

# September 11 cover-up crumbles: Who was covering for Moussaoui, and why?

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The revelations over the past two weeks about advance warnings of the September 11 terrorist attacks have focused particularly on the role of Zaccarias Moussaoui, the Islamic fundamentalist arrested last August in Minneapolis. Moussaoui is the only person facing criminal charges for allegedly playing a role in the attacks that destroyed the World Trade Center and killed more than 3,000 people.

Fragments of a May 22 letter from Colleen Rowley, an official in the Minneapolis FBI office, to FBI Director Robert Mueller were reported in the press last week. Virtually the entire text of the letter is published in the current issue of *Time* magazine and posted on its web site, [www.time.com](http://www.time.com). The letter documents not merely incompetence and bureaucratic indifference, but active opposition to an investigation of Moussaoui, sabotage so obvious that it led Minneapolis FBI personnel to joke that agents of Osama bin Laden must have penetrated the J. Edgar Hoover building.

Ever since September 11 the Bush administration has steadfastly maintained its opposition to any investigation into the circumstances leading up to the suicide hijackings, while offering shifting and contradictory explanations of how it was possible for terrorists to seize control of four commercial airliners simultaneously and hit the World Trade Center and Pentagon.

At first the White House, FBI and CIA claimed that the attacks came as a bolt from the blue, taking the US government totally by surprise, despite its vast intelligence apparatus employing hundreds of thousands of personnel. Anyone who questioned this claim, especially in view of the longstanding ties between the US intelligence services and Osama bin Laden, the alleged inspirer of the attacks, was branded a “conspiracy theorist.”

The administration launched its long-planned war against Afghanistan, bombing and then invading that

impoverished country, killing thousands of people—from Taliban rank-and-file soldiers to civilians in peasant villages and urban centers—who had no demonstrable connection to the destruction of the World Trade Center.

In the name of the “war on terrorism,” the administration drafted and pushed through Congress legislation that vastly expanded the powers of the government to spy on, arrest and imprison both American citizens and immigrants. These new powers were needed, according to Attorney General Ashcroft and other Bush spokesmen, to prevent a repetition of the “surprise attack” of September 11.

Then came the revelation this month that September 11 was not such a surprise. Press reports compelled the White House to admit that Bush had been briefed on August 6, 2001—more than a month before the attacks on New York and Washington—about Al Qaeda threats to hijack US commercial airliners.

The official story changed abruptly. Instead of no advance warning, White House and FBI spokesmen now claimed there had been too many warnings. The evidence had been plentiful, but so fragmentary that no one was able to put it together in time to forestall the hijackings.

With undisguised contempt for public opinion, the White House offered a new cover story that directly contradicted the old one that the White House had maintained for eight months. The new version, however, failed to explain why Bush & Co. had concealed the August 6 briefing and other evidence of advance warnings for months on end.

The American media dutifully swallowed the new set of lies without protest. Press accounts were filled with references to the failure to “connect the dots,” as though elaborate mental gymnastics were required to see the relationship between a warning of Islamic fundamentalist activity at US pilot-training schools (from the Arizona FBI) and the arrest (by the Minneapolis FBI) of

Moussaoui, an Islamic fundamentalist who paid cash to be trained to fly a Boeing 747 while he could not even pilot a small plane.

This new cover story lasted barely a week before it was exploded by Rowley's 13-page letter to Mueller and the Senate Intelligence Committee. Among other things, Rowley revealed that the local FBI reports from Arizona and Minneapolis had ended up on the desk of the same official at FBI headquarters, David Frasca, head of the Radical Fundamentalists Unit. Even on the morning of September 11, as the Minneapolis FBI agents were watching television coverage of the suicide attacks on the Twin Towers, Frasca called Rowley to tell her not to proceed with an investigation of Moussaoui because Minneapolis might "screw up" something else going on elsewhere in the country.

Nor were these the isolated actions of a single misguided official. Rowley points out, "Despite FBI leaders' full knowledge of all the items mentioned herein ... the SSA [supervisory special agent], his unit chief, and other involved HQ personnel were allowed to stay in their positions and, what's worse, occupy critical positions in the FBI's SIOC Command Center post-September 11th. (The SSA in question actually received a promotion some months afterward!)"

Rowley's letter confirms that there was extensive discussion within the government on the danger of hijackings by Islamic fundamentalists, although the public was not informed. Repeated efforts to investigate were being thwarted. Top-level FBI officials were protecting Moussaoui and his confederates, running interference for him when his own reckless and impulsive conduct brought him to the attention of the authorities. The question is, why?

There are two possible explanations. The first is that Moussaoui and others were being protected because they were engaged in operations that had the support of the US government—in Chechnya or other territories of the former Soviet Union, in Bosnia, or elsewhere. Moussaoui himself was active in recruiting Islamic fundamentalists to fight in Chechnya against the Russian army.

CIA Director William Casey initiated the recruitment of Islamic fundamentalists from around the world to go to Afghanistan in the 1980s to fight in the decade-long guerrilla war against the Soviet military intervention. They received training in terrorist tactics, including the planting of bombs, from US intelligence agents. This was the milieu out of which Osama bin Laden—himself a collaborator with the CIA in Afghanistan—recruited the

initial forces for his Al Qaeda organization.

After the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, many of these fighters, most of them Arabs, were allowed entry into the United States as a reward for their services in the war. In the aftermath of the Persian Gulf War, some of these Islamic fundamentalists turned against the US government, bombing the World Trade Center in 1993 and carrying out other attacks on US targets overseas. The phenomenon of former CIA-backed guerrillas using their US training to attack American targets became known as "blowback."

Many Islamic fundamentalists continued to make common cause with American imperialism, particularly in Bosnia, Chechnya, and other brutal guerrilla wars on the periphery of the former Soviet bloc. The US intelligence apparatus worked closely with these forces, particularly in Bosnia, Kosovo and Albania, but also in Chechnya and the former Soviet republics of Central Asia. US administrations regularly denounced the Russian military intervention in Chechnya—a position taken by George W. Bush as a candidate, which he abandoned only after September 11 in pursuit of Russian support for the US intervention in Central Asia.

It is thus quite possible that top US intelligence officials were aware of Moussaoui's role as a recruiter for the Islamic fundamentalist forces fighting Russian troops in Chechnya and sought to protect him from the attentions of lower-level FBI agents.

There is a second possibility, which largely coincides with the first, but with the sinister addition that the alliance of the CIA with Islamic fundamentalist terrorists may have included actions within the United States itself. In other words, the US intelligence apparatus was aware at some level of the unfolding plans for terrorist strikes against US targets, and let them proceed in order to provide a suitable pretext for the military action that the Bush administration and the Pentagon were planning to undertake in Central Asia.



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