

THE 9/11  
COMMISSION  
REPORT

# CONTENTS

*List of Illustrations and Tables ix*

*Member List xi*

*Staff List xiii–xiv*

*Preface xv*

1. “WE HAVE SOME PLANES” 1
  - 1.1 Inside the Four Flights 1
  - 1.2 Improvising a Homeland Defense 14
  - 1.3 National Crisis Management 35
  
2. THE FOUNDATION OF THE NEW TERRORISM 47
  - 2.1 A Declaration of War 47
  - 2.2 Bin Ladin’s Appeal in the Islamic World 48
  - 2.3 The Rise of Bin Ladin and al Qaeda (1988–1992) 55
  - 2.4 Building an Organization, Declaring  
War on the United States (1992–1996) 59
  - 2.5 Al Qaeda’s Renewal in Afghanistan (1996–1998) 63
  
3. COUNTERTERRORISM EVOLVES 71
  - 3.1 From the Old Terrorism to the New:  
The First World Trade Center Bombing 71
  - 3.2 Adaptation—and Nonadaptation—  
in the Law Enforcement Community 73
  - 3.3 . . . and in the Federal Aviation Administration 82
  - 3.4 . . . and in the Intelligence Community 86

3.5	... and in the State Department and the Defense Department	93
3.6	... and in the White House	98
3.7	... and in the Congress	102
4.	RESPONSES TO AL QAEDA'S INITIAL ASSAULTS	108
4.1	Before the Bombings in Kenya and Tanzania	108
4.2	Crisis: August 1998	115
4.3	Diplomacy	121
4.4	Covert Action	126
4.5	Searching for Fresh Options	134
5.	AL QAEDA AIMS AT THE AMERICAN HOMELAND	145
5.1	Terrorist Entrepreneurs	145
5.2	The "Planes Operation"	153
5.3	The Hamburg Contingent	160
5.4	A Money Trail?	169
6.	FROM THREAT TO THREAT	174
6.1	The Millennium Crisis	174
6.2	Post-Crisis Reflection: Agenda for 2000	182
6.3	The Attack on the USS <i>Cole</i>	190
6.4	Change and Continuity	198
6.5	The New Administration's Approach	203
7.	THE ATTACK LOOMS	215
7.1	First Arrivals in California	215
7.2	The 9/11 Pilots in the United States	223
7.3	Assembling the Teams	231
7.4	Final Strategies and Tactics	241
8.	"THE SYSTEM WAS BLINKING RED"	254
8.1	The Summer of Threat	254
8.2	Late Leads—Mihdhar, Moussaoui, and KSM	266
9.	HEROISM AND HORROR	278
9.1	Preparedness as of September 11	278
9.2	September 11, 2001	285
9.3	Emergency Response at the Pentagon	311
9.4	Analysis	315

10. WARTIME	325
10.1 Immediate Responses at Home	326
10.2 Planning for War	330
10.3 “Phase Two” and the Question of Iraq	334
11. FORESIGHT—AND HINDSIGHT	339
11.1 Imagination	339
11.2 Policy	348
11.3 Capabilities	350
11.4 Management	353
12. WHAT TO DO? A GLOBAL STRATEGY	361
12.1 Reflecting on a Generational Challenge	361
12.2 Attack Terrorists and Their Organizations	365
12.3 Prevent the Continued Growth of Islamist Terrorism	374
12.4 Protect against and Prepare for Terrorist Attacks	383
13. HOW TO DO IT? A DIFFERENT WAY OF ORGANIZING THE GOVERNMENT	399
13.1 Unity of Effort across the Foreign-Domestic Divide	400
13.2 Unity of Effort in the Intelligence Community	407
13.3 Unity of Effort in Sharing Information	416
13.4 Unity of Effort in the Congress	419
13.5 Organizing America’s Defenses in the United States	423

*Appendix A: Common Abbreviations* 429

*Appendix B: Table of Names* 431

*Appendix C: Commission Hearings* 439

*Notes* 449



## COMMISSION MEMBERS

Handwritten signature of Thomas H. Kean in black ink.

