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## **The 9/11 Attacks—A Study of Al Qaeda’s Use of Intelligence and Counterintelligence**

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*The 9/11 attacks on New York and Washington, D.C. were undoubtedly the most brazen and shocking terrorist attacks conducted by a sub-state group in history. Al Qaeda’s capacity to achieve this outcome depended in large part on its meticulous intelligence and counterintelligence preparations. These activities allowed Al Qaeda to exert a strong measure of control over its operating environment, leading to a confidence that events would unfold as planned. Moreover, intelligence and counterintelligence allowed Al Qaeda to form highly accurate and realistic assessments of its environment, an outcome that helps to dispel notions of an organization consumed by a level of fanaticism that distorts its perception of reality, or else frustrates its capacity to engage in rational decision making.*

This article examines Al Qaeda’s use of intelligence and counterintelligence using the attacks on New York and Washington, D.C. on 11 September 2001 (hereinafter, “the 9/11 attacks”) as a case study. It will trace Al Qaeda’s collection and use of operational intelligence, with particular emphasis on how this intelligence may have influenced a range of operational decisions and how it may provide evidence of Al Qaeda’s rational approach to decision making. The use of intelligence influenced critical elements of the operation, so that various key decisions were directly determined by operational intelligence accumulated over a lengthy period.

This article will analyze how those involved in the operation, including both the operatives and the leadership that directed and coordinated it, craved high levels of certainty and operational control. It will examine the idea that this search for certainty was largely satiated by the organization’s extensive use of intelligence. Aligning decisions to accommodate the conditions most likely to be encountered on the day of the operation served to maximize Al Qaeda’s chance of achieving operational success.

Similarly, counterintelligence allowed for the creation of a security umbrella that shielded the operation from exposure throughout all its stages. The nature of the operation dictated the need for the hijackers to engage in behavior that exposed them to constant risk. From communications between the various levels involved in the planning and execution

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of the operation, to the extensive travel and preparation undertaken by the hijackers, each activity was fraught with danger. This article will critically investigate the proposition that counterintelligence allowed the hijackers to function with confidence during each of these activities, secure in the knowledge that the operation had not been compromised and that they maintained the crucial element of surprise.

This case study will, therefore, seek to examine the extent to which intelligence and counterintelligence allowed Al Qaeda to engage in decision making based on accurate representations of reality rather than false illusions influenced by strong ideological or dogmatic perceptions of the world. Moreover, it will examine the argument that Al Qaeda's intelligence and counterintelligence preparations for the operation may be suggestive of a rationality more sophisticated than the means–ends logic that exemplify most explanations of terrorist rationality.<sup>1</sup> For example, attempts to manipulate the terrorists' operating environment for the purpose of acquiring detailed and very specific intelligence suggests a desire to base decisions on near-complete information, not just that which was immediately presented to the group. Intelligence collection on this level was intended to allow Al Qaeda to carry out operations without encountering the type of unanticipated outcomes that could lead to operational failure or blunt the impact of its political or ideological message. Just because events would demonstrate that Al Qaeda was unable to achieve an outcome as resounding as this does not diminish the rationality of its decision making or the role intelligence was expected to discharge in this process.

In this way, this study will fill a significant gap in the understanding of the events leading up to the 9/11 attacks. Although some effort has previously been made to examine the counterintelligence protocols of Al Qaeda during the operation,<sup>2</sup> no attempt has been made to assess the role of intelligence in these events. In neither case, however, has there been a serious attempt to contextualize the function of intelligence and counterintelligence as key activities within Al Qaeda's decision-making process. Although descriptions of intelligence and counterintelligence in the lead-up to the 9/11 attacks routinely stress their operational importance, analyses linking these activities to decision making and the organization's capacity to engage in rational behavior appear non-existent.

## Operational Intelligence

An analysis of the role of intelligence in the 9/11 operation demonstrates that the strength of its contribution resided in two areas, namely that of assisting in the preparation of a detailed plan, and to a lesser extent, target identification. It will be demonstrated that Al Qaeda's preparations for the operation were designed to uncover as much detail as possible about their targets and operating environment to optimize the likelihood of operational success.

An examination of the role of intelligence in the 9/11 operation will be served best by examining two distinct phases to the operation, those of *conceptualization* and *planning*.<sup>3</sup> These phases clearly delineate the impact of intelligence on Al Qaeda decision making at critical junctures of the operation's evolution, while also demonstrating the considered, deliberate, and methodical approach that characterized a decision-making process that spanned years. Revealing a clear capacity to calculate costs and benefits, frequently with the assistance of detailed intelligence, Al Qaeda during these phases displayed the hallmarks of a rational organization that engaged in reflective rather than impulsive decision making designed to achieve an act of violence of tremendous strategic and symbolic importance.<sup>4</sup>

### *Conceptualization*

To understand the role of intelligence in facilitating the 9/11 operation, it is first necessary to analyze its genesis as an idea. Such an examination will demonstrate that intelligence fulfilled a limited role during the earliest phases of the operation when discussion focused on the method of attack and preferred targets. It will be contended, however, that the operation's conception at the apex of the Al Qaeda hierarchy, along with the formulation of a tentative strategy, precluded a need for the type of detailed intelligence that normally determines these fundamental questions. It will be demonstrated that by the time the Al Qaeda leadership approved the operation, the method of attack, along with at least some of the targets, had, for years, formed part of the thinking of those central to the operation. As the following discussion will show, the historical development of the 9/11 operation facilitated a refining process that transformed it from an ambitious idea into reality.

The driving force behind the 9/11 operation was Kuwaiti-born Khalid Sheikh Mohammed (hereafter "Khalid"). By the time Khalid presented his ideas to the Al Qaeda leadership for what would ultimately become the 9/11 operation (known within Al Qaeda as the "planes operation"), and prior to his membership of the organization, he had already demonstrated a keen interest in the use of aircraft for terrorist attacks. In the most well-known and ambitious of these plans, the "Bojinka" plot, Khalid and others planned to bomb twelve U.S. commercial aircraft over the Pacific during a two-day period.<sup>5</sup> Working with his nephew and principal plotter behind the 1993 attacks on the World Trade Center, Ramzi Yousef, Khalid played an active role in this, his first terrorist operation.<sup>6</sup> This multifaceted plot also involved a plan to assassinate Pope John Paul II during his planned visit to the Philippines in January 1995. It seems to have been Yousef's idea to use co-conspirator Abdul Hakim Murad, a trained pilot, to fly a light aircraft over the route to be taken by the Pope and drop bombs over the side.<sup>7</sup> At this time, Murad also contemplated flying a light aircraft loaded with chemical weapons into CIA Headquarters in Langley, Virginia.<sup>8</sup> This idea emerged in casual conversation between Murad and Yousef, and no specific plan for its execution was devised.<sup>9</sup> At about this time, Khalid and Yousef also developed a plan to bomb U.S.-bound cargo flights by placing jackets containing nitrocellulose on board.<sup>10</sup> Thus, Khalid demonstrated a consistent pattern of behavior and interest, at the center of which lay the use of aircraft to attack U.S. interests. Significantly, Jack Roche informed this author that when he met Khalid for the first time in early 2000, the latter asked Roche whether the United States and Israel operated commercial aircraft out of Australia. Although this was not taken any further, Roche believes that Khalid was scouting for targets within Australia.<sup>11</sup>

The idea of using hijacked aircraft as weapons also extended to senior members of Al Qaeda, even before Khalid put forward his proposal for the planes operation. It is believed that Mohammed Atef, at that time Al Qaeda's operational commander, conducted a study in 1996 that concluded that traditional hijackings failed to meet the organization's goal of inflicting mass casualties.<sup>12</sup> The study reportedly considered the feasibility of hijacking aircraft and blowing them up in flight.

