

No evidence of Iraq-Al Qaeda ties: 9/11 commission undermines another Bush war lie

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18 June 2004

The staff report of the 9/11 commission released June 16 further discredits one of the main lies employed by the Bush administration to justify its invasion and conquest of Iraq. It confirms that there was no Iraqi role in the September 11 terrorist attacks in New York and Washington and no “collaborative relationship” between Al Qaeda and former Iraqi president Saddam Hussein.

The 12-page report summarizes evidence provided from hundreds of documents and witnesses and represents the consensus, not only of the commission staff, but of currently serving CIA, FBI and other intelligence officials. While listing incidental contacts between Iraq and Al Qaeda, particularly in the period of Osama bin Laden’s residence in the Sudan, from 1991 to 1996, the report concluded: “We have no credible evidence that Iraq and Al Qaeda cooperated on attacks against the United States.”

In testimony the same day before the panel—formally known as the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States—FBI and CIA counterterrorism specialists agreed with the report’s findings that there was no evidence of cooperation between bin Laden and Saddam Hussein, or of any Iraqi involvement in the September 11 attacks.

This consensus flatly contradicts comments made by Bush and Cheney on the eve of the report’s release. On Monday, in a speech to a right-wing think tank, Cheney declared that Saddam Hussein “had long-established ties to Al Qaeda.” Defending that claim on Tuesday, Bush cited the role of Abu Musab Zarqawi, the alleged organizer of a series of bomb attacks in Iraq, who the administration says is an Al Qaeda leader.

This charge, even if true, would prove nothing about Al Qaeda ties with Iraq before the US occupation of the country. Zarqawi is reportedly a Palestinian who fought with the CIA-backed Islamic fundamentalists in Afghanistan and was severely wounded. He later received medical treatment in Baghdad, but there is no indication that he played any role in terrorist actions until after the US invasion.

There is considerable doubt about all the media reports on Zarqawi—it is by no means certain that such a person even exists, at least with the biography claimed by the US government—and the Bush administration has sought to build him up as a terrorist bogeyman responsible for much of the Iraqi resistance to the US occupation.

One 9/11 commissioner, Republican Fred Fielding, a former

White House counsel in the Reagan administration, sought to diminish the impact of the staff report and testimony on the Bush administration’s claims of an Iraq-Al Qaeda connection. But his intervention had the opposite effect.

He asked one witness, US Attorney Patrick Fitzgerald, about the case of Al Qaeda members who were tried for the 1998 bombings of the US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, pointing to language in the indictment that suggested an Al Qaeda relationship with Iraq. But Fitzgerald, who supervised the prosecution of the case, said that the reference was dropped in a superseding indictment because investigators did not have evidence to confirm any ties to Iraq.

Since the staff report was released Wednesday morning, US officials have advanced other spurious claims to try to soften the blow to the Bush administration’s credibility. They have declared that Bush and Cheney had never asserted that Iraq was directly involved in September 11 or closely linked to Al Qaeda. Such claims fly in the face of the historical record.

The political preparation for the war with Iraq involved the systematic poisoning of American public opinion with three major lies: that Iraq had close ties to the Al Qaeda terrorist organization; that Iraq had large stockpiles of weapons of mass destruction; and that Iraq might supply those weapons to Osama bin Laden, thus creating the conditions for a chemical, biological or even nuclear version of September 11.

In the crudest presentation of the case, the three lies were amalgamated into a single, all-encompassing fabrication, linking Saddam Hussein directly to September 11, 2001. When asked about opinion polls showing that two-thirds of Americans believed that Iraq was responsible for the terrorist attacks, Cheney said last year, “It’s not surprising people make that connection.”

Cheney was also the principal sponsor of the claim that alleged hijack leader Mohammed Atta had met with an Iraqi intelligence agent in Prague several months before September 11. The 9/11 commission staff report concluded that reports of such a meeting were groundless, citing video footage of Atta withdrawing money from a bank in Virginia on the day he was supposedly meeting the Iraqi agent in central Europe.

Bush himself, in his 2003 State of the Union speech, two months before the war, declared, “Imagine those 19 hijackers with other weapons and other plans— this time armed by Saddam... It would take one vial, one canister, one crate slipped into this country to bring a day of horror like none we have ever known.”

US troops participating in the invasion were told that the attack on Iraq was in response to the attacks on September 11. As they awaited orders in Kuwait to cross the border into Iraq, the soldiers were bivouacked in camps Virginia, Pennsylvania, New York and New Jersey, so named to commemorate those who died in the World Trade Center, the Pentagon and on United Flight 93, which crashed in rural Pennsylvania.

