

Within that effort were the seeds of an integrated, comprehensive government-wide strategy for countering the Bin Ladin threat that could have put the nation on a war footing before September 11. The initiative is perhaps the closest that President Clinton and the National Security Council came between 1998 and the Administration's departure from office in January 2001 to a coordinated response to the threat. However, the PDD does not appear to have had much impact. It is clearly not as straightforward as the DCI's declaration and, beyond Mr. Clarke's reference to it in his testimony, no other Joint Inquiry witness pointed to PDD-62 as the policy guiding the government's response to the growing al-Qa'ida threat.

Shortly after the Bush Administration took office in January 2001, the National Security Council undertook a review of existing policy for dealing with al-Qa'ida. In response to written Joint Inquiry questions, Deputy National Security Advisor Steve Hadley explained:

The Administration took the al-Qa'ida threat seriously and, from the outset, began considering a major shift in United States counterterrorism policy. From the first days of the Bush Administration through September 2001, it conducted a 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. The new goal was to eliminate completely the ability of al-Qa'ida and other terrorist groups of global reach to conduct terrorist attacks against the United States. . . . Between May and the end of July 2001, four Deputies Committee meetings were held directly related to the regional issues which had to be resolved in order to adopt a more aggressive strategy for dealing with al-Qa'ida. These meetings focused on [———

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This new policy might have produced a coordinated government response to the Bin Ladin threat or put the nation on more of a war footing with al-Qa'ida before September 11. However, as Mr. Hadley noted, "[t]he Administration finalized its review of policy on al-Qa'ida at an NSC Principals [page 247] Committee meeting on September 4, 2001." President Bush had not reviewed the draft policy before September 11.

In short, the DCI and other Intelligence Community officials recognized the Bin Ladin threat. Notwithstanding the DCI's declaration, President Clinton's August 1998 statements, and intelligence reports to policymakers over many years indicating that Bin Ladin was waging war