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**Date:** January 20, 2002 11:20 AM  
**Subject:** US Against Terrorism - pre 9/11

We can look at US policy and actions against terrorism prior to 9/11 and find fault and blame for allowing 9/11 to happen - but hind-site is always 20-20....the important thing what we do from here. This from 1/20 **WashingtonPost.com**:

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## **A Strategy's Cautious Evolution**

### **Before Sept. 11, the Bush Anti-Terror Effort Was Mostly Ambition**

***By Barton Gellman***  
***Washington Post Staff Writer***

On a closed patch of desert in the first week of June, the U.S. government built a house for Osama bin Laden.

Bin Laden would have recognized the four-room villa. He lived in one just like it outside Kandahar, Afghanistan, whenever he spent a night among the recruits at his Tarnak C training camp. The stone-for-stone replica, in Nevada, was a prop in the rehearsal of his death.

From a Predator drone flying two miles high and four miles away, Air Force and Central Intelligence Agency ground controllers loosed a missile. It carried true with a prototype warhead, one of about 100 made, for killing men inside buildings. According to people briefed on the experiment, careful analysis after the missile pierced the villa wall showed blast effects that would have slain anyone in the target room.

The Bush administration now had in its hands what one participant called "the holy grail" — a three-year quest by the U.S. government — a tool that could kill bin Laden within minutes of finding him. The CIA planned and practiced the operation. But for the next three months before the catastrophe of Sept. 11, President Bush and his advisers held back.

The new national security team awaited results of a broad policy review toward the al Qaeda network and Afghanistan's Taliban regime, still underway in a working group two and three levels below the president. Bush and his top aides had higher priorities — above all, ballistic missile defense. As they turned their attention to terrorism, they were moving toward far-reaching goals than the death of bin Laden alone.

Bush's engagement with terrorism in the first eight months of his term, described in interviews with advisers and contemporary records, tells a story of burgeoning ambition without the commitment of comparably ambitious means. In deliberations and successful drafts of a National Security Presidential Directive approved by Bush's second-ranking advisers on Aug. 13, the declared objective evolved from "rolling back" to "permanently eroding" and eventually to "eliminating" bin Laden's al Qaeda organization.

Cabinet-rank policymakers, or principals, took up the new strategy for the first time on Aug. 4. It called for phased escalation of pressure against Taliban leaders to present them with an unavoidable choice — disgorge al Qaeda or face removal from power.

The directive asked the CIA and the Pentagon to produce options involving force — covert and overt — but it deferred decisions on their use. It had not reached Bush's desk by Sept. 11, and on that day its multiyear plan of single steps became a race to start the war on terror front at once.

Had hijackers not killed more than 3,000 people, senior advisers said, there is no way predict how far Bush would have chosen to follow the path they were mapping.

"We won't really know, because the strategy doesn't unfold" before Sept. 11, said a participant in developing it, who declined to be quoted by name. "It's a phased strategy we lay out. And in some sense, whether you have to use the military option is going to depend [on] whether the first part of your strategy fails or succeeds. I can tell you the strategy we had, the sequencing we had in mind. I guess I can't prove to you that we have done it."

Privately, as the strategy took form in spring and summer, the Bush team expressed concern for the counterterrorist policies it had inherited from President Bill Clinton. Speaking of national security adviser Condoleezza Rice, a colleague said that "what she characterizes as the Clinton administration approach was 'empty rhetoric that made us look feckless

Yet a careful review of the Bush administration's early record on terrorism finds more continuity than change from the Clinton years, measured in actions taken and decisions made. Where the new team shifted direction, it did not always choose a more aggressive path:

The administration did not resume its predecessor's covert deployment of cruise missiles, submarines and gunships, on six-hour alert near Afghanistan's borders. The standby force gave Clinton the option, never used, of an immediate strike against targets in al Qaeda leadership. The Bush administration put no such capability in place before Sept. 11. At least twice, Bush conveyed the message to the Taliban that the United States would hold the regime responsible for an al Qaeda attack. But after concluding that bin Laden's group had carried out the October 2000 attack on the USS Cole – a conclusion stated without hedge in a Feb. 9 briefing for Vice President Cheney – the new administration did not choose to order armed forces into action.

