in the command center, with then-Attorney General Ashcroft and Director Bob Mueller. And the place, which I had seen only a few days earlier for other reasons, and at the time seemed sort of cavernous and almost empty, on that day, it was like sardines packed in there. The place was packed to capacity, people spilling out of every room in the place.

00:09:31 And though it was a chaotic and horrifying time, it was also a time of incredible solidarity, because every single person in that center had just one purpose, which was to make sure that it never, ever happened again-- to keep people that we will never know and families we will never meet safe from harm.

And I remember being somewhat in awe of that feeling then, and I still am, in many ways, to this day. There was a period after that where we lived in this kind of haze that seemed like September 12, day after day after day after day.

00:10:09 And I remember every time a plane-- I was sharing this with some of the folks I was talking to right beforehand-- that every time a passenger plane didn't promptly respond to air traffic control communication, our pulses would go racing again, and we'd all go scrambling up to the command

center, listening to the chatter between the F.A.A. air traffic controllers and the planes, you know, really praying that the plane was going to respond. And every time it did respond, we all kind of breathed a sigh of relief. And every lead, every tip, every threat seemed like, "Oh, is this going to be the next one?"

00:10:48 You know, we kept asking ourselves over and over and over again, "What could we have done better? What should we have done better?" We were, I think it's fair to say, in disbelief. We were disoriented. We were angry. We were deeply hurt and gravely damaged. But we did what Americans do best, which is: we mourned our lost, we nursed our wounds, and then we stood up together and we faced a new day, grimly but fiercely determined to prevent an atrocity like that from ever happening again.

00:11:22 So now, fast-forward to 2017. Today at the FBI, we live as if it were September 10 every day. And every day, we wake up asking ourselves, "What do we need to do to keep people safe today and tomorrow and the day after that?"

And we should, because no one should have to live through that kind of loss. I remember a couple of years after the attacks-- by that time, I was the assistant attorney general-- and I participated in a presentation to the families of the victims of the attacks. And after I did my part, as the day rolled on, I kind of moved around to the back of the room and watched as the line prosecutors stood up and kind of walked the family members through each of the four flights in a very detailed, really minute-by-minute way, and then took questions.

00:12:22 And, to me, sitting in the back of the room at that point, watching the prosecutors and the family members interact, the grief in the room two years later was palpable. It was almost overwhelming. There are a lot of stories I could tell, but a few of them stand out to mind in particular. There was a father, I remember, of a young woman who had died on one of the planes, and he stood up to ask a question, but he only got about partway through his question before, kind of abruptly, and without warning, he just collapsed onto the floor.

00:12:58 And I remember another man who had lost his wife on one of the flights, and, as I recall, he had some kind of job where he worked the night shift, so he had just gone to sleep at the time of the attacks, and his wife called, like so many passengers did, from her cell phone, called from the plane to try to call and have a tearful goodbye. But she didn't get through because he was sound asleep, and it rolled on to his voicemail. And then about a minute or so later, she tried again, and this time she got him, and so they said their-- you know, they had a chance to say their goodbyes, as gut-wrenching and as heartbreaking as that must have been.

00:13:42 Well, fast-forward several days later, you know, after 9/11 itself, he went to, you know, off to attend to her funeral, stayed with family, take care of her affairs, et cetera. And it was several days later, he finally came back to his house, and he went in, and he, of course, like we all do, went and listened to his "new" messages. And so you can imagine when he hit "play," and the first message he heard was his wife's voice from that first call, calling to say goodbye.

00:14:18 And that story has stuck with me ever since then. I mean, can you imagine the emotions of that moment, on the one hand hearing your wife's voice one last time, the joy that would come with that, but on the other hand, the overpowering pain of loss that would have come with that same moment?

00:14:40 And that kind of grief, that kind of knee-buckling grief, that sense that something you held most precious was stolen from you, never goes away. It may dissipate with the passage of time, but it doesn't disappear. And after you experience that kind of grief, after that heaviness, after you feel it in your bones, even as a public servant and not even as a victim, you're forever changed. And many of you in this room know that better than most, because you lived through it.

00:15:14 In the FBI, we, too, were changed by that day. Under Director Mueller's leadership, the FBI made what we often referred to as a paradigm shift from a, sort of more of a pure law enforcement agency that investigated

crime after the fact to a national security service that works to prevent crime and terrorism. And when I left D.O.J. in 2005, we were on a dramatic upswing in expanding our national security operations.

00:15:46 But there was still, even when I left, I remember thinking, there was still a lot to be done. And now, as I take stock of where things stand, having stepped away from that mission for several years and now coming back, I find the progress remarkable, in some ways more than all my former and now once-again colleagues, who stayed throughout all of it.

