

CIA briefing memo exposes Bush lies on 9/11

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The declassification and release of the president's daily brief (PDB) for August 6, 2001, coming on the heels of National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice's appearance before the commission appointed to investigate the events of September 11, has thoroughly exposed the official version of the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington as a tissue of lies.

Whatever shred of credibility remained for the Bush administration's claims that it had no prior warnings of an attack by Osama bin Laden's Al Qaeda network on the US mainland has been shattered by the publication of the CIA memo, entitled "Bin Laden Determined to Strike in US."

The administration's decision to release the memo, like every other concession it has made to demands for a public investigation of the 9/11 attacks, was taken in a grudging attempt to quell growing skepticism over the official line, and the vocal protests of family members of 9/11 victims, many of whom are outraged over White House stonewalling and sabotage of efforts to uncover the facts surrounding the worst single attack on US civilians in American history.

When the existence of the August 2001 PDB was first revealed in May of 2002, White House officials, first and foremost, Condoleezza Rice, dismissed it as irrelevant. Rice declared at the time that the memo dealt entirely with possible terrorist attacks outside the US. She was, as is now proven, lying then, and, as even a cursory examination of her sworn testimony last week before the 9/11 panel shows, she is lying still.

For nearly two years the White House refused to release the document, given to President Bush more than a month before the hijack-bombings of the World Trade Center and Pentagon. It only agreed to do so in the wake of the controversy sparked by the testimony last month of Bush's former counter-terrorism chief, Richard Clarke, who told the 9/11 panel that the Bush administration took no serious action in response to multiple warnings of an impending, massive attack within the US by Al Qaeda, and then exploited the death of nearly 3,000 people on September 11, 2001 to implement an agenda for invading and occupying Iraq that had preoccupied Bush, Cheney, Rumsfeld and company from the outset of the Bush administration.

The content of the August 6, 2001 PDB makes clear why the administration was so reluctant to release the document. It is a clear and stark warning that Al Qaeda is actively preparing an attack within the US, that its previous attacks on US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania show that it has the capability to do so, and that a likely method of attack involves the hijacking of one or more US commercial aircraft.

In her April 8 testimony before the 9/11 panel, Rice, under prodding from one of the commissioners, former Watergate prosecutor Richard Ben-Veniste, gave out the title of the August 6 presidential brief. The official heading of the suppressed document produced an audible gasp from the audience in the hearing room, which included dozens of family members of 9/11 victims.

Yet Rice continued to lie about the contents and implications of the PDB. Her dissembling had three essential components.

* Lie number one: Rice declared numerous times that the PDB was not a "threat warning." It was merely a "historical" review of past events and old intelligence, and contained no warnings of current threats. Nor did it,

she claimed, give any indication as to specific cities or buildings to be targeted.

* Lie number two: Notwithstanding the title of the document, Rice continued to maintain that it contained no warnings of attacks within the US.

* Lie number three: Rice reiterated her previous assertions that the PDB in no way pointed to the possibility of hijacked airplanes being used as missiles.

Unfortunately for Rice and the rest of the Bush administration, the plain language of the document, and the actual context in which it appeared, flatly contradict all three contentions.

The claim that the memo was purely of a "historical" character and contained no warnings of current or specific threats is belied by the following information in the document:

Al Qaeda, it said, had active cells in the US that were planning attacks. It mentioned the existence of such cells in California and New York. It said the FBI had collected information since 1998 indicating "patterns of suspicious activity in this country consistent with preparations for hijackings or other types of attacks, including *recent* surveillance of federal buildings in New York." (Our emphasis).

The document also referred to the World Trade Center bombing of 1993 in connection with a statement by bin Laden that he wanted to follow the example of World Trade Center bomber Ramzi Yousef and "bring the fighting to America." It further said that the foiled Al Qaeda plot to bomb the airport in Los Angeles during the millennium celebrations of December-January 2000 "may have been part of bin Laden's first serious attempt to implement a terrorist strike in the US." It cited statements from convicted plotter Ahmed Ressam to the FBI that bin Laden was aware of the plot and that a top bin Laden lieutenant helped facilitate it. (This history, it should be noted, was anything but remote, since the aborted attack on Los Angeles occurred only twenty months prior to the August 6, 2001 briefing).