Thomas H. Kean

CHAIR

Handwritten signature of Lee H. Hamilton in black ink.

Lee H. Hamilton

VICE CHAIR

Handwritten signature of Richard Ben-Veniste in black ink.

Richard Ben-Veniste

Handwritten signature of Bob Kerrey in black ink.

Bob Kerrey

Handwritten signature of Fred F. Fielding in black ink.

Fred F. Fielding

Handwritten signature of John F. Lehman in black ink.

John F. Lehman

Handwritten signature of Jamie S. Gorelick in black ink.

Jamie S. Gorelick

Handwritten signature of Timothy J. Roemer in black ink.

Timothy J. Roemer

Handwritten signature of Slade Gorton in black ink.

Slade Gorton

Handwritten signature of James R. Thompson in black ink.

James R. Thompson

attempt to gather intelligence and wait for an opportunity. One Special Operations commander said his view of actionable intelligence was that if you “give me the action, I will give you the intelligence.”<sup>148</sup> But this course would still be risky, in light both of the difficulties already mentioned and of the danger that U.S. operations might fail disastrously. We have found no evidence that such a long-term political-military approach for using Special Operations Forces in the region was proposed to or analyzed by the Small Group, even though such capability had been honed for at least a decade within the Defense Department.

Therefore the debate looked to some like bold proposals from civilians meeting hypercaution from the military. Clarke saw it this way. Of the military, he said to us, “They were very, very, very reluctant.”<sup>149</sup> But from another perspective, poorly informed proposals for bold action were pitted against experienced professional judgment. That was how Secretary of Defense Cohen viewed it. He said to us: “I would have to place my judgment call in terms of, do I believe that the chairman of the Joint Chiefs, former commander of Special Forces command, is in a better position to make a judgment on the feasibility of this than, perhaps, Mr. Clarke?”<sup>150</sup>

Beyond a large-scale political-military commitment to build up a covert or clandestine capability using American personnel on the ground, either military or CIA, there was a still larger option that could have been considered—invading Afghanistan itself. Every official we questioned about the possibility of an invasion of Afghanistan said that it was almost unthinkable, absent a provocation such as 9/11, because of poor prospects for cooperation from Pakistan and other nations and because they believed the public would not support it. Cruise missiles were and would remain the only military option on the table.

### **The Desert Camp, February 1999**



Early in 1999, the CIA received reporting that Bin Ladin was spending much of his time at one of several camps in the Afghan desert south of Kandahar. At the beginning of February, Bin Ladin was reportedly located in the vicinity of the Sheikh Ali camp, a desert hunting camp being used by visitors from a Gulf state. Public sources have stated that these visitors were from the United Arab Emirates.<sup>151</sup>

Reporting from the CIA's assets provided a detailed description of the hunting camp, including its size, location, resources, and security, as well as of Bin Ladin's smaller, adjacent camp.<sup>152</sup> Because this was not in an urban area, missiles launched against it would have less risk of causing collateral damage. On February 8, the military began to ready itself for a possible strike.<sup>153</sup> The next day, national technical intelligence confirmed the location and description of the larger camp and showed the nearby presence of an official aircraft of the United Arab Emirates. But the location of Bin Ladin's quarters could not be pinned down so precisely.<sup>154</sup> The CIA did its best to answer a host of questions

about the larger camp and its residents and about Bin Ladin's daily schedule and routines to support military contingency planning. According to reporting from the tribals, Bin Ladin regularly went from his adjacent camp to the larger camp where he visited the Emiratis; the tribals expected him to be at the hunting camp for such a visit at least until midmorning on February 11.<sup>155</sup> Clarke wrote to Berger's deputy on February 10 that the military was then doing targeting work to hit the main camp with cruise missiles and should be in position to strike the following morning.<sup>156</sup> Speaker of the House Dennis Hastert appears to have been briefed on the situation.<sup>157</sup>