00:16:07 It's sort of the difference between when you see your own child grow little by little, you don't really notice how much taller they're getting. But we've all had the experience of when you see somebody's else's kid, and you say, "Oh, my, when I last saw you, you were this tall, and now you're up here." And to me that's the experience I have in seeing firsthand the capabilities that have been developed since the time I was gone, both here in the U.S. and around the world.

00:16:36 And I can tell you today, we are stronger, we are smarter, and we are better able to confront these threats. But, as last night's events remind us, we still face people who operate without constraint, without reason, and without humanity. And I find that I wake up every morning thinking about those people. And I can tell you, I'm going to keep thinking about those people, because the threats we confront are ever-changing and we can't afford to be static.

00:17:11 We still confront threats from large, structured terrorist organizations like Al Qaeda, planning large-scale attacks over a long period of time. But now, we also face groups like ISIS, who use social media to spread propaganda, to lure people in, and to inspire them to attack wherever they can in whatever way they can. And our challenge is finding those here at home who are responding to that propaganda, because there's no single profile of those individuals, there's no single path of radicalization, and there's no easy way to reveal who might be ready to actually take action.

- 00:17:55 Many of these are not professionally trained operatives with carefully executed plans. Right now, what we're seeing are unstable and erratic operatives prone to acting quickly and unpredictably. They're shifting from large-scale weaponry and sophisticated bombs to easily acquired weapons-- small arms, knives, vehicles-- and they're striking at what the intelligence community refers to as "soft targets."
- 00:18:27 And just as we saw last night in Las Vegas, although we don't yet know, again, like I said, what the full extent of that gunman's background or motives were, but let me be clear, when the intelligence community refers to "soft targets," that's just jargon. What they mean is, terrorists striking out at people who are just living their lives, minding their own business innocently: people at concerts and in cafes and at clubs, people just walking down the street.
- 00:18:56 These terrorists present different kinds of challenges for us to identify and track. And the same can be said of domestic extremists who pose a threat of violence and economic harm, often by chillingly lethal lone offenders. With default encryption on our devices, on the apps we use, in our communications, it's even more difficult now for us to ascertain where they are, who they're working with, and what they're planning to do, even with a fully lawful court order.
- 00:19:31 So we need to keep finding new, innovative ways of thinking. We need fresh perspectives. We need to keep finding new ways of thinking about, what is it that we actually know? What is it that we still need to know? And how does all that connect to the bigger picture? You know, 16 years ago, we suffered principally from a lack of shared intelligence.
- Today, we struggle with technical blind spots, with the sheer volume of intelligence, and with very compressed, tightening windows in which to act. So we've got to find new ways to prioritize all that information, to sort it, to search it, and to share it.
- 00:20:04 We've got to find new ways to exploit social media, and we've got to keep using intelligence to connect the dots, to put it all into context, and

to drive operations. One of the things I get to do in this job is go to Quantico and speak at graduations of agents and analysts. And on my first trip down there, as I was walking through one of the courtyards, I spotted this little stone that was probably about yea big, just kind of over... nestled in one of the corners. And you know the old saying about a picture being worth a thousand words, well, this stone just had the picture of the Twin Towers on it, and then it had two words, so, the Twin Towers, two words: "Intelligence matters."

00:21:03

Intelligence alone isn't enough. We need to have the right people on board. We still desperately need agents who are really good at talking to people, which has always been, to me, kind of the FBI's bread and butter.

But now, we also need people who are tech-savvy. We need I.T. specialists and intelligence analysts who can stand beside those agents and make sense of the flood of information that are pouring in. We need a true team approach. And that's awfully hard to drive from the top down, so we're really building it now from the ground up.

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At Quantico, the basic training course, the basic field training course, now combines agents and analysts together during their training from day one, so they start understanding each other's skill sets and capabilities right from the beginning. And that means that when they leave Quantico, they can hit the ground running. So we're being very intentional about integrating intelligence with operations and driving that kind of team mentality. Because we can collect intelligence, and we can have great technology at our disposal, but if we don't make the best use of both tools, we're not going to be as great as we can be.

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The other thing I've noticed that's changed the most dramatically, besides the integration of intelligence with law enforcement, is partnerships. And we had partnerships before, and they were good-- partnerships with state and local law enforcement, partnerships in the intelligence community. But the difference now in terms of how much it's part of the DNA of how we operate is striking to me-- again, sort of that "this tall, this tall now" effect.