Thus, the idea of using aircraft had some precedence within Al Qaeda, and among others on the periphery of the organization, that would ultimately perform a central role in the 9/11 operation. Furthermore, it was apparent that the use of aircraft, especially in an unconventional sense, was seen as a vulnerability to existing security arrangements. Indeed, Khalid considered the use of aircraft a more effective and less problematic form of attack compared to conventional bombing methods, a lesson he claims to have learnt

from the 1993 World Trade Center bombing. With this in mind, he and Yousef considered using aircraft as weapons in attacks on targets that included the World Trade Center, and, as discussed earlier, CIA headquarters.<sup>13</sup>

Unable to realize his ambitions of carrying out an operation involving the use of aircraft on his own, Khalid was given an opportunity in mid-1996 to present his ideas to the Al Qaeda leadership.<sup>14</sup> During the course of this meeting, Khalid proposed an operation involving trained pilots who would crash planes into buildings in the United States.<sup>15</sup> Although bin Laden remained non-committal, he agreed, two years later, to support Khalid's proposal. Over a series of meetings involving bin Laden, Khalid, and Mohammed Atef in early 1999, it was decided that the initial list of targets would include the White House, the U.S. Capitol Building, the Pentagon, and the World Trade Center.<sup>16</sup> It is not known how detailed and involved these discussions were, and whether this list included other targets that were subsequently rejected for unknown reasons. Furthermore, it is not clear if intelligence was consulted in any comprehensive way during this initial period. It is plausible, however, that the suggested method of the attack precluded the need for intelligence at this stage because the use of aircraft as "flying bombs" exposed virtually every potential U.S. target to attack. In other words, the difficulties associated with conventional bombing methods in terms of ground security could be overcome through the use of aircraft. The Al Qaeda leadership was thus free to choose the targets it wanted, being guided almost entirely by the "statement" it wished to make through the attacks. Indeed, this appears to have been the sole consideration at this time, with the World Trade Center seen as symbolic of U.S. economic power, the Pentagon, a symbol of its military power, the U.S. Capitol as emblematic of U.S. policy on Israel, and the White House, a symbol of general U.S. political power.<sup>17</sup>

In time, however, intelligence would reveal problems specific to this method of attack. It would appear that these problems were identified only after the hijackers engaged in reconnaissance flights. In this regard, intelligence fulfilled its intended function by identifying circumstances that could be expected to impact on the likelihood of operational success. By replicating conditions most likely to be encountered on the day of the operation, the hijackers' intelligence collection efforts were successful in identifying impediments not anticipated by the Al Qaeda leadership at the time of target selection. The indecision over whether to strike at the White House or the Capitol Building emerged only after the hijackers' intelligence activities made it apparent that attacking the White House would be more problematic than initially anticipated. Indeed, it seems likely that Mohammed Atta was given some latitude over target selection, because the number of targets that formed the initial list (the World Trade Center Towers, the Pentagon, the Capitol, and the White House) exceeded the number of aircraft to be hijacked.<sup>18</sup> It may, therefore, be presumed that Atta was to prioritize these targets.<sup>19</sup> Although it is not clear on what basis they were to be prioritized, there are strong indications that intelligence played some role in this process.

From the outset of the "planes operation," bin Laden was determined to attack the White House, emphasizing his preference on a number of occasions.<sup>20</sup> In May 2001, for example, bin Laden met with operations coordinator Ramzi Binalshibh, instructing him to confirm that Atta understood that bin Laden's preference was for the White House over the Capitol. Atta, however, clearly had problems with bin Laden's continued preference for the White House. Atta informed Binalshibh on at least two separate occasions that he considered the White House too difficult a target.<sup>21</sup> It is not clear why Atta considered the White House a difficult target, although Khalid's 2002 comment to journalist Yosri Fouda that reconnaissance teams dismissed it for "navigation reasons," may be close

to the truth. According to Khalid, the small size of the White House made it difficult to see from the air, while the strong defenses surrounding the building made it a less attractive target than the Capitol.<sup>22</sup> Despite these difficulties, Atta informed Binalshibh that he had tasked Hazmi and Hanjour to conduct reconnaissance on the White House to evaluate the feasibility of an attack, and was apparently awaiting their answer at the time of Atta's meeting with Binalshibh. Atta also indicated at this time that these two operatives had rented small aircraft and flown reconnaissance flights in the vicinity of the Pentagon.<sup>23</sup>

It therefore seems clear from events that a process was in place to conduct intelligence activities designed to refine the target list with a view to maximizing the likelihood of operational success. Although it is true that the role of intelligence in this process was minor compared to operations such as that of the bombing of the U.S. embassy in Kenya in 1998, it is nevertheless indicative of a deliberate and considered approach to decision making in which the weighing of the possibilities and likely outcomes was determined by intelligence.

It is also plausible that other intelligence was consulted in deciding on the preferred targets. Dhiren Barot and his associates were actively engaged in reconnaissance in the United States some time after the Al Qaeda leadership approved the "planes operation." It is known that Barot entered the United States in August 2000 and again in March 2001, and that during these visits travelled to New York and Washington, D.C.<sup>24</sup> Barot may have scouted potential targets for the "planes operation," in addition to those that became the subject of his casing reports. Indeed, Khalid confirmed that during the planning for the "planes operation," he had direct contact with Barot, sending him on at least two missions during this period.<sup>25</sup> Other reporting also indicates possible surveillance activity in New York before 9/11 that was considered of sufficient concern that it was included in a Presidential Daily Brief in August 2001 addressing bin Laden's intention to attack the United States.<sup>26</sup>

### ***Planning***

By the time Khalid approached bin Laden with his idea that would become the 9/11 operation, the hijacking of aircraft was a method looking for an operation. The method of attack thus formed the essence of the operation, providing a unique mode of attack capable of circumventing existing defensive measures while also facilitating Al Qaeda's aim of inflicting mass casualties. Intelligence during the planning phase, therefore, sought to identify vulnerabilities that would facilitate the preferred method of attack. Although the planned use of hijacked aircraft also influenced target selection by identifying vulnerabilities consistent with the method of attack (e.g., the need for buildings to be clearly visible from the air), it was during the planning phase of the operation that intelligence made its most significant contribution. Intelligence would be used to determine those details of the plan capable of facilitating the preferred method of attack in such a way as to maximize the likelihood of success. Moreover, the hijackers' intelligence preparations were intended to achieve a high level of calculability of results by identifying security arrangements they could expect to encounter on the day of the operation. This knowledge could then be used to facilitate planning capable of negating or circumventing these security arrangements. Binalshibh would subsequently convey the thoroughness of these intelligence activities when he commented that the hijackers studied, "the security arrangements that [were] adopted at all the airports and establish[ed] a comprehensive picture about the procedures at all the airports and also unravel[ed] the security loopholes that exist at these airports . . . [and

found] out the trips that depart and arrive at these airports . . . [as well as] the level of security at these airports.”<sup>27</sup>

