

mally referred to as the “Blue Sky” memo; it was sent to Clarke on December 29. The memo proposed

- A major effort to support the Northern Alliance through intelligence sharing and increased funding so that it could stave off the Taliban army and tie down al Qaeda fighters. This effort was not intended to remove the Taliban from power, a goal that was judged impractical and too expensive for the CIA alone to attain.
- Increased support to the Uzbeks to strengthen their ability to fight terrorism and assist the United States in doing so.
- Assistance to anti-Taliban groups and proxies who might be encouraged to passively resist the Taliban.

The CIA memo noted that there was “no single ‘silver bullet’ available to deal with the growing problems in Afghanistan.” A multifaceted strategy would be needed to produce change.¹⁵³

No action was taken on these ideas in the few remaining weeks of the Clinton administration. Berger did not recall seeing or being briefed on the Blue Sky memo. Nor was the memo discussed during the transition with incoming top Bush administration officials. Tenet and his deputy told us they pressed these ideas as options after the new team took office.¹⁵⁴

As the Clinton administration drew to a close, Clarke and his staff developed a policy paper of their own, the first such comprehensive effort since the Delenda plan of 1998. The resulting paper, entitled “Strategy for Eliminating the Threat from the Jihadist Networks of al Qida: Status and Prospects,” reviewed the threat and the record to date, incorporated the CIA’s new ideas from the Blue Sky memo, and posed several near-term policy options.

Clarke and his staff proposed a goal to “roll back” al Qaeda over a period of three to five years. Over time, the policy should try to weaken and eliminate the network’s infrastructure in order to reduce it to a “rump group” like other formerly feared but now largely defunct terrorist organizations of the 1980s. “Continued anti-al Qida operations at the current level will prevent some attacks,” Clarke’s office wrote, “but will not seriously attrit their ability to plan and conduct attacks.” The paper backed covert aid to the Northern Alliance, covert aid to Uzbekistan, and renewed Predator flights in March 2001. A sentence called for military action to destroy al Qaeda command-and-control targets and infrastructure and Taliban military and command assets. The paper also expressed concern about the presence of al Qaeda operatives in the United States.¹⁵⁵