

Following the Money

Understanding how terrorists finance their operations is key to predicting and thwarting attacks

By Katherine McIntire Peters
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Three days before he boarded American Airlines Flight 11 at Boston's Logan International Airport on Sept. 11, 2001, Mohamed Atta drove to two grocery stores in Laurel, Md., from which he wired \$2,860 and \$5,000 to an account in the United Arab Emirates. The conspirator, who would hijack the first of four aircraft on that day's suicide mission, was a stickler for detail. Recently declassified documents captured in Afghanistan after the U.S. invasion in 2001 show that al Qaeda members were under pressure to not waste the organization's money. One document written by Mohammed Atef, a senior leader close to Osama bin Laden, angrily chastises an operative for purchasing an air conditioner: "Furniture used by brothers in al Qaeda is not considered private property . . . I learned that you did not submit the voucher to the accountant."

Marty Ficke, former special agent in charge at the New York field division for Homeland Security's Immigration and Customs Enforcement bureau, says, "My experience is you learn a lot about how an organization works by how they deal with money." Ficke, who ran the El Dorado Task Force, the government's largest multiagency money laundering investigation team, before retiring in January 2007, says the documents show a disciplined organization obsessed with paperwork and the flow of money.

Full story: http://www.govexec.com/story_page.cfm?filepath=/features/0608-01/0608-01s2.htm