Within months of receiving permission to proceed with the attack, Khalid took the first steps in assembling the body of intelligence that would make the attacks possible. Relying on open source intelligence, Khalid compiled data from Western aviation magazines, telephone directories for U.S. cities, airline timetables, and conducted Internet searches on U.S. flight schools. This intelligence was supplemented by flight simulator software and information gleaned from movies depicting hijackings.<sup>28</sup> Some of these early intelligence efforts may have been an attempt to generate ideas and identify possible vulnerabilities. Familiarity with the enemy’s methods and culture was also deemed important at this early stage, as was the need to provide the suicide operatives the basic skills and knowledge to function in an unfamiliar and hostile environment. Khalid, therefore, organized a short course for the operatives in Karachi, which included techniques on how to conduct reconnaissance on flights. Although rudimentary in nature, these instructions proved critical in bringing the attack to fruition by encouraging the operatives to probe for vulnerabilities in the routine behavior of the flight crew. These instructions included the need to observe cabin doors during take-off and landing, whether the captain exited the cockpit during the flight, and at what stage, and using what methods, flight attendants brought food into the cockpit.<sup>29</sup>

It was not long after that actual casing flights took place with the purpose of probing for weaknesses in airport security arrangements, and ascertaining the feasibility of elements of the plan as they stood at that point in time. One of the suicide operatives in particular, Khallad, engaged in intelligence activity with these ends in mind. For example, he flew from Bangkok to Hong Kong in early January 2000 on board a U.S. airliner, seating himself in first class. This casing flight would prove instructive because it identified problems perhaps not anticipated by the operation’s planners. For instance, Khallad was unable to view the cockpit from his seat. He also probed airport security by carrying a box cutter onto the aircraft in his toiletries bag. He subsequently removed this bag from his carry-on luggage, observing that flight staff paid no attention.<sup>30</sup>

The hijackers conducted further intelligence activity after their arrival in the United States, again with the intention of identifying vulnerabilities capable of advancing the plan. This reconnaissance was typified by a hands-on approach designed to identify conditions most likely to be encountered on the day of the attack. In this way, the plan would enjoy a greater likelihood of success because decisions would not be based on false assumptions that could mean the difference between success and failure. Realism, not distorted notions of reality determined by powerful ideological views, served to shape operational planning.

For example, it is suspected that the hijackers conducted numerous surveillance flights in an attempt to approximate as near as possible the circumstances likely to be encountered on the day of the attack. Seeking to replicate these conditions, the pilots conducted their surveillance flights while seated in first class, enabling them to monitor the cockpit and also observe firsthand the activities in first class on a transcontinental flight similar to the one that they would take on 11 September. Each also conducted their surveillance flight on the same type of aircraft he would pilot on the day of the hijackings, thereby injecting further realism into the surveillance process.<sup>31</sup> On the basis of the surveillance flights, Atta informed Binalshibh in July 2001 that the best time to storm the cockpit was 10 to 15 minutes after take-off when the cockpit was normally opened for the first time.<sup>32</sup> It is also plausible that the hijackers compared the results of their surveillance activity for the purpose of identifying behavior common to their flights, thus permitting the identification of routines susceptible to exploitation. In keeping with the hijackers’ desire to engage in

activity closely replicating the conditions expected during the day of the operation, some pilots also took practice flights near some of their targets. For instance, Hani Hanjour and Nawaf al Hazmi (American Airlines Flight 77, which was flown into the Pentagon) rented a plane and traveled a route close to Washington, D.C.<sup>33</sup> It is significant that Jarrah and Hanjour also took separate training flights along the Hudson Corridor, a low-altitude route along the Hudson River that passed by landmarks such as the World Trade Center. In fact, the Hudson Corridor would have provided the pilots an excellent view of the World Trade Center towers, and at the time was open to uncontrolled aircraft flying below 1,200 feet.<sup>34</sup>

Atta also informed Binalshibh that he, Marwan al Shehhi, and Ziad Jarrah carried box cutters onto their surveillance flights, encountering no problems. These surveillance flights were so successful that Atta informed Binalshibh that he would not need other weapons, and that he was so confident the cockpit doors would be opened that he did not consider contingency plans.<sup>35</sup> This represents an important example of the ability of intelligence to elevate terrorist confidence levels by helping to establish operational certainty.

In an attempt to explore alternate means of gaining access to the cockpit, the hijackers' intelligence probes went beyond that of passive observation. For instance, it was reported that on 1 August 2001, Abdulaziz Alomari boarded a flight from Las Vegas to New York. Before taking off, Alomari made an attempt to secure a ride in the cockpit's jump seat all the way to New York, on the pretext that he was on the verge of flying for Egypt Air. After being shown to the cockpit, it became apparent to the crew that Alomari was not what he claimed to be and was asked to leave the cockpit prior to take-off. During the course of the flight, he told a flight attendant that he left his pen in the cockpit and, therefore, needed to return to the flight deck. He was told that he would not be able to return to the cockpit, especially while the aircraft was in flight.<sup>36</sup>

These highly developed intelligence collection methods were suggestive of a rationality more sophisticated than the simple means-ends logic that characterizes most explanations of terrorist rationality. Attempts to manipulate the hijackers' operating environment for the purpose of acquiring detailed and accurate intelligence suggest a desire to attain near-perfect intelligence in which chance would play a negligible role.

## Counterintelligence

To those within the law enforcement and intelligence community with even a rudimentary knowledge of Al Qaeda and the global *Salafi jihad*, the attacks on 9/11 could hardly have been a *strategic* surprise.<sup>37</sup> Al Qaeda's enmity toward the United States and its desire to carry out an attack on U.S. soil was well known prior to 9/11.<sup>38</sup> Al Qaeda had already declared, in 1998, that it was in a state of war with the United States. Bin Laden's 1998 *fatwa* in which he urges *jihad* against Americans is unambiguous, declaring that the killing of, "... the Americans and their allies—civilian and military—is an individual duty for every Muslim who can do it in any country in which it is possible to do it. . . ."<sup>39</sup> This was, in turn, followed by attacks on the U.S. embassies in East Africa (August 1998)<sup>40</sup> and the U.S.S. *Cole* in Yemen (October 2000). Furthermore, the arrest of Ahmed Ressam on the U.S.–Canadian border in December 1999 was a clear indication of Al Qaeda's intention of bringing its war to the United States. This pattern of behavior was preceded by the 1993 World Trade Center attack and the planned attacks on prominent New York landmarks, including the Holland Tunnel, which, although not Al Qaeda inspired or organized, were certainly indicative of the dawning of a brand of Islamic militancy intent on striking directly at the United States. This strategic warning was supplemented by tactical intelligence revealing the possibility of a terrorist strike in the period leading up to 9/11.<sup>41</sup>



