

9/11 there were 34. While useful, the JTTFs had limitations. They set priorities in accordance with regional and field office concerns, and most were not fully staffed. Many state and local entities believed they had little to gain from having a full-time representative on a JTTF.⁴⁷

Other federal law enforcement resources, also not seriously enlisted for counterterrorism, were to be found in the Treasury Department.

Treasury housed the Secret Service, the Customs Service, and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms. Given the Secret Service's mission to protect the president and other high officials, its agents did become involved with those of the FBI whenever terrorist assassination plots were rumored.

The Customs Service deployed agents at all points of entry into the United States. Its agents worked alongside INS agents, and the two groups sometimes cooperated. In the winter of 1999–2000, as will be detailed in chapter 6, questioning by an especially alert Customs inspector led to the arrest of an al Qaeda terrorist whose apparent mission was to bomb Los Angeles International Airport.

The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms was used on occasion by the FBI as a resource. The ATF's laboratories and analysis were critical to the investigation of the February 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center and the April 1995 bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City.⁴⁸

Before 9/11, with the exception of one portion of the FBI, very little of the sprawling U.S. law enforcement community was engaged in countering terrorism. Moreover, law enforcement could be effective only after specific individuals were identified, a plot had formed, or an attack had already occurred. Responsible individuals had to be located, apprehended, and transported back to a U.S. court for prosecution. As FBI agents emphasized to us, the FBI and the Justice Department do not have cruise missiles. They declare war by indicting someone. They took on the lead role in addressing terrorism because they were asked to do so.⁴⁹

3.3 . . . AND IN THE FEDERAL AVIATION ADMINISTRATION

The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) within the Department of Transportation had been vested by Congress with the sometimes conflicting mandate of regulating the safety and security of U.S. civil aviation while also promoting the civil aviation industry. The FAA had a security mission to protect the users of commercial air transportation against terrorism and other criminal acts. In the years before 9/11, the FAA perceived sabotage as a greater threat to aviation than hijacking. First, no domestic hijacking had occurred in a decade. Second, the commercial aviation system was perceived as more vulnerable to explosives than to weapons such as firearms. Finally, explosives were