In the spring, CIA officers traveled into northern Afghanistan to assess rebel forces commanded by Ahmed Shah Massoud. They found him worse than he had appeared in the autumn before. The agency gave Massoud cash and supplies in small amounts in exchange for intelligence on al Qaeda but did not have the authority to build back his fighting strength against the Taliban.

In his first budget, Bush spent \$13.6 billion on counterterrorist programs across 40 departments and agencies. That compares with \$12 billion in the previous fiscal year, according to the Office of Management and Budget. There were also somewhat higher requests this year, however, between what military commanders said they needed to combat terrorism and what they got. When the Senate Armed Services Committee tried to fill those gaps, \$600 million diverted from ballistic missile defense, Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld said he would recommend a veto. That threat came Sept. 9.

On May 8, Bush announced a new Office of National Preparedness for terrorism at the Federal Emergency Management Agency. At the same time, he proposed to cut FEMA's budget by \$200 million. Bush said that day that Cheney would direct a government-wide review on managing the consequences of a domestic attack, and "I will periodically convene a meeting of the National Security Council to review these efforts." Neither Cheney's review nor Bush's took place.

Bush did not speak again publicly of the dangers of terrorism before Sept. 11, except to promote a missile shield that had been his top military priority from the start. At least three times he mentioned "terrorist threats that face us" to explain the need to discard the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty.

The Treasury Department created a new deputy assistant secretary's post last summer to coordinate anti-terrorist efforts among its five enforcement arms, and it took the first step toward hosting a Foreign Terrorist Assets Tracking Center. It also spent months finding

the new laws and old global institutions that are central to the war against al Qaeda's financing.

Unresolved interagency disputes left the administration without a position on legislative initiatives to combat money laundering. And until the summer, Treasury Secretary Paul O'Neill suspended U.S. participation in allied efforts to penetrate offshore banking havens whose secrecy protects the cash flows of drug traffickers, tax evaders and terrorists.

At the nexus of law enforcement and intelligence, where the United States has concentrated its work against al Qaeda since 1998, a longtime senior participant said he observed a fundamental change after the White House passed to new occupants.

"Ninety-nine point-something percent of the work going on and the decisions being made would have continued to be made whether or not we had an election," the career official said. "I have a real difficult time pointing to anything from January 20th to September 10th that can be said to be a Bush initiative, or something that wouldn't have happened anyway."

### **'What Are You Going to Do About It?'**

At 1:30 on a Wednesday afternoon, two weeks after receiving the nod as Bush's national security adviser, Condoleezza Rice walked into a room whose maps and charts only partially obscured the peeling of pale yellow paint. Room 302 of the Old Executive Office Building had become the unlikely seat of a bureaucratic empire built by Richard Clarke and Robert Cressey, his chief of staff.

Clarke's white crew cut imparts a military demeanor, but he actually came to government by way of Boston Latin School and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Under Clinton he had combined modest authority with immodest infighting skills to become the government's main engine of policy on terrorism. In this first meeting with Rice, on January 10, Clarke won a prompt invitation to keep the job.

"The focus was on al Qaeda – who is al Qaeda, what is al Qaeda and why is it an existential threat?" Clarke recalled in an interview.

Rice told him first, he said, that the dangers appeared to be greater than she had known.

"Her second reaction was 'What are you going to do about it?'," Clarke said. "I don't think she actually got a tasking at that meeting, but it was clear that she wanted an organized staff review. She didn't just passively take this information."

Soon afterward, Rice had lunch with the man she would replace in the northwest corner office of the White House. Sitting face to face in blue wingback chairs, Rice and Samuel "Sandy" Berger traversed the policy horizon from Russia, China and the Middle East to the spread of nuclear weapons. Berger made what he thought might be an unexpected claim.

