

ernment the possibility of expelling Bin Ladin. U.S. Ambassador Timothy Carney encouraged the Sudanese to pursue this course. The Saudis, however, did not want Bin Ladin, giving as their reason their revocation of his citizenship.⁶

Sudan's minister of defense, Fatih Erwa, has claimed that Sudan offered to hand Bin Ladin over to the United States. The Commission has found no credible evidence that this was so. Ambassador Carney had instructions only to push the Sudanese to expel Bin Ladin. Ambassador Carney had no legal basis to ask for more from the Sudanese since, at the time, there was no indictment outstanding.⁷

The chief of the Bin Ladin station, whom we will call "Mike," saw Bin Ladin's move to Afghanistan as a stroke of luck. Though the CIA had virtually abandoned Afghanistan after the Soviet withdrawal, case officers had reestablished old contacts while tracking down Mir Amal Kansi, the Pakistani gunman who had murdered two CIA employees in January 1993. These contacts contributed to intelligence about Bin Ladin's local movements, business activities, and security and living arrangements, and helped provide evidence that he was spending large amounts of money to help the Taliban. The chief of the Counterterrorist Center, whom we will call "Jeff," told Director George Tenet that the CIA's intelligence assets were "near to providing real-time information about Bin Ladin's activities and travels in Afghanistan." One of the contacts was a group associated with particular tribes among Afghanistan's ethnic Pashtun community.⁸

By the fall of 1997, the Bin Ladin unit had roughed out a plan for these Afghan tribals to capture Bin Ladin and hand him over for trial either in the United States or in an Arab country. In early 1998, the cabinet-level Principals Committee apparently gave the concept its blessing.⁹

On their own separate track, getting information but not direction from the CIA, the FBI's New York Field Office and the U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of New York were preparing to ask a grand jury to indict Bin Ladin. The Counterterrorist Center knew that this was happening.¹⁰ The eventual charge, conspiring to attack U.S. defense installations, was finally issued from the grand jury in June 1998—as a sealed indictment. The indictment was publicly disclosed in November of that year.

When Bin Ladin moved to Afghanistan in May 1996, he became a subject of interest to the State Department's South Asia bureau. At the time, as one diplomat told us, South Asia was seen in the department and the government generally as a low priority. In 1997, as Madeleine Albright was beginning her tenure as secretary of state, an NSC policy review concluded that the United States should pay more attention not just to India but also to Pakistan and Afghanistan.¹¹ With regard to Afghanistan, another diplomat said, the United States at the time had "no policy."¹²

In the State Department, concerns about India-Pakistan tensions often crowded out attention to Afghanistan or Bin Ladin. Aware of instability and