

As is explained in more detail in other sections of this report, America first faced major international terrorist attacks within the United States in February 1993 when a bomb was detonated in the World Trade Center and in June 1993 when the FBI arrested eight persons for plotting to bomb New York City landmarks. In 1996, as Bin Ladin's involvement in directing terrorist acts became more evident, the Counterterrorist Center created a special unit with ten to fifteen members to focus on him. Since 1996, the Community has been actively engaged in operations with mixed success to collect intelligence on Bin Ladin and disrupt his network. On September 10, 2001, thirty-five to forty people were assigned to the CTC's Bin Ladin unit. In 1999, the FBI also created a Bin Ladin unit at Headquarters. Approximately nineteen persons were working in that unit on September 10.

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In August 1998 after the two embassy bombings in Africa, the Intelligence Community quickly confirmed that the attacks had been carried out by Bin Ladin's network. The DCI made combating the threat Bin Ladin posed one of the Intelligence Community's highest priorities, establishing it as a "Tier [Zero] priority," and he raised the status of the threat still further when he announced in December 1998 that "[w]e are at war" with Bin Ladin.

K. The Declaration of War

Whether and when the Intelligence Community as a whole recognized that Bin Ladin was waging war on the United States and that it was necessary to respond in kind is an important factor in assessing the Community's response to the threat Bin Ladin's network posed. In interviews, many persons on the National Security Council staff and at CTC pointed to the August 1998 bombings of two U.S. embassies in East Africa as the moment when they recognized that Bin Ladin was waging war against the United States. That judgment was reflected in two statements by President Clinton in the immediate aftermath of the bombings:

- On August 20, 1998, in an address to the nation on military action against terrorist sites in Afghanistan and Sudan, President Clinton declared: "A few months ago, and again this week, Bin Ladin publicly vowed to wage a terrorist war against America."