SPYING BLIND

The CIA, the FBI, and the Origins of 9/11

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Critics will argue that this account of missed opportunities is unfair: It has often been said that U.S. intelligence agencies must be right 100 percent of the time, while terrorists need to succeed only once. Many have also suggested, quite correctly, that sifting through massive volumes of intelligence for clues to a surprise attack is an inherently daunting challenge. Roberta Wohlstetter's classic study of the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor found that in 1941, various U.S. intelligence agencies had pieces of information about the impending attack, but nobody could distinguish these warnings from all of the background noise.[53] As Bruce Berkowitz writes, "this problem of signal-to-noise ratio is so fundamental in the intelligence business that today, if one refers to the 'Roberta Wohlstetter problem,' almost everyone knows exactly what you are talking about."[54] Sixty years later, these challenges may be even worse. When Wohlstetter wrote her book in 1962,

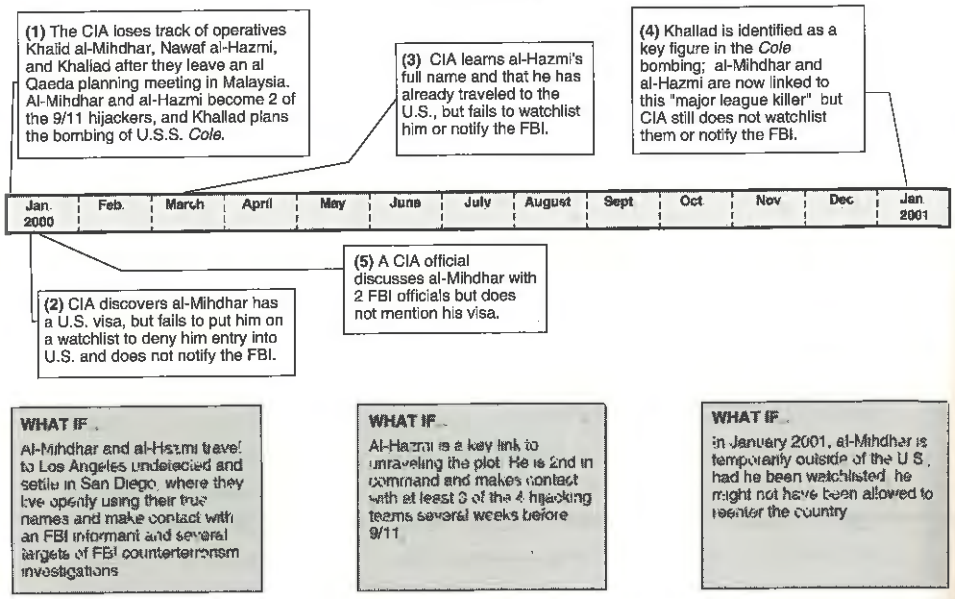

Figure 5.2a. Timeline of the CIA's 11 Missed Opportunties.

there were 5,000 computers in the world, no fax machines or cellular phones. Today the National Security Agency, which collects signals intelligence, must contend with 180 million computers, fourteen million fax machines and forty million cell phones.[55] The agency's information intake is astounding: it operates a dozen or more listening posts around the world, each one of which intercepts two million faxes, e-mails, telephone calls and other signals every *hour*.[56] That's about 200 million pieces of intelligence in a regular workday; little wonder less than 1 percent of it is ever decoded, translated, or processed.[57] The FBI's former counterterrorism chief described the challenges of preventing the September 11 attacks in this way:

> There were a lot of red flags prior to 9/11. And once 9/11 occurred it's real easy to go back and pick out the red flag in the ocean of red flags and say "You should have done this" or "You should have seen this." And the threat to aviation is certainly one of the areas that we received threat reporting on. It was not the only area. We had threats to malls, threats to power plants, threats to assassinations. Across the board we have threats coming in every day. And if something happened today concerning a small boat at-

