

United States intersected. By early December, the CIA rated this possibility at less than 15 percent.¹⁹³

Finally, the CIA considered the possibility of putting U.S. personnel on the ground in Afghanistan. The CIA had been discussing this option with Special Operations Command and found enthusiasm on the working level but reluctance at higher levels. CIA saw a 95 percent chance of Special Operations Command forces capturing Bin Ladin if deployed—but less than a 5 percent chance of such a deployment. Sending CIA officers into Afghanistan was to be considered “if the gain clearly outweighs the risk”—but at this time no such gains presented themselves to warrant the risk.¹⁹⁴

As mentioned earlier, such a protracted deployment of U.S. Special Operations Forces into Afghanistan, perhaps as part of a team joined to a deployment of the CIA's own officers, would have required a major policy initiative (probably combined with efforts to secure the support of at least one or two neighboring countries) to make a long-term commitment, establish a durable presence on the ground, and be prepared to accept the associated risks and costs. Such a military plan was never developed for interagency consideration before 9/11. As 1999 came to a close, the CIA had a new strategic plan in place for capturing Bin Ladin, but no option was rated as having more than a 15 percent chance of achieving that objective.