

- Former U.S. Attorney Mary Jo White testified that the FBI often lacked linguists competent in the languages and dialects spoken by radicals linked to al-Qa'ida.

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- An FBI agent with considerable counterterrorism experience noted that foreign governments often knew more about radical Islamist activity in the United States than did the U.S. Government because they saw this activity as a threat to their own existence.

As is discussed in other sections of this report, the Joint Inquiry record confirms that the FBI's decentralized structure and inadequate information technology made the Bureau unable to correlate the knowledge possessed by its components. The FBI did not gather intelligence from all its many cases nation-wide to produce an overall assessment of al-Qa'ida's presence in the United States. The Joint Inquiry has also found that many FBI field offices had not made counterterrorism a top priority and they knew little about al-Qa'ida before September 11.

The FBI also did not inform policymakers of the extent of terrorist activity in the United States, although former Director Freeh stated that he met regularly with senior U.S. Government officials to discuss counterterrorism. Former National Security Advisor Berger has testified that the FBI assured him that there was little radical activity in the United States and that this activity was "covered." Although the FBI conducted many investigations, these pieces were not fitted into a larger picture.

FBI officials argue that al-Qa'ida and its sympathizers proved a difficult target in the United States. Director Mueller contends that the hijackers did little to arouse suspicion in the United States, staying away from known terrorist sympathizers:

They gave no hint to those around what they were about. They came lawfully. They lived lawfully. They trained lawfully.

This judgment is corroborated by several senior FBI investigators who point out that, although "international radical fundamentalists" operate in the United States, "real al-Qa'ida members," those involved in planning or carrying out attacks, avoid other radicals and radical mosques as part of their tradecraft. As is discussed elsewhere in this report, that judgement is open to some question, based on what is now known about the activities of the hijackers in the United States.