"I said to Condi, 'You're going to spend more time during your four years on terrorism generally and al Qaeda specifically than any other issue,'" he said. Bush administration officials gave a similar account.

In the Situation Room on Jan. 10, a CIA briefer showed Rice a video clip of bin Laden being shot by a Predator drone – then unarmed – some months before. The live-action image tracked him out the door of a villa and across the road. The same villa, in another five months, would rise and fall on the Nevada desert test range.

Across the Potomac River, outgoing defense secretary William S. Cohen and his chief of staff, Robert Tyrer, prepared what may stand as the shortest memo of consequence in

Pentagon lore.

"There's a period in the transition where the building gets its hooks into you and you get 'death by briefing' by each component in every service," Tyrer recalled. Before that stage he said, "we wanted to lay out, from the perspective only the top guy has, what are some of the issues that may not occur to you that you need to be prepared for."

One of those came in a handwritten note, covering less than a page. The lined paper had nothing on it but three names and three telephone numbers – the Pentagon's top care specialists on terrorism. Cohen had found out the hard way that a defense secretary needs to need them fast.

"Literally, it was 'Here's a piece of paper, here are the names of your experts who you haven't met, here are their home phone numbers,' " said another top Cohen aide, who prepared the list. "We tried to make it clear that you can wake up on the morning of your inauguration and have something very big in your face."

At a Jan. 10 meeting in the Tank, the secure conference room of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, President-elect Bush and his defense team took their first briefing from Gen. Henry H. Shelton, the chairman, and the four service chiefs. Participants said neither side, then later, raised the subject of a six-hour alert force near Afghanistan.

Shelton had no interest in returning Los Angeles-class submarines, which carry cruise missiles, or AC-130 gunships, which fire computer-directed cannon, to their previous locations. The intelligence community had yet to give him a target for bin Laden that he thought he could strike in time.

Those on Bush's team had different reasons. They had already begun discussions, one adviser said, of whether bin Laden's death would be enough. And they were convinced "this wasn't about [bin Laden], this was about al Qaeda, and that's why we had to go after the network as a whole."

Personalizing the struggle to one man, he said, was "one of the fallacies" of the Clinton team's approach.

### **'There Must Be a Consequence'**

In his first week on the job, deputy national security adviser Stephen J. Hadley instructed NSC team leaders to propose subjects for high-level review. Much of the incoming staff was still finding its way around the 553 rooms and two miles of corridors in the Eisenhower Executive Office Building, once the world's largest.

Clarke did not need a map, or a second invitation. He had a three-page proposal on his desk that day.

The Jan. 25 memorandum spoke starkly. Clarke and Cressey had just navigated through the most intensive period of counterterrorist activity in American history. The millennium year marked its start with al Qaeda plots – stopped by improbable good fortune – to mount synchronized strikes on airports in Boston and Los Angeles, and on American tourists in Jordan. It ended with a suicide attack that killed 17 sailors and crippled the USS Cole in Yemen three weeks before the presidential election.

More attacks had almost certainly been set in motion, Clarke and Cressey wrote. American intelligence believed there were al Qaeda "sleeper cells" in America – not a potential problem but "a major threat in being," according to people who read their proposal.

Clarke had pressed superiors since the Cole bombing on Oct. 12, 2000, to mount a major attack on al Qaeda's Afghan training camps. Clinton left the question for his successor; what little public record there was hinted that Bush might choose to act.

"I hope that we can gather enough intelligence to figure out who did the act and take the necessary action," candidate Bush said the morning after the explosion. "There must be a consequence."

Clarke argued that the camps were can't-miss targets, and they mattered. The facilities amounted to conveyor belts for al Qaeda's human capital, with raw recruits arriving and trained fighters departing – either for front lines against the Northern Alliance, the Afghan rebel coalition, or against American interests somewhere else. The U.S. government had whole libraries of images filmed over Tarnak Qila and its sister camp, Garmabat Ghar, miles farther west. Why watch al Qaeda train several thousand men a year and then catch them around the world when they left?

Clarke asked Rice to let him begin an interagency review. As it began, he recommended immediate steps.