00:22:45 We are working really, really hard and I see it in everybody I talk to, in every field office and every division, to build on our partnerships with federal, state, local, and international partners. We're more tightly connected than ever before. The JTTFs-- the joint terrorism task forces-- are a particularly strong example of that, and the New York JTTF is probably the best example, because-- and it's certainly the oldest-- it was the nation's first JTTF.

00:23:14 Those task forces are, in many, many ways, our first line of defense against terrorism. You're talking about highly trained and passionately committed investigators, analysts, linguists, SWAT members, specialists from dozens and dozens of U.S. law enforcement intelligence agencies. So if somebody sees something here in New York, that information moves at the speed of light to everybody who needs it. And that's the way we need it to be.

00:23:42 But we've also got to keep building relationships of trust and support with the communities we serve so that they know we have their best interests at heart and that we're working every day to keep them safe. Most importantly, we need to stand together. Law enforcement, the intelligence community, the private sector, and all the citizens we serve, because a united front is the only way we're going to truly defeat the threat.

00:24:08 So a lot has changed in the years since I left D.O.J., but there are, I want to say, a couple of things that will never change. The FBI's mission is simple but profound: to protect the American people and uphold the Constitution. And that mission hasn't changed, and it's not gonna change, not as long as I have anything to say about it.

00:24:31 So we're going to abide by the rule of law and our core values. We're going to follow the facts independently, wherever they may lead, and no matter who likes it. And we're going to always, always pursue justice. Those are the FBI's anchors, and I'm determined to make sure that they and we adhere to them, no matter the test.

- 00:24:54 I had the opportunity, right before coming out here with all of you, to tour the museum. And I have to say, it was, for me, an emotional experience. It was also incredibly inspiring. As many of you know, the bureau lost one of our own that day, Special Agent Lenny Hatton. Lenny was actually on his way to work when he saw the smoke and fire coming from the North Tower, and within minutes, he was on the rooftop of the Marriott, relaying information back to his FBI colleagues.
- 00:25:27 And then when the second plane struck the South Tower, without even a second thought, he raced back into the World Trade Center to do what he could. And there was one guy in the building who said he was guided out by a man who identified himself as a special agent. And then he said, after sort of thanking him, he was surprised to see the agent turning around and running back.
- 00:25:48 And he said, like most of us would have, "Wait," you know. "Hey, where are you going?" And Lenny said, "I'm going back in the building." And he died doing what he loved doing, which was helping people, trying to right what was wrong. And I had the chance to see Lenny's name on the memorial wall outside, near the fountain, and it... it meant a lot to me. Because that kind of goodness, that kind of dedication and selflessness, combined with everything else I saw today, gives me hope.
- 00:26:20 Some of you may be familiar with the songwriter Leonard Cohen. And even if you don't know Cohen's music, you may have seen some of his lyrics. One of his most well-known songs is a song called "Anthem," and there's a phrase from it: "Ring the bells that can still ring, Forget your perfect offering, There is a crack, a crack in everything, And that's how the light gets in." And I think, in Cohen's mind, it is the darkness that reveals the light. It's the worst in life that reveals the very best in us. It's the evil that often reveals the goodness. And it isn't often until something is broken or cracked, or even torn apart, that we actually get to see the light shining through.

00:27:06 So September 11, to me, left a crack in every one of us that no amount of time can ever fully heal, and I think most people would say it left a crack in this city that will never fully disappear. But in the days and the weeks and the months that followed, the light began to creep back in.

00:27:27 And you see-- and saw, people standing in solidarity, people being kind and selfless and caring, determined to help this city heal and to move forward, never to forget, but to begin, slowly, to build again. And we decided, as a country, that we would take that tiny sliver of light coming out of such a terrible, unrelenting darkness, and we would make it sacred, and we would hold it close to our hearts.

00:27:57 And that's what I think this memorial that we're sitting in is for so many people. It's a light of remembrance and respect, it's a light of determination and resolve, and it's a part of the reason why I'm so honored to be back in this mission.

There are times-- I know I have times-- where we feel like this may be some kind of never-ending fight and that we're never going to fully eradicate the terrorist threat. And, to some extent, that might be true. Terrorism may just be a fact of life. But it's a fact that we face together, and we face it with the unshakable belief that good will triumph over evil, that reason will trump ideology, and that justice and the rule of law will rise above savagery. And I think we face it with the hope for more peaceful days to come.

00:28:51 And so that's that hope that I think keeps us going, even on the darkest days, even on a day like this, with what happened last night. So thank you for having me here today.

