

Military officers reviewed the capture plan and, according to "Mike," "found no showstoppers." The commander of Delta Force felt "uncomfortable" with having the tribals hold Bin Ladin captive for so long, and the commander of Joint Special Operations Forces, Lieutenant General Michael Canavan, was worried about the safety of the tribals inside Tarnak Farms. General Canavan said he had actually thought the operation too complicated for the CIA—"out of their league"—and an effort to get results "on the cheap." But a senior Joint Staff officer described the plan as "generally, not too much different than we might have come up with ourselves." No one in the Pentagon, so far as we know, advised the CIA or the White House not to proceed.²³

In Washington, Berger expressed doubt about the dependability of the tribals. In his meeting with Tenet, Berger focused most, however, on the question of what was to be done with Bin Ladin if he were actually captured. He worried that the hard evidence against Bin Ladin was still skimpy and that there was a danger of snatching him and bringing him to the United States only to see him acquitted.²⁴

On May 18, CIA's managers reviewed a draft Memorandum of Notification (MON), a legal document authorizing the capture operation. A 1986 presidential finding had authorized worldwide covert action against terrorism and probably provided adequate authority. But mindful of the old "rogue elephant" charge, senior CIA managers may have wanted something on paper to show that they were not acting on their own.

Discussion of this memorandum brought to the surface an unease about paramilitary covert action that had become ingrained, at least among some CIA senior managers. James Pavitt, the assistant head of the Directorate of Operations, expressed concern that people might get killed; it appears he thought the operation had at least a slight flavor of a plan for an assassination. Moreover, he calculated that it would cost several million dollars. He was not prepared to take that money "out of hide," and he did not want to go to all the necessary congressional committees to get special money. Despite Pavitt's misgivings, the CIA leadership cleared the draft memorandum and sent it on to the National Security Council.²⁵

Counterterrorist Center officers briefed Attorney General Janet Reno and FBI Director Louis Freeh, telling them that the operation had about a 30 percent chance of success. The Center's chief, "Jeff," joined John O'Neill, the head of the FBI's New York Field Office, in briefing Mary Jo White, the U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of New York, and her staff. Though "Jeff" also used the 30 percent success figure, he warned that someone would surely be killed in the operation. White's impression from the New York briefing was that the chances of capturing Bin Ladin alive were nil.²⁶

From May 20 to 24, the CIA ran a final, graded rehearsal of the operation, spread over three time zones, even bringing in personnel from the region. The FBI also participated. The rehearsal went well. The Counterterrorist Center