Massoud's Northern Alliance fighters, in danger of defeat by the Taliban, needed enough time "to keep them alive until we figured out what our overall strategy would be," as a new appointee put it. In neighboring Uzbekistan, President Islam Karimov needed more help than an American-trained battalion he sent against fundamentalist rebels allied with al Qaeda. Treasury had to get moving on a terrorist assets tracking center, months overdue. The Counterterrorism Center could buy a lot more cooperation from foreign intelligence services if it had more cash – the center's whole budget, sources said, did not exceed \$50 million. And the Voice of America had to start answering bin Laden – in local languages – to counter his appeal in the Islamic world.

Not much came of Clarke's immediate requests. It would be months before the new appointees arrived in force. But Rice and Hadley liked his zeal. The inherited strategy of battling al Qaeda cell by cell, they believed, could not work.

"The premise was, you either had to get the Taliban to give up al Qaeda, or you were going to have to go after both the Taliban and al Qaeda, together," Hadley said in an interview. "As long as al Qaeda is in Afghanistan under the protection of the Taliban . . . you're going to have to treat it as a system and either break them apart, or go after them together."

Work began in the Counterterrorism Strategy Group, or CSG, by the first week of February. There it stayed for months.

"The U.S. government can only manage at the highest level a certain number of issues at one time – two or three," said Michael Sheehan, the State Department's former coordinator for counterterrorism. "You can't get to the principals on any other issue. That's in any administration."

### **Before Sept. 11, terrorism did not make that cut.**

Army Lt. Gen. Donald Kerrick, who had come from top posts on the Joint Staff and the Defense Intelligence Agency to manage Clinton's National Security Council staff, remained at the NSC nearly four months after Bush took office.

He noticed a difference on terrorism. Clinton's Cabinet advisers, burning with the urgency of their losses to bin Laden in the African embassy bombings in 1998 and the Cole attack in 2000, had met "nearly weekly" to direct the fight, Kerrick said. Among Bush's first-line advisers, "candidly speaking, I didn't detect" that kind of focus, he said. "That's not necessarily derogatory. It's just a fact. I didn't detect any activity but what Dick Clarke and the CSO

doing."

### **'Say Nothing and Do It'**

On Feb. 8, Assistant Secretary of State Alan Eastham summoned Abdul Hakeem Mujahid to the State Department. Mujahid called himself the Taliban's United Nations ambassador, though the world body paid little notice. Now Eastham ordered his office shut down.

State Department spokesman Richard Boucher highlighted the move and said Washington would reconsider Mujahid's visa status. But the Bush administration had no intention of expelling him. Nor did the symbolic closing, mandatory under new U.N. sanctions, stop Mujahid from conducting business from a third-floor walk-up in Queens.

The same old deadlocked conversations played out among the United States, the Taliban and interested bystanders. Taliban Foreign Minister Abdul Wakil Muttawakil told Pakistani news agencies Feb. 11 that his government had a new "fourth proposal" to resolve the Laden problem. (Others had included keeping a close eye on him for the United States; submitting U.S. complaints to a panel of Islamic scholars.) Washington never discovered what, if anything, Muttawakil was talking about this time.

Bush officials continued to scold the Taliban for harboring terrorists and for the "cultural barbarism" of its March 16 destruction of Buddhist statues at Bamiyan. But the government's impotence came through on March 29 when Eastham gave a long interview on PBS's NewsHour With Jim Lehrer." The transcript remained the State Department's major public statement until Sept. 11.

"You have to take the country as it presents itself," Eastham said. "The reality is that the Taliban do control most of the territory of Afghanistan." Asked whether Washington might back the Taliban's military opponents, he replied, "We don't do that."

As it happened, Massoud had just set off on his first tour of the West. Rebuffed by the Clinton team and discouraged by what he heard from Bush, he basked in a statesman's welcome at the European Parliament in Strasbourg, France. On April 5, a reporter there asked Massoud if he had a message for Bush.