(applause)

00:29:21 Clifford Chanin: Thank you so much for that, you know, very powerful statement of your sense of the mission, your understanding of the

bureau, and, of course, the connection back to 9/11. I was very struck by your story of your own day-of experience. And, of course, now we're years later, and you're in a very different position than you might have imagined you'd be.

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But I wonder if it's possible to take you back to those days and to get a sense of what you thought was coming at that point in the immediate aftermath of 9/11, all of the responsibilities the Justice Department had, that you might have seen in other departments at top levels of government, and think about whatever those expectations were and how they compare to where we actually are today.

00:30:11

Director Christopher Wray: You know, I think we pretty quickly pivoted within the first 24 to 36 hours to the realization that the focus needs to be on preventing what's coming next.

And that may seem sort of like common sense to all of you regular people, but I will tell you that law enforcement, in particular, had a mentality going back to when I was in law school, which is, you investigate crimes that have already happened, and you get the bad guys and you put them in jail.

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The problem with that, of course, is, if your enemy is somebody who is determined, in fact, enthusiastic about killing themselves in the course of committing the crime, then viewing it through that lens, sort of a classic deterrence model, is almost silly, really. And it was, I remember very vividly, that the fairly sharp instructions we got-- again, I think it was less than 24 hours-- from the president were, "Don't let this ever happen again," and that was in response to somebody who I won't identify, being very well-intentioned, very experienced, saying, "We're going to get the people who did this."

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And the reaction was, the people who did this just died in those planes. We need to be worrying about the next attack. So I think we pretty quickly started to adjust to that. But as a result, as I said in my remarks, every flight, every threat, every tip, you know, the number one sin in that

environment was, heaven help you if you don't share information that somebody else should have had, you know, in the law enforcement and intelligence communities.

00:32:02 So there was, like, this, just, explosion of information coming all over the place and trying to figure out which one is the one that matters. That's the hard part. You know, for example, there was a period where, you know, every morning I was meeting with the attorney general and the director, and we were-- they were trying to track every weapon that was getting confiscated at, you know, metal detector security checkpoints in the airport.

00:32:29 Well, needless to say, maybe you wouldn't be surprised-- I was surprised at how many people try to fly with weapons. So pretty quickly, they're, like, "All right, we need to-- we need to sort of sift through this in a little bit more systematic way."

You know, then we went from the... We went from the flights to anthrax, to, then there was the DC sniper, and for a while we wondered, you know, is that going to be the next thing? Is that going to be some kind of terrorism? And all the while, we're saying to ourselves, "We can't be chasing the last attack, we can't be fighting the last war." We had to be thinking about the next... what's next? What are they going to do next? And I think that's... that's the thing that I think I've noticed.

00:33:19 Now, when I talk to my counterterrorism guys, they... There's much more of this, it's much just more part of who they are. They're thinking both the balancing of collecting the intelligence about who else are these guys connected to, who all are they communicating with, where are they getting their money, where are they going, what are they-- what sites are they going on to, all that kind of stuff, all the while balanced against, we can't just watch people forever. Heaven help us if we lose them.

00:33:50 When do we have to disrupt? When do we have to sort of take action to just shut this down? That's much more of a natural part of conversation

now in a way that I think took a little bit... well, took a lot of adjustment in those first few years.

Clifford Chanin: You spoke about significant progress in these two periods, the earlier period and now, that you've come as director. This progress on the national security front, can you give us a little more detail on it, from that little boy to the big boy? I mean, what sports is he playing in school?

(Wray laughs)

00:34:23

Clifford Chanin: I mean, what are the things that characterize progress in your mind in these years of transformation?

Director Christopher Wray: I mean, to me, the biggest things are the integration of intelligence into everything we do and partnerships. There are probably others, but those would be the two biggest ones. I'll take the second first. To me, the partnerships... You know, now, everywhere you go, and it's true in every field office, in every division, you see, here's this person from this agency who's embedded in our agency. And they're very much treated as part of the team. And that's people from state, local, other intelligence community members, even overseas partners. You know, we have Brits, Australians, Canadians, New Zealanders, you know, embedded in our operations and vice versa. You know, that... That makes a much more seamless conversation.

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Clifford Chanin: I wonder if you could tell us a little bit more, particularly about these foreign partnerships, because I don't think everybody realizes just how closely our own military-- law enforcement and intelligence services are actually enmeshed with trusted partners. And these are essential, now, tools, I think, within law enforcement intelligence in particular.

00:35:46 Director Christopher Wray: I mean, to some... There's a lot of things that go into that. One is, we're such an interconnected world now, so any investigation is likely to involve either evidence in multiple countries about a person who's in another country, or people who are in different countries who are in communication with each other, or fact patterns that are in other countries that we're learning from to make sure that they don't get replicated in our country or vice versa.

