

# New York, Washington in security lockdown on 9/11 anniversary

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New York City and Washington DC were under a full-scale security lockdown Friday after federal and local officials announced “credible” threats of terrorist attacks on the two cities on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon.

No details were released to substantiate the seriousness or the specific nature of the alleged threat, but a full-scale mobilization of local police and federal agents increased tensions throughout both cities.

Anti-terrorism units, equipped with body armor and assault rifles, were on patrol at many key transit points, following claims that the terrorists intended to strike bridges or tunnels using car or truck bombs.

President Obama was briefed three times Thursday on the intelligence reports, according to White House officials, before delivering a speech to a joint session of Congress on Thursday night. He reportedly directed US intelligence agencies to “take all necessary steps to ensure vigilance,” although neither the steps nor any information related to the alleged threat were disclosed to the public.

Until Wednesday, US officials had largely downplayed any suggestion that the tenth anniversary of the 9/11 attacks would be the occasion for any new efforts by Al Qaeda to strike within the United States. They claimed that the killing of Osama bin Laden May 2 and the ongoing drone strikes against alleged lower-ranking Al Qaeda operatives in Pakistan had largely disrupted the organization.

But on Thursday officials told the media they received a series of reports on the movement of several Al Qaeda agents from Pakistan into the United States.

New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg and Washington Mayor Vincent Gray both ordered police placed on 12-hour-a-day shifts and a dramatic increase

in visible security measures, including stepped-up random searches on subway platforms, bus terminals and highway roadblocks. These included heavy use of dog teams and similar measures calculated to generate widespread public concern.

The FBI also deployed marked cars at locations around the US capital, a highly unusual public mobilization of the principal federal internal security force.

Similar measures were reported in California, with stepped-up police mobilization at landmarks like the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco.

The security alert was officially triggered when the FBI and Department of Homeland Security issued a bulletin Thursday night to all US law enforcement agencies warning of potential attacks on ceremonies commemorating the 9/11 attacks.

The assistant director of the FBI’s New York field office and a spokesman for the Department of Homeland Security used identical language to warn of “specific, credible but unconfirmed threat information.”

Like similar alerts issued over the past ten years, under both the Bush and Obama administrations, the warning seemed calculated more to cause public unease than anything else, since the threat was undefined.

Friday wore on with no additional information, but plenty of heavy-handed security action. Police searched vehicles crossing the Brooklyn Bridge in New York City and roadblocks and checkpoints were set up throughout the city in time for the morning rush hour.

A report published on the *New York Times* web site Friday afternoon was typical. It cited two unnamed US police officials who in turn cited an informant who warned of “two American citizens of Arab ancestry” allegedly en route from Afghanistan to the US. The

informant gave “only a vague physical description of the two men – one described as 5 feet tall, the other 5-foot-8 – and a first name for one of them that is common in the Middle East.”

The only conceivable purpose of such a leak to the media is to further inflame public fears and focus them on anyone matching the “vague physical description,” which would apply to virtually any Arab-American male of average or less than average height.

Since the killing of Bin Laden four months ago, US officials have told the media that they found in a notebook discussion of possible attacks on the 9/11 anniversary, but without any specifics.

Vice President Joseph Biden and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton discussed the threats in general terms on morning television interview programs Friday, but gave no further details. Biden admitted that there was “no certitude” that anyone has entered the US recently bent on a terrorist attack.

“The thing we are all most worried about is what they call a ‘lone ranger,’ a lone actor, not some extremely complicated plan like it took to take down the World Trade towers,” he said. What measures could be effective against such a threat he did not explain.

The largest security mobilization is expected Sunday for the tenth-anniversary ceremony that will dedicate a national memorial to the 9/11 victims who died in the World Trade Center. Both President Obama and former president George W. Bush are to attend.

Security measures around the World Trade Center site include the creation of what police called a “frozen zone,” in which even residents of the area would require a police escort to go to and from their own apartments.

The White House said Friday that there was no change in the schedule for Obama, who is to visit all three 9/11 sites: lower Manhattan, the Pentagon, and the field in Shanksville, Pennsylvania where United Airlines Flight 93 crashed.



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