

Part 1 of a two-part series

The complicity connection: What did the Bush administration know and when did it know it?

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May 23, 2002—Former president George H. W. Bush on December 7 told a ceremony marking the 60th anniversary of Pearl Harbor: “On September 11, our nation suffered another surprise attack”

After six decades, some suggest there is evidence the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor was hardly a surprise. Now, eight months after September 11, questions are surfacing whether the terrorists’ attack on the United States was a surprise.

On May 15, for corporate media audiences, the Bush administration cover story about the events of 9–11 began to unravel. For independent media audiences, what has been apparent since September 11, 2001, the unraveling continues.

On May 15, the CBS Evening News reported that George W. Bush knew about potential hijackings that were being attributed to Osama bin Laden as early as August 2001. The best defense White House spokesman Ari Fleischer could muster about the report was “Who would have thought they would turn planes into missiles”

National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice could only repeat what CIA director George Tenet has been saying for months: the dates, times, places were known by only a few planning the event.

The Washington Post, while continuing to blithely report the “official story,” indicated in its May 16 story about the CBS report and White House response, that another shoe is about to drop. Senator Richard Shelby of the Senate Intelligence Committee hinted he had possession of documents that indicated Bush and other top administrations knew about the planes as bombs/weapons plans.

What is surprising about this “surprise” story is that events following September 11, and a look at what has been reported in the public domain for the past several years, clearly revealed the administration knew more than its pleaded ignorance and more than the complementary mainstream media stories purporting a crisis of competence in the intelligence communities.

The FBI blamed a lack of Arabic translators on its failure to intercept the terrorist attack on U.S. soil. However, reading Arabic is not a necessary research tool, though reading English—

especially English language newspapers—does help in piecing together who knew what when about September 11.

This report originally published in December 2001 details “evidence” of what the U.S. knew. It should dissuade anyone who thinks Osama bin Laden just appeared on the CIA’s radar screen in September 2001. The items demolish the argument, “Who would have ever thought such a thing could happen.”

It indicates the past week’s spike of stories are just the tip of the iceberg.

Media Blamed Intelligence Failures Post-September 11

Explanations about how the nation’s 13 intelligence agencies failed to detect and prevent the 9/11 attacks appeared in the media immediately after the event and continue today, so it is not surprising that the corporate media and their audiences are “surprised” by the revelation that Bush and his minions knew about the hijackers and hijackings the summer before.

For example, in a story about the bumbling intelligence agencies, reporter Michael Isikoff wrote in the November 19 issue of Newsweek magazine, “Sources tell Newsweek that in the year prior to September 11, the FBI allowed some counterintelligence wiretaps of suspected terrorists in the New York area to lapse. In addition, some tapes of terrorists suspects were never transcribed for a lack of Arabic translators.”

Intelligence operations depend too much on high-tech surveillance and not enough on recruiting “unsavory” informants inside foreign terrorist organizations. —Former president and former CIA director George W. Bush, a public forum in Boston, September 13.

“Osama bin Laden and his forces kept intelligence agencies off-guard for months before the September 11 attacks by feeding disinformation over intelligence agency-monitored communications systems.” —Los Angeles Times, September 21.

The Bush administration received a “lot of signs” that terrorists were planning attacks, but extensive efforts by intelligence agencies failed to pick up enough information to stop the attacks. —Secretary of State Colin Powell, October 3.

“Intelligence officials stunned by al Qaeda’s global grasp,” roared the headline of a New York Times story carried in the San Francisco Chronicle on October 14. The subhead: “Drastic shift in goals of Islamic extremists went undetected.”

There were plenty of warnings, but U.S. officials did not conceive the terrorists could pull off such a coordinated attack on U.S. soil. —MSNBC Special Report, December 29.

The Media’s Own Stories Showed the Wrong-headedness of their Reporting

An examination of events during the past three years shows quite the opposite of the intelligence communities’ denials. U.S. intelligence agencies—foreign intelligence under the rubric of the

CIA and domestic surveillance agencies like the FBI, which have a \$30 billion annual budget—knew a staggering amount about “September 11” before it happened.