00:36:17 I mean, I was struck by... I had only been on the job for, I guess, you know, three or four weeks, when the head of M.I.5, my counterpart in the U.K., had not only called me several times, he had been text messaging with me, and he flew over to spend the day with me on 9/11, all as a measure, I think, of how they in the U.K. view the partnership. And it's very much mutual.

00:36:48 You know, right before I walked out here, I got an email from one of my Canadian counterparts, you know, offering help, you know, related to the Las Vegas thing. But that's at my level. If you go down one level, into the operational level, it's happening many, many, many, many times a day. And especially with the threat that I was describing, one of the things we're seeing on the ISIS side is, more and more of these folks who a year or two ago might have traveled or wanted to travel over to the battlefield, you know, in Syria, are now being encouraged to stay where they are, to stay in the U.K., to stay in a European country, to stay in the United States, and to just act where they are, as opposed to traveling over there to fight and likely get killed. So we all have the same issues. And there's nothing that brings people together better than a common threat.

00:37:48 Clifford Chanin: There was a statement last week from Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the leader of ISIS, who was thought to have been killed, but in any case, he came forward with a statement exactly to the point you make, calling for more attacks, wherever they might be. I wonder if you could describe for us your thinking about the differences between ISIS and Al Qaeda in terms of the threat they represent. Do they... obviously, they're motivated by similar ideas. But do they act, and do they represent the same kind of threat?

00:38:16 Director Christopher Wray: I think they think they're both very daunting threats, but they're very different. You know, with Al Qaeda, you're talking about people who have trained over long periods of time, very sophisticated network. I used to talk about the continuum of a terrorist plot, you know, with Al Qaeda being, you know, you've got the idea, then you got the planning, then you got the fundraising, then you got the preparation, the sort of casing out of the route or whatever the potential attack would be, you know, all the way to eventually final preparations and attack.

00:38:54 You know, it could-- as we know from the 9/11 attacks, it goes over a long, long period of time, involving a very intricate network of people. That presents its own challenges, because they're very sophisticated and determined.

Contrast that to the ISIS adversary, where you have people who are communicating with very few other people. They get a smaller number of people, much less in the way of money that's needed to finance what they're doing, much, many fewer people for them to communicate with, so, therefore, fewer people for us to intercept or recruit as cooperators.

00:39:41 And because their mode of attack is crude, but very effective, much greater ability for them to call an audible and switch from a gun to a car to a knife back to a gun, all in a very, very short period of time, because they don't, you know, they're not trying to put together some elaborate plot. So you hear sometimes people in our business refer to the time "flash to bang," you know, the compression, the window in which we have to act and the amount of ways we can get at it are very hard.

00:40:16 And then if you compound that with ISIS's, you know, spewing its propaganda to lots and lots and lots of people. Some of those people are enthusiastic about the message but have no intention to commit an attack. Other people have every intention of committing an attack. And then there's people in the middle who are starting to warm to the idea. And for us, with the scores of people involved trying to sort of sift

through that and figure out who do we need to identify quickly-- because, again, we may not have much of a window-- presents a very different kind of challenge. Sort of volume...

00:40:54 I guess I think of the ISIS and homegrown violent extremists as kind of a volume threat, and the, you know, Al Qaeda and the other sort of more classic terrorist organizations as more of a, kind of a qualitative threat. One attack could be spectacular, whereas the ISIS attack is just many, many, many more people.

00:41:15 Clifford Chanin: Got it. Today, coincidentally, two trials opened-- one here in New York, one in Washington, both coming, though, out of the New York office-- prosecutions of terrorists, the Libyan in Washington who was responsible for the Benghazi attack in 2012, and then the so-called Chelsea Bomber from last year. Does this indicate to you that the criminal justice system, law enforcement have actually got a much better handle on how to take these cases and move them through the system?

00:41:49 The whole Guantanamo question, of course, hangs over some of this. The... Khattala, the Libyan, could have conceivably gone that way. But in your mind, is this sort of the system showing that it can manage these problems?

Director Christopher Wray: I am a big believer that the federal criminal justice system can handle these kinds of cases. That's not to say that I don't support Guantanamo or military commissions. I think the president and the executive branch should have every tool that's lawful at its disposal, depending on the circumstances.

00:42:28 But I'm, you know, as a guy who came from within the system of prosecutors, and now in the bureau, I have a lot of confidence in our ability to investigate these cases, to prosecute these cases, and to succeed with these cases. I also think we've gotten a lot more sophisticated over the years about...

