

been given additional resources for such efforts, both it and the CIA were having problems exploiting leads by tracing U.S. telephone numbers and translating documents obtained in cell disruptions abroad. The Justice Department reported that the current guidelines from the Attorney General gave sufficient legal authority for domestic investigation and surveillance.¹⁰⁸

Though intelligence gave no clear indication of what might be afoot, some intelligence reports mentioned chemical weapons, pointing toward work at a camp in southern Afghanistan called Derunta. On November 4, 1998, the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Southern District of New York unsealed its indictment of Bin Ladin, charging him with conspiracy to attack U.S. defense installations. The indictment also charged that al Qaeda had allied itself with Sudan, Iran, and Hezbollah. The original sealed indictment had added that al Qaeda had "reached an understanding with the government of Iraq that al Qaeda would not work against that government and that on particular projects, specifically including weapons development, al Qaeda would work cooperatively with the Government of Iraq."¹⁰⁹ This passage led Clarke, who for years had read intelligence reports on Iraqi-Sudanese cooperation on chemical weapons, to speculate to Berger that a large Iraqi presence at chemical facilities in Khartoum was "probably a direct result of the Iraq-Al Qida agreement." Clarke added that VX precursor traces found near al Shifa were the "exact formula used by Iraq."¹¹⁰ This language about al Qaeda's "understanding" with Iraq had been dropped, however, when a superseding indictment was filed in November 1998.¹¹¹

On Friday, December 4, 1998, the CIA included an article in the Presidential Daily Brief describing intelligence, received from a friendly government, about a threatened hijacking in the United States. This article was declassified at our request.

The same day, Clarke convened a meeting of his CSG to discuss both the

The following is the text of an item from the Presidential Daily Brief received by President William J. Clinton on December 4, 1998. Redacted material is indicated in brackets.

SUBJECT: Bin Ladin Preparing to Hijack US Aircraft and Other Attacks

1. Reporting [—] suggests Bin Ladin and his allies are preparing for attacks in the US, including an aircraft hijacking to obtain the release of Shaykh 'Umar 'Abd al-Rahman, Ramzi Yousef, and Muhammad Sadiq 'Awda. One source quoted a senior member of the Gama'at al-Islamiyya (IG) saying that, as of late October, the IG had completed planning for

an operation in the US on behalf of Bin Ladin, but that the operation was on hold. A senior Bin Ladin operative from Saudi Arabia was to visit IG counterparts in the US soon thereafter to discuss options—perhaps including an aircraft hijacking.

- IG leader Islambuli in late September was planning to hijack a US airliner during the “next couple of weeks” to free ‘Abd al-Rahman and the other prisoners, according to what may be a different source.
- The same source late last month said that Bin Ladin might implement plans to hijack US aircraft before the beginning of Ramadan on 20 December and that two members of the operational team had evaded security checks during a recent trial run at an unidentified New York airport. [—]

2. Some members of the Bin Ladin network have received hijack training, according to various sources, but no group directly tied to Bin Ladin’s al-Qa’ida organization has ever carried out an aircraft hijacking. Bin Ladin could be weighing other types of operations against US aircraft. According to [—] the IG in October obtained SA-7 missiles and intended to move them from Yemen into Saudi Arabia to shoot down an Egyptian plane or, if unsuccessful, a US military or civilian aircraft.

- A [—] in October told us that unspecified “extremist elements” in Yemen had acquired SA-7s. [—]

3. [—] indicate the Bin Ladin organization or its allies are moving closer to implementing anti-US attacks at unspecified locations, but we do not know whether they are related to attacks on aircraft. A Bin Ladin associate in Sudan late last month told a colleague in Kandahar that he had shipped a group of containers to Afghanistan. Bin Ladin associates also talked about the movement of containers to Afghanistan before the East Africa bombings.

- In other [—] Bin Ladin associates last month discussed picking up a package in Malaysia. One told his colleague in Malaysia that “they” were in the “ninth month [of pregnancy].”
- An alleged Bin Ladin supporter in Yemen late last month remarked to his mother that he planned to work in “commerce” from abroad and said his impending “marriage,” which would take place soon, would be a “surprise.” “Commerce” and “marriage” often are codewords for terrorist attacks. [—]