These events mixed with the official denials raise the question of a cover-up or complicity in the events now known as September 11.

Three weeks after the attacks, a member of the audience of a forum broadcast October 1 on MSNBC challenged the “surprise” attack defense. “The public does not believe the CIA did not know. We’ve tracked [bin Laden] for years,” he said. “The American public doesn’t buy it was a screw-up. We knew.”

Here is some of what “we knew.”

Immediate Official Warnings

In June, the BND, the German intelligence service, warned the CIA and Israel that Middle Eastern terrorists were “planning to hijack commercial aircraft to use as weapons to attack important symbols of American and Israeli culture,” according to a story in Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung on September 14 as reported by www.copvicia.com. An Iranian detained by Hamburg police gave them this information.

Russian President Vladimir Putin in August ordered his intelligence service to warn the U.S. government “in the strongest possible terms” of imminent attacks on airports and government buildings. Putin made his comments in an interview on MSNBC on September 15.

The Jerusalem Post on September 18 and the Los Angeles Times on September 20 carried accounts originally reported in the September 17 Sunday (London) Telegraph that in August, Mossad, the Israeli intelligence service, warned the CIA and FBI that “large-scale terrorist attacks on highly visible targets on the American mainland are imminent.” The CIA, FBI, and Mossad have denied the story.

Twelve days before the attacks, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak warned the U.S. that “something (will) happen.” In an Associated Press interview published in the Lebanese newspaper As-Safir on December 7, he said he had no idea of the enormity of the attack or the targets.

In the week before the attacks, India’s intelligence mechanism intercepted communication from bin Laden referring to the September 11 attack, according to the San Francisco Chronicle which obtained a confidential law enforcement memo.

In August in Boston, the FBI arrested an Islamic militant who possessed flight manuals. A September 13 Reuters news story reported that French intelligence sources confirmed he was a key member of bin Laden’s network.

Sen. Dianne Feinstein (D-Ca), who sits on the Senate Intelligence Committee, told the San Francisco Chronicle on September 13 that “bin Laden’s people had made statements (in mid-to-

late August) carried in the Arab press in Great Britain that they were preparing to carry out unprecedented attacks in the United States.”

Closer to home, in August, the U.S. flight school where one hijacker and one alleged potential hijacker trained repeatedly warned the FBI of the exact nature of a terrorist attack. An instructor at a Minnesota flight school warned the FBI one student might be planning “to use a commercial plane loaded with fuel as a weapon,” according to a December 22 New York Times story. This student, Zaccaria Moussaoui, is accused of conspiracy in the hijacking events of September 11.

In addition, the Arizona branch of the school told the FAA earlier this year that a student who spoke little English was at their school. Officials say this Saudi student crashed the plane into the Pentagon.

In addition to the warnings from foreign governments, the U.S. State Department issued a world-wide alert in May: “American citizens may be the target of a terrorist threat from extreme groups with links to Osama bin Laden’s al Qaeda organization.”

The bulletin also said, “Such individuals have not distinguished between official and civilian targets.” The report continued, “As always, we take this information seriously. U.S. Government facilities worldwide remain on heightened alert.

A September 7 State Department memorandum updated the warning to include threats to U.S. military bases in Japan and Korea.

State Department spokesman Richard Boucher mentioned the bulletin at a routine media briefing September 7. Boucher said the State Department wanted “to ensure that the general American public is aware of this potential danger to their safety.”

Few media outlets reported the State Department warning. At the time, the cable stations were using Rep. Gary Condit (D-Ca) as a punching bag. They were pontificating around the clock whether he should keep his seat on the House Intelligence Committee since he might be a “security threat.” The reason: his relationship with Chandra Levy, an intern at the U.S. Bureau of Prisons, who disappeared on April 30, 2001.

On September 10, the night before the attacks, San Francisco International airport “security” warned Mayor Willie Brown, who was scheduled to fly from San Francisco to New York the next morning, about a potential hijacking threat.

More Official Warnings

Three executive and legislative branch-mandated reports, issued between June 2000 and January 2001, warned the U.S. faced terrorist threats on its own soil.