No strike was launched. By February 12 Bin Ladin had apparently moved on, and the immediate strike plans became moot.<sup>158</sup> According to CIA and Defense officials, policymakers were concerned about the danger that a strike would kill an Emirati prince or other senior officials who might be with Bin Ladin or close by. Clarke told us the strike was called off after consultations with Director Tenet because the intelligence was dubious, and it seemed to Clarke as if the CIA was presenting an option to attack America's best counterterrorism ally in the Gulf. The lead CIA official in the field, Gary Schroen, felt that the intelligence reporting in this case was very reliable; the Bin Ladin unit chief, "Mike," agreed. Schroen believes today that this was a lost opportunity to kill Bin Ladin before 9/11.<sup>159</sup>

Even after Bin Ladin's departure from the area, CIA officers hoped he might return, seeing the camp as a magnet that could draw him for as long as it was still set up. The military maintained readiness for another strike opportunity.<sup>160</sup> On March 7, 1999, Clarke called a UAE official to express his concerns about possible associations between Emirati officials and Bin Ladin. Clarke later wrote in a memorandum of this conversation that the call had been approved at an interagency meeting and cleared with the CIA.<sup>161</sup> When the former Bin Ladin unit chief found out about Clarke's call, he questioned CIA officials, who denied having given such a clearance.<sup>162</sup> Imagery confirmed that less than a week after Clarke's phone call the camp was hurriedly dismantled, and the site was deserted.<sup>163</sup> CIA officers, including Deputy Director for Operations Pavitt, were irate. "Mike" thought the dismantling of the camp erased a possible site for targeting Bin Ladin.<sup>164</sup>

The United Arab Emirates was becoming both a valued counterterrorism ally of the United States and a persistent counterterrorism problem. From 1999 through early 2001, the United States, and President Clinton personally, pressed the UAE, one of the Taliban's only travel and financial outlets to the outside world, to break off its ties and enforce sanctions, especially those relating to flights to and from Afghanistan.<sup>165</sup> These efforts achieved little before 9/11.

In July 1999, UAE Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Hamdan bin Zayid threatened to break relations with the Taliban over Bin Ladin.<sup>166</sup> The Taliban did not take him seriously, however. Bin Zayid later told an American diplo-

mat that the UAE valued its relations with the Taliban because the Afghan radicals offered a counterbalance to “Iranian dangers” in the region, but he also noted that the UAE did not want to upset the United States.<sup>167</sup>

### Looking for New Partners

Although not all CIA officers had lost faith in the tribals’ capabilities—many judged them to be good reporters—few believed they would carry out an ambush of Bin Ladin. The chief of the Counterterrorist Center compared relying on the tribals to playing the lottery.<sup>168</sup> He and his associates, supported by Clarke, pressed for developing a partnership with the Northern Alliance, even though doing so might bring the United States squarely behind one side in Afghanistan’s long-running civil war.

The Northern Alliance was dominated by Tajiks and drew its strength mainly from the northern and eastern parts of Afghanistan. In contrast, Taliban members came principally from Afghanistan’s most numerous ethnic group, the Pashtuns, who are concentrated in the southern part of the country, extending into the North-West Frontier and Baluchistan provinces of Pakistan.<sup>169</sup>

Because of the Taliban’s behavior and its association with Pakistan, the Northern Alliance had been able at various times to obtain assistance from Russia, Iran, and India. The alliance’s leader was Afghanistan’s most renowned military commander, Ahmed Shah Massoud. Reflective and charismatic, he had been one of the true heroes of the war against the Soviets. But his bands had been charged with more than one massacre, and the Northern Alliance was widely thought to finance itself in part through trade in heroin. Nor had Massoud shown much aptitude for governing except as a ruthless warlord. Nevertheless, Tenet told us Massoud seemed the most interesting possible new ally against Bin Ladin.<sup>170</sup>