Indeed, the perceived threat from Al Qaeda was such that the collection of intelligence on Al Qaeda became a high priority for U.S. intelligence and the White House in the two years leading up to the 9/11 attacks. Although arguments persist about whether the U.S. intelligence community pursued Al Qaeda with sufficient vigor in this period, it is clear that Al Qaeda was an important target whose capabilities and intentions were well known.<sup>42</sup> The Director of Central Intelligence at the time of the attacks, George Tenet, acknowledged this state of war, observing, "... even before September 2001, we knew we faced a foe that is committed, resilient and has operational depth. The Intelligence Community was already at war with al-Qaida."<sup>43</sup>

Despite these indicators, the 9/11 hijackers were able to avoid detection, even though the first hijackers arrived in the United States 20 months before the attacks. The effectiveness of their counterintelligence tradecraft was such that Tenet informed the Joint Inquiry investigating the 9/11 attacks that, "[b]ased on what we know today, the investigation of the 9/11 attacks has revealed no major slip in the conspirators' operational security."<sup>44</sup> This statement is significant not only because it concedes that the hijackers did not reveal their intentions, but also because the subsequent investigation, even with the benefit of hindsight, was unable to detect significant lapses in the conspirators' counterintelligence tradecraft.<sup>45</sup>

This, of course, was not the result of luck or circumstances beyond the control of the conspirators. On the contrary, it was the result of carefully planned activity, imbued with the hijackers' adherence to Al Qaeda's counterintelligence tradecraft. The protection afforded by these measures allowed the hijackers to conduct their activity secure in the knowledge that their intentions, indeed, their very existence, was unknown to the U.S. intelligence and law enforcement community. By ensuring that their defensive measures were in place, the hijackers were free to pursue their operational objectives with confidence, and as it turned out, impunity. Counterintelligence, therefore, fulfilled a function similar to that of operational intelligence through its ability to reduce the level of perceived and actual risk and by providing the organization a significant degree of control over the direction and outcome of the operation. Ultimately, the effect of counterintelligence was to facilitate Al Qaeda's attempts to construct and execute a specific and very deliberate act of violence by removing or minimising the uncertainties normally associated with terrorist activity.

Moreover, Al Qaeda's counterintelligence practices demonstrated a level of practicality and an appreciation for the operational realities that defy notions of irrationality based on fanaticism or an inability to form accurate representations of reality. As noted earlier, it was realized very early that the success of the operation depended on an ability to construct a highly detailed and pragmatic understanding of the enemy and its methods. This intent and capability demonstrated a side to Al Qaeda at odds with theories based on terrorists' distortion of reality for reasons stemming from internal pressures to conform,<sup>46</sup> the need for clandestinity,<sup>47</sup> or ideological zeal.<sup>48</sup> These theories suggest that many aspects of terrorist decision making can in turn be affected, including perceptions of the enemy, the ability to adapt to changing circumstances, and the capacity to calculate the costs and benefits of alternative courses of action.<sup>49</sup> Al Qaeda's counterintelligence protocols in preparation for the 9/11 attacks, however, revealed a detached objectivity that allowed it to form and respond to accurate and highly detailed assessments of its operating environment. The hijackers' effective use of cover demonstrated a capacity to suspend their strong ideological beliefs in the interests of the operational needs and realities at the time. Contrary to notions of irrationality based on a level of fanaticism that distorts reality, the hijackers' preparedness to "abandon" their beliefs suggests a capacity to think tactically and rationally to achieve immediate and attainable ends. Indeed, this behavior tends to negate theories that terrorists' intense ideological views, especially those with a religious orientation,

inhibit their capacity to think tactically and beyond the metaphysical.<sup>50</sup> On the contrary, the hijackers' preparedness to suspend these beliefs and their hostility to Western culture in the interests of maintaining a credible cover, revealed a grasp on reality, including a tactical awareness, which transcended the distorting effects of ideology.

Deception, based on a detailed knowledge of the methods and mindsets of its adversaries, was thus a key counterintelligence strategy employed by Al Qaeda in its preparations for the 9/11 attacks. In fact, this deception proved so effective precisely because it was based on the hijackers' keen knowledge of their adversaries' own perceptions and preconceived ideas. From the utilization of operatives likely to arouse the least suspicion, to the methods used by the hijackers to enter and operate within the United States, the effectiveness of Al Qaeda's deception and denial stemmed directly from their plausibility. Familiarity with the West was, therefore, one of the characteristics most sought after by the Al Qaeda leadership in their selection of the pilots and cell leaders.<sup>51</sup> This familiarity enabled the hijackers to integrate more easily into U.S. society, thereby fulfilling the crucial requirement of remaining anonymous and indistinct. These integration efforts were aided through the hijackers' manipulation of Western stereotypical views of Islamic militants. The adoption of Western habits, including the shaving of beards and the wearing of Western clothing, were all intended to deceive and conceal. Demonstrating an ability to adapt and suspend intense ideological views in the interests of operational reality, Binalshibh described the process involved in adopting a suitable cover:

Every brother would look at what suited him best in terms of cover, according to his age and educational standard, his physiognomy and the like, and he would consult with his brothers and exchange views with them, and the operation of adopting a security cover is in essence a process aimed at deceiving the security services generally and mystifying the people around him.<sup>52</sup>

The strength of the security measures injected the operation with a level of resilience that stemmed from confidence in the robustness of these precautions. Without these measures, the ability to move forward would be under constant risk, so that uncertainty would overshadow every action, each telephone call made, and every trip undertaken. Binalshibh would subsequently explain that his role of co-ordinator for the operation was to solve the, "problems that might face the brothers in [the] cells and devising an appropriate security umbrella under which the brothers can move around."<sup>53</sup>

Almost every aspect of the 9/11 operation required confidence in the hijackers' security arrangements. Confidence in these arrangements allowed the hijackers to engage in each of those activities fundamental to any operation, but each of which had the potential to expose the operatives and their intentions. The creation of a security umbrella during the various phases of the hijackers' activities enabled them to move onto the next phase, reasonably secure in the knowledge that it was safe to do so. The hijackers' method of entry into the United States serves as a useful example. The ability to function and make the necessary preparations in the United States during a period stretching over many months was dependent on them being able to enter the country without arousing the slightest suspicion. The security arrangements undertaken prior to their entry into the United States, therefore, proved crucial and formed a major part of Al Qaeda's preparations for the operation. These measures included the selection of hijackers with little connection with Al Qaeda.<sup>54</sup>

Similarly, the hijackers' confidence in the integrity of their security arrangements provided the cell leaders the self-assurance to engage in extensive travel. Travel, especially

that which traverses international boundaries, is a risky activity for those engaged in illicit behavior because it brings one into contact with government officials particularly alert to the possibility of unlawful activity. The hijackers, especially the pilots, however, seemed to engage in international and domestic travel at will. Atta, for example, undertook extensive international and domestic travel in preparation for the attacks.<sup>55</sup> The fact that all the hijackers traveled under their real names indicates the level of confidence each had in their security arrangements and the thoroughness of preparations designed to conceal their links to Al Qaeda.