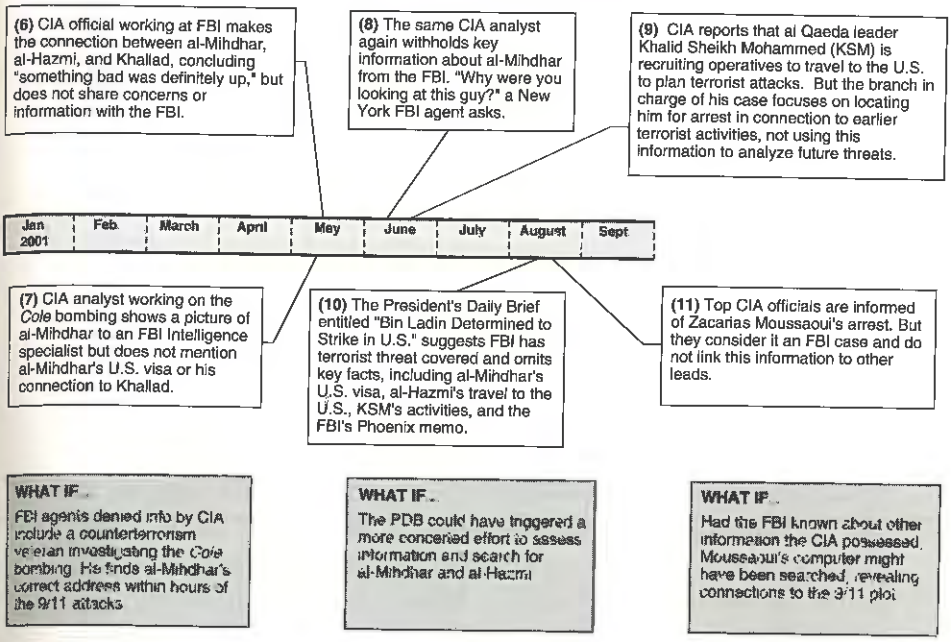

Figure 5.2b. Timeline of the CIA's 11 Missed Opportunities.

tacking somewhere in one of our harbors in the U.S., we'd probably have information about that. So it's a mass of information and it's a sea of threats, and it's like working against a maze. If you know where the end point of a maze is, it's certainly easier to work your way back to the starting point than trying to go through the maze and sort out all the red flags."[58]

These criticisms are understandable, but ultimately unconvincing, for three reasons. First, every one of the eleven missed opportunities involved information that CIA and other officials had already distinguished from the background noise. Remember that back in January of 2000, CIA leaders were so convinced about the potential significance of the al Qaeda meeting in Malaysia, they not only set up surveillance of it, but provided regular updates to the FBI director, the head of the CIA, and the national security advisor. CIA officials knew this particular al Qaeda meeting was important. They treated it as important. They were primed by reports of potential terrorist attacks surrounding the Millennium. They were tipped off to the meeting by sources considered to be the very best on al Qaeda.[59] They

believed "something nefarious" was afoot. And nothing they learned suggested otherwise. Nobody and nothing ever indicated that these suspected terrorists were wrongly targeted, that the meeting was for innocent purposes, that something nefarious was not in fact afoot. A year and half before 9/11, Khalid al-Mihdhar, Nawaf al-Hazmi, and Khallad were singled out. The Wohlstetter problem had been overcome. It was only then that the system broke down. The 9/11 Commission staff statement investigating the Malaysian tracking and watchlisting failures concluded, "We believe every available resource should have been devoted to learning who these people were, and trying to spot and track them."[60] This never happened. The signal was not missed. It was found and then lost.

Second, CIA officials were not searching for red flags in an endless sea of possible threats. They were focused on terrorism and al Qaeda. In the spring and summer of 2001, the U.S. intelligence system was, in Director Tenet's words, "blinking red" with an unprecedented crescendo of reports suggesting an imminent and catastrophic terrorist attack against American targets somewhere in the world. In June, and again in July, intelligence agencies warned senior U.S. government officials that attacks were expected to "cause major casualties" and would "occur with little or no warning."[61] Many intelligence officials told the 9/11 Commission that they realized something terrible was in the offing and were working desperately to stop it.[62] American embassies were warned of the possibility of attack. Military exercises were cancelled and alert levels raised. All fifty-six FBI field offices in the United States were called and told to get their evidence teams ready to investigate attacks at a moment's notice. The president was briefed repeatedly about al Qaeda's intention to strike American targets.[63] To be sure, most of the threat reporting pointed overseas. The September 11 attacks, however, were not bolts from the blue. U.S. intelligence officials and senior policymakers knew an attack was coming and that al Qaeda was behind it. This information alone narrowed the scope of inquiry considerably. The intelligence challenge was still formidable, but it was not impossible. CIA officials still had to find the red flags, but with one major advantage: they had a pretty good idea of what they were looking for.

