

October 2000 attack on *USS Cole*, in part, because it believed that the incoming Bush Administration should handle the matter. However, Bush Administration officials testified that they did not begin their major counterterrorism policy review until April 2001. Thus, it appears that significant slippage in counterterrorism policy may have taken place in late 2000 and early 2001. At least part of this was due to the unresolved status of Mr. Clarke as National Coordinator for Counterterrorism and his uncertain mandate to coordinate Bush Administration policy on terrorism and specifically on Bin Ladin.

D. The George W. Bush Administration

Al-Qa'ida remained an intelligence priority under the Bush administration. Mr. Hadley told the Joint Inquiry that "countering terrorist threats to the United States was a top intelligence priority from the first days of this Administration." He noted that Clinton Administration counterterrorism programs and covert action authorities remained in place in early 2001, while the Bush Administration considered a far more aggressive policy against al-Qa'ida and its Taliban supporters: [page 229]

From the first days of the Bush Administration through September 2001, it conducted a comprehensive, senior-level review of policy for dealing with al-Qa'ida. The goal was to move beyond the policy of containment, criminal prosecution, and limited retaliation for specific attacks, toward attempting to 'roll back' al Qa'ida.

[As Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage testified to the Joint Inquiry on September 19, 2002:

The National Security Council . . . called for new proposals [in March 2001] on a strategy that would be more aggressive against al-Qa'ida. The first deputies meeting, which is the first decision making body in the administration, met on the 30th of April and set off on a trail of initiatives to include financing, getting at financing, to get at increased authorities for the Central Intelligence Agency, sharp end things that the military was asked to do. . . . So, from March through about August, we were preparing a national security Presidential directive, and it was distributed on August 13 to the principals for their final comments. And then, of course, we had the events of September 11. . . .]

That policy review reportedly involved drafting new covert action authorities, several senior level meetings to discuss policy alternatives, and exploration of other initiatives. The review was nearing completion in the days before September 11.