

The thirteen remaining hijackers, the “muscle,” whose role was to overcome pilots and control passengers, began arriving in the United States in April 2001. Except for one threesome, they arrived in pairs, the last in June. Twelve of the thirteen were from Saudi Arabia, and one was from the United Arab Emirates. Salem al-Hazmi, Nawaf’s brother, obtained his visa as early as April 1999; seven obtained visas from September to November 2000; three, as late as June 2001. As FBI Director Mueller noted, these hijackers arrived in the United States “within a fairly short window,” each transiting through the United Arab Emirates.

Many in the group knew each other. There were two pairs of brothers, the al-Hazmis and al-Shehris, in addition to networks of friends. Many came from southwest Saudi Arabia, and they represented a range of socioeconomic levels. A few had higher education. Others had little education. Some had struggled with depression or alcohol abuse. Some, according to DCI Tenet, “never exhibited much religious fervor, before apparent exposure to extremist ideas – through family members, friends, [page 145] or clerics – led to an abrupt radicalization and separation from their families;” some spoke of “their desire to participate in *jihad* conflicts such as the war in Chechnya, and some appear to have used this as a cover for traveling to Afghanistan.” The DCI also testified that “[a]s part of their commitment to militant Islam, these young Saudis traveled to Afghanistan to train in the camps of their exiled countryman Usama Bin Ladin.” Most supporting hijackers went to Afghanistan for the first time in 1999 or 2000. Notwithstanding the experience in Afghanistan, the CIA does not believe that the supporting hijackers became involved in the plot until late 2000. Their early travel may have “added these young men to the ranks of operatives that al-Qa’ida could call upon to carry out future missions,” but DCI Tenet said he does not believe that al-Qa’ida leadership wanted the supporting hijackers to know about the plot any sooner than necessary: “they probably were told little more than that they were headed for a suicide mission inside the United States.”

Al-Mihdhar, who left the United States a year before, obtained a visa in Jeddah in June 2001, using a new Saudi passport. According to DCI Tenet, he “spent the past year traveling between Yemen and Afghanistan, with occasional trips to Saudi Arabia.” Al-Mihdhar traveled to New York in July 2001 from Saudi Arabia, six days after the last of the supporting hijackers had flown to the United States. FBI Director Mueller testified that “al-Mihdhar’s role in the September 11 plot between June 2000 and July 2001 – before his re-entry into the United States – may well have been that of the coordinator and organizer of the movements of the non-pilot