"If President Bush doesn't help us," he replied in Persian, according to a recording of his remarks translated by Afghan allies, "then these terrorists will damage the United States and Europe very soon, and it will be too late."

The CIA said it might be too late for Massoud. Officers who traveled to rebel territory that spring reported that the Northern Alliance's weapons were in "abysmal condition," according to someone who reviewed their account. Massoud had five Mi-8 helicopters—lumbering 12-ton Russian transport helicopters built in the 1960s—but no more than two could fly on a given day and those were so shaky that the Americans refused to board.

(Massoud was assassinated in a suicide bombing on Sept. 9.)

Behind the closed doors of the Situation Room, and in secure video conferences, Bush's mid-level advisers were hardening their stance. The CSG, represented most often by assistant secretaries of their departments, had begun its work by looking for a "rollback" strategy against al Qaeda. By April 20, when the group transmitted a 12-page discussion draft for the first time to their superiors, they were proposing a plan of "significant actions that permanently erode what is now a robust terrorist organization."

"There was, I think, an increasing frustration at our inability to convince the Taliban or anybody else to get to them," said Francis X. Taylor, the State Department's coordinator for counterterrorism.

When the Deputies Committee met April 30, Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage declared an important shift in stance by saying the destruction of al Qaeda should be the American priority in South Asia—higher than slowing the spread of nuclear arms, or preventing another Indo-Pakistan war, or restoring democracy after Gen. Pervez Musharraf's coup in Pakistan. Only al Qaeda, Armitage said, represented a direct threat to the United States.

Sometime in early spring, according to an account reconstructed by Rice from her own memory and from those of others present, Bush expressed impatience with the pace of progress against bin Laden. As Rice briefed him in the Oval Office about recent threat warnings, with Cheney and White House Chief of Staff Andrew H. Card Jr. in the room, it is said to have replied: "I'm tired of swatting flies. I'm tired of playing defense. I want to take offense. I want to take the fight to the terrorists."

White House officials acknowledge in broad terms that a president's time and public relations are among his most valuable policy tools. But they challenge the view that Bush's silence about al Qaeda before Sept. 11, and his absence from strategy reviews, meant inattention. "He didn't deal with al Qaeda by hyping it in presidential speeches," one senior adviser said. "You dealt with it by putting together a plan."

Rice, by this account, thought "the last administration had made a major mistake after the embassy bombings by saying we're going to war on terrorism and then not doing it. And I thought it would be much better to take the reverse tack, which was to say nothing and

### **'Dialogue,' Not Sanctions**

As the interagency review reached for still bolder objectives against al Qaeda in April, the global effort to track bin Laden's money trail reached a stumbling point.

O'Neill directed his businessman's doubts about regulation toward the tools of financial probes. Sen. Carl M. Levin (Mich.), an influential Democrat on the banking committee, handed the treasury secretary a copy of the department's Money Laundering Strategy report required annually by Congress.

After reading "all this data and verbiage in the book," O'Neill told Washington Post reporters and editors in December, he was astonished to find his department spending \$642 million against money laundering: "I started asking questions. What are we getting for it?"

With the old enforcement tools under cost-benefit review, new ones languished in Congress. Three bills offered rival approaches to a common problem: how to identify the owners of foreign accounts that clear money through the U.S. banking system.

American banks have to verify the identities of their domestic customers, but not of their owners in "correspondent accounts" and other arm's-length relationships designed for obscurity. Useful to drug traffickers and tax evaders, the same methods allowed terrorists to cover their tracks as they wired money in and out of the United States.

All three bills in Congress would have imposed some new form of legal obligation on U.S. banks to know whose money they were holding. Until Sept. 11, the Bush administration was so torn-among the Justice Department, the president's National Economic Council and separate views inside Treasury—that it supported none of them.

In a complementary approach to the problem, wealthy countries banded together in multilateral efforts to punish rogue banking systems that declined all law enforcement requests.