Al Qaeda's security arrangements also protected the operation when, as a matter of necessity, it was required to engage in behavior more risky than that undertaken on a day to day basis. Communications between the hijackers and the Al Qaeda leadership is a conspicuous example. Due to the scale and importance of the 9/11 operation, the Al Qaeda leadership took an active role in directing it, insisting on regular progress reports, which included some of the results from the hijackers' own surveillance activities.<sup>56</sup> This, of course, entailed significant risk because the lines of communication required to achieve this (between leadership, coordinator, cell leaders, and operatives) had the potential to expose almost all elements involved in the operation.<sup>57</sup> Al Qaeda's counterintelligence tradecraft, however, meant that this communication could proceed confident that it would not be exposed. Indeed, Binalshibh explained that he considered communications as, "the dangerous security gap through which the enemy could infiltrate and attempt to foil any operation. Therefore, it was imperative that the network establish the most secure means of communication. . . . it was imperative to have, "simplicity in the language of communication and sophistication in the method of communication."<sup>58</sup>

The confidence inspired by Al Qaeda's security arrangements manifested itself in other ways, encouraging activity that might have been avoided in the absence of thorough counterintelligence measures. These measures, for example, allowed the hijackers to undertake flight training in the United States, despite the risks involved. For instance, conducting training in the United States exposed the hijackers to additional risk for a number of reasons. First, this training extended significantly the amount of time the hijackers were required to spend in the United States, all the while exposing them to the risk of detection. Second, a group of Middle Eastern males conducting flight training was more likely to attract unwanted attention in the United States than if this training was conducted elsewhere, for example some place in the Arab world or in a country less sensitive to the threat of Islamic-based terrorism. Third, conducting flight training within the target country increased the likelihood of the security services identifying the group's intentions and methods. This became a matter for concern to bin Laden as the date for the attacks neared and anxiety levels increased. Bin Laden's unease was such that he pressed for the attacks to occur as soon as possible, concerned by the large number of operatives in the United States at the time.<sup>59</sup>

In reality, this training could have been undertaken almost anywhere else in the world. Binalshibh claimed that the reasons for conducting this training in the United States were financial and weather related.<sup>60</sup> These reasons appear insignificant, however, given the scale and importance of the planned operation. The preparedness of the Al Qaeda leadership to allow flight training to occur in the United States merely for the reasons mentioned by Binalshibh is suggestive of strong confidence in those security arrangements already in place and those that would follow.

The confidence engendered by Al Qaeda's security measures also contributed to the operation's resilience. The strength of these measures meant that when unanticipated problems arose, especially those that risked exposing the operation, the organizers and cell

leaders felt confident enough to proceed with the plot. The robustness of the plot was such that George Tenet considered the operation's resilience one of its defining features.<sup>61</sup> This was evident in a number of areas. For example, in the days leading up to the attacks, three of the hijackers received speeding tickets from local law enforcement. Remaining calm, they did not arouse any suspicion, presumably because they were sufficiently confident in the integrity of the security arrangements put into place up to that time.<sup>62</sup> The police officer who intercepted Ziad Jarrah later reflected that Jarrah's demeanor did not warrant further investigation, commenting that he, "was extremely calm and cooperative throughout the entire traffic stop."<sup>63</sup> In fact, some of the hijackers' level of confidence was such that *they* initiated contact with law enforcement. Atta's second-in-command, Nawaf al-Hazmi, for instance, reported an attempted street robbery to Virginia Police on 1 May 2001, just four and a half months before the attacks.<sup>64</sup>

## Aftermath

Kepel, in his study of political Islam, described the 9/11 attacks as, "... a seismic event with incalculable consequences."<sup>65</sup> This observation, and others like it,<sup>66</sup> captures the dramatic and far-reaching implications of the attacks. For Al Qaeda, the impact was no less dramatic. These carefully constructed and choreographed attacks, with their tremendous symbolic significance, revealed to multiple audiences Al Qaeda's worldview centered on the existence of a struggle between the forces of good and evil. Moreover, the attacks were planned to convey the power and righteousness of Al Qaeda's cause, while demonstrating the vulnerability of the U.S. government and all that it represents. By discrediting U.S. power in this way, Al Qaeda sought to establish the supremacy of its ideology in what it considers to be a world at war.<sup>67</sup> Indeed, the Al Qaeda leadership in the post-9/11 period emphasized the capacity for the *mujahidin* to achieve victory despite the strength of those forces massed against them. In the aftermath of the attacks, the United States, despite its "great power" status, was presented as a country particularly susceptible to military defeat.<sup>68</sup>

In fact, Al Qaeda's successful use of intelligence and counterintelligence represented an impressive display of power in its own right. These activities, especially counterintelligence, exemplified the capacity of the organization to challenge the authority of the United States by overcoming its intelligence services, one of the most recognizable symbols of American power. By demonstrating such vulnerability, Al Qaeda further weakened perceptions of U.S. power while strengthening images of its own omnipotence and the righteousness of its cause. Moreover, this fulfilled a more practical role insofar as it provided evidence that the United States and its intelligence services could be defeated. For instance, Binalshibh, in reference to the 9/11 attacks, would comment that, "[p]eople are often morally defeated. . . . They have a complex towards the CIA and Mossad but why should they when Allah has instilled this nation with the duty of jihad, as we see [from the example] of these rare heroic and courageous operations?"<sup>69</sup> Similarly, al-Hakaymah's *Myth of Delusion* observed that the 9/11 attacks, "... exposed to the world the myth of delusion called 'NSA-CIA-FBI.' They used to say that 'if a mouse entered America or came out of it, you should be able to find a report about it in the archives of the American intelligence services.' The American intelligence lost this round against al-Qaeda intelligence."<sup>70</sup> In fact, presenting images of a David and Goliath struggle that can be won is central not only to Al Qaeda's attempt to demonstrate the power of its ideology, the heroism of its operatives, and the reach of the organization, but also to inspire others who might be discouraged by the apparent omnipotence of the United States and those countries aligned with it. Presenting images

of almost insurmountable odds has a solid basis in Islamic history, a fact that Al Qaeda routinely exploits to arouse and mobilize its supporters.<sup>71</sup>

The effects of the 9/11 attacks, however, were meant to be more than just symbolic. Although emphasizing the existence of a global struggle based on a dichotomous worldview was central to Al Qaeda's planning and objectives, the tangible and worldly goals it hoped to achieve through this symbolism were no less important. For instance, the attacks served to propel the organization onto the world stage, drawing global attention to its grievances,<sup>72</sup> at least some of which are rooted in reality and have political solutions.<sup>73</sup> Moreover, the images of power and war generated by the attacks were intended to radicalize and mobilize supporters by offering an example of a successful operation achieved through methodical planning, personal sacrifice, and submission to the will of God.<sup>74</sup>

## Conclusion

The 9/11 attacks provide strong evidence of the capacity of intelligence and counterintelligence to lead to outcomes consistent with Al Qaeda's strategic and symbolic objectives. These critical operational tools allowed Al Qaeda to accurately evaluate its operating environment and construct plans that could lead to a carefully crafted and choreographed act of violence. These plans were firmly rooted in an understanding of the target and its milieu acquired through methodical intelligence collection. In particular, intelligence provided a level of familiarity with the target that ensured surprise or unanticipated circumstances would be kept to an absolute minimum. By attempting to replicate the conditions likely to be encountered on the day of the operation, the hijackers' dry-runs and intelligence probes established in great detail and precision aircraft and airport security procedures and the likely reactions by airline staff to specific events, while also creating a strong sense of environmental familiarity.

