

B. Khalid al-Mihdhar and Nawaf al-Hazmi Travel to the United States – Watchlist Opportunity Lost

[For six weeks, CIA sought to locate al-Mihdhar in Thailand. It was unsuccessful, however, because, according to a CIA officer's testimony, "[w]hen they arrived [in Thailand] we were unable to mobilize what we needed to mobilize." Nonetheless, in February 2000, CIA rejected a request from foreign authorities to become involved because CIA was in the middle of an investigation "to determine what the subject is up to]."

[In early March 2000, CIA Headquarters, including CTC and its Bin Ladin unit, received a cable from a CIA station in [—] noting that Nawaf al-Hazmi had traveled to Los Angeles on January 15, 2000. The cable was marked "Action Required: None, FYI [For Your Information]." The following day, another station, which had been copied on the cable by the originating station, cabled [page 154] CTC's Bin Ladin unit that it had read the cable "with interest," particularly "the information that a member of this group traveled to the U.S. following his visit to Kuala Lumpur." No action resulted at CIA].*

Once again, the CIA did not add Nawaf al-Hazmi's name to the State Department's watchlist for denying admission to the United States. It also did not notify the FBI that a "terrorist operative," as al-Hazmi was described in January, had entered the United States. The CIA did not consider the possibility that al-Mihdhar and al-Hazmi, who had flown together to Thailand, continued on together to the United States. In fact, al-Mihdhar had flown with al-Hazmi to the United States on January 15, 2000.

The CIA Headquarters employee who had direct responsibility for tracking the movement of the attendees at the Malaysia meeting does not recall either the March 5 or March 6, 2000 messages concerning al-Hazmi's travel to the United States. The CTC Supervisor, referred to earlier, testified before the Joint Inquiry:

It's very difficult to understand what happened with [the March 5] cable when it came in. I don't know exactly why it was missed. It would appear that it was missed.

* This occurred even though CTC had republished guidance reminding personnel of the importance of watchlisting in December 1999. (see Appendix, "CTC Watchlisting Guidance – December 1999").