At first glance, O'Neill declared that kind of ganging up to be "by its nature, highly coercive." The United States, a founding member of each panel—one at the Group of Seven industrial

nations, the other at the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development-step away from both of them in April. O'Neill said the G-7 task force should use "dialogue," sanctions, to shift scofflaw countries. And the separate OECD project to stamp out tax havens, O'Neill wrote May 11 in the Washington Times, was "not in line with this administration's tax and economic priorities."

By July 7, when he met his counterparts again in Rome, O'Neill had agreed to resume full money-laundering program of the G-7. But he continued to say he would cooperate "exclusively on information exchange" at the OECD-without possibility of sanctions.

### **'Hold the Taliban Responsible'**

Summer brought a storm of intelligence warnings that blew longer and harder even than those of the millennium. Through June and July, one foreign interlocutor said, CIA Director George J. Tenet worked himself "nearly frantic" with concern.

With Bush scheduled to meet foreign leaders in Genoa starting July 20, U.S. and Italian surveillance found alarming signs in June of an active al Qaeda cell at Milan's Islamic Cultural Institute. The Secret Service assumed that Bush was the target. Pentagon analysts feared for the vast naval base in Naples. Hundreds of fragmentary clues pointed to the target aimed, or emanating, elsewhere.

On June 22, U.S. Central and European commands imposed "Force Protection Condition Delta," the highest anti-terrorist alert, and the Fifth Fleet steamed out of port in Bahrain. On June 28, according to an authoritative account, the CIA station chief in Rome assessed the targets at highest risk were the U.S. Embassy and the Vatican. That led Bush to cancel his scheduled meeting with Pope John Paul II, on July 23, to the papal summer residence Castel Gandolfo.

Tenet dispatched an urgent request on July 3 to 20 foreign intelligence services, asking to arrest a list of suspected al Qaeda members. Two days later, his Counterterrorism Center called in the FBI, Customs and Coast Guard, as well as immigration and aviation authorities to say a major attack on U.S. interests appeared to be imminent-likeliest, by now, in Saudi Arabia or Israel, but a target inside the United States could not be excluded.

Hoping to head off an attack, the State Department sent instructions on June 29 for U.S. Ambassador to Pakistan William B. Milam to find his Taliban counterpart. Warn Abdul Zaeef, the instructions said, that Washington regarded the Taliban as equally accountable for any attack. Clarke, by telephone, conveyed the same message to intermediaries in the United Arab Emirates.

Following local custom, Milam first poured tea for Zaeef in his grand reception room, with a view of Islamabad's Margalla Hills. Then he said his piece.

"I told him we had information that al Qaeda was planning something, and they were our enemies," Milam recalled. "Since the Taliban were their hosts, and very accommodating hosts, we would have to hold the Taliban responsible."

By late July, according to one national security official, Tenet had delivered so many warnings with so much urgency that some administration colleagues grew tired of hearing them.

New tests in the Nevada desert, meanwhile, showed that a Predator armed with a Hellfire missile could strike its target consistently in atmospheric conditions suitable for laser guidance. Equipped with a standard armor-piercing warhead, one of them struck no more than six inches off dead center of a surplus Army tank, spinning the shattered turret 30 degrees.

The warhead for killing men behind walls remained classified. And according to the Air Force and CIA, there was no compelling reason in June to rush the Predator back to Afghanistan.

"This was not a mature system," Air Force Secretary James G. Roche said in an interview. "When a new system passes a flight test, he said, 'usually you just start doing a whole lot more tests.'"

### **'Show That You're Serious'**

Some of the Bush administration's strategists were now describing the new policy as a crucible for terror, from the Latin word for a pot and flame hot enough to melt metal into a single mass. They did not want al Qaeda rolled back or eroded. They wanted it gone—a molten puddle of nothing more. Another of the word's modern meanings applied equally to them: a severe test.

By June 7 they had reached a form of words for their goal that remained largely intact through Sept. 4. It would be U.S. policy to eliminate al Qaeda as a threat to the United States and to friendly governments. The strategy called for a multiyear and multifaceted effort involving diplomatic, economic, intelligence, law enforcement and, if necessary, military efforts.

