

II. THE CONTEXT

September 11, 2001, while indelible in our collective memory, was by no means America's first confrontation with international terrorism. Although the nature of the threat had evolved considerably over time, the United States and its interests have long been prime terrorist targets. For example, the bombings of the Marine barracks and the U.S. Embassy in Beirut, Lebanon in 1983 should have served as a clear warning that terrorist groups were not reluctant to attack U.S. interests when they believed such attacks would further their ends.

The Intelligence Community also had considerable evidence before September 11 that international terrorists were capable of, and had planned, major terrorist strikes within the United States. The 1993 attack on the World Trade Center confirmed this point, as did the 1993 plots to bomb New York City landmarks and the 1999 arrest at the U.S.-Canadian border of Ahmad Ressaam, who intended to bomb the Los Angeles International Airport. [Page 4]

Usama Bin Ladin's role in international terrorism had also been well known for some time before September 11. He initially came to the attention of the Intelligence Community in the early 1990s as a financier of terrorism. However, Bin Ladin's own words soon provided evidence of the steadily escalating threat to the United States he and his organization posed. In August 1996, he issued a *fatwa* -- or religious decree -- authorizing attacks on Western military targets in the Arabian Peninsula. In February 1998, Bin Ladin issued a second *fatwa* authorizing attacks on U.S. civilians and military personnel anywhere in the world. Bin Ladin's fatwas cited the U.S. military presence in

¹ Anthrax attacks in October 2001 eventually killed five Americans, contaminated the Senate Hart Office building in Washington, D.C. as well as U.S. Postal Service facilities in Maryland, and significantly affected the U.S. economy. The statement of Initial Scope of this Joint Inquiry made specific reference to the anthrax attacks. In pursuing that matter, the Inquiry received briefings from the FBI and the U.S. General Accounting Office (GAO) regarding their investigations of the anthrax attacks. It also requested that GAO's Center for Technology and Engineering review the attacks; current knowledge regarding the use of anthrax as a weapon; technologies available to detect anthrax; and the law enforcement community's ability to combat chemical and biological terrorist attacks, including the FBI's resources and analytical capabilities to investigate such attacks. The GAO report has been completed. It is summarized in Part Three of this report and is included in its entirety as an appendix. To date, no connection has been established between the anthrax attacks and the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001.