The planners' and hijackers' predicative capabilities were, therefore, enhanced significantly by the operation's intelligence preparations. In assembling their plans for the take-over of the aircraft, the operational leaders could construct specific responses and assign roles in anticipation that events would unfold as the intelligence indicated they would. For instance, knowledge that the cockpit doors would be opened shortly after take-off precluded the need to smuggle on board weapons other than box cutters. The need to resort to weapons more sophisticated or deadly was deemed unnecessary because access to the cockpit was unlikely to meet with the type of resistance that would require weapons other than box cutters. Furthermore, knowledge that these doors were routinely opened during the very early stages of each of the flights formed the basis of the hijackers' intention to crash all aircraft in a coordinated, almost simultaneous series of attacks. Knowing that these doors would be opened 10 to 15 minutes into each flight provided a window of opportunity in which access could be gained to cockpits at approximately the same time. Indeed, this was considered so important that Binalshibh claimed that if the hijackers could not gain control of the cockpit during this critical period, then they would abandon their attempt to seize the aircraft.<sup>75</sup>

Moreover, the hijackers' extensive use of intelligence and counterintelligence lends substantial support to theories of terrorist rationality, including those that employ suicide as a tactic and strategy.<sup>76</sup> Despite their preparedness to die, the hijackers' use of intelligence and counterintelligence demonstrated a desire to avoid death until the planned moment. The hijackers' extensive use of intelligence, despite their intention to die and their intense ideological views, demonstrated a desire to maintain their grasp on reality and to be guided

by the operational realities on which a successful outcome depended. This goal-oriented behavior, and the postponing of death to coincide with utility maximization, demonstrates a rationality in which suicide is employed to achieve identifiable and achievable goals. This reinforces notions that suicide terrorism is not indicative of irrationality stemming from fanaticism or an indifference to risk. Instead, the use of intelligence to maximize the benefits to be derived through suicide demonstrates deliberate and calculated behavior consistent with rational and purposive behavior.

## Notes

1. See, for example, Maxwell Taylor and Ethel Quayle, *Terrorist Lives* (London: Brassey's, 1994), p. 12; Martha Crenshaw, "The Causes of Terrorism," *Comparative Politics* 13(1) (1981), p. 385; Andrew Silke, "Beyond Horror: Terrorist Atrocity and the Search for Understanding—The Case of the Shankill Bombing," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 26(1) (2003), pp. 37–60.

2. R. H. Shultz and R. M. Beitler, "Tactical Deception and Strategic Surprise in Al-Qai'da's Operations," *Middle East Review of International Affairs* 8(2) (2004), pp. 56–79; Devin D. Jessee, "Tactical Means, Strategic Ends: Al Qaeda's Use of Denial and Deception," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 18(3) (2006), pp. 367–388.

3. George Tenet, in his testimony before the Joint Inquiry into the 9/11 attack, also used these descriptors to identify the stages of the operation, along with that of *execution*. George J. Tenet, *Unclassified Version of Director of Central Intelligence George J. Tenet's Testimony before the Joint Inquiry into Terrorist Attacks Against the United States*, available at [http://www.cia.gov/cia/public\\_affairs/speeches/2002/dci\\_testimony\\_06182002.html](http://www.cia.gov/cia/public_affairs/speeches/2002/dci_testimony_06182002.html), 18 June 2002 (accessed 17 February 2005).

4. The notion of reflective decision making is facilitated by an ideological outlook that emphasizes the importance of patience and having a long-term view to the struggle. See, for example, bin Laden's comments in Jason Burke, *Al-Qaeda: The True Story of Radical Islam* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2004), p. 33; Abdulaziz al-Moqrin, "The Group or Crew of Execution," *Al-Battar Training Camp*, no. 8 (14 April 2004). In addition to fostering a sense that operations should not be rushed, and that a methodical and deliberate approach to planning will maximize the likelihood of operational success, Al Qaeda also sees other opportunities in its lengthy struggle. For instance, *The Management of Savagery*, in discussing the use of aggressive counterintelligence, observes that the length of battle, "... provides an opportunity for infiltrating the adversaries and their fellow travelers and establishing a strong security apparatus that is more supportive of the security of the movement now, and later the [Islamic] state." Abu Bakr Naji, *The Management of Savagery. The Most Critical Stage Through Which the Umma Will Pass*, available at [http://www.ctc.usma.edu/Management\\_of\\_Savagery.pdf](http://www.ctc.usma.edu/Management_of_Savagery.pdf), n.d. (accessed 12 December 2006), p. 52.

5. Simon Reeve, *The New Jackals* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1999), pp. 71–93.

6. *9/11 Commission Report. Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2004), p. 147. Khalid also played a minor role in the 1993 World Trade Center bombing, wiring \$660 to Yousef's co-conspirator, Mohammed Salameh. Although a minor actor only in this attack, it is important because it links Khalid to the original World Trade Center bombing and is, therefore, indicative of his historic interest in this target. Terry McDermott, Josh Meyer, and Patrick J. McDonnell, "The Plots and Designs of al Qaeda's Engineer," *Los Angeles Times*, 22 December 2002.

7. Peter Lance, *1000 Years for Revenge* (New York: Regan Books, 2003), pp. 277–278; Reeve *The New Jackals*, p. 86.

8. Reeve, *The New Jackals*, p. 87.

9. Lance, *1000 Years for Revenge*, pp. 277–278. It would subsequently emerge that Murad allegedly informed investigators from the Philippine National Police that he held discussions with Yousef about attacking the World Trade Center with hijacked commercial aircraft. It was alleged that the other targets would include the CIA, the Pentagon, a nuclear facility, and other U.S. landmarks.

Other than the source from the Philippine National Police who provided this information to author Peter Lance post-9/11, there is no corroboration of this version of events.

10. *9/11 Commission Report*, p. 147.

11. Jack Roche, interview with author, 25 August 2005.

12. *9/11 Commission Report*, p. 153; Tenet, *Unclassified Version of Director of Central Intelligence George J. Tenet's Testimony before the Joint Inquiry into Terrorist Attacks Against the United States*.

13. *9/11 Commission Report*, p. 153. Yousef's interest in a second attack on the World Trade Center is supported by another source. In 1995, Murad informed FBI investigators that Yousef wished to return to the United States to bomb the World Trade Center a second time. Lance, *1000 Years for Revenge*, p. 511.

14. Khalid's approach to the Al Qaeda leadership for assistance with his ambitious plans is consistent with Burke's thesis of the organization acting like a venture-capital firm. Burke, *Al-Qaeda*, p. 13. Moreover, Khalid's many meetings and discussions with the Al Qaeda leadership revealed its need for information and reasoned argument before committing its name and resources to the operation.

15. *9/11 Commission Report*, p. 149. Revealing the continuity between the "Bojinka" plot and this proposal, Khalid's original suggestion to the Al Qaeda leadership was for the hijacking of ten aircraft, nine of which would crash into targets on the U.S. east and west coasts. This idea was rejected by bin Laden as too complex. *9/11 Commission Report*, p. 154.

16. *9/11 Commission Report*, p. 155.

