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(R)

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

Event: Richard A. Clarke

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Team Number: Three (Counterterrorism Policy)

Location: 2100 K Street NW

Participants – Commission: Commissioner Richard Ben-Veniste, Commissioner Jamie Gorelick, Commissioner John Lehman, Commissioner Tim Roemer, Philip Zelikow, Chris Kojm, Dan Marcus, Michael Hurley, Warren Bass, Alexis Albion, John Roth, Ernest May

Note: Clarke was placed under oath by Commissioner Roemer at the start of his first interview on Dec. 18, 2003. At the start of this interview, Clarke was reminded that he was still under oath.

Notes and Documentation Issues

Clarke hasn't found any notes that he took on 9/11 itself, although Paul Kurtz and Lisa Gordon-Hagerty—two of Clarke's directors at the Transnational Threats Directorate (TNT)—did take notes in the Situation Room. (U)

The ongoing SVTS that began on 9/11 and continued thereafter was not taped. Indeed, per an earlier memorandum of understanding, recording such SVTS sessions was forbidden. (C)—

After the 1998 East Africa bombings, APNSA Sandy Berger started holding "Small Group" meetings on UBL, usually held in Berger's office. The SG met basically whenever Clarke's CSG asked them to. Unlike full-blown Principals' Committee meetings (PCs), there were usually no back-benchers at SGs. Nor were there papers (such as agendas) or SOC's. There probably are some roadmaps, drafted by Clarke and sent by email to Berger's EA, describing how to conduct the SG meetings. (U)

Any documents Clarke made a hard copy of would be found on his computer hard drive and were automatically saved to the NSC system (with the exception of one project not directly related to CT done on a stand-alone laptop). (C)—

Declassified Under Authority of the Interagency
Classification Appeals Panel,
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NSC-directed ISCAP Review, Document 3
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The lack of available paperwork on the SG reflects the fact that CIA, FBI (which occasionally attended the SG), and DOD didn't want a lot of paper "flying around." By Clarke's estimate, some 200 people would see material prepared for a full PC. That involved real risks. The administration had had to handle some bad leaks—including somebody who told a newspaper that CIA had the ability to intercept UBL's satellite phone, which we then lost. Consequently, Clarke saw a good reason for preserving secrecy. (U)

The Saudi Flight after 9/11

Clarke distinctly remembers being asked about the evacuation of Saudi nationals from America immediately after 9/11, including members of the bin Ladin family. He doesn't recall if the request came on September 12 or September 13, and he doesn't recall who asked him about evacuating the Saudis. The person asking him was either a White House, State Department, or FBI official, Clarke said. He has no idea if the Saudi ambassador, Bandar bin Sultan, was involved; Clarke did not talk to Bandar about this at the time, although Clarke said Bandar probably was the source. Clarke guesses that Bandar called someone on the White House staff. The urgency here came not from Clarke but from the Saudis, who feared that bin Ladin relatives "would be hung from the trees." Clarke was not unsympathetic to this request. (U)

On 9/11, Clarke was running an ongoing SVIS, staffed 24 hours a day, out of the Sit Room, and he thinks the Saudi evacuation was probably discussed during the rolling videoconference. Clarke recalls someone saying that the Saudi embassy was very concerned about possible retribution against Saudi nationals inside the US. That seemed plausible to him; after all, US officials also feared hate crimes against Arabs in America. Clarke asked the FBI's Dale Watson to see if evacuating these Saudis was OK with the bureau, and to check whether the USG wanted access to any of them. Clarke said he probably told whoever asked him about the Saudi evacuation that it was OK with the FBI, so it was OK with him. (U)

Before 9/11, the FBI had been doing extensive surveillance of UBL's relatives in the US, ~~b(7)(e)~~ Clarke said. None of it had indicated connections with terrorism or UBL. "They were apparently clear," Clarke said. The FBI has never wanted to talk to any of these Saudi nationals, either in the immediate wake of 9/11 period or since, Clarke said. He doesn't recall how long the FBI had been investigating these Saudis, but ~~b(7)(e)~~ before 9/11. Since the 1993 WTC bombing, the FBI had been sensitive about people leaving the country. ~~(LES)~~

The Saudi embassy gave someone a list of names of Saudis to evacuate, which was passed to the FBI with a flight manifest. Clarke never saw this, nor, to the best of his knowledge, did anyone else in the White House. Clarke had no suspicions about the

people on the flight and thinks this is a non-issue. "If I'm right about that," Clarke said, "this is a tempest in a teapot." (U)

Paul Kurtz and Lisa Gordon-Hagerty, both members of Clarke's TNT staff, also remember this episode and also don't remember who started it. The episode has been discussed extensively in *Vanity Fair*. (U)

The Clinton MONs

By the time of the Aug. 20, 1998 MON, the USG had been working on a plan for a forcible rendition of UBL for about 18 months, to be carried out by CIA's Afghan
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25X1 Unfortunately, CIA didn't want to use its own personnel, and CIA's Afghan assets weren't up to the job, Clarke said. ~~(TS)~~ 25X1