Yet the CIA failed to use this advantage to focus its own intelligence collection and analysis efforts in a systematic way. Nor did the agency ever develop a comprehensive collection and analysis plan for the rest of the Intelligence Community. What al Qaeda information did U.S. intelligence agencies already possess? What questions still needed to be answered, and in what priority? What kinds of intelligence could fill in the gaps? Which agencies and people were best suited for the job, and how could they work together most productively? These questions were never asked or answered.[64] Instead, the nation's best intelligence professionals were cast adrift, left to piece together what they knew based on what they could get. Tellingly, even the eventual watchlisting of al-Mihdhar and al-Hazmi nineteen days before the attacks was not part of any formal assignment, but came from two FBI analysts and a CIA analyst who reviewed the information on their own.

Third, although it is true that no organizational arrangement guarantees 100 percent success, in this case the CIA's organizational weaknesses led to 100 percent failure. The agency did not miss some of the eleven opportunities it had to potentially disrupt the September 11 attacks. It missed them all. A track record that poor suggests something more fundamental is broken.

Efforts to modernize the Bureau's obsolete information technology (IT) systems can only be described as feckless. Between 1997 and 1999, legislators were so concerned that the FBI was incapable of implementing a successful IT modernization program, they refused to fund the bureau's proposed $430 million Information Sharing Initiative.[91] Their concerns were justified. As former Attorney General Janet Reno later explained, "Unfortunately, the FBI had faced extensive delays and cost overruns in the deployment of its previous major technology programs, so

it faced major challenges convincing the Congress to provide significant new funding for this initiative."[92] The FBI's main information system at the time, the Automated Case Support system (ACS), had cost $67 million and was obsolete from its inception.[93] Launched in 1995 with 1980s technology, the system used function keys instead of "point and click" mouse technology or icons, could not store graphics or picture files, required twelve separate commands to store a single document, and proved so unreliable that many agents continued storing case information in paper files and transmitted electronic data using forty-two different and unconnected information systems to circumvent ACS problems.[94] Chief among them was the ACS system's inability to perform data searches using more than one word. In the fall of 2001, for example, an agent interested in flight schools could search for the word "flight" or the word "schools" in some FBI case files but not for "flight schools." By contrast, the CIA had been able to search for full phrases on its computers since 1985.[95] As Acting FBI Director Thomas Pickard put it, "The FBI computer system was the joke of Washington, D.C. The FBI knew it, DOJ [the Department of Justice] knew it, and Congress knew it."[96]

Yet FBI Director Freeh, who ordered his own computer removed from his office because he never used it, was slow to act.[97] In the spring of 2000, two years after the strategic plan was released, Attorney General Janet Reno was so concerned that "the FBI didn't know what it had," she sent three separate memos to the FBI director demanding urgent action.[98] On February 29, 2000, Reno asked the FBI to "develop and implement a system to ensure the linkage and sharing of intelligence evidence and other information" among all parts of the FBI, and to have the system in place by October 1, 2000.[99] On March 8, 2000, Reno issued a second memo that noted, "the bottom line is that we must develop a capacity within the Federal Bureau of Investigation in all fields to identify relevant information and share it internally, and then share it securely with other agencies."[100] And in May she wrote that it was imperative that the bureau "immediately develop the capacity to fully assimilate and utilize intelligence information currently collected and contained in FBI files, and use that knowledge to work proactively to identify and protect against emerging national security threats."[101] As Reno later

explained, she believed that enhancing existing computer systems would be "helpful," but it was also important "for people to begin to look at manually what they could do and to find out what they had and what they didn't have."[102] Finally, in June 2000, Freeh appointed the bureau's first professional chief information officer, an IBM veteran named Bob Dies, and in the fall of 2000 convinced Congress to fund a new, $500 million information technology modernization program named Trilogy.

It was too little, too late. At the time of the September 11, 2001, attacks, half of all of the FBI's records—six billion pages—were still being stored in paper form.[103] The FBI's technology systems were several generations behind industry standards.[104] Most of the bureau's desktop computers were so old that they could not use standard software or connect to the Internet.[105] Agents had to write interview notes by hand, retype them into their computers, and store other case-related documents and photographs in manila envelopes.[106] E-mail was so slow and unreliable that agents often resorted to faxing important documents instead.[107] Management of information technology programs and investments continued to be splintered across several operational divisions, with no consolidated control or high-level attention.[108] In short, as al Qaeda was mastering twenty-first-century terrorist warfare, the FBI was struggling to bring its technology systems out of the Dark Ages. Without modern computer networks to collect, integrate, and share information, individual agents were left groping in the dark, searching for clues and piecing together what information they could unearth through personal contacts and gut instinct. As one former FBI official reflected with frustration, "If you really understood what domestic intelligence was, *nothing* would have stood in the way of getting the computer piece right. It's the heart of intelligence."[109]

