

unit. So there is a lot of duplication. . . . [T]he system is very cumbersome, and people unfortunately have just become very frustrated with it, to the point where . . . [w]hat will frequently happen, for example, is even though a field division sends a lead to headquarters and ACS, they are also e-mailing that communication to the particular FBI headquarters [supervisory special agent]. So they are getting it and working on it via the e-mail but not necessarily within the ACS system. . . . Even though a couple of years ago . . . there was a directive that went out to the field telling them to stop sending hard copies to headquarters because they should be retrieved electronically, it was well known, both in the field and at headquarters, that you wouldn't get the communication or there was a good chance that you weren't going to get it. As such, the field would routinely still send hard copy.

ACS requires that FBI analysts search for information relevant to their analytical responsibilities. This is in stark contrast to the CIA's automated system, which automatically routes communications to analysts that are relevant to their interests. Before September 11, 2001, many FBI field agents did not include sensitive information in ACS because they believed the system was not secure. In addition, many agents who did include information in ACS blocked access to it in order to limit the number of FBI [page 61] personnel who could obtain the information. Given these limitations, ACS does not provide assured retrieval of complete, authoritative information on any subject. The fact that many FBI personnel do not understand how to make maximum use of the limited capabilities of ACS and the FBI's other databases compounds the problem.

Because of its limitations, many agents simply did not use ACS as a research or case management tool. When the Phoenix FBI field office agent was drafting his July 2001 Electronic Communication, he had no easy or reliable way of querying a central FBI system to determine whether there were other reports on radical fundamentalists taking flight training or whether other FBI field offices were investigating similar cases. As a result, the agent did not know that another FBI field office had voiced concern about Middle Eastern men taking flight lessons in 1998 or that an operational unit in the Counterterrorism Section at FBI Headquarters had directed twenty-four field offices (including Phoenix) to pay close attention to certain Islamic students engaged in aviation training in 1999.