Therefore, there was nothing new in the August 1998 MON that CIA had not been already trying to do (under the authorization of the 1986 Worldwide Finding), and arguably, Clarke noted, CIA did not need the new MON. Clarke suspects that the new MON was not only a way to do something after the East Africa bombings on Aug. 7, 1998, it was also an NSC vehicle for "gigging" the CIA to move—or, as Clarke put it, a reminder signed by the president. But "it too resulted in nothing," Clarke said. Much like Graham Greene's *Our Man in Havana*, the CIA's assets kept giving regular reports on what actions they were taking to earn their monthly payments—without delivering UBL. Since no CIA officer was in Afghanistan watching the tribals, Clarke added, it was hard to say what the tribals were really doing. ~~(TS)~~ 25X1

Zelikow asked whether Attorney General Reno had raised concerns or invoked EO 12333's ban on assassinations. Clarke said that he believes the MON was written to make things happen, not to limit things or clearly define the limits. The substantive policy issue, he explained, was: did we want to push the envelope on the assassination ban? Over the course of the MONs, Clarke said, it was increasingly clear that the administration was pushing the envelope of the assassination ban. They did so reluctantly; Clarke felt that it had been a bad, counterproductive idea 25X1 to embrace a hit list, including regular meetings of their own equivalent of the Small Group to decide whether to order a given targeted killing. Moreover, the USG was concerned about "opening Pandora's box," or sliding along a slippery slope, from killing UBL, to his chief lieutenants 25X1 and so on. Clarke feared that over time, others would draw up a longer list. But in fact, over time, the administration did just that, adding names alongside UBL's (He noted that it got to a point at which the national security adviser could add names himself without consulting others, including the president, if circumstances required.) ~~(TS)~~ 25X1

Clarke noted that he didn't write the MONs; rather, he assigned the MONs to the NSC's Legal Committee, chaired by NSC General Counsel Jamie Baker, who had the "unenviable task" of dealing with the lawyers from other agencies and held extremely long meetings "slicing and dicing" various MON drafts. ~~TS~~ 25X1

Clarke noted that CIA is now saying it always found the language in the MONs "Talmudic and restrictive," complaining that its poor boys in the field found the language confusing and therefore didn't act. "That's bullshit," Clarke said. "They knew exactly what it meant, they knew exactly what we wanted, and they were unable to produce it. And they will excuse their inability to produce the results by telling you that they were worried about the legal language." Clarke explained that the reason why there was a string of MONs was in part because when NSC asked CIA why it had been unable to do anything, "Occasionally they would come back and say the last MON wasn't perfectly drafted, so NSC would say, fine, tell us what the problem is, and we'll draft another one." Clarke noted that he could not recall another subject in the last 30 years about which the president had signed so many MONs over such a short period of time. "There was no lack of willingness on the part of the president or the national security adviser or me," he said, "to sign as many MONs as it took to make clear to the CIA that we wanted bin Ladin and his fellows killed." ~~TS~~ 25X1

Clarke added that he had many conversations with DCI Tenet and C/CTC Cofer Black in which Clarke said, "You understand that, whatever the legal mumbo-jumbo is, the president wants bin Ladin dead?" And on all those occasions, Clarke was assured by the DCI and CTC that "they knew exactly what our intent was." Clarke added that if CIA officials tell the Commission that they were only authorized by all the MONs to plan a capture operation against UBL and never a kill operation, "they are misleading you," Clarke said. ~~TS~~ 25X1

With regard to the December 24, 1998 MON, which authorized CIA to undertake lethal offensive operations against UBL and his lieutenants "if a successful capture operation is not feasible," Clarke explained that the CIA just needed to say that capture wasn't feasible, and then they could assassinate him. But the fact of the matter was that CIA was relying on its assets to do something that it could not do and refused to put its own people in. ~~TS~~ 25X1

Zelikow asked Clarke whether President Clinton's hand-written edits on the February 1999 MON made the authorities weaker or stronger. Clarke said that he wasn't good at splicing words in this way and suggested asking Jamie Baker of NSC Legal or Mary McCarthy of NSC Intel. But Clarke noted that "it was pretty clear to me what we were saying as a matter of policy," that he asked the DCI if he also thought it was pretty clear, and that Clarke had thought that they had "a pretty clear communication as to what the president wanted." Clarke doesn't recall conversations about the MONs with Geoff O'Connell during O'Connell's time as C/CTC; he does recall discussing the MONs with O'Connell's replacement, Cofer Black. *[Commission note:*

O'Connell has told us that he would have resigned if he'd been ordered to plan an assassination.)

(TS 25X1)

Reno signed off on the MONs only after being assured that al-Qa'ida was planning further imminent attacks on the US, Clarke said. APNSA Sandy Berger wanted to send a unanimous recommendation to the president; Berger worked with Jamie Baker to assuage Reno's concerns rather than sending the president a MON that was recommended by four or five principals along with a dissent from the attorney general. If there was a policy consideration with the words of the MONs, Clarke explained, that's what was behind it. (TS 25X1)

"I don't think the White House was interested in plausible deniability," Clarke said. Indeed, they would have been very happy to take credit for killing UBL. "I think the White House was interested in not opening Pandora's box to a principle of assassination," he continued. They didn't want to get a dissent from the attorney general or to set a precedent for ongoing assassinations. (TS 25X1)

Clarke said he was extraordinarily frustrated by this, as were Berger and the president. He was being repeatedly told by lawyers that it was perfectly acceptable to use overt force to kill UBL but illegal to use CIA assets to kill UBL without an MON. That seems "insane" to non-lawyers, Clarke said. (TS 25X1)