After September 11, the Trilogy information modernization program proved to be precisely the disaster that Congress had feared all along. Robert Mueller, who became FBI director just one week before 9/11, quickly announced that Trilogy was one of his top reform priorities.[110] Nearly four years later, however, he was forced to declare failure. In February 2005, Mueller announced that Trilogy's cornerstone electronic case filing system, which had already run behind schedule and over budget, cost $170 million, and burned through five different chief informa-

tion officers and ten project managers, was being scrapped because it did not work.[111] "It's unbelievable," fumed Senator Patrick Leahy (D-VT). "It's been a kind of train wreck in slow motion. . . . Back in 2000, when we began discussions about Trilogy as a way to bring the FBI's antiquated system into the 21st century, we were warned of dire consequences to our security and our safety if the improvements weren't imminent, if we didn't get the money so we could be done right away. Well, we responded . . . But time and again, it has fallen victim to escalating costs and implementation concerns, mismanagement and so on. . . . The $170 million seems to have evaporated."[112]

Missed Opportunities 2 and 3: The Phoenix Memo

In May 2001, a veteran FBI agent named Kenneth Williams began reading old files to get up to speed for his new counterterrorism assignment in Phoenix. He became increasingly alarmed by what he found: a large number of Islamist extremists enrolling in Arizona flight schools. Williams himself had interviewed one of them a year earlier, in April 2000. The subject had a poster of Osama bin Laden in his apartment and said he considered the United States government to be a legitimate target of Islam.[23] By the summer of 2001, Special Agent Williams realized that his subject was not an isolated case. On July 10, Williams sent a memo to six officials at FBI headquarters[24] and two agents on different international terrorism squads in the FBI's New York field office[25] warning that he believed "a coordinated effort by Usama bin Laden (UBL)" was underway "to send students to the United States to attend civil aviation universities and colleges."[26] The memo discussed ten individuals who were the subject of FBI investigations.[27] It also recommended that the bureau begin compiling lists of civil aviation colleges in the United States, establish relationships with those schools, consider seeking authority to obtain visa information about foreign flight school students, and most importantly, discuss the issue with other intelligence agencies so that they could gather additional information.[28]

The Phoenix memo produced two missed opportunities. The first was the chance to alert and engage a broader circle of FBI and intelligence officials about the terrorist threat two months before the attacks. Although the memo contained no direct warning of the September 11 plot, it was a timely and outstanding piece of strategic analysis that reached across cases, noticed a disturbing pattern with potentially serious implications for U.S.

national security, and recommended specific next steps to involve additional FBI field offices and other U.S. intelligence agencies. As FBI Director Robert Mueller later reflected, "You are not going to have a better intelligence product than the Phoenix memo."[29] But before 9/11, almost no one knew or did anything about it. The Congressional Joint Inquiry found that Williams's memo "generated little or no interest" at either FBI headquarters or the New York office.[30] It was sent to just one FBI field office, Portland, because one of the ten suspects had a connection to a local case.[31] It was never forwarded to any managers at FBI headquarters, the CIA, or any other intelligence agency.[32] As Director Mueller admitted, "the Phoenix memo should have been disseminated to all field offices and to our sister agencies, and it should have triggered a broader analytic approach."[33]

Second, the primary person named in the Phoenix memo turned out to be an associate of hijacker Hani Hanjour, but he was never investigated before September 11. FBI officials now believe that the two men trained in the same Arizona flight school beginning as early as 1997, continued meeting there at least until 2000, and may have reconnected in June 2001 as part of the September 11 operation.[34] But for bureaucratic reasons discussed below, this connection to the plot was never pursued before the attacks. The suspect was singled out in the Phoenix memo and then lost.

