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CIA Cited Risk Before Attack

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WASHINGTON — The U.S. government has gathered evidence that links some of the Sept. 11 hijackers to Osama bin Laden's network through phone intercepts, wire transfers and participation in Afghan training camps, officials said Wednesday.

Officials also said the CIA had developed general information a month before the attacks that heightened concerns that bin Laden and his followers were increasingly determined to strike on U.S. soil after several strikes overseas.

The information indicated bin Laden and his supporters "were trying to bring the fight to America" but details were lacking, a U.S. official told The Associated Press.

"There was something specific in early August that said to us that he was determined in striking on U.S. soil," the official said, speaking only on condition of anonymity. "But there was nothing about who, when, where or how."

The information prompted the CIA to issue a warning to federal agencies that U.S. interests overseas and stateside should be vigilant, the officials said. The warning, like the intelligence, was vague about how terrorists might strike, the officials said.

Meanwhile, the FBI is gathering more evidence that links some of the hijackers to bin Laden associates, law enforcement sources told the AP.

One of the most important pieces of evidence is a series of money transfers in the three days before the attacks between suspected hijacking ring leader Mohamed Atta and a Middle Eastern man suspected of being a key financial figure in bin Laden's network, the officials said, speaking only on condition of anonymity.

Atta sent several thousand dollars in suspected leftover hijacking funds back to Mustafa Ahmed in the United Arab Emirates. FBI agents are investigating whether Ahmed is an alias for a man U.S. authorities knew as Shayk Saïd, who is believed to be in charge of bin Laden's financial affairs, officials said.

Ahmed is believed to have left the United Arab Emirates on Sept. 11 for Pakistan and is a major focus of the FBI's global manhunt.

Another important piece of evidence, officials said, involved a

meeting two other hijackers, Khalid Almihdhar and Nawaf Alhazmi, had with a bin Laden associate last year in Malaysia.

The meeting was observed and recorded at the time, but its significance was not apparent until just a few weeks before the attacks, officials said. By that time, the two men already were in the United States.

The Malaysia meeting took on new significance when U.S. investigators developed evidence in Yemen that the man the two hijackers met with was involved in the planning of the USS Cole bombing, the officials said.

Other evidence comes in the form of intercepted communications. German authorities have confirmed they intercepted a conversation of bin Laden supporters celebrating the suicide hijackings.

Another intercept, confirmed by Sen. Orrin Hatch, R-Utah, earlier in the investigation, detected a bin Laden sympathizer indicating that intended targets had been hit on Sept. 11.

Information gathered by U.S. and foreign intelligence services and law enforcement, officials said, also indicates four of the hijackers trained at Afghan camps tied to bin Laden's network.

Officials said the four included Wail Alshehri. Uncorroborated intelligence indicates he received several months of training last year in hand-to-hand combat, bomb-making and poison-mixing at Al Farooq camp in Khandhar, Afghanistan, officials said.

The others linked to Afghan camps are Waleed Alshehri, believed to be a brother of Wail Alshehri, Hamza Alghamdi, and Nawaq Alhamzi, the officials said.

In other developments:

–A judge in Alexandria, Va. ordered Luis Martinez-Flores held without bond after an FBI agent testified that he had misled investigators for several days about his involvement with two of the hijackers, Khalid Almihdhar and Hani Hanjour. Martinez-Flores' only involvement was to falsify documents to help the two men obtain Virginia identification cards, the FBI said.

–Another person charged with helping two other hijackers obtain false Virginia ID cards was released on \$25,000 bond Wednesday after a hearing in U.S. District Court in Alexandria. The FBI said Kenys Galicia admitted that she signed residency certification forms for Abdulaziz Alomari and Ahmed Saleh Alghamdi.

–The Giant food store chain confirmed Wednesday that two of its stores in suburban Washington were used by hijackers to wire money in the days before the attacks. Company spokesman Barry Scher said the hijackers wired money from stores in Laurel, Md., and Greenbelt, Md.