

b. Difficulties in Adjusting to Terrorist Targets

The communications sophistication of stateless terrorists in general and al-Qa'ida in particular clearly surprised NSA officials. The rise of al-Qa'ida seemingly paralleled in some respects what NSA's Director referred to as "the telecommunications and information revolution" of the past ten years. He noted that al-Qaida operatives are skilled users of the global telecommunications infrastructure, "al-Qa'ida is in many respects different from NSA's typical SIGINT targets of the past 50 years."

In spring 2001, NSA began to change direction: rather than analyzing *what was collected*, NSA would dissect its targets' communications practices to determine *what to collect*. This is commonly referred to at NSA as *hunting* rather than *gathering*. This procedure was in its infancy when the September 11 terrorist attacks occurred.

c. Problems Keeping Pace with [—————] Advances before September 11

[—————]

_____]. The Director of NSA did acknowledge NSA's deficiencies in dealing with some forms of modern communications, but was also quick to credit his organization for working on the building blocks before September 11, so that [Page 401] fielding additional capabilities after September 11 was expedited].

NSA's Director apparently felt handcuffed in his effort to move forward in this area, citing his inability to "churn" (redirect) some \$200 million into "new age signals ... because we were going to erode our coverage of [other intelligence issues] as part of this effort." Indeed, General