In June 2000, the bipartisan National Commission on Terrorism in a 44-page report was clear: Terrorists today “seek to inflict mass casualties” in the United States and overseas. The report

warned the Department of Defense should have detailed plans to respond to a catastrophic terrorist attack that could kill “tens of thousands” of people in the U.S.

“ . . . Today’s terrorists seek to inflict mass casualties and they are attempting to do so both overseas and on American soil. They are less dependent on state sponsorship and are, instead, forming loose, transnational affiliations based on religious or ideological affinity and a common hatred of the U.S.”

Six months later on December 14, the Advisory Panel to Assess Domestic Response Capabilities for Terrorism Involving Weapons of Mass Destruction, chaired by Virginia Gov. James Gilmore, issued its congressionally mandated report which came to similar conclusions.

In January 2001, a third panel chaired by former senators Warren Rudman and Gary Hart predicted a “catastrophic attack” on the U.S. (The panel hedged its bets saying an attack was likely within “the next 25 years.”) The Defense Department commissioned the National Security in the 21st Century Report. CNNfyi.com reported this story February 1. Interviewed after September 11, Rudman said his commission predicted almost precisely the cataclysmic event which occurred.

What the Clinton Administration Knew and Did

More than three years ago, bin Laden ordered his followers to attack U.S. and British worldwide interests. Attacks on U.S. embassies in Africa in 1998 and on the U.S.S. Cole in 2000 followed.

In the wake of military action against Afghanistan, former Clinton administration officials seeking—on and off the record—to counter claims they gave bin Laden a free ride, say they were keenly aware of the threat he posed and attempted to track him down.

In 1998, the CIA secretly sent American officers to northern Afghanistan to convince Ahmed Shah Massoud, then leader of the anti-Taliban forces, to capture and possibly kill bin Laden.

According to a September 30, 2001, New York Times article based on interviews with current and former American officials, Clinton administration lawyers had determined that the U.S. could “legitimately” seek to kill bin Laden and his lieutenants despite the presidential ban on assassinations. They had concluded such efforts were either acts of war or national self-defense and therefore legitimate under both American and international law, the story reported. This report decimates the argument that the CIA’s hands were legally tied in eliminating bin Laden.

During 1999, the CIA secretly “prepared” dozens of commandos from the Pakistani intelligence agency to capture or kill Osama bin Laden in Afghanistan, according to an October 3 Washington Post story. The plan was abandoned when a military coup ousted then Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif. The new leader, General Pervez Musharraf, refused to carry out the operation.

In 2000, President Clinton issued an intelligence finding for the extradition of bin Laden because of his indictment in the 1993 Twin Towers attack.

What the Clinton Administration Knew

In the mid-1990s, firefighters found a laptop belonging to the mastermind of the 1993 World Trade Center bombing after his apartment caught fire. The laptop contained plans to hijack a dozen U.S. airplanes—all on the same day.

Since 1998, federal prosecutors and investigators have known that two members of Osama bin Laden's cadre trained in the United States as airplane pilots. They presented the information in early 2001 at the trial of four men accused of bombing the U.S. Embassy in Kenya.

Bin Laden could strike 'at any time' against symbols of American power, CIA Director George Tenet told Congress in February 1999, more than two years before the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon.

The same month, Robert Oakley, a former ambassador to Pakistan and a former State Department counterterrorism expert, gave what could be the answer to the "why do they hate us" question that surfaced after September 11: "In Pakistan," he said, "the principal reasons for bin Laden's popular appeal are growing. People feel they have no voice. They look at a people with great wealth while they live in deep poverty. They resent the personal corruption of the Saudis and the power of the United States."

What (Else) the Bush II Administration Knew

"The threat from terrorism is real. It is immediate, and it is evolving," Tenet said in remarks prepared for delivery to the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence last February 7. Tenet said terrorists were seeking out "softer" targets that provide opportunities for mass casualties.

Tenet called bin Laden and his "global network of lieutenants and associates" the "most immediate and serious threat." He said since 1998, bin Laden has "declared all U.S. citizens are legitimate targets of attack."