The CSG discussed the issue of capture-vs.-kill, Clarke said. The group was not keen to have UBL in a Manhattan jail; they feared that an American trial of UBL would be a circus. But no other country wanted to take UBL, so if caught, he would have to be brought to the Southern District of New York, where he'd been indicted. Clarke also was skeptical about the potential intel benefits of taking UBL alive. Nobody thought that he would cough up "all the hawalas or all the cells," Clarke said. So the CSG wanted to put aside all the legal issues and have UBL assassinated or otherwise killed. He thinks the Small Group also discussed capture-vs.-kill but is unsure when that happened or what transpired. (TS 25X1)

The first capture operations envisioned taking UBL to a foreign country, but the USG never found one. 25X1

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(TS 25X1)

Clarke was particularly skeptical of Bandar, whom he felt often didn't represent the kingdom's views. "Most of us didn't trust Bandar as far as we could throw him," Clarke said. (U)

The DO Ethos

"Cofer Black shared my enthusiasm for killing bin Ladin," Clarke said. But the CTC chief was frustrated by the DDO, Jim Pavitt, who was constantly putting the brakes on him. (Clarke added that Black said the DCI was behind this.) Clarke said he was

quite confident that Black understood that the intent was to kill UBL, not capture him. But Black would convey the view that, as an institutional ethos, the DDO did not believe in assassination. ~~(TS)~~ 25X1

Clarke did not think as highly of Black's predecessor, O'Connell, who he did not think was sufficiently proactive. Clarke said he repeatedly asked the DCI to remove O'Connell and replace him with someone more proactive and "hard-nosed." Tenet agreed, but it took a while, Clarke said. Tenet told Clarke that when he picked Black to head CTC, things were going to change because Black was so hard-charging. But things didn't change. Clarke said that Black told him that his chain of command was through the DDO, who was "reluctant to be cowboy-like." (U)

Moreover, Black would explain to Clarke that he had to worry about his next job, which would also be in a DO whose institutional framework and ethos was opposed to covert action and assassinations. ~~(TS)~~ 25X1

Clarke raised this concern with Tenet and repeatedly told him the kinds of conversations he was having with Black. Tenet would say, Yes, this was a problem, that the DDO was institutionally opposed to covert action, that this went back to DCI Gates, and that Tenet was trying to change the ethos. This gave Clarke reason to believe that something would be done about the problems Black was having. (U)

Clarke said he didn't know that O'Connell had threatened to resign over the assassinations issue. But he did know that O'Connell was opposed to assassination operations. ~~(TS)~~ 25X1

DDO Pavitt never came to a White House meeting in which Clarke sat. Instead, Pavitt would send Black or an underling. (U)

The Origins of the Predator

Out of frustration that the current range of options weren't working, President Clinton told Clarke to do something more. So Clarke asked DOD's Scott Frye and CIA's Charlie Allen to go off outside the CSG and come back with creative ideas. They came back with Predator—a pilotless drone to spot UBL so he could be killed with a cruise missile. The Predator program was approved despite CIA resistance. ~~(TS)~~ 25X1

Clarke added that the reason that talks were held in 2000-01 on command-and-control for armed Predators was because one could use the drones to see the target in real time and literally pull a trigger. Moreover, armed Predator was a joint CIA/DOD operation, so the issue of command and control arose naturally. ~~(TS)~~ 25X1

Covert Action

According to Clarke, he directly told DCI Tenet that the president wanted UBL killed; he did not recall when he said this. Clarke believes Berger had a similar conversation with Tenet. Clarke also made this clear to Cofer Black on several occasions. Clarke said that the DCI's response was typically, Yes, we want to do it, and we'll try to do it. (TS 25X1)

Clarke talked to both O'Connell and Black about using CIA personnel in Afghanistan, but they were "very reluctant." They had to go to the DDO or DCI to get approval. (TS 25X1, X5)

Clarke also found it tough to get CIA people into Afghanistan to meet up with Masood; at one point, the DDO banned CIA personnel from using Masood's (TS 25X1) to enter Afghanistan. (TS 25X1) In Clarke's mind, this really was "seventh floor micro-management." (TS 25X1)

CIA suggested training (TS 25X1) as another proxy, Clarke said. He thinks that training the (TS 25X1) might have provided an option that could have worked,, either in northern or southern Afghanistan; he also thought the Northern Alliance—which reportedly staged a mortar attack in Kandahar before we asked them to—was a viable proxy. But while the other proxy options were real, the proposed (TS 25X1) team was "fruitless." The idea of a (TS 25X1) match team came from (TS 25X1) Clarke said. Tenet and Clarke both saw that idea as "laughable" and "a smokescreen" put up by the (TS 25X1) USG in other ways. But they agreed to explore the option because they didn't see much of a downside. "What we were doing was trying one thing after another," Clarke said. "We were trying everything we could think of." He always hoped for that phone call in the middle of the night to tell him that one of these methods had worked. (TS 25X1)

Clarke doesn't remember CIA saying, This isn't our job, send Delta instead. Reluctance to put CIA officers on the ground in Afghanistan was not a capabilities issue; rather, the CIA feared risking casualties or hostage-takings. After all, CIA management had endured the dreadful experience of having a station chief tortured to death in Lebanon. (U)