Missed Opportunities 4 and 5: Zacarias Moussaoui

One month later, the FBI missed perhaps its best chance to derail the September 11 attacks when Minneapolis field agents arrested a French citizen of Moroccan descent named Zacarias Moussaoui. Moussaoui has since admitted to being a member of al Qaeda, in April 2005 pleaded guilty to six counts of conspiracy to commit terrorism in the 9/11 plot, and in 2006 was sentenced to life in prison, becoming the only person convicted in the United States in connection with the attacks.[35]

The lucky break came on Wednesday, August 15, 2001, when an employee of the Pan American International Flight School called the local Minneapolis FBI field office about a suspicious foreign student who had paid more than $6,000 in cash for train-

ing on a Boeing 747 flight simulator but lacked all of the usual qualifications—including a pilot's license—and seemed unusually interested in the operation of the plane's doors, take-offs and landings.[36] Minneapolis field agents immediately opened an intelligence investigation, interviewed Moussaoui, and concluded that he, along with "others yet unknown" were probably plotting to seize control of an aircraft.[37] They were right. But they then made two crucial errors. First, instead of initiating surveillance of Moussaoui, agents quickly arrested him, losing a potentially valuable opportunity to uncover intelligence about the plot. As September 11 neared and the hijacking teams converged for their flights, Moussaoui was sitting in a Minnesota jail.

Second, Minneapolis field agents spent the next four weeks on a wild goose chase trying to get a warrant under the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA) to search Moussaoui's belongings.[38] They failed because they were operating in near total isolation and because FBI officials in both Minneapolis and headquarters misunderstood the legal requirements for investigating a suspected terrorist who had not yet committed a crime.

Whether different actions could have resulted in different outcomes will never be known. However, this much is clear: when officials searched Moussaoui's belongings after September 11, they found substantial evidence connecting him to Ramzi Binalshibh, one of the core planners of the September 11 plot;[39] nobody on the Moussaoui case knew about the Phoenix memo which could have expedited the warrant and raised questions about a broader al Qaeda operation;[40] and one other FBI field office had a terrorist in custody who could have quickly identified Moussaoui as an al Qaeda member before September 11, but he was never asked.[41]

Missed Opportunities 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12: Pulsing the System and Putting Pieces Together

Finally, the FBI missed at least seven opportunities throughout the summer of 2001 to pulse the system and put the pieces together. In each case, the threat of a domestic terrorist attack caught the attention of someone somewhere in the FBI, but failed to trigger a broader effort to collect information, share information, or take stock of what the FBI already knew.

The first opportunity arose on July 2, when the FBI's Counterterrorism Division warned other federal agencies, as well as state and local law enforcement agencies, that terrorist attacks in the United States could not be discounted and recommended that personnel "exercise extreme vigilance" and "report specific activities" to the FBI.[42] Apparently, however, no plans were made inside the FBI to do anything with that information. Three days later, on July 5, FBI officials attended a special White House briefing for domestic security agencies about terrorist threat reporting, but took no follow-up steps to query field offices, meet with informants, or check case files to assess what agents across the bureau might know.[43] A third chance came on July 10, when Phoenix Special Agent Kenneth Williams sent his now famous memo to headquarters and the New York office warning that bin Laden might be sending al Qaeda operatives for U.S. flight training. Although Williams asked FBI officials to share his ideas with other U.S. intelligence agencies and take further steps to uncover links between al Qaeda and U.S. flight schools, the memo produced no action. Next, on a July 19 conference call with all fifty-six FBI field office heads, FBI Acting Director Thomas Pickard discussed the heightened terrorist threat level, but instead of asking for information or analysis about potential plots, he asked all field offices to have their evidence teams ready to deploy after an attack.[44] Pickard telephoned field office heads again between July 9 and 31 to discuss their performance evaluations.[45] Once more, he discussed the need to focus on terrorism. Again, however, he directed no proactive investigatory or analytic efforts. The vast majority of field office personnel said they did not perceive any sense of urgency.[46] Next, on August 15, news of the arrest of Zacarias Moussaoui was deemed important enough to reach the director of central intelligence, but was never disseminated to FBI field offices or relayed to senior officials in the FBI's own Counterterrorism Division.[47] Finally, on August 23, when headquarters officials learned that suspected al Qaeda operatives Khalid al-Mihdhar and Nawaf al-Hazmi had probably entered the United States, no steps were taken to determine whether the two might be connected to a broader network or plot.