In February 1999, Tenet sought President Clinton’s authorization to enlist Massoud and his forces as partners. In response to this request, the President signed the Memorandum of Notification whose language he personally altered. Tenet says he saw no significance in the President’s changes. So far as he was concerned, it was the language of August 1998, expressing a preference for capture but accepting the possibility that Bin Ladin could not be brought out alive. “We were playing the same ground,” Tenet said.<sup>171</sup>

CIA officers described Massoud’s reaction when he heard that the United States wanted him to capture and not kill Bin Ladin. One characterized Massoud’s body language as “a wince.” Schroen recalled Massoud’s response as “You guys are crazy—you haven’t changed a bit.” In Schroen’s opinion, the capture proviso inhibited Massoud and his forces from going after Bin Ladin but did not completely stop them.<sup>172</sup> The idea, however, was a long shot. Bin Ladin’s usual base of activity was near Kandahar, far from the front lines of Taliban operations against the Northern Alliance.

132. NSC email, Ward to Clarke and others, Jan. 5, 1999.
133. NSC memo, Clarke to Berger, Jan. 12, 1999.
134. NSC email, Clarke to Kerrick, Feb. 10, 1999; Charles Allen interview (Jan. 27, 2004).
135. NSC email, Clarke to Berger, Feb. 11, 1999. The email in fact misspells “boogie” as “boggie.”
136. NSC email, Riedel to NSC front office, Feb. 16, 1999. The email does not provide Riedel’s source. For Berger’s authorization, see NSC notes, TNT note, Feb. 12, 1999.
137. DOD memo, “Chronology of Planning,” Dec. 14, 1998.
138. DOS cable, Washington 157093, “Aug. 21 telephone conversation between POTUS and Prime Minister Sharif,” Aug. 26, 1998. Sharif was cordial but disagreed with the U.S. decision to strike.
139. Anthony Zinni interview (Jan. 29, 2004).
140. Ibid.
141. DOD memo, Headquarters SOC, “Planning Directive for Infinite Resolve,” Dec. 23, 1998. On basing options, see DOD memo, “Summary of Conclusions: AC-130 Deployment Decision Paper,” Jan. 12, 1999.
142. NSC memo, Clarke to Berger and Steinberg, Roadmap for Feb. 2, 1999, Small Group meeting, undated; John Maher III interview (Apr. 22, 2004); Anthony Zinni interview (Jan. 29, 2004); Peter Schoomaker interview (Feb. 19, 2004).
143. Peter Schoomaker interview (Feb. 19, 2004); William Boykin interview (Nov. 7, 2003).
144. Hugh Shelton interview (Feb. 5, 2004).
145. President Clinton meeting (Apr. 8, 2004); William Cohen interview (Feb. 5, 2004).
146. Hugh Shelton interview (Feb. 5, 2004); William Boykin interview (Nov. 7, 2003).
147. General Zinni reminded us that in addition to severing military-to-military relations with Pakistan after the 1998 nuclear test, the United States had not shipped to Pakistan the F-16s Pakistan had bought prior to the test. Instead, the United States kept the money Pakistan paid for the F-16s to fund storage of the aircraft. Meanwhile, Pakistani pilots were crashing and dying. “Guess how they [felt] about the United States of America,” Zinni said. Nevertheless, Zinni told us that Musharraf was someone who would actually work with the United States if he was given the chance to do so. Anthony Zinni interview (Jan. 29, 2004).
148. William Boykin interview (Nov. 7, 2003).
149. Richard Clarke interview (Jan. 12, 2004).
150. William Cohen testimony (Mar. 23, 2004).
151. CIA report, “UBL Situation Report,” Feb. 2, 1999. Public sources include Coll, *Ghost Wars*, pp. 447–449; Benjamin and Simon, *Age of Sacred Terror*, p. 281.
152. CIA cable, “Update on Location of an Activity at Sheikh Ali’s Camps,” Feb. 7, 1999.
153. DOD order, MOD 001 to CJCS warning order, Feb. 8, 1999.
154. CIA reports, “UBL Situation Report,” Feb. 6–10, 1999.
155. CIA cable, “Support for Military Contingency Planning,” Feb. 10, 1999.
156. NSC email, Clarke to Kerrick, Feb. 10, 1999.
157. CIA talking points, “CIA Operations Against UBL,” Feb. 10, 1999.
158. CIA reports, “UBL Situation Reports,” Feb. 11–12, 1999.
159. John Maher III interview (Apr. 22, 2004); Richard Clarke interview (Jan. 12, 2004); Gary Schroen interview (Mar. 3, 2004); Mike interview (Jan. 6, 2004).
160. Mike briefing (Mar. 11, 2004); John Maher III interview (Apr. 22, 2004).
161. NSC memo, Clarke, secure teleconference between UAE Chief of Staff Muhammad bin Zayid and Clarke, Mar. 7, 1999.
162. Mike interview (Jan. 6, 2004). Maher told us he thinks it “almost impossible” that the CIA cleared Clarke’s call. John Maher III interview (Apr. 22, 2004).
163. Days before overhead imagery confirmed the location of the hunting camp, Clarke had returned from a visit to the UAE, where he had been working on counterterrorism cooperation and following up on a May 1998 UAE agreement to buy F-16 aircraft from the United States. His visit included one-on-one meetings with Army Chief of Staff bin Zayid, as well as talks with Sheikh Muhammad bin Rashid, the ruler of Dubai. Both agreed to try to work with the United States in their efforts against Bin Ladin. NSC memo, Clarke to Berger, Trip Report, Feb. 8, 1999; Theodore Kattouf interview (Apr. 21, 2004). On February 10, as the United States considered striking the camp, Clarke reported that during his visit bin Zayid had vehemently denied rumors that high-level UAE officials were in Afghanistan. NSC email, Clarke to Kerrick, UBL update, Feb. 10, 1999. Subsequent reporting, however, suggested that high-level UAE officials had indeed been at the desert camp. CIA memo, “Recent High Level UAE Visits to Afghanistan,” Feb. 19, 1999. General Shelton also told us that his UAE counterpart said he had been hunting at a desert camp in Afghanistan at about this time. Hugh Shelton interview (Feb. 5, 2004).
164. Mike briefing (Mar. 3, 2004). Talking points for the DCI to use at a late March Small Group meeting note that concurrently with the UAE being “tipped off” to the CIA’s knowledge of the camp, one of the tribal network’s major subsources (within Bin Ladin’s Taliban security detail) was dispatched to the north, further hand-capping reporting efforts. CIA talking points, “Locating Bin Ladin,” Mar. 29, 1999.