The Military and Terrorism

For their part, the JCS were perfectly happy to have CIA handle these operations; the chiefs didn't want to discourage CIA from doing a job that the military didn't want. (Clarke also noted that the DOD's lawyers always signed off on the MONs very quickly). DOD was always extremely negative about boots-on-the-ground options, Clarke said. They warned that such options could mean another Desert One and noted the lack of a contiguous base from which to mount Afghan operations. "They were very, very, very reluctant," Clarke said. This wasn't just an Afghan issue; there was opposition at the highest level of the JCS to trying to snatch Serb war criminals in Bosnia. (U)

In 1993, when the USG attacked Iraqi intelligence headquarters after the attempted assassination of former President George H.W. Bush, the military envisioned a strike comprised only of TLAMs. The planning started with five targets, but Secretary of State Warren Christopher argued that striking one target was a more commensurate response. He prevailed. ~~(TS)~~

Operation Infinite Resolve

The president wanted a more complete follow-on plan to Operation Infinite Reach, Clarke said, and asked to have a military options package developed. President Clinton especially liked the idea of using helicopter gunships against UBL targets. NSC then talked to JCS, whereupon a planning order ("planord") was sent to the regional CINC, Gen. Zinni of CENTCOM. ~~(TS)~~

Zinni did send up plans, but he also told CJCS Shelton that he was vehemently opposed to implementing them, according to Clarke. Zinni argued that carrying out the plans would badly hurt US-Pakistani relations—even more than they had been damaged by the August 20 strikes—and damage U.S. military power in the Middle East. Shelton relayed Zinni's warnings in a SG, Clarke said. (U)

Later, Clarke added that DOD had called for a large force to back up the insertion of US soldiers into Afghanistan for Infinite Resolve, involving tens of thousands of people. ~~(TS)~~

When asked about the December 1998 planord about Special Operations Forces, Clarke recalled a discussion of CT issues with a larger group. At some point, Clarke said, President Clinton asked Shelton and Clarke to come back into the Oval Office with him. The president then told them that the sight of US commandos plunging into al-Qa'ida camps from helicopters would terrify the terrorists, and he wanted this option examined. According to Clarke, Shelton expressed doubt as to the feasibility of this option at the time but followed the president's orders nonetheless. ~~(TS)~~

[Commission note: this episode is pungently related on p. 318 of The Age of Sacred Terror, wherein President Clinton tells an ashen Gen. Shelton, "You know, it would scare the shit out of al-Qaeda if suddenly a bunch of black ninjas rappelled out of helicopters into the middle of their camp."] (U)

Eyes On?

Deciding Whether to Fire Missiles at UBL

Clarke recalls three episodes in which he was called by the C/CTC to say that CIA had good enough information about UBL's location to convene the principals to try to take a shot at UBL. *[Commission note: C/Alec Mike Scheuer has mentioned five such episodes in interviews by the Commission, although it's not clear which were briefed up to the White House.]* In all three cases, the Small Group was convened, either via SVTS or in person (which may have happened once). In two out of the three cases, the DCI

recommended against firing the cruise missiles because he lacked confidence in the sources. In the third case, Clarke said that they were targeting a UAE hunting camp.

~~TS~~ 25X1

Only once did questions of civilian casualties arise. In one case, Clarke remembers looking at 25X1 the proposed attack site 25X1

But the SG never got around to the collateral-damage issue because the DCI recommended against firing. A reported collateral-damage issue in one of the cases 25X1 rang no bells for Clarke. ~~TS~~ 25X1

Clarke didn't specifically remember the December 1998 incident at the Governor's Palace in Kandahar or the February 1999 episode at the Governor's House in Kandahar. ~~TS~~ 25X1

After August 20, 1998, the administration had DOD keep two submarines armed with TLAMs off the coast of Baluchistan; the missiles were preprogrammed with the coordinates of places UBL had frequented in the past. The idea was that once CIA assets spotted UBL, word would go to the CIA, then the CSG, then the SG and the president. They tried to cut the response time, working with CIA and DOD; Clarke recalled a timing chart that he and VADM Fry had worked on. Clarke's best guess is that, if everything went right, it take close to 25X1, X4 from the CIA asset's first transmission to the actual strike. That meant that UBL had to stay put for at least 25X1, X4 for the USG to have a shot. ~~TS~~ 25X1

They also tried to cut the firing time for the TLAMs. Coming out of the Allen/Fry cell, operations research staffers did a probability model of UBL's movements. They used this to help plan military strikes with cruise missiles. ~~TS~~ 25X1

One of these three episodes involved a UAE hunting camp in Afghanistan known as Shaykh Ali. In this case, Clarke and the DCI were shown 25X1 photographs of a luxurious desert camp, featuring some Mercedes, RVs, land rovers, satellite dishes, a 25X1 and even signs that the gathering there was being catered. Clarke knew the UAE royal family well from his involvement in the 1991 Gulf War and knew that wealthy Emiratis sometimes went hunting with falcons in Afghanistan. To Clarke, it seemed as if the CIA was presenting an option to attack America's best CT ally in the Gulf. 25X1, X5