- 00:42:47 One of the big arguments you used to hear before about not using a courtroom was protection of sources and methods and classified information that would be somehow more likely to be compromised in a traditional prosecution, because you'd have to share that information, reveal it in some way, to the defendant because of the protections that criminal defendants have in our system.
- 00:43:13 And that is a legitimate concern, but I just think we've gotten better at being able to manage that. There's lots of things that go into that, either what we charge and what we don't charge. There's a statute called CIPA, which is, you know, that deals with classified information and how we handle introducing that information. So there's just a lot more... road testing, if you will, of that than there was back in 2001. So I think the fact that we're now using them, I think, shows a level of confidence throughout the executive branch that this is, in fact, a very viable option and that we've had some very good success with it.
- 00:43:54 Clifford Chanin: Let me ask-- I realize, you know, you're getting fed from all the different departments of the bureau and all the field offices and so on, but to focus on, particularly, the counterterrorism mission, because it is so central, you know, how do you bring yourself up to speed on something like that? And, again, you have to bring yourself up to speed presumably in many different areas. But could you give us what the learning curve is like for you in relation to the counterterrorism example?
- 00:44:22 Director Christopher Wray: Well, I mean, I'm getting reports on terrorism matters. It's the first thing I see in the morning, and it's usually the last thing I get briefed on before I leave in the evening. It's a, you know, all day long kind of thing. If you broaden that to include counterintelligence matters, you know, national security matters more broadly, that's... Well, you know, 60% of what consumes me on a day-to-day basis.
- 00:44:55 I guess because I spent so much time on counterterrorism during the 2001 to 2005 time period, a lot of things like FISA-- you know, the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act-- or the concepts of balancing intelligence versus disruption, a lot of those things-- dealing with classified

information-- a lot of that stuff was pretty much natural. It's sort of like riding a bike. It wasn't that hard.

00:45:22

The harder part was adjusting to what I was describing before, about the difference between using an Al Qaeda mindset for more of an ISIS adversary. And then I think the biggest thing that I've found difficult is the changes in technology.

You know, ten years... Ten years is not that much time to try to learn the difference between Al Qaeda and ISIS. Ten years in technology, if you think about what's happened in technology, I mean, 2005, tweeting was something that birds did.

(laughter)

00:46:00

Director Christopher Wray: Just as an example. So there's been some adjustments in a lot of ways on my end.

Clifford Chanin (chuckling): Yes, particularly, I guess, in tweeting.

(laughter)

Clifford Chanin: This issue of cyberterrorism, I think, is-- or cyberthreat, I should say-- is particularly salient because it covers... You know, the Equifax thing may not be an act of terrorism, but it certainly exposes vast vulnerabilities within the system. And then, of course, the whole issue with the election, and the reach in there.

00:46:32

I mean... and I want... I'll talk about the investigation into the election in a moment. But, you know, looking forward, whatever happened happened with the Russian election, and that's going as a subject matter for a separate investigation. But how do we look forward? And what can the

bureau do to prevent and limit damage to future elections from these kinds of interferences in our process?

00:46:58 Director Christopher Wray: We spend a lot of time right now talking about that. The... we know that the cyber-threats from not just Russia, but other state actors, are significant-- and, frankly, non-state actors. And, I think, ultimately, the solutions take on a similar pattern to what I talked about in the counterterrorism arena, which is intelligence-sharing, partnerships, multidisciplinary responses. I think you've got a layer on top of that, technological sophistication.

00:47:36 You know, we can't recruit enough really, really smart, technologically savvy people. I was in the New York office this afternoon and met a couple of young agents who, you know, it was like that scene from "A Beautiful Mind," you know, where they're writing all these elaborate... If we could clone those people, you know, that would be a good start.

00:48:01 Clifford Chanin: The role of Facebook and Twitter, these private companies that serve as global platforms for exchange, their vulnerability now being really discussed more publicly. What can you tell us about that and whether or not, as private companies, they are more vulnerable, whether they're subject or they need to be subject to certain kinds of regulations that allow for a better understanding of who is actually getting involved in some of these issues?

00:48:30 Director Christopher Wray: Well, I want to be careful with that one. We do know that the... and I think this is all public, we do know that the Russians—I think we know this from the intelligence community assessment-- tried at a level that we had not previously seen to interfere with the 2016 election, not just through sort of dissemination of fake news, of various other forms of development and distribution of divisive posting-- you know, there's the whole trolling aspect.