165. Theodore Kattouf interview (Apr. 21, 2004). Kattouf was the U.S. ambassador to the UAE from 1999 to 2001. He indicated that high-level UAE officials would agree to restrict Afghan flights but told him that the government had a difficult time enforcing this. For communications with the UAE, see White House letter, President Clinton to bin Zayid, July 23, 1999; DOS memo, Sheehan to Albright, "Signs of Progress on our UBL strategy," Sept. 12, 1999.

166. DOS memo, Indyk and Sheehan to Albright, "UAE Gives Ultimatum to Taliban on Bin Laden," July 16, 1999, and attached transcript of conversation between Hamdan bin Zayid and Mullah Mutawakkil, "Informal Translation of UAE Note," July 14, 1999; DOS cable, Abu Dhabi 04644, "Taliban Refuse to Expel Bin Ladin Despite UAEG Ultimatum: Need to Stiffen UAE Resolve to Take the Necessary Next Steps," July 19, 1999.

167. DOS memo, Indyk and Sheehan to Albright, "UAE Gives Ultimatum to Taliban on Bin Laden," July 16, 1999.

168. Jeff interview (Dec. 17, 2003). Schroen, however, told us that the tribals' reporting was 50–60 percent accurate. Gary Schroen interview (Mar. 3, 2004).

169. For discussion of the Taliban generally, see Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil and Fundamentalism in Central Asia* (Yale Univ. Press, 2000).

170. *Ibid.*; Benjamin and Simon, *Age of Sacred Terror*, pp. 338–399; George Tenet interview (Jan. 22, 2004).

