

President Bush told us that before 9/11 there was an appetite in the government for killing Bin Ladin, not for war. Looking back in 2004, he equated the presidential directive with a readiness to invade Afghanistan. The problem, he said, would have been how to do that if there had not been another attack on America. To many people, he said, it would have seemed like an ultimate act of unilateralism. But he said that he was prepared to take that on.²²⁸

Domestic Change and Continuity

During the transition, Bush had chosen John Ashcroft, a former senator from Missouri, as his attorney general. On his arrival at the Justice Department, Ashcroft told us, he faced a number of problems spotlighting the need for reform at the FBI.²²⁹

In February, Clarke briefed Attorney General Ashcroft on his directorate's issues. He reported that at the time, the attorney general acknowledged a "steep learning curve," and asked about the progress of the *Cole* investigation.²³⁰ Neither Ashcroft nor his predecessors received the President's Daily Brief. His office did receive the daily intelligence report for senior officials that, during the spring and summer of 2001, was carrying much of the same threat information.

The FBI was struggling to build up its institutional capabilities to do more against terrorism, relying on a strategy called MAXCAP 05 that had been unveiled in the summer of 2000. The FBI's assistant director for counterterrorism, Dale Watson, told us that he felt the new Justice Department leadership was not supportive of the strategy. Watson had the sense that the Justice Department wanted the FBI to get back to the investigative basics: guns, drugs, and civil rights. The new administration did seek an 8 percent increase in overall FBI funding in its initial budget proposal for fiscal year 2002, including the largest proposed percentage increase in the FBI's counterterrorism program since fiscal year 1997. The additional funds included the FBI's support of the 2002 Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City, Utah (a onetime increase), enhanced security at FBI facilities, and improvements to the FBI's WMD incident response capability.²³¹

In May, the Justice Department began shaping plans for building a budget for fiscal year 2003, the process that would usually culminate in an administration proposal at the beginning of 2002. On May 9, the attorney general testified at a congressional hearing concerning federal efforts to combat terrorism. He said that "one of the nation's most fundamental responsibilities is to protect its citizens . . . from terrorist attacks." The budget guidance issued the next day, however, highlighted gun crimes, narcotics trafficking, and civil rights as priorities. Watson told us that he almost fell out of his chair when he saw this memo, because it did not mention counterterrorism. Longtime FBI Director Louis Freeh left in June 2001, after announcing the indictment in the Khobar Towers case that he had worked so long to obtain. Thomas Pickard was the act-