00:49:09 I mean, there's lots and lots of different ways in which they did what they did. That's all the subject of ongoing investigations that I'm not going to discuss. We are spending a lot of our time at the bureau from a

counterintelligence perspective looking forward and trying to figure out how we anticipate... It's the same kind of prevention concept that I was talking about in the counterterrorism arena.

00:49:35 In other words, how do we, working together with the Department of Homeland Security, other members of the intelligence community, the private sector-- you know, there are a lot of private sector companies that support and service our election systems, which is, of course, a state-run... You know, all the states have their own election systems, and there are private companies that provide a lot of the backbone for that.

00:50:01 And, we're, you know, interacting with them. We're talking to our... I mentioned our foreign partners. You know, we're talking to them about what they're seeing on their end so that we can learn... We know a lot more now than we did about all the different threats to-- whether it's to our election systems or anything else-- about, you know, their tradecraft, their capabilities, their methods. So I think, again, it's intelligence-sharing, it's partnerships, it's thinking ahead, and not chasing our tails.

00:50:36 Clifford Chanin: Right. Would you anticipate 2018, 2020, and onward, that there will be changes that will better protect the elections, or is it too early to say about that at this point?

Director Christopher Wray: Well, we're certainly a lot more dialed in, and I don't mean just "we" at the FBI, but I think... and, frankly, not just the U.S. government more broadly. State and local governments, foreign governments, I think everybody's a lot more dialed in on this issue and a lot smarter, and a lot more... putting a lot more resources to it.

00:51:10 So I would expect that we will do better, but I also expect that our adversaries don't just coast, right? I mean, they up their game, too. So they're going to improve their networks. We have to improve our networks to fight them.

Clifford Chanin: How would you characterize the motivations of Russians or others who are trying to interfere with our election?

00:51:33 Director Christopher Wray: I mean, they all have different motives. I think America, in many ways is... Remains the, you know, the envy of the world. And if there's ways to take us down a peg, people are going to do it.

Clifford Chanin: I wanted to ask a little bit about becoming a director. How did you learn that, you know, your name was... how does this happen?

(laughter)

00:52:02 Director Christopher Wray: That's a question people in my family are asking.

(laughter)

Director Christopher Wray: You know, as recently as, you know, May of this year, if you had walked up to me on the street and said something to me about it, I would have chuckled out loud and said, "That's the craziest thing I've ever heard." I wasn't even contacted about this position until after one of my predecessors, Bob Mueller, had been appointed the special counsel.

00:52:38 I got a call one evening from Rod Rosenstein, who is the deputy attorney general, asking me if I would be willing to be considered. Because my wife was asleep, I whispered, "Yes, I think I'd be willing to be considered."

(laughter)

- 00:52:57 And then, the next morning, had some explaining to do. You know, I... I mean, having spent time dealing with the bureau as a line guy, dealing with line agents in the field, as a leadership guy, dealing with bureau leadership at headquarters, having dealt with everything from all the different national security issues to the criminal issues, and then, frankly, having had time in the private sector with clients on the receiving end of the bureau's great work, I think, you know, I had a level of perspective that I guess was useful.
- 00:53:37 Clifford Chanin: You described during the Senate hearing the outreach by many former colleagues in law enforcement, and-- whether D.O.J. or FBI or others-- many humbling, you described them, messages of support. Do you think-- obviously, under any circumstances, becoming director of the FBI is a very significant appointment-- but, obviously, the circumstances of your appointment and the environment in which it happened was very particular. Was that part of what they were reaching out to you about, do you think?
- 00:54:13 Director Christopher Wray: I think... I think the process... For me, there were a couple of very inspiring but humbling phases of the process. The first was in the period-- there was a period of about five days between when my name was first released to the news media as, I don't know, a finalist or whatever word you'd want to use, but before I was actually selected.
- 00:54:48 And during that window-- and I still hadn't decided at that point whether or not I would take the job if asked-- when that... at the beginning of that five-day period. And during that five-day period, starting with, literally, within hours, I had, you know, agents, many of whom were retired, you know, that I had worked with back in the day, all the way to prosecutors I'd had cases against or with, you know, judges who can't communicate publicly, but-- a lot of my friends are, you know, now judges-- texting me. Sort of urging me to do it if asked.
- 00:55:24 There's one agent I remember who, he said to me, he said, "Look, if you, if you get asked and you say yes, you don't need to call me back. But if you get asked and you think you might actually say no, will you promise

that you won't-- that you will first call me, because there's a bunch of us who want to take you out to dinner, and you're going to say yes after we take you out to dinner."

