

There was a mounting sense of public alarm. The earlier Jordanian arrests had been covered in the press, and Ressam's arrest was featured on network evening news broadcasts throughout the Christmas season.³⁸

The FBI was more communicative during the millennium crisis than it had ever been. The senior FBI official for counterterrorism, Dale Watson, was a regular member of the CSG, and Clarke had good relations both with him and with some of the FBI agents handling al Qaeda-related investigations, including John O'Neill in New York. As a rule, however, neither Watson nor these agents brought much information to the group. The FBI simply did not produce the kind of intelligence reports that other agencies routinely wrote and disseminated. As law enforcement officers, Bureau agents tended to write up only witness interviews. Written case analysis usually occurred only in memoranda to supervisors requesting authority to initiate or expand an investigation.³⁹

But during the millennium alert, with its direct links into the United States from Hijazi, Deek, and Ressam, FBI officials were briefing in person about ongoing investigations, not relying on the dissemination of written reports. Berger told us that it was hard for FBI officials to hold back information in front of a cabinet-rank group. After the alert, according to Berger and members of the NSC staff, the FBI returned to its normal practice of withholding written reports and saying little about investigations or witness interviews, taking the position that any information related to pending investigations might be presented to a grand jury and hence could not be disclosed under then-prevailing federal law.⁴⁰

The terrorist plots that were broken up at the end of 1999 display the variety of operations that might be attributed, however indirectly, to al Qaeda. The Jordanian cell was a loose affiliate; we now know that it sought approval and training from Afghanistan, and at least one key member swore loyalty to Bin Ladin. But the cell's plans and preparations were autonomous. Ressam's ties to al Qaeda were even looser. Though he had been recruited, trained, and prepared in a network affiliated with the organization and its allies, Ressam's own plans were, nonetheless, essentially independent.

Al Qaeda, and Bin Ladin himself, did have at least one operation of their very own in mind for the millennium period. In chapter 5 we introduced an al Qaeda operative named Nashiri. Working with Bin Ladin, he was developing a plan to attack a ship near Yemen. On January 3, an attempt was made to attack a U.S. warship in Aden, the USS *The Sullivans*. The attempt failed when the small boat, overloaded with explosives, sank. The operatives salvaged their equipment without the attempt becoming known, and they put off their plans for another day.

Al Qaeda's "planes operation" was also coming along. In January 2000, the United States caught a glimpse of its preparations.