At each of these junctures, various officials inside the FBI had pieces of information that could have prompted a more concerted investigation but did not. Field offices were not directed

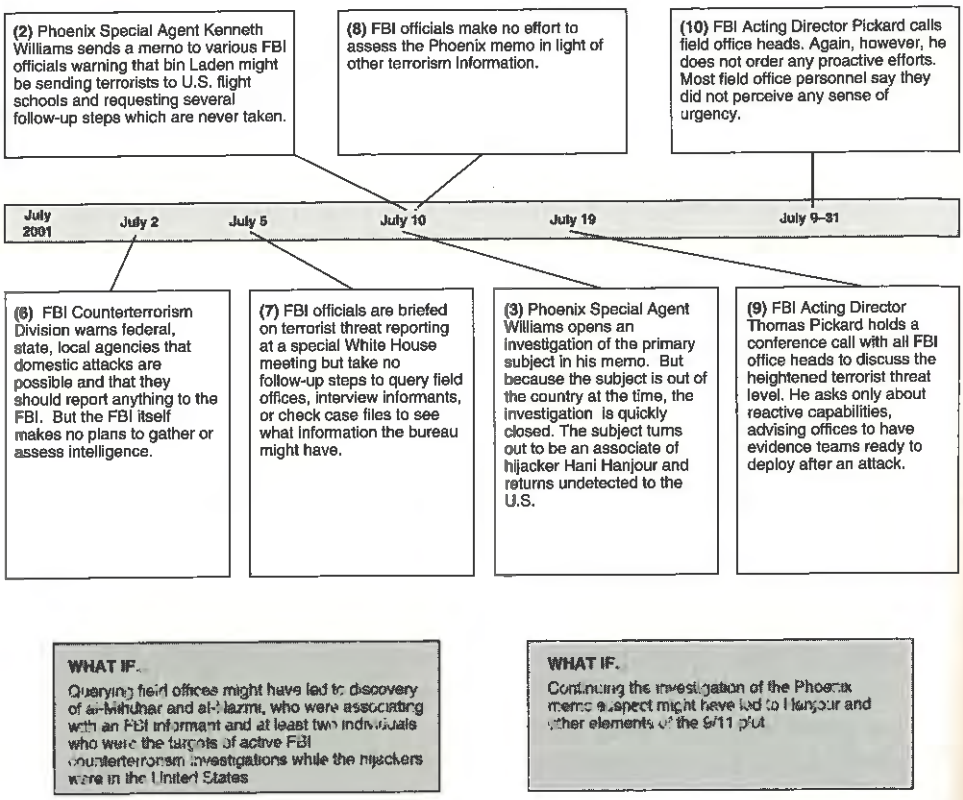

Figure 7.1a. Timeline of the FBI's 12 Missed Opportunities.

to review files or contact informants for possible clues to a terrorist plot. Analysts were not tasked to assess what the FBI knew. Terrorists in custody were not canvassed. Surveillance was not initiated. Resources were not marshaled. Personnel were not alerted. The result was that threads went unnoticed and unconnected. To be sure, the threads were not ubiquitous or easy to follow. However, the Congressional Joint Inquiry concluded that the 9/11 hijackers had numerous links to a broader al Qaeda support network inside the United States that had already attracted the FBI's attention. Specifically, five of the hijackers—Khalid al-Mihdhar, Nawaf al-Hazmi, Hani Hanjour, Mohamed Atta, and Marwan al-Shehhi—may have had links to as many as fourteen extremists known to the FBI. Four of the fourteen were the targets of active FBI counterterrorism investigations while the hijackers were in the United States.[48] To give just