25X1, X5

So Clarke called Tenet, and they agreed to call the attack off. ~~TS~~ 25X1

Some CIA officials, including Pavitt, have suggested that Clarke may have blown an opportunity by calling the UAE during this episode to find out if UBL could be at the hunting camp. Clarke, however, said that his recollection is that he called the UAE only *after* the USG had decided not to strike the camp, at which point he asked who was there and what connection the UAE royal family had with UBL. His UAE

interlocutors then told him that they had no indication that UBL had been anywhere near the camp. Clarke said he was sorry that some CIA people were upset by this, but it struck him as the right thing to do. He doesn't remember whether the call was coordinated with the CIA. 25X1
25X1

The CIA said that UBL had been staying near the hunting camp and continued to think their source was accurate after the fact; Clarke is dubious. The UAE did subsequently abandon Shaykh Ali, which they realized was in the middle of a firing zone. (TS) 25X1

The CIA intel about UBL's location was all ex post facto, except these three cases, Clarke said. The CIA had a source 25X1 who was able to access information on where the Taliban thought UBL was, but by the time he got information about UBL's whereabouts and passed it along to the agency, UBL had moved on. For a strike, the USG needed contemporaneous information—and they needed UBL to stay put 25X1, X4 (TS) 25X1

In one of the three cases, CIA said the intel was wrong; in another, it said the sighting of UBL was real. After May 1999, the administration didn't spin the gyroscopes on the TLAMs again. (TS) 25X1

Follow-On Strikes

Underlying these discussions was a high-level concern that the US would look silly if it fired on UBL again and missed (as it had in August 1998). Clarke urged the principals not to worry. First, he argued that it was OK to try and fail; if we miss, he said, so what? "Congress will not get on your ass," he added. (TS)

Second, Clarke argued that the USG should subsume the TLAM strikes on UBL into a wider strike against al-Qa'ida high-value targets. The administration could then say the strikes' purpose was to hit al-Qa'ida infrastructure; if they hit UBL, "that's gravy." After all, 25X1 al-Qa'ida had six or more facilities training terrorists to kill Americans. DOD warned that hitting the camps meant wasting million-dollar missiles on destroying mud huts and worried about the effect 25X1

25X1 But Clarke argued that there was an inherent value in blowing up al-Qa'ida camps that went beyond concealing US attempts to kill UBL. True, al-Qa'ida had rebuilt the camps we hit in August 1998. Striking the camps also wouldn't deter UBL himself, but it could deter potential al-Qa'ida recruits around the world from joining up. If we had the same sort of Afghan policy as we had in Iraq—ongoing operations like those in the Iraqi no-fly zone where people knew that, on any given day, the CINCENTCOM could blow up a camp with minimal back-and-forth discussions in Washington—it might make jihadis think twice about going to the camps. (TS)

Zinni opposed such a campaign, and DOD concurred with the CINC, Clarke said. Instead of implementing Infinite Resolve, DOD kept "polishing the diamond of that plan" to use *after* the next al-Qa'ida attack (which everyone believed would occur).

Clarke thinks that Defense Secretary William Cohen and Secretary of State Madeleine Albright needed the justification of another attack before taking large-scale action. Clarke said these concerns were expressed in the SG. With the UNSC consensus for Iraq sanctions eroding and echoes of America's mistaken strike on the Chinese embassy in Belgrade during the Kosovo war, Albright and Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott feared being seen by Russia, China, and the EU as a "mad-bomber nation," Clarke said. DAPNSA Jim Steinberg also echoed Talbott's view with his caution about military options reflecting poorly on a "bomb-happy US." Clarke did not recall Congress having a concern along these lines, but he noted that the congressional review of the Chinese embassy bombing probably had an effect. Clarke added that Tenet may have considered resigning after the Chinese embassy incident. ~~(TS)~~

The Cost of Doing Business?

Coming to Terms with the UBL Threat

Clarke urged that these decisions be seen in context. For one thing, ongoing combat in Iraq and Kosovo had raised allegations that the US was an out-of-control hyperpower. For another, before October 2000, CIA had said that al-Qa'ida was responsible for the embassy bombings, but the agency was unsure about UBL involvement in WTC I and the October 1993 battle of Mogadishu. The only specific thing UBL had done to the US at this point was the 1998 bombings. The USG hadn't retaliated for the 1983 Beirut bombings or Pan Am 103. "Al-Qa'ida hadn't approached killing that number of Americans," Clarke noted. We also hadn't retaliated against Palestinian terrorists, Hezbollah, or Iran, which had killed more Americans than al-Qa'ida. (U)

Still, Clarke knew that more attacks were coming. Embassy security had been upgraded, in a major program. After Khobar, DOD had upgraded its force-protection measures in the Middle East. ~~(S)~~

Implicitly, though never explicitly, some principals may have thought that al-Qa'ida was a problem, that we needed the CIA to do something about it, that they'd like DOD to take some steps, but before December 1999 nobody saw al-Qa'ida as a major threat—with a few exceptions, including Tenet. Ramzi Yousef wasn't being described as an al-Qa'ida operative; WTC I and the Bojinka plot were not seen as al-Qa'ida operations, either. This wasn't the picture the CIA was painting. Nevertheless, UBL probably got more PCs and SGs than anything else over these three years. (Bosnia got daily PCs for a short time, but not on this sort of ongoing basis.) Although all the policymakers thought al-Qa'ida would try more operations, there was no shared consensus that it was as big a threat as Clarke and Tenet thought it was. It was never said out loud, but Clarke had the impression that some policymakers thought that terrorism was the cost of doing business—an inevitable part of being a superpower and maintaining a presence in the Middle East. "No one

ever said explicitly that this was the cost of doing business," Clarke said. "No one ever said it was not a serious threat." (U)