Tenet, who became director in July 1997, is the first CIA director in three decades to stay in office after a change of administrations.

U.S. Contacts with "The Enemy"

The most curious contact is encapsulated in this banner headline in the French newspaper *Le Figaro*: "Bin Laden meets the CIA in Dubai." The kicker headline: "Gravely ill, enemy number one stayed in an American hospital in the [United Arab] Emirates at the beginning of the summer."

In its October 31 editions, *Le Figaro* reported bin Laden, who suffers from a severe chronic kidney disorder, stayed at the American hospital in Dubai from July 4–14. There, he reportedly met with an official of the CIA. According to the paper, a professional partner of the hospital's

administration saw the local CIA representative, who is well known in the area, go to bin Laden's hospital suite.

The CIA representative, who bragged to his friends about visiting bin Laden, was at CIA headquarters on July 15, the day after bin Laden left the hospital.

Then this blockbuster: "According to various Arab diplomatic sources and French intelligence itself, precise information was communicated to the CIA concerning terrorist attacks aimed at American interests in the world, including its own territory."

The story explained, "The contacts between the CIA and bin Laden date back to 1979, when representing the family firm in Istanbul, he [bin Laden] began to recruit volunteers from the Arab-Islamic world to the Afghan resistance against the Red Army.

"Following their investigations [of the August, 1998 attacks on the U.S. embassies in Africa], the FBI discovered 'structures' that the CIA had developed with its 'Islamic friends' for years. The meeting in Dubai, therefore, is nothing but the logical follow-up of a 'certain American policy.'"

Scoop at www.scoop.co.nz translated the French story using a computer program.

Another translation of the story used the phrase "financing agreements" instead of "structures."

This story would certainly explain the fissures between the CIA and FBI.

Michael Ruppert of From the Wilderness <www.copvicia.com> reported that in stories published last November 1 in Le Figaro, the hospital staff denies reports of a meeting between the CIA and bin Laden. Also, according to Ruppert, last November 1, the Ananova press agency reported the CIA denied any meeting between the CIA and bin Laden at any time.

Also last July, according to an investigation conducted by The [UK] Guardian, three U.S. State Department officials from the Clinton administration "indicated" to former Pakistani foreign minister Niaz Naik that the Bush administration was planning to launch military action against Afghanistan unless the Taliban turned over bin Laden. Pakistan was to help influence the Taliban. The Pakistan government passed this information on to the Taliban.

The Guardian's interpretation in its September 22 story: "The serious nature of what they [the Taliban] were told raises the possibility that bin Laden, far from launching the attacks on the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon out of the blue 10 days ago, was launching a pre-emptive strike in response to what he saw as U.S. threats."

The Guardian says the exchange took place at a UN-convened meeting of senior American, Russian, Iranian, and Pakistani officials in Berlin. The purpose of the meeting, the third in a series of brainstorming sessions, was to find a negotiated solution to the civil war in Afghanistan, end terrorism and heroin trafficking, and discuss humanitarian aid.

One of the U.S. officials, Lee Coldren, former head of the State Department's Office of Pakistan, Afghan and Bangladesh Affairs, confirmed a discussion about the "broad outline" of the American position. He told the Guardian that the U.S. officials mentioned the plan "in passing" based on "hearsay from US officials." He recalled some discussion that the US was "so disgusted with the Taliban that they might be considering some military action." The two other U.S. officials denied the conversation.

However, the BBC last September 18 reported the details of what the U.S. officials told him. Naik told the BBC that the officials said military action against Afghanistan would start by the middle of October. They said unless bin Laden were turned over soon the U.S. would take military action to kill or capture bin Laden and the Taliban leader, Mullah Omar. He said the overall objective would be to topple the Taliban and install a moderate transitional government. He was told the U.S. would launch its attacks from bases in Tajikistan, that Uzbekistan would participate, and 17,000 Russian troops were on stand-by.

Naik said it was unlikely the U.S. government would drop its plan even if the Taliban surrendered bin Laden immediately.

Next in Part 2: Strange Goings On

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