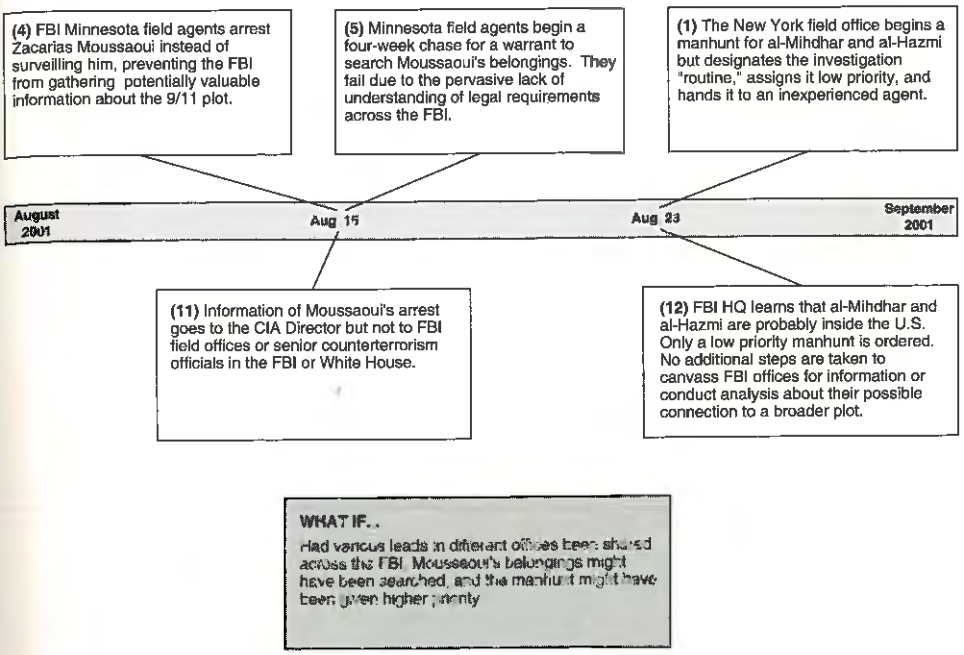

Figure 7.1b. Timeline of the FBI's 12 Missed Opportunities.

a few examples: One previous target of an FBI counterterrorism investigation housed al-Mihdhar and al-Hazmi, cosigned their lease, and held a welcome party for them in San Diego;[49] another extremist who was the subject of an active FBI investigation hired al-Hazmi to work for him;[50] a third, a local imam named Anwar Aulaqi[51] who was the target of an FBI counterterrorism inquiry at the time, became al-Hazmi and al-Mihdhar's spiritual advisor in San Diego, and reconnected with al-Hazmi in Virginia in the spring of 2001.[52] These and other links, however, were never uncovered before September 11 because the FBI never mobilized a coordinated effort to find them.

The Organizational Roots of Failure

Organizational deficiencies prevented the FBI from capitalizing on all of these opportunities. First, structural fragmentation created an invisible barrier between terrorist investigations at home and abroad that kept one of the FBI's best agents from following

one of the most promising 9/11 leads. In the summer of 2001, Phoenix Special Agent Kenneth Williams was onto something. He had detected a coordinated terrorist effort to train pilots in the United States, sent word to headquarters, identified a prime suspect who, it turns out, had ties to 9/11 hijacker Hani Hanjour, and opened an investigation on him. But because the suspected terrorist happened to be outside the United States at the time, the case was quickly closed. What's more, Special Agent Williams never knew that the suspect soon returned to the United States. The reason: once FBI targets traveled outside the country, they were considered somebody else's responsibility. Standard FBI operating procedures discouraged agents from investigating suspects outside of the United States and provided no mechanisms for coordinating with other U.S. border agencies to notify FBI agents when suspects returned. Structural fragmentation ensured that the trail would go cold.[53]

The FBI's decentralized field office structure proved even more crippling. Within a seven-week period, three different field offices uncovered leads to the plot. Phoenix identified a connection between bin Laden and flight schools, Minneapolis arrested a suspicious Jihadist who wanted to fly 747s, and New York began searching for two suspected al Qaeda operatives. Because of the autonomous field office structure, however, none of the agents working these cases knew about the others,[54] and most of the FBI's fifty-three other field offices didn't either.[55] As a result, tantalizing clues surfaced, only to disappear again. Moussaoui's belongings went unsearched when a terrorist in custody could have identified him from al Qaeda's Afghan training camps. A New York agent began searching for al-Mihdhar and al-Hazmi in New York Marriott Hotels[56] completely unaware that the San Diego field office had an informant and several other subjects of past and open counterterrorism investigations who knew both operatives.

These and other dots were never connected because the FBI's organization was designed to keep them apart. FBI field offices were built and expected to work independently, not together. They were designed to pursue individual cases in discrete jurisdictions, not broad plots that spanned the country. And they were given broad latitude to operate, with little direction or oversight from headquarters. This decentralized structure was

optimally suited for the FBI's old mission, giving agents great independence to solve criminal cases one by one. For counterterrorism, however, it was a setup for disaster.

