

heard if there had been anything unusual about it. The pilot said he followed standard procedures and filed his flight plan with the FAA prior to the flight, adding, "I was never questioned about it." Christopher Steele interview (June 14, 2004); Barry Ellis interview (June 14, 2004). FAA records confirm this account. FAA supplemental response to Commission questions for the record, June 8, 2004. When the plane arrived at Lexington Blue Grass Airport, that airport had also been open for more than five hours. Lexington-Fayette Urban County Airport Board, Blue Grass Airport response to Commission questions for the record, June 8, 2004. The three Saudi nationals debarked from the plane and were met by local police. Their private security guards were paid, and the police then escorted the three Saudi passengers to a hotel where they joined relatives already in Lexington. Mark Barnard interview (June 7, 2004). The FBI is alleged to have had no record of the flight and denied that it occurred, hence contributing to the story of a "phantom flight." This is another misunderstanding. The FBI was initially misinformed about how the Saudis got to Lexington by a local police officer in Lexington who did not have firsthand knowledge of the matter. The Bureau subsequently learned about the flight. James M. interview (June 18, 2004).

26. Richard Clarke interview (Jan. 12, 2004).

27. Andrew Card meeting (Mar. 31, 2004); President Bush and Vice President Cheney meeting (Apr. 29, 2004); Condoleezza Rice meeting (Feb. 7, 2004); Prince Bandar interview (May 5, 2004); Richard Clarke interview (Jan. 12, 2004); Richard Clarke testimony, Mar. 24, 2004 ("I would love to be able to tell you who did it, who brought this proposal to me, but I don't know"). Instead, the matter was handled as follows. Within days of September 11, fearing reprisals against Saudi nationals, Rihab Massoud, the deputy chief of mission at the Saudi embassy in Washington, D.C., called Dale Watson, the FBI's assistant director for counterterrorism, and asked for help in getting some of its citizens out of the country. Rihab Massoud interview (May 11, 2004). At about the same time, Michael Rolince, chief of the FBI's international terrorism operations section, also heard from an FBI official in Newark about a proposed flight of Saudis out of the country. Michael Rolince interview (June 9, 2004). We believe this was the Saudi deputy defense minister's flight. Rolince says he told the Newark official that the Saudis should not be allowed to leave without having the names on their passports matched to their faces, and their names run through FBI case records to see whether they had surfaced before. Rolince and Watson briefed Robert Mueller, the director of the FBI, about the issue and how they were handling it. The State Department played a role as well in flights involving government officials or members of the royal family. State coordinated with the FBI and FAA to allow screening by the FBI of flights with Saudi nationals on board. There is no evidence that State tried to limit the screening. DOS record, Log of USA 9-11 Terrorist Attack Task Force, Sept. 13, 2001; Jack S. interview (June 14, 2004). The FBI effectively approved the Saudi flights at the level of a section chief. Having an opportunity to check the Saudis was useful to the FBI. This was because the U.S. government did not, and does not, routinely run checks on foreigners who are *leaving* the United States. This procedure was convenient to the FBI, as the Saudis who wished to leave in this way would gather and present themselves for record checks and interviews, an opportunity that would not be available if they simply left on regularly scheduled commercial flights.

28. These flights were screened by law enforcement officials, primarily the FBI. For example, one flight, the so-called Bin Ladin flight, departed the United States on September 20 with 26 passengers, most of them relatives of Usama Bin Ladin. Screening of this flight was directed by an FBI agent in the Baltimore Field Office who was also a pilot. This agent, coordinating with FBI headquarters, sent an electronic communication to each of the field offices through which the Bin Ladin flight was scheduled to pass, including the proposed flight manifest and directing what screening should occur. He also monitored the flight as it moved around the country—from St. Louis to Los Angeles to Orlando to Washington Dulles, and to Boston Logan—correcting for any changes in itinerary to make sure there was no lapse in FBI screening at these locations. Again, each of the airports through which the Bin Ladin flight passed was open, and no special restrictions were lifted to accommodate its passage. James C. interview (June 3, 2004).

The Bin Ladin flight and other flights we examined were screened in accordance with policies set by FBI headquarters and coordinated through working-level interagency processes. Michael Rolince interview (June 9, 2004). Although most of the passengers were not interviewed, 22 of the 26 people on the Bin Ladin flight were interviewed by the FBI. Many were asked detailed questions. None of the passengers stated that they had any recent contact with Usama Bin Ladin or knew anything about terrorist activity. See, e.g., FBI report of investigation, interview of Mohammed Saleh Bin Laden, Sept. 21, 2001. As Richard Clarke noted, long before 9/11 the FBI was following members of the Bin Ladin family in the United States closely. Richard Clarke testimony, Mar. 24, 2004. Two of the passengers on this flight had been the subjects of preliminary investigations by the FBI, but both their cases had been closed, in 1999 and March 2001, respectively, because the FBI had uncovered no derogatory information on either person linking them to terrorist activity. Their cases remained closed as of 9/11, were not reopened before they departed the country on this flight, and have not been reopened since. FBI electronic communication, Summary of Information Regarding Flights taken by Saudi Citizens Out of the U.S. Shortly After September 11, 2001, Oct. 29, 2003, pp. 9–10.

29. Michael Rolince interview (June 9, 2004). Massoud corroborates this account. He said the FBI required the names and personal information of all departing passengers sponsored for departure by the Saudi Embassy. Rihab Massoud interview (May 11, 2004).