

stage an operation for a small amount of money. My view was that it may have been true that you could stage an operation for a small amount of money, but you couldn't run al-Qa'ida for a small amount of money. Al-Qa'ida was a vast worldwide organization that was creating terrorist groups in various countries that would not be called a-Qa'ida, but would be called names associated with that particular country. But they were creating terrorist groups, they were funding them from the start. They were taking preexisting terrorist groups and buying their allegiance and buying them additional capability. It seemed to me it must have cost a great deal of money to be al-Qa'ida, but I was never able to get the Intelligence Community to tell me within any range of magnitude how much money the annual operating budget of al-Qa'ida may have been.

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Prior to September 11, there was also some reluctance to use available financial databases to track suspected terrorists. The Chief of the FBI's Financial Review Group -- which had been only a section in the FBI's White Collar Crime Unit before September 11 -- and the Director of the Treasury Department's Financial Crimes Enforcement Network (FinCEN) both testified before the Joint Inquiry that, prior to September 11, they had capabilities to develop leads on terrorist suspects and link them to other terrorists and to terrorist funding sources. They both agreed that they would have been able to locate Nawaf al-Hazmi and Khalid al-Mihdhar in the United States in August 2001, if asked, through credit card and bank information. The use of these capabilities in the first weeks after September 11 enabled the FBI, with assistance from the Secret Service, to connect almost all of the 19 hijackers to each other very quickly by linking bank accounts, credit cards, debit cards, address checks, and telephones. Despite the existence of those capabilities, the FBI did not seek their assistance in the search for al-Hazmi and al-Mihdhar in late August 2001.

FinCEN was involved in tracking terrorist funds prior to September 11 and experienced some success. FinCEN began doing linkage analysis of terrorist financing in October 1999 and first identified a specific account with a direct link to al-Qa'ida in February 2001. It has the advantage of being able to work with both law enforcement and intelligence information, and to combine that information with Bank Secrecy Act and commercial data to assist the Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) and others in the seizure, blocking, and freezing of terrorist assets. FinCEN's capabilities have been made available to federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies for lead purposes since before September 11.