The FBI's law enforcement culture also proved debilitating. In all of the missed opportunities described above, FBI officials from top to bottom made the same kinds of mistakes for the same reasons. They pursued specific cases without considering broad trends, favored reaction over prevention, and sought to protect information for trial rather than share it. Officials in headquarters and New York dismissed the Phoenix's memo's strategic analysis because it offered little help with current investigations. Director Pickard urged field offices to be ready to respond to an attack, but never said anything about taking steps to prevent one. A Minneapolis field agent arrested Zacarias Moussaoui because all of his Criminal Division experience told him that arresting a suspect would stop the illegal activity—in his words, it would "freeze the situation."[57] It seems the agent never seriously considered the possibility that Moussaoui was more valuable under surveillance than in jail or that arresting him would freeze the FBI more than the enemy. Finally, officials throughout the bureau misunderstood and misapplied information sharing rules—delaying the Moussaoui warrant and depriving the manhunt of critical resources—because they were steeped in a culture that erred on the side of protecting information so that it could be used in court. The FBI missed all of these clues to 9/11 because most officials were viewing events during the summer of 2001 as they always had: through law enforcement lenses.

Incentives reinforced the worst aspects of FBI culture, encouraging officials to put traditional criminal cases before counterterrorism and operational priorities ahead of strategic analysis. For agents interested in rising up the ranks, the key to success was closing criminal cases, not pondering possible terrorist attacks. As a result, the best agents usually avoided counterterrorism and the best counterterrorism agents usually avoided doing strategic analysis. As Special Agent Williams told Congress, he realized his Phoenix memo would likely go to "the bottom of the pile," because it dealt with the lowest of the bureau's priorities: longer-term analysis in counterterrorism.[58]

Had the memo gone to the top of the pile, moreover, there were few analysts capable of doing much with it. By the summer of 2001, years of personnel policies that relegated analysts to support staff and prevented them from being promoted to senior ranks had taken their toll. In the words of one FBI analyst, the bureau's strategic analysis unit was "on its last legs,"[59] with poor quality products and just one person assigned to handle everything related to al Qaeda.[60] Other pieces of information were not put together in the summer of 2001 for the same reason: thanks to career incentives, there were very few people who could do the job, and even fewer who could do it well.[61] As FBI Assistant Director for Counterterrorism Dale Watson later told Congress, he found not one instance where FBI analysts produced "an actual product that helped out."[62]

At the same time, incentives discouraged field agents from connecting the dots on their own because the bureau's obsolete information technology systems made any search for information exceedingly difficult, time consuming, and ineffective. When Special Agent Williams wrote his Phoenix memo, for example, he was unaware that the FBI had issued several earlier reports expressing similar concerns about terrorists studying at U.S. flight schools because the FBI had no central, user-friendly database to search for relevant cases or reports.[63] Indeed, many agents found FBI computer systems so unreliable that they stopped using them altogether.[64] These technology problems made a bad situation worse. Case agents were already inclined by culture and career advancement to eschew broader analysis and concentrate on individual cases. The bureau's antiquated technology meant that undertaking cross-case analysis would require a superhuman effort.

Summary

The bureau had twelve known chances to follow leads that hinted at impending disaster. In each case, FBI officials missed the lucky break. Organizational factors explain why. Splintered into separate field offices, rewarded for other priorities and blinded by law enforcement culture, the FBI could not make the most of what it had. The FBI's nagging organizational weaknesses gave the 9/11 hijackers the upper hand.

* CHAPTER 8 *

The More Things Change . . .

> What's needed for the fix is known. But is it accepted? Not generally. And is it well on the way to getting implemented? Not at all. Can we say we're really on the way to remedying the problems that got us into the deep shit we're in? The answer is no. But we have to. There is no other way.
>
> —Former senior intelligence official[1]

History suggests that transformative change rarely occurs during ordinary times. Instead, dramatic departures from the past often require a large external shock—a tragedy, catastrophic failure, scandal, or focusing event that challenges conventional wisdom and exposes the dangers of the status quo. Examples abound. The Civil War led to ratification of the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments of the U.S. Constitution. The Great Depression produced Roosevelt's New Deal. World War II gave rise to the CIA, the United Nations, and the Marshall Plan. The Cuban missile crisis of 1962 ushered in an era of détente between the United States and the Soviet Union. By this reasoning, the adaptation failure of U.S. intelligence agencies before 9/11 may not be surprising. But adaptation failure after 9/11 is. If ever we would expect to find a catalyst for major change, the worst terrorist attack in U.S. history should be it. As one senior government official remarked, "You can talk about how we missed watchlisting two guys, that information sharing wasn't what it should have been, that there were cultural differences between the FBI and CIA. But find me a time when the world went to war without a galvanizing event."[2]

Yet nearly six years after 9/11, the Intelligence Community's most serious deficiencies remain. In this chapter, I examine the missed opportunities to overhaul the U.S. Intelligence Community since the attacks, the current state of intelligence capabili-