

President Clinton issued a classified directive in June 1995, Presidential Decision Directive 39, which said that the United States should “deter, defeat and respond vigorously to all terrorist attacks on our territory and against our citizens.” The directive called terrorism both a matter of national security and a crime, and it assigned responsibilities to various agencies. Alarmed by the incident in Tokyo, President Clinton made it the very highest priority for his own staff and for all agencies to prepare to detect and respond to terrorism that involved chemical, biological, or nuclear weapons.¹⁰¹

During 1995 and 1996, President Clinton devoted considerable time to seeking cooperation from other nations in denying sanctuary to terrorists. He proposed significantly larger budgets for the FBI, with much of the increase designated for counterterrorism. For the CIA, he essentially stopped cutting allocations and supported requests for supplemental funds for counterterrorism.¹⁰²

When announcing his new national security team after being reelected in 1996, President Clinton mentioned terrorism first in a list of several challenges facing the country.¹⁰³ In 1998, after Bin Ladin’s fatwa and other alarms, President Clinton accepted a proposal from his national security advisor, Samuel “Sandy” Berger, and gave Clarke a new position as national coordinator for security, infrastructure protection, and counterterrorism. He issued two Presidential Decision Directives, numbers 62 and 63, that built on the assignments to agencies that had been made in Presidential Decision Directive 39; laid out ten program areas for counterterrorism; and enhanced, at least on paper, Clarke’s authority to police these assignments. Because of concerns especially on the part of Attorney General Reno, this new authority was defined in precise and limiting language. Clarke was only to “provide advice” regarding budgets and to “coordinate the development of interagency agreed guidelines” for action.¹⁰⁴

Clarke also was awarded a seat on the cabinet-level Principals Committee when it met on his issues—a highly unusual step for a White House staffer. His interagency body, the CSG, ordinarily reported to the Deputies Committee of subcabinet officials, unless Berger asked them to report directly to the principals. The complementary directive, number 63, defined the elements of the nation’s critical infrastructure and considered ways to protect it. Taken together, the two directives basically left the Justice Department and the FBI in charge at home and left terrorism abroad to the CIA, the State Department, and other agencies, under Clarke’s and Berger’s coordinating hands.

Explaining the new arrangement and his concerns in another commencement speech, this time at the Naval Academy, in May 1998, the President said:

First, we will use our new integrated approach to intensify the fight against all forms of terrorism: to capture terrorists, no matter where they hide; to work with other nations to eliminate terrorist sanctuaries overseas; to respond rapidly and effectively to protect Americans from terrorism at