CHAPTER 5
AUGUST 7, 1998:
U.S. EMBASSIES IN KENYA AND TANZANIA

A. SIMULTANEOUS DESTRUCTION

1. The Attacks

At 10:35 a.m. on August 7, 1998, a pick-up truck loaded with explosives blew up at the rear entrance to the U.S. Embassy in Nairobi, Kenya. The U.S. Embassy in Nairobi was located on a busy downtown intersection, and it was snuggled in between other office buildings. The men driving the truck pulled up to the rear entrance of the compound, which provided access to the parking garage; one of the men in the truck jumped out to argue with the guards there and threw a stun grenade. The guards radioed for help, but refused to let the truck proceed. When the bomb exploded moments later, it blast bounced off the nearby buildings, magnifying the damage done to the Embassy. It killed 213 people and wounded more than 4,000 others.

Four minutes later, a delivery truck blew up in front of the U.S. Embassy in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. The U.S. Embassy there was located in a less dense portion of the city, and the terrorists detonated their bomb further away than they planned when they could not get past a water truck making a delivery to the Embassy. That bomb killed 11 people and wounded several hundred.

In both cities, two vehicles were involved—one truck carrying a heavy bomb, and another vehicle acting as a scout and control. The drivers of the bomb vehicles both expected to commit suicide by driving into or under their respective targets and setting off their bombs. The on-site operational commanders in the control vehicles may have detonated the explosives remotely and then sped off. They immediately fled the country, following by several days the senior terrorist planners and bomb makers who had already made their escape.

The devastation, the similar methods of operation (MOs), the use of military-grade explosives, and the precise timing of the incidents hundreds of miles apart, pointed to a professional terrorist operation. Attention focused quickly on the then relatively unknown Saudi dissident Osama Bin Laden and his terrorist network.

1 Accounts differ as to whether the truck approached the front door, or went directly to the rear in an effort to get into the parking garage under the building.

2 This is based on testimony of Mohamed al-Owhali, who was in the truck when it approached the gate; he could not remember having lit the fuse on the bomb before fleeing, and it is thus possible that Fazul detonated the bomb remotely.

161

CHAPTER 5
AUGUST 7, 1998:
U.S. EMBASSIES IN KENYA AND TANZANIA

A. SIMULTANEOUS DESTRUCTION

1. The Attacks

At 10:35 a.m. on August 7, 1998, a pick-up truck loaded with explosives blew up at the rear entrance to the U.S. Embassy in Nairobi, Kenya. The U.S. Embassy in Nairobi was located on a busy downtown intersection, and it was snuggled in between other office buildings. The men driving the truck pulled up to the rear entrance of the compound, which provided access to the parking garage; one of the men in the truck jumped out to argue with the guards there and threw a stun grenade. The guards radioed for help, but refused to let the truck proceed. When the bomb exploded moments later, it blast bounced off the nearby buildings, magnifying the damage done to the Embassy. It killed 213 people and wounded more than 4,000 others.

Four minutes later, a delivery truck blew up in front of the U.S. Embassy in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. The U.S. Embassy there was located in a less dense portion of the city, and the terrorists detonated their bomb further away than they planned when they could not get past a water truck making a delivery to the Embassy. That bomb killed 11 people and wounded several hundred.

In both cities, two vehicles were involved—one truck carrying a heavy bomb, and another vehicle acting as a scout and control. The drivers of the bomb vehicles both expected to commit suicide by driving into or under their respective targets and setting off their bombs. The on-site operational commanders in the control vehicles may have detonated the explosives remotely and then sped off. They immediately fled the country, following by several days the senior terrorist planners and bomb makers who had already made their escape.

The devastation, the similar methods of operation (MOs), the use of military-grade explosives, and the precise timing of the incidents hundreds of miles apart, pointed to a professional terrorist operation. Attention focused quickly on the then relatively unknown Saudi dissident Osama Bin Laden and his terrorist network.

1 Accounts differ as to whether the truck approached the front door, or went directly to the rear in an effort to get into the parking garage under the building.

2 This is based on testimony of Mohamed al-Owhali, who was in the truck when it approached the gate; he could not remember having lit the fuse on the bomb before fleeing, and it is thus possible that Fazul detonated the bomb remotely.

161
It now seems likely that Iran and Sudan had a role in the bombings, as well, and the U.S. response to the attacks indicated that the government was aware of Sudan's role, at least.

2. The Response

Two weeks after the attacks, the United States launched dozens of cruise missiles against a series of terrorist training camps in Afghanistan and a factory in Sudan. Based on a soil sample outside the plant, the CIA believed that the al-Shifa pharmaceutical factory was involved in the production of chemical weapons; it also appeared to be financed by Bin Laden. Intelligence reports indicated that a major gathering of terrorist leaders would occur on August 20 in Afghanistan, so the White House seized the opportunity to retaliate. President Clinton went on national television that night to proclaim that the United States had struck back against the terrorists.

The missile strike did not achieve most of its objectives. Roughly 50 terrorists were killed in the camps, including about a dozen terrorist trainers from Pakistan's intelligence service (the ISI), but Bin Laden was nowhere to be found. He may have been tipped off by ISI or by the rapid departure of most U.S. Embassy personnel in Pakistan the day before. No fewer than six Clinton Administration officials went on the record to defend the strike on the Sudan plant by citing its links to al-Qaeda. Richard Clarke, who later insisted that there was never any linkage between Iraq and al-Qaeda, told Washington Post reporter Vernon Loeb that there was intelligence linking Bin Laden to al-Shifa's previous and current owners, Iraqi nerve gas experts, and Sudan's National Islamic Front. The pharmaceutical factory in Sudan was in fact the main producer of medicine for the country, and despite the fact that Iraqi scientists had assisted Sudan in developing chemical weapons, no further evidence has ever been found to substantiate the claim that the factory was involved.

