

Recognizing the threat, the Intelligence Community warned regularly and repeatedly that al-Qa'ida and affiliated radicals sought to kill Americans on U.S. soil.

The FBI increased its focus on terrorism in the 1990s, but critics charge that it neither focused sufficiently on radical Islamist activities in the United States nor properly aligned itself to counter the growing danger of terrorism domestically. As a result, the critics say, radical Islamists were able to exploit our freedoms and operate undetected within the United States. Several senior FBI officials, [page 254] however, contend that countering terrorism at home was a top priority and that Islamic radicals simply did not present opportunities for the FBI to disrupt their activities.

[Other Intelligence Community members made only limited contributions to preventing attacks at home and refrained from activities that could be construed as monitoring American citizens. The CIA provided general assessments, noting the risk to the United States. NSA offered some leads related to possible radical activity in the United States, but chose not to intercept communications between individuals in the United States and foreign countries. In general, the Community as a whole did not come together to close gaps in coverage of international terrorist activity in the United States].

As is explained in other sections of this report, in the 1990s, it became clear that al-Qa'ida was a deadly adversary operating in America and able to levy attacks on U.S. soil. The relative immunity from international terrorism that America had enjoyed for many years was gone. Al-Qa'ida was also unusual in its dedication, size, organizational structure, and mission. As former CTC Chief Cofer Black testified, al-Qa'ida became more skilled and attracted more adherents throughout the 1990s, becoming in essence a small army by the end of the decade.

The Intelligence Community repeatedly warned that al-Qa'ida had both the capability and the intention to threaten the lives of thousands of Americans and that it wanted to strike within the United States. This information was conveyed in intelligence reports, broader intelligence assessments, counterterrorism policy documents, and classified Congressional testimony. Policymakers from the Clinton and Bush administrations have testified that the Intelligence Community repeatedly warned them of the danger al-Qa'ida posed and the urgency of the threat.