

The handling of the Phoenix EC also exposed information sharing problems among FBI Headquarters elements. A number of analysts commented in Joint Inquiry interviews that the UBLU and RFU frequently do not share information with the International Terrorism analytic unit. A UBLU supervisor explained that the Investigative Services Division, of which the [page 348] analytic unit is a part, was not a “major player” and that information was often not shared with it. In testimony before the Joint Inquiry, the FBI’s Deputy Assistant Director for Counterterrorism Analysis referred to strategic analysis as the Bureau’s “poor stepchild” before September 11. As a result, strategic analysts were often marginalized by the operational units and rarely if ever received requests from those units for assessments of pending al-Qa’ida cases.

Even if the Phoenix EC had been transmitted to the International Terrorism Analytic Unit, its capacity to conduct strategic analysis on al-Qa’ida was limited because five of the unit’s analysts had been transferred to operational units. According to the Chief of the National Security Intelligence Section, the Bureau had no personnel dedicated solely to strategic analysis before September 11. The Joint Inquiry has also been told that, as competent new analysts arrived, UBLU and RFU would recruit them as operational support analysts or refuse to share information with them if they remain in the analytic unit.

Due to the FBI’s technological limitations, operational units, such as UBLU and RFU, controlled information flow. Strategic analysts often had to rely on operational units for incoming intelligence, a problem the FBI’s Deputy Assistant Director for Counterterrorism Analysis acknowledged before the Joint Inquiry: “[because] the FBI lacked effective data mining capabilities and analytical tools, it has often been unable to retrieve key information and analyze it in a timely manner—and a lot has probably slipped through the cracks as a result.” Thus, even if the project had been assigned to an al-Qa’ida analyst in the analytic unit, there can be no guarantee that the several reports the FBI had received about airplanes as weapons and terrorist networks sending students to flight schools in the United States would have been drawn together.

The handling of the Phoenix EC also illustrates the extent to which technological limitations affected information flow because most EC addressees have told the Joint Inquiry that they had not seen the EC before September 11. The FBI’s electronic system is not designed to ensure that all addressees receive communications, a point a Headquarters supervisory agent