

by 2001 was cooperating with investigators, recognized Moussaoui as someone who had been in the Afghan camps.¹⁰⁶ As mentioned above, before 9/11 the FBI agents in Minneapolis had failed to persuade supervisors at headquarters that there was enough evidence to seek a FISA warrant to search Moussaoui's computer hard drive and belongings. Either the British information or the Ressay identification would have broken the logjam.

A maximum U.S. effort to investigate Moussaoui conceivably could have unearthed his connections to Binalshibh. Those connections might have brought investigators to the core of the 9/11 plot. The Binalshibh connection was recognized shortly after 9/11, though it was not an easy trail to find. Discovering it would have required quick and very substantial cooperation from the German government, which might well have been difficult to obtain.

However, publicity about Moussaoui's arrest and a possible hijacking threat might have derailed the plot.¹⁰⁷ With time, the search for Mihdhar and Hazmi and the investigation of Moussaoui might also have led to a breakthrough that would have disrupted the plot.

Khalid Sheikh Mohammed

Another late opportunity was presented by a confluence of information regarding Khalid Sheikh Mohammed received by the intelligence community in the summer of 2001. The possible links between KSM, Moussaoui, and an individual only later identified as Ramzi Binalshibh would remain undiscovered, however.

Although we readily equate KSM with al Qaeda today, this was not the case before 9/11. KSM, who had been indicted in January 1996 for his role in the Manila air plot, was seen primarily as another freelance terrorist, associated with Ramzi Yousef. Because the links between KSM and Bin Ladin or al Qaeda were not recognized at the time, responsibility for KSM remained in the small Islamic Extremist Branch of the Counterterrorist Center, not in the Bin Ladin unit.

Moreover, because KSM had already been indicted, he became targeted for arrest. In 1997, the Counterterrorist Center added a Renditions Branch to help find wanted fugitives. Responsibility for KSM was transferred to this branch, which gave the CIA a "man-to-man" focus but was not an analytical unit. When subsequent information came, more critical for analysis than for tracking, no unit had the job of following up on what the information might mean.¹⁰⁸

For example, in September 2000, a source had reported that an individual named Khalid al-Shaykh al-Ballushi was a key lieutenant in al Qaeda. Al-Ballushi means "from Baluchistan," and KSM is from Baluchistan. Recognizing the possible significance of this information, the Bin Ladin unit sought more information. When no information was forthcoming, the Bin Ladin unit