17. *National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States*, "Outline of 9/11 Plot. Staff Statement No. 16" (2004), p. 4.

18. Although there has been some suggestion that Zacarias Moussaoui may have formed part of a "second wave" of attacks, there is little evidence to support this position. Indeed, the 9/11 Commission formed the view that Moussaoui was being readied as a pilot for the immediate planes operation in the event that he needed to replace Jarrah. *9/11 Commission Report*, p. 247.

19. Khalid reportedly informed interrogators that this list of targets was even more extensive. According to Khalid, bin Laden gave Atta a list of targets that included the World Trade Center, the Pentagon, the Capitol, the White House, the Israeli embassy in Washington and the Sears Tower in Chicago. Eric Lichtblau, "Bin Laden Chose 9/11 Targets, Al Qaeda Leader Says," *New York Times*, 20 March 2003.

20. *9/11 Commission Report*, pp. 155, 243, and 248.

21. *Ibid.*, pp. 244 and 288.

22. Yosri Fouda and Nick Fielding, *Masterminds of Terror* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 2003), p. 127. Khalid indicated to Fouda that Al Qaeda had dispatched reconnaissance teams to the United States to scout targets for the "planes operation" during the second half of 1998, and that it was the recommendation of these teams that the White House was too difficult a target for the reasons outlined earlier. The veracity of Khalid's claim that reconnaissance teams were dispatched to the United States to identify targets specifically in support of the planes operation as early as late 1998 is questionable. Indeed, Khalid would subsequently explain that he, bin Laden, and Atef alone decided the initial list of targets. *9/11 Commission Report*, p. 155. He would also later admit that his comment to Fouda that an Al Qaeda reconnaissance committee had identified 30 potential targets in the United States during the late 1990s was a lie designed to exaggerate the perceived scale of the operation. *9/11 Commission Report*, p. 492.

23. *9/11 Commission Report*, p. 244.

24. United States District Court, *United States of America v. Dhiren Barot, Nadeem Tarmohamad and Qaisar Shaffi. Criminal Indictment*. Southern District of New York, 2005.

25. *9/11 Commission Report*, p. 150. The author has viewed some of the video footage taken by Barot during these reconnaissance missions. At one stage, Barot focuses on the World Trade Center, and in an apparent attempt to simulate their destruction, tilts the camera to its side so that the buildings appear to be lying on their side. Barot can then be heard to say "boom."

26. "Bin Laden Determined To Strike in US," *President's Daily Brief Dated 6 August 2001*, available at <http://news.findlaw.com/hdocs/docs/terrorism/80601pdb.html> (accessed 16 September 2005).
27. Cited in Joel Mowbray, "How They Did It. An 'Evil One' Confesses, and Boasts," *National Review* 54(24) (2002), p. 37.
28. *9/11 Commission Report*, p. 157.
29. *Ibid.*, pp. 157–158.
30. *Ibid.*, pp. 158–159. It should be noted that the intelligence activities of Khallad at this time appear to have been carried out in support of another element of the "planes operation" that was to be centered in South East Asia and also involve the hijacking of U.S. commercial aircraft. This part of the "planes operation," however, was cancelled by bin Laden because he considered it too difficult to coordinate with the U.S. element of the plan. Despite this, it is fair to say that the results of Khallad's reconnaissance activities were used to instruct those involved in the U.S. component of the planes operation. National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, *Outline of the 9/11 Plot. Staff Statement No. 16* (2004), pp. 3 and 13–14. Indeed, Khallad reported on the results of his casing mission directly to bin Laden. *9/11 Commission Report*, p. 159.
31. *9/11 Commission Report*, pp. 242 and 248.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 245. It is likely that these surveillance flights also yielded other intelligence crucial to the operation. For example, the hijackers would have been aware that the flights ultimately selected for hijacking would carry relatively few passengers, thus making the task of seizing control of the aircraft less risky (American Airlines Flight 77 carried 58 passengers; United Airlines Flight carried 37; United Airlines Flight carried 56; and American Airlines Flight carried 81).
33. *Ibid.*, p. 242.
34. Russ Niles, "Senator Calls For Hudson Corridor Closure, ADIZ-Like Rules," *AVweb*, available at [http://www.avweb.com/newswire/10\\_30b/briefs/187749-1.html](http://www.avweb.com/newswire/10_30b/briefs/187749-1.html), 22 July 2004 (accessed 16 November 2005). Neither Jarrah nor Hanjour, however, piloted aircraft into either of the World Trade Center towers on 11 September. Although it is plausible that the pilots had not been assigned their targets at this time, whatever intelligence or lessons were gleaned as a result of these flights in all probability found their way to Atta and al Shehhi, both of whom would pilot aircraft into the towers.
35. *9/11 Commission Report*, p. 245.
36. John Miller, Michael Stone, and Chris Mitchell, *The Cell. Inside the 9/11 Plot, and Why the FBI and CIA Failed to Stop it* (Melbourne: Scribe Publications, 2002), pp. 295–296.
37. What was most certainly a surprise, however, was the method, scale, and audacity of the attacks. Indeed, it is important to note that Al Qaeda's two other major attacks, East Africa and the U.S.S. *Cole*, were land- and sea-based operations, respectively. The use of an air-based attack represented a level of operational diversification intended to deceive and surprise for the purpose of maximizing utility and improving the likelihood of operational success.
38. Daniel Benjamin and Steven Simon, *The Age of Sacred Terror* (New York: Random House, 2003), pp. 233–255 and 286–288; Richard A. Clarke, *Against All Enemies: Inside America's War on Terror* (New York: Free Press, 2004), pp. 227–238.
39. Osama bin Laden, *Fatwah Urging Jihad Against Americans*, available at <http://www.ict.org.il/articles/fatwah.htm>, 23 February 1998 (accessed 10 March 2005).
40. The East Africa bombings served as a particularly important indicator of Al Qaeda's new strategy, because these attacks revealed the organization's intention of broadening its campaign to include non-Muslim lands, signalling its commitment to pursuing the "far enemy" as described in bin Laden's 1998 *fatwa*. Marc Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), pp. 47–48.
41. Perhaps the most well-known reporting on this can be found in the Presidential Daily Brief dated 6 August 2001, which not only provides a brief history on Al Qaeda's enmity with the United States, but also makes reference to intelligence indicating possible preparations for attacks in the United States, including those involving the use of hijackings. *President's Daily Brief Dated 6 August 2001*.
42. Benjamin and Simon, *The Age of Sacred Terror*, pp. 256–325.



43. Tenet, *Unclassified Version of Director of Central Intelligence George J. Tenet's Testimony before the Joint Inquiry into Terrorist Attacks Against the United States*.

