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Reuters Top News
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NEW YORK (Reuters) - A plan for the United States to attack al Qaeda languished for eight months because of the change in presidents and was approved just a week before the Sept. 11 attacks on America, Time Magazine reported on Sunday.

The proposals, developed in the final days of the Clinton administration, were presented to the Bush administration's new national security adviser, Condoleezza Rice, in the opening days in January 2001, the magazine said. The plan was developed by Richard Clarke, a career bureaucrat who had served in the first Bush administration and became the point man on terrorism in the Clinton White House.

The draft initiative became the victim of the transition process between the presidencies of Bill Clinton and George W. Bush, the magazine said, as the Bush White House instituted its own "policy review process" on the terrorist threat and the proposals outlined by Clarke were not reviewed by top decision-makers until late April.

The resulting draft presidential directive, which Bush officials told Time was redesigned not to "roll back" al Qaeda but to "eliminate it," was approved by Bush national security deputies on Sept. 4, 2001, just a week before the hijacked airliner attacks that killed some 3,000 people in New York and Washington, Time said.

The magazine also reported that while concern was mounting by last summer that a major terrorist attack against U.S. interests was imminent, no decision was made to send a Predator drone -- the best possible source of intelligence on what was happening in the terror camps run by Osama bin Laden -- to fly over Afghanistan.

"The Predator sat idle from October 2000 until after September 11," Time reported.

Clarke's proposals called for the breakup of al Qaeda cells and arrest of their personnel, a systematic attack on the financial support for its terrorist activities and for aid to nations where al Qaeda was operating to fight terrorism. Clarke also wanted a dramatic increase in covert action in Afghanistan to eliminate the al Qaeda sanctuary provided by the Islamic Taliban regime.

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