The document went on to say that the FBI was conducting 70 full-field investigations throughout the US into bin Laden threats, and that the FBI and CIA were investigating a tip that bin Laden supporters in the US were planning attacks with explosives. (Why would the FBI and CIA be conducting such probes if there were no current threats? Rice did not explain this conundrum).

Finally—and in a sense most damaging to Rice's characterization of the memo as merely of "historical" interest—the CIA briefers wrote that bin Laden was "patient," that he began planning for attacks years in advance, and was not deterred by setbacks. This comment could have only one meaning: it was a specific caution against any tendency to belittle the looming threat on the grounds that most of the hard information at hand dealt with past events and previously gathered intelligence.

Rice's second lie—that the PDB did not contain threat warnings of attacks within the US—is contradicted by virtually everything in the document, beginning with the title. Among the specific potential targets named in the memo are: California, New York and Washington DC. The memo, moreover, suggests that federal buildings in New York and the World Trade Center are prime objectives.

Rice's third lie—that no one could reasonably be expected to infer from the PDB that bin Laden might seek to use hijacked planes as bombs—is perhaps the most cynical of all. The August 6 PDB occurred in the midst of growing alarms from local FBI offices over a suspicious pattern of Arab and Muslim immigrants taking training courses in the piloting of commercial jets at US flight schools. On July 10, less than a month before Bush received the CIA briefing while vacationing at his Texas ranch, an FBI agent in the Phoenix, Arizona office sent a memo to FBI headquarters in Washington urging that it undertake a national survey of American flight schools to see if there was evidence of an Islamist terrorist plot to hijack commercial aircraft.

Ten days later, Italian authorities, in collaboration with the US, shut down air space around Genoa, the site of the Group of 8 summit, and declared the area a no-fly zone. War ships were stationed in the area as well. These precautions were taken specifically out of concern that Al Qaeda terrorists might hijack airplanes and use them to bomb the summit, which was attended by the leaders of the major powers, including George W. Bush.

In his testimony before the 9/11 commission, Richard Clarke said he briefed Rice, to whom he reported, on the warnings that terrorists might use aircraft to attack the G-8 summit. Rice herself testified that she knew at the time that Italian and American authorities were acting to guard the summit from air attacks.

Finally, one week after Bush received the August 6 PDB, immigration authorities in Minneapolis, Minnesota arrested Zaccarias Moussaoui, an Islamic fundamentalist extremist who had sought training in flying a Boeing 747 at a Minneapolis-area flight school. The US government has since charged Moussaoui with being a co-conspirator in the September 11 attacks.

At the time of Moussaoui's detention, FBI officials in Minneapolis sent a series of urgent requests to FBI headquarters in Washington for authorization to pursue an investigation into the man's suspected links to Al Qaeda. The agents explicitly cited fears that Moussaoui was training to fly commercial jets in order to pilot one into a skyscraper, and named the World Trade Center as a likely target. Top FBI officials denied their requests and refused to authorize a search of Moussaoui's computer hard drive.

Neither the Bush administration, nor congressional investigators, nor any other official body has ever explained this extraordinary decision on the part of FBI headquarters. One thing can be said for certain, however: had the Bush White House been seriously interested in pursuing the warnings contained in the PDB it received one week prior to Moussaoui's detention and two weeks after the Genoa summit, the alarms raised by the Minneapolis FBI would not have gone unheeded and steps would have been taken that would have likely unraveled the plot that was, within a few weeks, to destroy the World Trade Center and the lives of some 3,000 civilians.

Instead, Bush remained on vacation at his Crawford, Texas ranch for another three weeks, fishing and clearing brush. And, as Rice has acknowledged, the first and only cabinet meeting prior to 9/11 dedicated to a discussion of the threat of Al Qaeda terrorist attacks occurred on September 4, 2001—one week before the hijack-bombings.

Even as Rice insisted to the 9/11 commission that the August 6, 2001 PDB did not contain warnings of an imminent attack in the US, she maintained that the Bush administration vigorously acted to protect the American people, issuing orders, alerts and instructions to all relevant intelligence and police agencies, as well as to the air transport industry. She repeatedly spoke of "tasking" the FBI to conduct intensive "full-field" investigations into reports of Al Qaeda activity in the US.

