

a. Difficulties of Gaining Actionable Intelligence on al-Qa'ida

[Several senior NSA officials, including the Deputy Director of NSA and Chief of the counterterrorism organization contended in interviews and testimony that information on terrorist plans and intentions was often not available [_____

_____]. Even when information was intercepted, the analyst often must interpret arcane, circumspect discussions, put them into context, and identify linkages to other known targets or activities. NSA's Director stated: "... we do not anticipate being able to provide detailed threat information from SIGINT in most cases." Indeed, SIGINT did not provide significant intelligence to prevent other major terrorist attacks against U.S. interests such as Khobar Towers, the East Africa U.S. Embassies, and *USS Cole*].

[However, these arguments are somewhat belied by evidence uncovered during the Joint Inquiry that identified several instances of communications providing some specifics in terms of a timeframe and general location for terrorist activity. In addition, the FBI acquired toll records that five or six hijackers communicated extensively abroad after they arrived in the United States. The Intelligence Community had no information prior to September 11, 2001 regarding these communications, and, as a result, does not know what clues they may have contained].

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[Page 400] [_____]. The Director of NSA, testifying about the targeting challenges facing NSA, said "cracking into these targets is hard – very hard – and SIGINT operations require considerable patience – sometimes over years – before they mature."