"I don't think people envisioned 3,000 people dead in the US," Clarke continued. But al-Qa'ida was explicit about its goals. Unlike less ambitious terrorist groups such as PIJ, al-Qa'ida said that "it wanted to conquer the world"—creating a global caliphate by expelling the US from the Middle East, setting up Taliban-style regimes across the region, and then moving on to the rest of the planet. (U)

CIA analytically understood the problem. The DCI would testify before Congress in 2001 that al-Qa'ida was the number-one security threat to America. But even before the 1998 bombings, the CIA was giving NSC formal briefings on the threat and doing analysis on the scope of the jihadist trainee program being run out of Afghanistan (about 40,000 operatives were being trained and distributed around the world), on the network's financial resources, and on UBL's potent ideological appeal to millions of Muslim youth. 25X1 was a dissenting voice about the seriousness of the al-Qa'ida threat, Clarke said; Black and Tenet sounded a lot more like Clarke than 25X1 (Clarke urged the Commission to look at CIA briefings to SSCI and HPSCI by 25X1 Bonk, Black, and Tenet). (U)

Moreover, Clarke said, people could agree with him about the seriousness of the problem and still oppose military strikes. The USG was trying other things as well, including intense diplomatic pressure on the Taliban (via Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE), two UN sanctions resolutions against Afghanistan, and an ongoing 25X1 -campaign. CIA and FBI were "extremely busy" hunting down al-Qa'ida cells around the world, most notably in Bosnia—a key site for UBL's jihad campaign, where the CIA and DOD did a good job stopping the network from turning Bosnia into a Taliban-like state. ~~(TS)~~

Daily UBL Updates

Clarke vaguely recalled that for three weeks in March 1999, the CIA's daily UBL situation reports—sent via "Washfax"—stopped briefly. He doesn't remember why. These reports were addressed to Berger, Clarke, and COS John Podesta, but Clarke said they were seen by others as well. ~~(TS)~~

Al-Qa'ida in America: The FBI and the Threat at Home

CIA said that it had no specific information about al-Qa'ida cells inside the US but thought they probably did operate here, Clarke said. FBI Director Freeh started by saying that the bureau had no information about US cells; later, he did say that there were a few handfuls of al-Qa'ida sympathizers in America but added that the FBI had them under surveillance. John O'Neill, however, warned that there were probably hundreds of al-Qa'ida operatives in the US and several cells, which FBI couldn't yet find. In Clarke's opinion, the FBI was not looking. (U)

Al-Qa'ida wasn't on radar for many JTTFs, Clarke said. The Boston JTTF focused on worries about the IRA; Seattle's JTTF did likewise with Sikh extremists. The al-Qa'ida threat was not internalized in the field. In 2000, Watson convened all 56 field offices in Florida for a conference on al-Qa'ida designed, as Clarke put it, to tell them in the director's name that this was their priority—and that the way they handled it would affect their bonuses and chances for promotion. ~~(LES)~~

The Millennium Plot and Its Aftermath

Beginning in July or August 1999, intelligence-collection requirements were sent requesting intel on al-Qa'ida around the Millennium period. Nothing came back until late November or early December 1999, when Jordan broke up a cell and found that the terrorists had been planning millennial attacks on the SAS Radisson Hotel in Amman, Mount Nebo, and other tourist sites in Jordan. A senior Jordanian official said that they were surprised by the amount of bomb-making gear that the cell had—enough, the official said, for a war. We had been expecting a Millennium attack, Clarke said, but this concentrated the mind. The CIA found links back to the US—including the cell's leader, a former Boston cabbie who fled after the cell was disrupted. His boss, Khalil Deek, had lived in Los Angeles and had a brother who still lived there. So the FBI was looking for jihadist cells in Los Angeles and Boston. ~~(LES)~~

Then Ahmed Ressam was caught at the Canadian border. The FBI called him part of a plot to blow up Los Angeles International Airport. The bureau also found an al-Qa'ida cell in Montreal with links to Brooklyn. At that point, the USG went to what we now would call "code orange alert," Clarke said, alerting federal agencies and police around the country. Berger held a Small Group after Jordan broke up the al-Qa'ida cell. "Tenet's hair was on fire," Clarke recalled. Berger warned that we were under attack and told the SG members that he expected them all to make the terrorist threat their number-one priority. ~~(LES)~~

It was a very intense period, featuring significant top-level involvement. The FBI asked for an extraordinary number of FISAs, Clarke said, and received them with noteworthy speed—something Clarke credited in particular to Fran Townsend. DOJ did a phenomenal job getting FISAs, Clarke said. He also vividly remembered discussing the whereabouts of one suspicious blue van in Texas with Berger—an unusual thing to be doing with the national security adviser. Principals were working such things as suspicious reports about a farm in Tennessee. With the principals deeply involved, working-level officials were also going flat-out; Berger held daily meetings with the DCI and Attorney General Reno, and he went to the FBI and CIA on Christmas Day, 1999, to buck up morale. ~~(LES)~~

