

In a statement to the Joint Inquiry, a former CTC Chief cited the “international political context of this period” as presenting “an operational environment with major impediments that CIA constantly fought to overcome”:

- “The U.S. Government had no official presence in Afghanistan, and relations with the Taliban were seriously strained. Both of these factors made it difficult to get access to Bin Ladin and al-Qa’ida personnel.”
- “U.S. policy stopped short of replacing the Taliban regime or providing direct support to others for the specific purpose of overthrowing the Taliban. These realities limited our ability to exert pressure on Bin Ladin.”
- “During this period, the Taliban gradually gained control over most of Afghanistan, increasingly limiting the opposition’s capabilities and room to maneuver.”

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- “U.S. relations with Pakistan, the principal access point to Afghanistan, were strained due to the nuclear tests of 1998 and the military coup in Islamabad in 1999.”

He also noted other factors that complicated CIA operations against Bin Ladin:

[_____

_____].

The former CTC Chief explained that these challenges and operational constraints, [_____
_____] left virtually no room to craft an executable operation. In an interview with the Joint Inquiry, CIA’s Deputy Director for Operations also noted that CIA [_____] capabilities had “atrophied” in the years preceding the September 11 attacks.