(laughter)

00:55:52 Director Christopher Wray: And so, that's when I went home and I started saying, you know, how on Earth could I not do this? I think the second moment that was maybe almost more meaningful in its own way was going through what seemed like the world's longest job interview up in the Senate, where I ended up having to meet with, you know, 70-plus senators individually, plus the hearing.

0:56:13 And to see that the senators, ranging from some of the single most conservative members of the Senate to the most liberal members of the Senate, all kind of wanted the same thing from the bureau at a time when people in our country don't seem like they can agree on much of anything-- certainly the politicians don't seem like they can agree on anything-- to have people basically saying, "Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, we're going to kill each other"-- rhetorically-- over here, but, "FBI? Whoa, whoa, whoa. No, that we don't want to mess with. That, we need a certain kind of..."

00:56:51 And they all wanted the same thing. So to me, that then sort of bookended what I was hearing from the law enforcement community. And I think that's... To me, that's a bright spot at a time when a lot of people are worried and angry and stressed, that even politicians can agree that they want an independent, professional FBI.

00:57:11 Clifford Chanin: Can you describe in any more detail the public expectations for yourself and for the bureau now that you've picked up this responsibility? What are you getting from the public at large as you begin coming to groups like this, or going out in the world and meeting people?

Director Christopher Wray: Support, relief. I think, hopefully, one of the things I bring is a level of calm. That's my goal, is to try to stabilize things and kind of have everybody get back to work. Some might say I'm just bringing boredom.

(laughter)

00:57:51

Clifford Chanin: That would be welcome at this point.

Director Christopher Wray: Exactly. But as a couple of agents said to me, "We could use a little boring right now. That would be just fine." So I said, "I'm your man."

(laughter)

Clifford Chanin: Given all of the swirl of comments that were made-- in some cases in the form of tweets-- about the work of the bureau, what do you find, now arriving as director, to be the mood within the FBI?

00:58:14

Director Christopher Wray: I mean, I see in the bureau the same bureau that I've always loved, which is people who are focused on whatever their assignment is. And I'd always seen it in agents. Whatever kind of case they had, even if it wasn't the squad they were originally thinking they were going to get assigned to, you know, you give them a case, they're going to take it, and they're going to run with it, and they're going to do the best damn job that can, possibly can be done.

00:58:41

If I already kind of knew that, I think the eye-opening part for me since being back is, I've gotten to see a lot of other parts of the bureau, and it ranges from people in support functions to people in training, people in the labs, linguists... You know, no matter what it is, the thing that they all have in common is, whatever you ask them to do, whatever their assignment is, they're determined they're going to be the best.

- 00:59:10 And they don't spend a lot of time thinking too much about all the noise in the system. It's just, "We're going." I mean, I had a briefing from a very, very experienced, very accomplished agent, an alum of the office here, who's now what we call a legat, you know-- has relationships overseas, and whose primary responsibility is building relationships with the countries that he services, in effect, on behalf of the FBI.
- 00:59:42 Totally different skill set than investigating significant counterterrorism cases. And when that guy came in to meet with me because I was getting ready to meet with, you know, the... my counterpart from one of those countries, he comes in, man, it was like the guy got shot out of a cannon. And he was talking about how great the relationships were that he'd forged and how hard he was working on it, and how proud he was of the bridges he'd built with these countries, and the same kind of enthusiasm that he channeled into investigations when he did those.
- 01:00:15 And I think that, that wiring... You know, I've heard comments about morale. You know, it's 36,000 people. I'm sure there's somebody who's got a morale issue. But the people I see are, you know, "It's go time."
- 01:00:31 Clifford Chanin: I'm going to ask one more question, and then I'm going to ask the audience at the end to stay in your seats while the director and his party leave, just for a brief moment. So one last question, and it goes back to the Senate hearing. And some of this you probably would have answered in the statement you made, the speech you gave at the beginning, but I wanted to ask it specifically, because that Senate hearing was a very powerful moment, and it got an awful lot of attention. And I think your representation of the principles that you believe in, I think, were very well-received across the aisle, as you describe.
- 01:01:07 But at one point, Senator Lindsey Graham, talking about the great interest in the hearings, said, "America is listening." And I wonder if you could refine very briefly what the message you would like to give to America would be.

Director Christopher Wray: Do the right thing.

(laughter)

Clifford Chanin: On that note, we have a reference to Spike Lee, and also the earlier...

(laughter)

01:01:36

Clifford Chanin: I'm guessing here, but, eight FBI directors, I'm guessing you're the first one to quote Leonard Cohen, as well. So a wonderful mix of references as we close. But, please, join me in thanking Director Christopher Wray.

(applause)