We now know that there were three components to the plot, Clarke said. On January 3, 2000, al-Qa'ida planned to launch simultaneous attacks: the three operations in Jordan, the aborted Ressam plot against LAX, and an attack on the *USS The Sullivans*

in Yemen. The plot against *The Sullivans* failed because al-Qa'ida's skiff was overloaded and sank; al-Qa'ida reused the same boat to hit the *Cole* that October. (U)

The USG wasn't "drop-dead" sure that Ressam was part of a plot against LAX, Clarke said, but it lacked a detailed plan for what the cell actually intended. They knew comparatively little about the LAX plot. This uncertainty may explain some of the USG's views on response, Clarke suggested. They didn't know about the plot against *The Sullivans* until a year later, he said. They did know about the Jordan plots and about the Montreal cell with ties to Boston, Brooklyn, and Los Angeles, and arrests were made. (S)

After the Millennium—"after we caught our breath"—Berger started an after-action review, asking the CSG to look back at steps the USG had been taking against al-Qa'ida and defensive measures within the US. The principals met again to discuss covert action, military steps, law enforcement, and diplomacy; they did all these steps, except the military ones. The PC talked about strengthening the JTTFs and made other recommendations. The discussions about covert action and military options were left for the SG, not the PC, Clarke said, so there's no paper trail. (S)

Clarke said he pushed again in February/March 2000, in the wake of the Millennium plots, for military strikes. He constantly wanted to bomb Afghanistan and was looking for his chances to push the issue. But DOD was still opposed after the Millennium to more military strikes, Clarke said. (TS)

Shelton conveyed two arguments: first, that SOF attempts could mean another Desert One, given the long tether that the commandos would have to be on. (Clarke replied that they could carpet-bomb the camps instead.) Second, CINCENTCOM Zinni was worried that military action could have disastrous consequences for Pakistan; the CINC's views were expressed via Shelton. (TS)

For its part, CIA continued to 25X1 fund its CT efforts, Clarke said. CIA chose as a matter of policy not 25X1 its own. They would always say there was not \$1 in the CIA budget to reassign to the fight against al-Qa'ida, Clarke said. TNT argued with them, asking whether every dollar they spent—on FBIS translations, on the cafeteria—was more important than going after al-Qa'ida. Clarke said he would explain to CIA that there was a disconnect between what it was telling Congress and what actions CIA was taking, Clarke said. But CIA would just say that it was strapped. (S)

On the law-enforcement front, one post-Millennium issue was translations. Translations of communications captured by FISA wiretaps were done by the local FBI office, Clarke said, which meant that they had somehow to find Arabic speakers with sufficient clearances. After the Millennium, a proposal emerged for a national center to do FISA translations, similar to the way 25X1 handles translations. For a

while, the USG considered staffing this center with ^{25X1} intelligence personnel. But DOJ did not fund the translation center, Clarke said. ~~(S)~~

As far as Clarke was concerned, despite the fact that the Millennium plots had been foiled, al-Qa'ida had already both attacked and attempted to attack the US, and his continued CT efforts were based on this premise. By about February 2000, Clarke said, it was pretty clear that the 1993 WTC and landmarks plots were linked to al-Qa'ida. The USG also knew more about Shaykh Umar Abd al-Rahman's ties to UBL; the blind shaykh's son was living in the "next tent over" from UBL. Moreover, a series of intel reports linked the blind shaykh's followers to al-Qa'ida. ~~(S)~~

Clarke considers the Millennium "a success story," for several reasons. First, Jordan successfully penetrated an al-Qa'ida cell and found out the plotters' intent in time. Second, the USG got Pakistan's cooperation, which led to the arrest of Khalil Deek by the Pakistanis, who flew him to Jordan. Third, due to the USG's general alert to federal law enforcement agencies, a very diligent Customs agent on the Canadian border in Washington state got Ressam. Fourth, the USG enjoyed very good cooperation ^{25X1}
25X1

Fifth, the episode was met with good high-level interagency coordination. ~~(S)~~

A Tale of Two Threats: Comparing the Millennium to the Summer of 2001

The interview then proceeded to a discussion comparing the Millennium alert to the "summer of threat" in 2001. Clarke—who was deeply involved in both cases—noted that the 2001 threat was an open-ended one, unlike the Millennium episode. From May/June 2001 onward, the USG was receiving a "steady drumbeat of reports," he said. Everyone in CTC and the NSC thought they had a lot of really credible reports that something was planned. The period felt similar to the Millennium, Clarke said. They couldn't crack the plot, but the intel was probably better than they'd had in 1999. The CSG response was similar in 2001, Clarke said. (U)

In 2001, CIA briefings said the most likely targets for an attack were Saudi Arabia or Israel, not America. Clarke was concerned about an attack in Bahrain; he called the crown prince personally and had the Fifth Fleet moved. There was also a series of meetings about a possible attack on the Genoa G-8 summit meeting. ~~(S)~~

CSG sent two messages to law enforcement, Clarke said, and they asked the FAA to send security advisories. It was very unusual for us to ask for such advisories, he said. They also brought in immigration officials, Coast Guard, Customs, and so on together—a series of agencies that aren't usually in the White House. CIA briefed these law enforcement agencies, including the FAA's head of security, a two-star from the Coast Guard, the head of intelligence for immigration, the head inspector of Customs, the director of GSA police, and probably the director of Capitol Hill police

as well. Clarke was surprised to hear that Transportation Secretary Norman Mineta was unaware of this; a Coast Guard admiral who works in Mineta's office was briefed. (U)

Clarke said that they didn't know if the attack might come on US soil, and the CIA briefed that assessment to the law enforcement agencies. They had no evidence that the attack would come at home, but it was only logical; after all, al-Qa'ida had tried it before. No HUMINT, SIGINT, or liaison reports that he saw were about an attack inside America.