171. George Tenet interview (Jan. 22, 2004).

172. Richard interview (Dec. 12, 2003); Gary Schroen interview (Mar. 3, 2004).

173. John Maher III interview (Apr. 22, 2004). For an account of the reporting from this period written by Mike, see CIA memo, Jeff to Tenet, "Tracking Usama Bin Ladin, 14–20 May 1999," May 21, 1999. Mike's account was also used to prepare the DCI for a May 25, 1999, Principals Committee meeting. CIA briefing materials, "Background Information: Evaluating the Quality of Intelligence on Bin Ladin (UBL) in Qandahar, 13–20 May, 1999," undated (probably May 25, 1999).

174. CIA email, Mike to Schroen, "Re:Your Note," May 17, 1999.

175. John Maher III interview (Apr. 22, 2004).

176. George Tenet interview (Jan. 22, 2004); John Gordon interview (May 13, 2004).

177. Samuel Berger interview (Jan. 14, 2004).

178. The May 1999 intelligence on Bin Ladin's location in Kandahar came as criticism of the CIA over the recent bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade was at its peak. The DCI later testified that this bombing was the result of a CIA mistake. Testimony of George Tenet before the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, July 22, 1999. On Bin Ladin's whereabouts during the December 1998 episode, see John Maher III interview (Apr. 22, 2004).

179. Cruise missiles were readied for another possible strike in early July 1999. But none of the officials we have interviewed recalled that an opportunity arose at that time justifying the consideration of a strike. See, e.g., John Maher III interview (Apr. 22, 2004).

180. Hugh Shelton interview (Feb. 5, 2004); DOD briefing materials, UBL JCS Focused Campaign, undated.

181. NSC memo, Benjamin to Berger and Steinberg, Apr. 29, 1999; NSC email, Clarke to Berger, May 26, 1999.

182. NSC memo, Clarke to Berger, June 24, 1999. For Clarke's request to Berger to convene the Small Group, see NSC memo, Clarke to Berger, Analysis/Options re UBL, Jun. 13, 1999. See also NSC email, Storey to Berger and Clarke, June 24, 1999.

183. Berger notes on NSC memo, Clarke to Berger, June 24, 1999.

184. NSC memo, Clarke to Berger, June 24, 1999.

185. NSC memo, Clarke to Berger, UBL review for Dec. 3, 1999, Small Group meeting, Dec. 2, 1999.

186. NSC memo, CSG agenda, Sept. 24, 1999.

187. According to CTC talking points for the CSG in June 1999, more than 40 members of al Qaeda had been imprisoned over the past year. CIA talking points, C/CTC TPs/Backgrounder for CSG, June 7, 1999. Figures cited in the DCI's letter to President Clinton in October, however, are slightly different: CTC had helped render 32 terrorists to justice since July 1998, more than half of whom were al Qaeda. CIA letter, Tenet to President Clinton, "CIA's Counterterrorism Efforts," Oct. 16, 1999.

188. See CIA cable, "Usama Bin Ladin: The Way Ahead," Aug. 25, 1999, soliciting comments from various stations on "possible new approaches to capturing UBL and disrupting operations." The evolution of some of this thinking can be seen throughout the summer of 1999. See, e.g., CIA briefing materials, CTC UBL Update: "Must Do Some Fundamental Rethinking," July 20, 1999 (Afghan assets are not capable of mounting a UBL capture operation or ambush); CIA briefing materials, CTC UBL Update: "Problems with Capturing UBL," Aug. 3, 1999 (tribals are good reporters but are unlikely to capture Bin Ladin because of the risks involved, so there is a need to identify a new group to undertake a capture operation).

189. July 1999 Memorandum of Notification.

190. See James Baker interview (Feb. 4, 2004); Janet Reno interview (Dec. 16, 2003); Randy Moss interview (Jan. 22, 2004); George Tenet interview (Jan. 22, 2004). On the Pakistani and Uzbek capture teams, see CIA memo,