But the remarks of two commissioners, which went uncontested, utterly exposed these claims as fraudulent. Jamie Gorelick, deputy attorney general in the Clinton administration, said:

"Secretary [Norman] Mineta, the secretary of transportation, had no idea of a threat. The administration of the FAA [Federal Aviation Administration], responsible for security on our airlines, had no idea. Yes, the attorney general was briefed, but there was no evidence of any activity by him about this.

"You indicate in your statement that the FBI tasked its field offices to find out what was going on out there. We have no record of that. The Washington field office international terrorism people say they never heard about the warnings, they were not asked to come to the table and shake those trees. SACs, special agents in charge, around the country—Miami in particular—had no knowledge of this."

Another commissioner, former Democratic congressman Timothy Roemer, said:

"We have done thousands of interviews here at the 9/11 commission. We've gone through literally millions of pieces of paper. To date, we have found nobody—nobody at the FBI who knows anything about a tasking of field offices.

"We have talked to the director at the time of the FBI during this threat period, Mr. Pickard. He said he did not tell the field offices to do this. And we have talked to the special agents in charge. They don't have any recollections of receiving a notice of threat."

Finally, there was the following exchange between commissioner Ben-Veniste and Rice:

Ben-Veniste: "Did the president meet with the director of the FBI between August 6 and September 11?"

Rice: "I will have to get back to you on that. I am not certain."

The facts cited here constitute only a small part of a veritable mountain of evidence demonstrating that the Bush administration, the CIA and the FBI played a crucial role in one of the greatest crimes in US history. In its aftermath, every branch of government, both political parties, and the media have been engaged in a non-stop effort to conceal this role from the American people. The 9/11 commission itself is part and parcel of the official coverup. It proceeds entirely from the premise that the ability of 19 foreign terrorists, a number of whom were known to US authorities, to commandeer four commercial jets and fly three of them into the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, without the slightest interference from the government or air industry officials, was simply a "failure of intelligence."

But this "failure" does not admit of any innocent explanation. Suffice it to note that even the most elementary and obvious measures taken in response to a welter of threat warnings in the summer of 2001 would have, at the very least, saved hundreds of lives. Had airport and airline officials been properly alerted, and the identities of known Al Qaeda operatives living in the US been revealed to them, it is highly unlikely that all, or even any, of the hijackers would have been able to board the targeted planes.

Had the World Trade Center, a likely target of attack, been alerted of the threats, and New York City officials been "tasked" with drawing up emergency response plans, orders would have gone out to vacate all buildings in the vicinity within seconds of the actual terrorist strike. Many lives would have been spared, even had the hijackers succeeded in hitting the first of the twin towers at the World Trade Center.

No such measures were taken. There are only two plausible explanations for this. One is a level of incompetence and indifference to the public's safety on the part of the Bush administration and the responsible federal authorities—beginning with the president himself and the power behind the throne, Vice President Dick Cheney—that rises to the level of criminal negligence. Here the emphasis must be placed on "criminal," especially in light of the cynical manner in which the tragedy of 9/11 was used to implement the most sweeping and reactionary foreign and domestic policies, including the barbaric invasion and occupation of Iraq and an unprecedented assault on democratic rights within the US.

The alternate explanation is a deliberate and calculated decision to “stand down” the intelligence and security apparatus, in order to allow a terrorist attack within the US to occur. Certainly the role of top FBI officials in running interference for Al Qaeda operatives and blocking an investigation of their flight training activities points in this direction.

It is not necessary to assume that those involved in such a conspiracy would have known of or anticipated the enormous scale of the attacks. They may have expected a “traditional” hijacking, for example. But it would not be the first time that a regime in crisis resorted to such methods to extricate itself from intractable problems and create conditions for stampeding the country behind policies that otherwise would be politically impossible to implement.

It is no secret that the “war on terror” that Bush announced within hours of the 9/11 attacks corresponds to the program of military aggression, domestic repression and global hegemony that was drawn up prior to the theft of the 2000 election by those who were to become leading figures in the present administration.

As Rice told the 9/11 commission, referring to the “opportunity” provided by the September 11 disaster:

“Bold and comprehensive changes are sometimes only possible in the wake of catastrophic events—events which create a new consensus that allows us to transcend old ways of thinking and acting.”



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