The FBI said that it was surveilling all people with known al-Qa'ida links, Clarke said. If Clarke had known of anything unusual, the CSG would meet right away, and the information would go to the top. Instead of passing along documents, Watson would share information with Clarke over a secure phone. ~~(LES)~~

Indeed, the FBI produced no written documents, "ever," Clarke said. It claimed that all it had was raw field reports. Clarke asked for a summary of 302s. (Clarke noted one bureaucratic difference: unlike the CIA—which channels its reports via a reports officer, who cleans up sourcing detail so that the message can go out to everybody—the FBI has no reports officers.) Clarke and his staffers—Cressey, Kurtz, Gordon-Hagerty—always came back frustrated from the twice-weekly CSG Threats group meetings, complaining that the FBI wouldn't say a word. Clarke asked Rolince and Watson to get their people to talk, noting that dealing with al-Qa'ida was supposed to be part of the fitness reports for SACs and JTTFs. ~~(LES)~~

Clarke said he simply does not know why he was unaware of the presence of Khalid al-Midhar and Nawaf al-Hazmi in the US. Watson never mentioned the hunt for the two al-Qa'ida operatives to him. Indeed, Clarke said he wasn't sure if Watson even knew about Midhar and Hazmi. If the FBI representatives at the CSG knew about Midhar and Hazmi, they never told it to Clarke or the CSG. After 9/11, Clarke asked Watson why Clarke hadn't known about them, and Watson said he didn't know how it had happened that Clarke was in the dark. Clarke asked the same question to Tenet and C/CIC Black, who said that one analyst in CTC who should have put the two on the watchlist did not. ~~(LES)~~

Clarke's job was not to find these people, he said; it was to get the agencies to find them. If Clarke had known that two real killers who'd been at the Kuala Lumpur meeting were in America, "I would have gone to battle stations," he said. He would have told Rice and Hadley, he said. "I would have been in Dale Watson's face on a permanent basis until they found them," Clarke added. Clarke thinks that "there would have been an extraordinarily high probability" that the two terrorists would then have been caught. (U)

Similarly, the arrest of Zacarias Moussaoui was never reported to the CSG. (U)

Commissioner Gorelick asked if Clarke ever suggested elevating the threat to the DC or PC. Clarke said he had no idea if he ever asked Rice to convene a DC or PC (though he had a standing request for a PC, and it sounds like the kind of thing he would have done). He added that he'd love to be able to say that he asked for one or mentioned the Millennium experience, but he simply couldn't recall. Clarke agreed that convening a PC might have sucked up some FBI information to a higher level. But Rice decided to handle the crisis at the CSG level. (U)

He said that CSG attendees were to report back to their deputy or principal. Moreover, one of the core CSG participants was Dale Watson, the number-two person in the FBI. Clarke said that he personally was no longer a PC member; moreover, in the Bush administration, the CSG no longer reported directly to the cabiner level. Still, Clarke said he had access to Rice and Hadley when he wanted. Furthermore, Tenet was briefing this information to President Bush every morning. APNSA Rice spoke to Clarke, Tenet, and President Bush about this threat; Tenet talked to the acting FBI director; and Clarke talked to the second-in-command at FBI, Watson. Warnings were sent saying that a major terrorist attack was imminent—and that the IC could not rule out the possibility that it might occur in America. The DC and PC did not convene about the threat, Clarke said, but that wasn't because they didn't know about it. (U)

Clarke noted that it took awhile to get some deputies confirmed. (U)

Asked if there was a letdown after ~~TS~~ 25X1 July 2001, Clarke noted that DOD physically could not keep its troops at the elevated Threatcon and came down. At that time, there was an explicit discussion about why other agencies had to keep the alert up, which was hard to sustain. So the alert level reached a plateau. After the Fourth of July passed without an attack, they asked, if the attack doesn't come on the Fourth and doesn't come in Genoa, should we keep up the alert? They decided they should. ~~(S)~~

Clarke's Frustrations

Clarke was growing extremely frustrated, as seen in his September 4, 2001 note to Rice. He said that he had already asked in May/June 2001 to be reassigned—shifted away from the CT portfolio to handle cybersecurity. "I'd come to the conclusion the administration wasn't serious about al-Qa'ida," Clarke said. It was clear to Clarke that the new administration didn't trust him enough to do the same things the Clinton administration had asked him to do. He felt he'd done all that he could, "short of running naked through the West Wing." He didn't explicitly tell Rice and Hadley that he wanted to be reassigned because he "can't stand working for you on CT," but he felt the message was clear. (U)

Clarke estimated that he saw President Clinton a handful of times during the two-week period of the Millennium crisis. Clarke never briefed President Bush on counterterrorism from January 2001 to September 2001. (U)