

Director of congressional probe into September 11 terror attacks resigns

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1 May 2002

The top staff official in the joint congressional investigation into the September 11 attacks on the Pentagon and World Trade Center has resigned, a development that will further delay the holding of public hearings into the worst-ever terrorist attack in the United States.

L. Britt Snider, staff director of the investigation, responsible for hiring the 30 investigators and aides currently working on the probe, quit last week after a series of intense but unpublicized conflicts within the staff and among the members of the intelligence committees of the House and Senate.

Neither Senator Robert Graham (Democrat of Florida) nor Congressman Porter Goss (Republican of Florida), the co-chairmen of the investigation, would give any details of the reasons for Snider's departure, calling it a confidential "personnel matter." The *Los Angeles Times* reported, "A Congressional aide, who asked to remain anonymous, said Mr. Snider had made an error in judgment that lawmakers could not overlook, but declined to elaborate."

Snider will be replaced temporarily by his deputy, Rick Cinquegrana, a former aide to right-wing Republican Congressman Christopher Cox in the House of Representatives investigation into alleged transfers of US nuclear missile technology to China during the Clinton administration.

Snider is a long-time CIA employee who retired last year as inspector-general of the agency. He has close ties with current CIA Director George Tenet, who appointed him to the post. Tenet was staff director of the Senate Intelligence Committee in the late 1980s and early 1990s, when Snider was the committee's general counsel.

The two committees were to begin joint hearings in late May—more than four months after the investigation

was initially announced, and more than eight months after the terrorist attacks themselves. Now press reports suggest that Snider's removal may be followed by a further staff purge, with the hearings pushed back well into the summer.

A section of the Republican right initially criticized Snider's appointment, suggesting that he was too close to Tenet, the only prominent Clinton administration official to be kept on after George W. Bush entered the White House. Bush has continued to back Tenet however, and the White House praised the selection of Snider by the two congressional committees, even as it repeatedly sought to block or delay the investigation.

The *Los Angeles Times* commented: "Snider's brief tenure underscores the politically treacherous nature of the committee's task. Even among the four ranking members of the House and Senate committees, there is tension over how aggressively to pursue the inquiry. Members agree the public deserves straight answers about intelligence failures, but are at odds over whether the inquiry should seek to place direct blame at a time when few in Washington are eager to be seen as unpatriotic."

While the immediate reasons for his removal are quite murky, Snider's ouster once again puts a spotlight on the extraordinary fact that nearly nine months after the September 11 attacks there has still been no congressional investigation into why the US intelligence apparatus failed to detect or prevent the murder of 3,000 people, despite numerous warnings.

There is growing public suspicion that the opposition to such an investigation is motivated by the Bush administration's desire to cover up connections between the intelligence agencies and the suicide hijackings, including evidence that suggests they had considerable advance knowledge of the methods to be

used, the targets, and even the identities of many of the hijackers. [Was the US government alerted to September 11 attack?, four-part series]

Such suspicions were expressed in a statement issued April 12 by Congresswoman Cynthia McKinney, a Georgia Democrat, suggesting that the Bush administration had an ulterior motive in its launching of military operations in Central Asia—the interests of the oil industry, to which Bush, Cheney and many other top officials have the closest ties.

McKinney declared: “We deserve to know what went wrong on September 11 and why. After all, we hold thorough public inquiries into rail disasters, plane crashes, and even natural disasters in order to understand what happened and to prevent them from happening again or minimizing the tragic effects when they do. Why then does the administration remain steadfast in its opposition to an investigation into the biggest terrorism attack upon our nation?”

McKinney noted that “news reports from *Der Spiegel* to the London *Observer*, from the *Los Angeles Times* to MSNBC to CNN, indicate that many different warnings were received by the administration. In addition, it has even been reported that the United States government broke bin Laden’s secure communications before September 11.”

In an interview with a Berkeley, California radio station, the congresswoman asked, “What did this administration know and when did it know it, about the events of September 11? Who else knew, and why did they not warn the innocent people of New York who were needlessly murdered? ... What do they have to hide?” She pointed to the connection between the 2000 presidential election and the post-September 11 attacks on democratic rights, saying, “an administration of questionable legitimacy has been given unprecedented power.”

McKinney’s comments, which referred to only a portion of the evidence of US government involvement in September 11, provoked a hysterical reaction in the media and on Capitol Hill. She was denounced by both Democratic and Republican congressional leaders, after which a media blackout was imposed on the issues she raised.

However, in what appears to be a tacit attempt to answer allegations that the US government had extensive advance warning of the attacks, FBI Director

Robert Mueller gave a speech a week later to the Commonwealth Club in San Francisco. He declared that the FBI was still not in possession of any significant information about the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, despite the mobilization of hundreds of agents, not only in the United States, but also in Europe, the Middle East, Southeast Asia and Afghanistan, over the past eight months.

According to the text of the speech released by the agency, Mueller said, “In our investigation, we have not uncovered a single piece of paper—either here in the United States or in the treasure trove of information that has turned up in Afghanistan and elsewhere—that mentioned any aspect of the September 11 plot.” He added that the FBI has not found any computers, laptops, hard drives or other electronic media that contain references to the attacks.

If this claim were true—and there are obvious reasons for doubt—it would suggest that the basis for the Bush administration’s invasion and occupation of Afghanistan is a monstrous lie. From the time the first US bombs were dropped on that devastated country, the White House claimed to be in possession of convincing evidence that the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon had been launched from Afghanistan by Osama bin Laden, with the tacit consent of the Afghan government. Now the official chiefly responsible for the administration’s own investigation into September 11 declares there is not a shred of evidence connecting Afghanistan to the terrorist attack.



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