

Why is the media burying new revelations about 9/11?

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The revelation that a military intelligence unit had identified four September 11 hijackers as Al Qaeda operatives working in the US a year before the 9/11 attacks has sparked a flurry of disclaimers and denials from official sources, while most media outlets have ignored the story altogether.

The fact that the government had long been tracking some of the hijackers, including the putative leader, Mohammad Atta, was revealed in a front page article in the *New York Times* on Tuesday. Citing Republican Congressman Curt Weldon and an unidentified former military intelligence officer, the article reported that a Pentagon unit known as Able Danger had by the middle of 2000 identified Atta and three of the other September 11 hijackers as members of an Al Qaeda cell operating in the US.

The former intelligence officer said that Able Danger was prevented by the military's Special Operations Command from passing on the information to the FBI.

The former intelligence officer also said that he was in a group that briefed members of the staff of the 9/11 commission on this information in October of 2003. The 9/11 commission made no mention of Able Danger in its final report, nor did it reveal that any government agency had identified Atta as an Al Qaeda operative prior to the hijack bombings of the World Trade Center and Pentagon.

Weldon has said he talked to top-level administration officials about Able Danger, including then-Deputy National Security Advisor Stephen Hadley, as early as September or October 2001.

On Tuesday and Wednesday, government officials and members of the September 11 commission scrambled to discount the significance of the revelations, while the media refrained from publicizing the story. The *New York Times* on Wednesday followed up its front-page report of the previous day with an article placed inconspicuously at the bottom of page 13.

The *Washington Post* published on an inside page a five-paragraph Associated Press dispatch which explained nothing about the significance of the revelations. The *Wall Street Journal* did not even take note of the *Times* exposé, nor did most other American newspapers.

The story received scant treatment on the evening television

news on Tuesday, and no coverage on Wednesday.

What accounts for this silence? A US congressman and a former intelligence official have alleged that at least a section of the American military knew the identity and whereabouts of several of the September 11 hijackers over a year before the attacks, and that they were prevented from acting on this knowledge.

The congressman says he told administration officials within a month of the attacks about the work of Able Danger, and the former intelligence officer says the staff of the official investigatory commission into 9/11 was likewise informed. And yet news of these facts has surfaced only this week, nearly four years after the attacks on New York and Washington.

If the claims concerning Able Danger are true, they point to a massive cover-up within the government, a cover-up that can have no innocent explanation. They deliver a further and devastating blow to the official history of an event that has had a profound effect on American foreign and domestic policy. Yet the media is all but silent.

As is often the case, the coverage in the media is inversely proportional to the gravity of the news.

What has been said or reported in response to the Able Danger revelations consists largely of evasions and obfuscations. It seems that in the scramble to cover up their past omissions and lies, Bush administration officials and 9/11 commission members have failed to get their story straight. They are tripping over themselves with contradictory statements and inane disclaimers.

At a press briefing on Tuesday, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld declared he had no knowledge of Able Danger. "I have no idea," he said. "I've never heard of it until this morning. I understand our folks are trying to look into it."

Weldon claims that the Able Danger team was set up in 1999 under the direction of the then-chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Henry Shelton. Yet Shelton said on Tuesday that he did not recall authorizing the creation of the unit.

Hadley, who is now Bush's national security adviser, has not made any public comments about the revelations.

A spokesman for the Pentagon took a different tact, implying that any investigation into the matter would help terrorist organizations. "There were a number of intelligence operations

prior to the attacks of 9/11,” said Lt. Col. Christopher Conway. “It would be irresponsible for us to provide details in a way in which those who wish to do us harm would find beneficial.”

The chairman and co-chairman of the 9/11 commission, while not denying that the October 2003 meeting with Able Danger took place, assert that the commission staff do not recall being given the name of Mohammad Atta. According to the *New York Times* article on Wednesday, Thomas Kean, the commission’s chairman and a former Republican governor from New Jersey, said 9/11 commission staff members were “confident” Atta’s name was not mentioned in the briefing or subsequent documents from the Pentagon.

Lee Hamilton, co-chairman of the commission and a former Democratic congressman from Indiana, made a similar statement. According to the Associated Press: “Hamilton said 9/11 commission staff members learned of Able Danger during a meeting with military personnel in October 2003 in Afghanistan, but that the staff members do not recall learning of a connection between Able Danger and any of the four terrorists Weldon mentioned.”

Hamilton is quoted by the Associated Press as saying, “The 9/11 commission did not learn of any US government knowledge prior to 9/11 of surveillance of Mohammed Atta or of his cell. Had we learned of it, obviously it would’ve been a major focus of our investigation.”

Even if one were to take the statements of these commissioners at face value, they do not explain the failure of the commission to even mention the work of Able Danger. Nowhere in its massive report on the September 11 attacks, nowhere in the volumes of documents and transcripts that it published, did the commission consider it relevant to mention the existence of a Pentagon group gathering information on Al Qaeda members operating on US soil. How is this to be explained?

In fact, it is inconceivable that no information was given to the commission concerning precisely who it was that Able Danger was tracking. What else would those associated with Able Danger who briefed the 9/11 commission staff in October 2003 have talked about?

The commission was tasked with investigating the September 11 attacks, and unless a conscious decision was made to cover up the information reported by the military intelligence officials, it would undoubtedly have pursued in great detail any report given by them. Yet Kean and Hamilton would have us believe that no one on the commission thought it necessary to investigate exactly what the military intelligence group had uncovered.

The statements by the commission members are directly contradicted by the military intelligence official who has been speaking to the press. According to a Reuters report, “The former military intelligence official insists he personally told Sept. 11 commission staff members about Atta in Afghanistan, and offered to supply them with documents upon his return to

the United States, only to be rebuffed.”

The intelligence official has specifically mentioned the panel’s staff director Philip Zelikow as someone he personally spoke to about Atta. Prior to being chosen as head of the 9/11 commission staff, Zelikow was a close associate of then-National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice. He has since been promoted to become a senior advisor to Secretary of State Rice.

Zelikow has refused thus far to comment on the revelations.

The statements by Dean and Hamilton have the appearance of a preemptive alibi for Zelikow, suggesting that the information he was given did not include details relevant to the commission’s investigation.

There can be no innocent explanation for the failure of the 9/11 commission to note in any way the activities of the Able Danger group and its identification of an Al Qaeda cell led by Atta and including three other future hijack-bombers. Why was this information concealed?

Because it points imperiously to the existence of a conspiracy within one or another intelligence or security agency, not to mention the Bush White House, to shield the future hijackers and allow some form of terrorist attack on US soil to occur. All of the efforts of the 9/11 commission—as well as the entire official media and both the Democratic and Republican parties—have been concentrated on excluding even the possibility that something more sinister than bureaucratic incompetence or institutional roadblocks were responsible for an intelligence failure of staggering dimensions.

But the evidence pointing to some form of government complicity continues to mount, despite official whitewashes, cover-ups, half-truths and lies.

One thing is certain: without the tragedy of 9/11, the government could not possibly have shifted public opinion to tolerate invasions in the oil-rich regions of Central Asia and the Persian Gulf and an open-ended policy of militarism codified in the doctrine of preventive war. Nor could it have carried out the massive attack on democratic rights that has been justified by appeals to national security and the “war on terrorism.”

For the Bush administration and the American ruling elite, 9/11 served, and continues to serve, an indispensable political function in facilitating the pursuit of imperialist policy abroad and social reaction at home.



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