

- The November 1985 hijacking of an EgyptAir flight from Athens and

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- The December 1985 attack on the Rome and Vienna airports by the Abu Nidal organization.

Before the emergence of al-Qa'ida in the early 1990s, attacks like these shaped the U.S. Government's conception of how terrorist groups behaved. In general, those groups were viewed as instruments of the nation states that sponsored them and they were not interested in mass casualties. The lessons learned at that time were reflected in Joint Inquiry testimony by former National Security Advisor Brent Scowcroft:

[In the late 1980s], terrorism was primarily a phenomenon which was state-sponsored or state-assisted or tolerated. And therefore, it was natural for us to think of deterring or dealing with terrorism primarily through the sponsor than through the terrorist organizations directly where things like deterrence and so on would have some impact....A further point, none of the terrorist organizations at that time so far as we knew had global reach. This meant that while U.S. persons, U.S. interests, and U.S. assets were not immune from terrorist attack, the United States homeland, in effect, was. And that certainly colored how terrorism was viewed. Terrorist organizations appeared to be either regionally or issue related. And even though Hizbollah was thought to be behind many of the terrorist acts that occurred during the Reagan Administration, the acts themselves seemed to be relatively independent and uncoordinated events rather than part of an overall strategy.

Terrorism aimed at the United States began to take on a different set of characteristics in the 1990s as Bin Ladin and al-Qa'ida emerged as a threat to the United States. Bin Ladin was intent on striking inside the United States, and the Intelligence Community detected numerous signs of a pending terrorist attack by al-Qa'ida in the spring and summer of 2001.

A. A New Breed of Terrorists

International terrorism struck directly in the United States in February 1993, when a truck bomb exploded in the parking garage of the World Trade Center in New York City. A second alarm sounded in June 1993 when the FBI arrested eight persons for plotting to bomb New York City landmarks, including the United Nations and the Lincoln and Holland tunnels. The central figures in these plots were Ramzi Yousef and Sheikh Omar Abd al-Rahman, who was the