The strategy was phased escalation. It would start with fresh diplomatic demands on the Taliban, combined with overtures to the regime's opponents, north and south, to assess the prospects of stoking rebellion.

Those two steps, according to authoritative accounts, would have begun the moment they signed the document. What came next was backing for the rebels, but the directive stopped short of deciding that in advance. Still further in the future were options for direct military attack.

Twin appendices directed the CIA and the uniformed chain of command to prepare brief palettes of options. At Langley, Tenet was nearly ready. His proposed assistance to the Northern Alliance rebels ranged from \$125 million to \$200 million and included money for battlefield intelligence, nonlethal equipment such as body armor and winter clothing, a cache of lethal equipment such as ammunition and upgrades for the Northern Alliance's dying helicopter fleet.

The military's task was to devise targets among al Qaeda leaders, the networks they used to direct their forces, and their training facilities; to plan direct support for Afghan rebel offensives; and to prepare strikes on Taliban leaders, ground forces and stores of military supplies.

But Shelton found himself troubled by the objective in its broadest form.

"To say 'eliminate' is to define defeat for yourself right up front," he said in an interview. "It's a terrorist organization operating in 50 or 60 countries—the odds of your eliminating it are slim. So words like 'reducing,' 'degrading,' 'rendering it operationally ineffective' would be more realistic."

Shelton liked the plan to back anti-Taliban rebels, but he did not think it would compel the Kabul government to break with bin Laden.

"You're not left with many options in that region of the world, and that one had some potential," he said. "I never thought [the Taliban] would agree to do it, but I thought it fit for them to take sides."

What came next would have been the hard part. But if decision-makers were serious about taking each step in sequence, they would have needed time. Some policymakers said initial diplomacy alone would have taken months. Building up the Northern Alliance and rebels, and testing their strength against the Taliban, would likely have kept overt U.S. off the table through 2002.

But officials speaking for the White House maintained strongly that the plan never had timetable. Had it come to war, Hadley said, dividing al Qaeda from the Taliban, or attacking them together, could not have been accomplished "just with cruise missiles."

"You're going to have to use air forces and you're going to have to use ground forces," Hadley said. "You can't say no casualties and standoff weapons only. You've got to go and put boots on the ground and American young men and women at risk, in order to get the job done and also to show that you're serious about it."

Shelton, who has since retired, said the Bush administration did not commit itself nearly as far by Sept. 4. Still chairman of the Joint Chiefs when American Airlines Flight 77 plummeted into the Pentagon, Shelton said serious contemplation of war began that day.

**"We had started looking at options" for a military campaign before that, he said. "we had really not leaned into going into Afghanistan against al Qaeda in the manner we did, or against the Taliban almost at all, until September 11th."**

Staff researcher Robert Thomason contributed to this report.

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**Author:** [Steven Russell](#)  
**Date:** January 20, 2002 12:20 PM  
**Subject:** Re: Abu Zubeida-OBL successor  
In response to [message](#) posted by **BPyles**:

*After extensive interviews with al-Qaeda and Taliban captives the US Central Command made Zubeida their 'priority target'. His alleged role as the 'operational link' between bin Laden and those who carried out the attacks on Washington and New York make him even higher priority than al-Zawahiri.*

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He was number 4 on my Top 25 al Qaeda list, but I was able to take the top three off it because they are on the Egypt's 25 Most Wanted instead, so Zubaydah moves up to number 1 now on the Top 25 al Qaeda list [names that do not appear on the FBI Top 22, nor on the Egypt Top 25 lists].

**1 Abu Zubaydah** ----- at large, possibly with bin Laden in Peshawar, Pakistan, December 17, 2001, disappeared from Tora Bora probably December 11, 2001. Born in the late 1960's, a thirtysomething Saudi or Algerian, but also thought to be a Palestinian from the Gaza Strip, and a top al Qaeda deputy and senior planner, director of external affairs for al-Qaeda, he oversaw Khalden terrorist training camp, he is suspected of being one of the key planners of the Sept. 11 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, along with Mr. Zawahiri and Mr. Atef.