

Before September 11, I do not recall receiving any information concerning al-Qa'ida using aircraft as weapons for attacks within the United States. One CIA analysis stated that al-Qa'ida was interested in possible hijackings in order to win the release of imprisoned al-Qa'ida members, but did not mention the possibility of using aircraft themselves as weapons.

The failure to consider seriously the use of aircraft as weapons may be the result of insufficient resources directed to intelligence analysis. Before September 11, CTC had forty analysts to analyze terrorism issues worldwide, with only one of its five analytic branches focused on terrorist tactics. As a result, the only terrorist tactic on which CTC had performed strategic analysis was the use of chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear weapons because of the obvious potential for mass casualties.

Aviation-related terrorism was included in some broader terrorist threat assessments, such as the National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) on terrorism. For example, a 1995 NIE mentioned the plot to blow up twelve U.S. airliners and cited the consideration the Bojinka conspirators gave to attacking CIA Headquarters with an aircraft laden with explosives. The FAA worked with the Intelligence Community on this analysis and drafted the section addressing the threat to civil aviation, which said:

Our review of the evidence... suggests the conspirators were guided in their selection of the method and venue of attack by carefully studying security procedures in place in the region. If terrorists operating in [the United States] are similarly methodical, they will identify serious vulnerabilities in the security system for domestic flights.

A 1997 update to the 1995 NIE concluded:

Civil aviation remains a particularly attractive target in light of the fear and publicity the downing of an airliner would evoke and the revelations last summer of the U.S. air transport sectors' vulnerabilities.

As a result of the increasing threats to aviation, Congress required the FAA and FBI to conduct joint threat and vulnerability assessments of security at select "high risk" U.S. airports and to provide [page 224] annual reports to Congress. A classified portion of the December 2000 report downplayed the threat to domestic aviation:

FBI investigations confirm domestic and international terrorist groups operating within the U.S. but do not suggest evidence of plans to target domestic civil aviation. Terrorist activity within the U.S. has focused primarily on fundraising,