44. *Ibid.*

45. *9/11 Commission Report*, pp. 215–216 and 229. It is true that Tenet's remarks may have been motivated by a desire to protect himself and the U.S. intelligence community from allegations of mismanagement and incompetence. Indeed, there is some evidence of opportunities missed. These have been discussed extensively elsewhere, and do not warrant being repeated here. See, for example, *9/11 Commission Report*, 254–277; Michael Elliott, "How the U.S. Missed the Clues," *Time* 159(21) (27 May 2002), pp. 24–32; Seymour Hersh, "Missed Messages," *The New Yorker*, 3 June 2002. Moreover, clumsiness was apparent in the hijackers' preparations for the attacks, including those in which requests were made of flight schools to learn how to take off, but not to land. It must, therefore, be acknowledged that the hijackers were to some degree helped by the U.S. intelligence and law enforcement community's sloppy investigative work and public complacency with unusual or odd behavior. A similar observation has been made by Horgan, who commented, "[t]he sustained success of any terrorist group can often be, we must acknowledge, a reflection of poor intelligence, uninformed or un-coordinated law enforcement, and poorly directed counter-terrorism policies more broadly." John Horgan, *The Psychology of Terrorism* (New York: Routledge, 2005), pp. 24–25.

46. J. M. Post, "Terrorist Psycho-Logic: Terrorist Behavior as a Product of Psychological Forces," in W. Reich, ed., *Origins of Terrorism: Psychologies, Ideologies, Theologies, States of Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 33–35.

47. Franco Ferracuti, "Ideology and repentance: Terrorism in Italy," in W. Reich, ed., *Origins of Terrorism: Psychologies, Ideologies, Theologies, States of Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 59–64.

48. Konrad Kellen, "Ideology and Rebellion: Terrorism in West Germany," in W. Reich, ed., *Origins of Terrorism: Psychologies, Ideologies, Theologies, States of Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 43; Martha Crenshaw, "An Organizational Approach to the Analysis of Political Terrorism," *Orbis* 29(3) (1985), p. 480.

49. Gordon H. McCormick, "Terrorist Decision Making," *Annual Review of Political Science* 6 (2003), p. 487.

50. Juergensmeyer, for instance, observes that, "[m]ost religious activists do not appear to think tactically. Rather than trying to deal strategically with their opponents, craft tactics, and conceive ways to discredit them, the activists see themselves as engaged in a great struggle, in which the discrediting of opponents comes naturally and even secondarily." Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), p. 187.

51. Fouda and Fielding, *Masterminds of Terror*, p. 114.

52. Cited in Mowbray, "How They Did It," p. 37.

53. Cited in Fouda and Fielding, *Masterminds of Terror*, p. 119.

54. Not all hijackers conformed to this mold. Hazmi and Mihdhar, for example, were experienced militants before joining the planes operations. *9/11 Commission Report*, p. 155.

55. Following his return from Afghanistan, Atta travelled to the Czech Republic from Germany by bus in June 2000. He then travelled from Prague to Newark. In early January 2001, Atta travelled to Germany where he met with Binalshibh before returning to Florida. In July 2001, Atta flew to Madrid where he again met with Binalshibh before flying back to Fort Lauderdale. *Ibid.*, pp. 224, 227, and 244. This does not include Atta's extensive travel within the United States.

56. As stated previously, it is known that Binalshibh and Atta met on at least two occasions (January 2001 in Germany and July 2001 in Spain). This was supplemented by other forms of electronic communication, which continued up to two days before the attacks. *Ibid.*, p. 531. During the time Binalshibh was in contact with Atta, he was also in regular contact with bin Laden, Khalid, and other members of the Al Qaeda leadership. According to Binalshibh, communications were, "constant and continuous until a few hours before the night of the execution." Cited in Mowbray, "How They Did It," p. 37.

57. Al Qaeda routinely emphasizes the perils involved in communications. Al-Moqrin, for instance, has observed that, "[c]ommunications (cable, wireless, direct, indirect) are the most

dangerous in killing organizations and in destroying them.” Abdulaziz al-Moqrin, “Secret Work Group,” *Al-Battar Training Camp*, no. 6 (17 March 2004).

58. Cited in Mowbray, “How They Did It,” p. 38.

59. *9/11 Commission Report*, p. 244.

60. Mowbray, “How They Did It,” p. 37.

61. Tenet, *Unclassified Version of Director of Central Intelligence George J. Tenet’s Testimony before the Joint Inquiry into Terrorist Attacks Against the United States*.

62. Robert S. Mueller, *Statement for the Record FBI Director Robert S. Mueller III Joint Intelligence Committee Inquiry*, available at <http://www.911investigations.net/document1155.html>, 25 September 2002 (accessed 5 October 2005).

63. “Hijacker Got a Speeding Ticket,” *New York Times*, 9 January 2002.

64. Mueller, *Statement for the Record FBI Director Robert S. Mueller III Joint Intelligence Committee Inquiry*.

65. Gilles Kepel, *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 2003), p. 1.

66. See, for example, Fouda and Fielding, *Masterminds of Terror*, p. 11.

67. Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God*, pp. 121–166.

68. See, for example, comments by bin Laden and Binalshibh cited, respectively, in Robert Pape, *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism* (Melbourne: Scribe, 2005), p. 123 and Mowbray, “How They Did It,” p. 39.

69. Cited in Fouda and Fielding, *Masterminds of Terror*, p. 143. This theme of providing *jihadis* the confidence to challenge the intelligence services continues in the post 9/11 period. For instance, one document stresses the importance of not overestimating the capabilities of the intelligence services of countries such as the United States and Israel for fear that this could discourage operations. Revealing a moderate and balanced approach to security, the document suggests that *jihadis* must find a middle ground that avoids both paranoia and negligence. Sheikh Abu Muhammad Asim Al-Maqdisi, *Precaution, Secrecy and Concealment: Balancing Between Negligence and Paranoia*, At-Tibyan Publications, available at [http://www.geocities.com/rjceicstine1/Makdisi—Precaution\\_Secrecy\\_and\\_Concealment.pdf](http://www.geocities.com/rjceicstine1/Makdisi—Precaution_Secrecy_and_Concealment.pdf), n.d. (accessed 15 February 2007). Similarly, al-Adl cautions that the pursuit of security should not be so extreme that operations are abandoned on the “pretext of vigilance.” Sayf Al-Adl, “The Principles of Security,” *Al-Battar Training Camp* no. 2 (15 January 2004).

70. Muhammad Khalil al-Hakaymah, *The Myth of Delusion*, al-Maqreze Center Site, available at <http://cryptome.org/mod-usintel.pdf>, n.d. (accessed 12 December 2006), p. 4.

71. Kepel, *Jihad*, p. 17; Fouda and Fielding, *Masterminds of Terror*, p. 107.

72. The activities of terrorism researchers serve to indicate the intense interest shown in Al Qaeda and its motivation following the 9/11 attacks. Despite having engaged in major operations prior to 9/11 such as the East Africa and U.S.S. *Cole* bombings, research relating to Al Qaeda up to the time of the New York and Washington attacks was almost non-existent. For instance, Silke observes that in the ten years before the attacks, Al Qaeda did not even appear on the top twenty list of terrorist groups that received most research attention. Andrew Silke, “An Introduction to Terrorism Research,” in A. Silke, ed., *Research on Terrorism: Trends, Achievements and Failures* (London: Frank Cass, 2004), p. 22.

73. Pape, *Dying to Win*; Burke, *Al-Qaeda*, pp. 23–25; John L. Esposito, *Unholy War: Terror in the Name of Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 22–25.

74. Kepel, *Jihad*, p. 2; Burke, *Al-Qaeda*, p. 36.

75. Fouda and Fielding, *Masterminds of Terror*, p. 144.

76. See, for example, Pape, *Dying to Win*.