The bipartisan commission was created jointly by the Bush administration and congressional Democrats in response to the pressure of families of the victims of September 11, and the widespread sense in the American population as a whole that the US government has failed to give any credible explanation of how the events of 9/11 were possible.

It has become a vehicle through which rival sections of the US ruling elite fight out their political differences, particularly over the debacle in Iraq. The unanimity on the panel to shoot down the more extravagant claims of the Bush administration—such as the lies about an Iraq-Al Qaeda connection—reflects the growing concern that the US position in Iraq has become unviable and that some change of course is necessary.

The commission is compelled to debunk the most obvious falsehoods about September 11 in order to have enough credibility with the public to carry out its most essential purpose: defending the key institutions of the US national security apparatus, including the Pentagon, the CIA and the FBI.

Thus the same staff report that exposes the lies about an Iraq-Al Qaeda connection covers up the actual connection between Al Qaeda and the CIA. In the section entitled “Roots of Al Qaeda,” the report describes the origins of the group among the Islamic fundamentalists who traveled to Afghanistan in the 1980s to fight against the Soviet occupation of the country. But while detailing bin Laden’s role in recruiting and financing for the “Afghan Arabs,” the report makes no mention of the principal sponsor of the Afghan mujaheddin—the US government and specifically the CIA.

The 9/11 commission is not an impartial or objective investigation into the actual causes of the September 11 attacks. That would require an understanding of why hundreds of millions in the Moslem countries hate the United States—because American imperialism has exploited the resources and subjugated the peoples of the Middle East and Central Asia over the last half century. And it would require a thorough examination of the role of successive US governments in using and promoting Islamic fundamentalism as an outlet for this popular anger, in order to weaken what the US perceived as more dangerous enemies, revolutionary nationalist and socialist tendencies.

Moreover, the commission has refused to investigate the most important aspect of the September 11 events themselves—the evidence that the Bush administration had ample warning of the attacks and could have prevented them, but chose not to in order to obtain the pretext required for its military intervention in Central Asia and the Middle East.

This evidence is so abundant that even the best efforts of the commissioners cannot avoid some mention of details which belie the official version of events, the claim that the suicide hijackers entered the United States, undertook flight training, met and

rehearsed their operations repeatedly, then seized four US airliners simultaneously on September 11, without any US intelligence agency having any idea what they were doing.

Thus in one exchange during testimony June 16, commissioner Timothy Roemer, a former Democratic congressman, referred in passing to the fact that the CIA received information in June 2001 that Khalid Sheikh Mohammed (a top Al Qaeda leader later alleged to be the principal organizer of the September 11 attacks) was “preparing operatives to go the United States.”

A top official of the CIA Counter-Terrorism Center, testifying undercover as “Dr. K” without revealing his name, said he did not recall receiving any such information. If the testimony of “Dr. K” was true, it would indicate a high-level cover-up of Al Qaeda threats during the summer of 2001. If false, then there is perjury and cover-up today. In either case, this was an obvious avenue for further exploration, but Roemer simply halted the line of questioning and no other commissioner raised it again.

The US media is no less compromised than the 9/11 commission. Press coverage of the commission’s report and public hearing noted the conflict between the evidence presented to the panel and the claims of the Bush administration. But there were no banner headlines or television news bulletins about the devastating implications of the latest exposure of Bush lies.

The prostration of the media was summed up in the editorial Thursday in the *New York Times*, headlined, “The Plain Truth,” which charged Bush with “selling the false Iraq-Qaeda claim to Americans. There are two unpleasant alternatives: either Mr. Bush knew he was not telling the truth, or he has a capacity for politically motivated self-deception that is terrifying in the post-9/11 world.”

The *Times* did not, however call for resignation or impeachment or criminal prosecution, although Bush’s lies have led directly to the deaths of tens of thousands of Iraqis and nearly one thousand Americans. Instead, it huffed, puffed ... and demanded: “Now President Bush should apologize to the American people, who were led to believe something different.” Nothing could demonstrate more clearly the complete impotence of American liberalism.

The only serious conclusion that can be drawn from the exposure of yet another Bush administration “big lie” is that the invasion, conquest and occupation of Iraq are a criminal enterprise, in which an unelected government has implicated the American people. Working people must demand the immediate withdrawal of all American and other foreign troops from Iraq, the payment of reparations to the people of Iraq while they work out their future free of outside intervention, and the initiation of war crimes prosecution of all those involved in the decision to attack a defenseless country.



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