

11.4 MANAGEMENT

Operational Management

Earlier in this report we detailed various missed opportunities to thwart the 9/11 plot. Information was not shared, sometimes inadvertently or because of legal misunderstandings. Analysis was not pooled. Effective operations were not launched. Often the handoffs of information were lost across the divide separating the foreign and domestic agencies of the government.

However the specific problems are labeled, we believe they are symptoms of the government's broader inability to adapt how it manages problems to the new challenges of the twenty-first century. The agencies are like a set of specialists in a hospital, each ordering tests, looking for symptoms, and prescribing medications. What is missing is the attending physician who makes sure they work as a team.

One missing element was effective management of transnational operations. Action officers should have drawn on all available knowledge in the government. This management should have ensured that information was shared and duties were clearly assigned across agencies, and across the foreign-domestic divide.

Consider, for example, the case of Mihdhar, Hazmi, and their January 2000 trip to Kuala Lumpur, detailed in chapter 6. In late 1999, the National Security Agency (NSA) analyzed communications associated with a man named Khalid, a man named Nawaf, and a man named Salem. Working-level officials in the intelligence community knew little more than this. But they correctly concluded that "Nawaf" and "Khalid" might be part of "an operational cadre" and that "something nefarious might be afoot."

The NSA did not think its job was to research these identities. It saw itself as an agency to support intelligence consumers, such as CIA. The NSA tried to respond energetically to any request made. But it waited to be asked.

If NSA had been asked to try to identify these people, the agency would have started by checking its own database of earlier information from these same sources. Some of this information had been reported; some had not. But it was all readily accessible in the database. NSA's analysts would promptly have discovered who Nawaf was, that his full name might be Nawaf al Hazmi, and that he was an old friend of Khalid.

With this information and more that was available, managers could have more effectively tracked the movement of these operatives in southeast Asia. With the name "Nawaf al Hazmi," a manager could then have asked the State Department also to check that name. State would promptly have found its own record on Nawaf al Hazmi, showing that he too had been issued a visa to visit the United States. Officials would have learned that the visa had been issued at the same place—Jeddah—and on almost the same day as the one given to Khalid al Mihdhar.