Cynics and critics held that the missile strike was a public relations ploy to deflect attention from the Independent Counsel's investigation into President Clinton's Whitewater real estate deal and a series of related subjects. The White House believed this was a perfect chance to nail Bin Laden that just missed. The retaliatory strike did demonstrate an understanding by the U.S. government that state sponsors were still involved in terrorism and that in some cases—Sudan and Afghanistan—they would be held responsible. But it also demonstrated that the United States was unwilling to pursue state sponsorship by other states that posed more of a challenge—Iran and Iraq. Perhaps even worse, it added to Bin Laden's image in the Arab world.

It now seems likely that Iran and Sudan had a role in the bombings, as well, and the U.S. response to the attacks indicated that the government was aware of Sudan's role, at least.

2. The Response

Two weeks after the attacks, the United States launched dozens of cruise missiles against a series of terrorist training camps in Afghanistan and a factory in Sudan. Based on a soil sample outside the plant, the CIA believed that the al-Shifa pharmaceutical factory was involved in the production of chemical weapons; it also appeared to be financed by Bin Laden. Intelligence reports indicated that a major gathering of terrorist leaders would occur on August 20 in Afghanistan, so the White House seized the opportunity to retaliate. President Clinton went on national television that night to proclaim that the United States had struck back against the terrorists.

The missile strike did not achieve most of its objectives. Roughly 50 terrorists were killed in the camps, including about a dozen terrorist trainers from Pakistan's intelligence service (the ISI), but Bin Laden was nowhere to be found. He may have been tipped off by ISI or by the rapid departure of most U.S. Embassy personnel in Pakistan the day before. No fewer than six Clinton Administration officials went on the record to defend the strike on the Sudan plant by citing its links to Iraq. Richard Clarke, who later insisted that there was never any linkage between Iraq and al-Qaeda, told Washington Post reporter Vernon Loeb that there was intelligence linking Bin Laden to al-Shifa's previous and current owners, Iraqi nerve gas experts, and Sudan's National Islamic Front. The pharmaceutical factory in Sudan was in fact the main producer of medicine for the country, and despite the fact that Iraqi scientists had assisted Sudan in developing chemical weapons, no further evidence has ever been found to substantiate the claim that the factory was involved.

Cynics and critics held that the missile strike was a public relations ploy to deflect attention from the Independent Counsel's investigation into President Clinton's Whitewater real estate deal and a series of related subjects. The White House believed this was a perfect chance to nail Bin Laden that just missed. The retaliatory strike did demonstrate an understanding by the U.S. government that state sponsors were still involved in terrorism and that in some cases—Sudan and Afghanistan—they would be held responsible. But it also demonstrated that the United States was unwilling to pursue state sponsorship by other states that posed more of a challenge—Iran and Iraq. Perhaps even worse, it added to Bin Laden's image in the Arab world.

It now seems likely that Iran and Sudan had a role in the bombings, as well, and the U.S. response to the attacks indicated that the government was aware of Sudan's role, at least.

2. The Response

Two weeks after the attacks, the United States launched dozens of cruise missiles against a series of terrorist training camps in Afghanistan and a factory in Sudan. Based on a soil sample outside the plant, the CIA believed that the al-Shifa pharmaceutical factory was involved in the production of chemical weapons; it also appeared to be financed by Bin Laden. Intelligence reports indicated that a major gathering of terrorist leaders would occur on August 20 in Afghanistan, so the White House seized the opportunity to retaliate. President Clinton went on national television that night to proclaim that the United States had struck back against the terrorists.

The missile strike did not achieve most of its objectives. Roughly 50 terrorists were killed in the camps, including about a dozen terrorist trainers from Pakistan's intelligence service (the ISI), but Bin Laden was nowhere to be found. He may have been tipped off by ISI or by the rapid departure of most U.S. Embassy personnel in Pakistan the day before. No fewer than six Clinton Administration officials went on the record to defend the strike on the Sudan plant by citing its links to Iraq. Richard Clarke, who later insisted that there was never any linkage between Iraq and al-Qaeda, told Washington Post reporter Vernon Loeb that there was intelligence linking Bin Laden to al-Shifa's previous and current owners, Iraqi nerve gas experts, and Sudan's National Islamic Front. The pharmaceutical factory in Sudan was in fact the main producer of medicine for the country, and despite the fact that Iraqi scientists had assisted Sudan in developing chemical weapons, no further evidence has ever been found to substantiate the claim that the factory was involved.

Cynics and critics held that the missile strike was a public relations ploy to deflect attention from the Independent Counsel's investigation into President Clinton's Whitewater real estate deal and a series of related subjects. The White House believed this was a perfect chance to nail Bin Laden that just missed. The retaliatory strike did demonstrate an understanding by the U.S. government that state sponsors were still involved in terrorism and that in some cases—Sudan and Afghanistan—they would be held responsible. But it also demonstrated that the United States was unwilling to pursue state sponsorship by other states that posed more of a challenge—Iran and Iraq. Perhaps even worse, it added to Bin Laden's image in the Arab world.