

The New York Times

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United States intelligence agencies in 1999. The analysis warned that bin Laden terrorists could hijack a jet and fly it into government buildings like the Pentagon.

Additionally, a flight school in Oklahoma that provided training last year to Zacarias Moussaoui, the so-called 20th hijacker in the Sept. 11 attacks, had been under scrutiny by the F.B.I. in 1998 after the discovery that another former student had been linked to the bombing that year of two American embassies in East Africa, attacks attributed to Al Qaeda. The school, the Airman Flight School in Norman, has cooperated with the F.B.I.

Congressional investigators say they are only now compiling a detailed chronology of what was known about potential terrorists receiving flight training here as Congress evaluates whether the F.B.I. and other law enforcement agencies failed to recognize signs that might have allowed the government to prevent the September attacks. At least six of the Sept. 11 hijackers received flight training in the United States.

The Phoenix memorandum, along with the disclosure this week that President Bush was warned in August of the possibility that Al Qaeda might be planning hijackings, have been seized on by lawmakers as evidence that the government missed signals of the coming attacks.

Spokesmen for F.B.I. headquarters in Washington, as well as for its field offices in New York and Oklahoma City, which investigated individual flight schools over the years, had no comment on the issue.

Lewis Schiliro, who retired two years ago as the bureau's assistant director in charge of its New York office, said in an interview that his agents had tried to follow up on information about the flight schools whenever possible. But he said that while the F.B.I. worried that Al Qaeda might hijack commercial planes, "never once did we really focus on the use of a plane as a weapon" and that it would have been "very difficult to connect the dots."

The F.B.I. did not alert other federal agencies about many of the results of its flight school investigations. The Phoenix memorandum, in fact, was sent to the Central Intelligence Agency only in recent weeks. The bureau's failure to alert other agencies is expected to be a focus of Congressional investigations into intelligence failures before Sept. 11.

Senator Charles E. Grassley of Iowa, a prominent critic of the F.B.I. and a senior Republican on the Judiciary Committee, said in a statement today that "it's clear the intelligence community had information about terrorist threats and hijacking years before the F.B.I. agent in Phoenix sent his warning memo ♦ that makes it even more indefensible that the F.B.I. failed to deal with the Phoenix memo last summer."

Law enforcement officials acknowledged that the F.B.I. never ordered a comprehensive investigation of flight schools before Sept. 11, even as individual F.B.I. offices were gathering compelling evidence about links between students trained at the schools and Al Qaeda.

In response to the uproar after the disclosure of the August warning to Mr. Bush, White House officials insisted that they had no serious evidence last summer that Al Qaeda was considering a suicide hijacking.

"I don't think anybody could have predicted that these people would take an airplane and slam it into the World Trade Center," Condoleezza Rice, the national security adviser, said on Thursday.

But since at least the mid-1990's, law enforcement officials have known that some terrorist organizations were considering suicide attacks using commercial jets.

In 1994, French investigators have said, a group of Algerian hijackers seized a Paris-bound Air France flight and planned to crash it into the Eiffel Tower or blow it up over Paris. The plot was foiled when French commandoes stormed the plane.

In 1995, Mr. Murad, the Pakistani pilot tied to Mr. bin Laden, was captured, and under interrogation by Philippines intelligence officers working with the F.B.I. and the C.I.A., American law enforcement officials said, he confessed on video to his role in the plot to bomb airliners over the Pacific.

The American officials said he also acknowledged he had planned to fly a plane packed with explosives into the C.I.A. headquarters or another federal building. Details of the plan had been shared with F.B.I. headquarters by the middle of 1996.

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