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Redaction Alert!

White House edits Aug. 6 presidential briefing, then claims it's been 'declassified.'

Everyone is assuming that the Bush administration meekly complied with the outcry coming from both sides of the aisle in Congress, declassifying and releasing the Presidential Daily Briefing (PDB) for August 6, 2001, with uncharacteristic speed. I did wonder about that, but now it turns out they weren't so forthcoming after all.

The [text of the PDB](#) released by the White House is one and a half pages long. But, according to an article by [intelligence expert Oliver Schröm](#), the original document was much longer:

*"Crawford, August 6, 2001. George W. Bush is on vacation. He wanted to spend the whole month at his ranch in Texas. 'The Presidential Daily Brief' was part of his morning routine. In the PDB, as it's called in CIA jargon, a senior CIA official presents the President with a summary of the security situation. On this morning the CIA Director personally briefs the President. Instead of the usual two or three pages, today's briefing paper consists of **eleven and a half printed pages** and carries the title 'Bin Laden Determined to Strike in U.S.'"*

Schröm's article, entitled "[Deadly Mistakes](#)," was published in *Die Zeit*, a respected German weekly, on October 2, 2002: go [here](#) for the original German. The piece is structured like a chronology, recounting, in excruciatingly painful detail, the mishaps, bureaucratic hurdles, and squandered opportunities that stood in the way of foiling the 9/11 terror plot. Key dates are highlighted, and August 6 was significant in that, apparently for the first time, awareness of the threat posed by Al Qaeda had percolated up to the Oval Office:

"The CIA chief argued that Al Qaeda was now also attempting to carry out attacks inside the US, and there were probably already members of the terror organization located in the US for some time. It's not clear whether or not the CIA Director told the President about statements made by Al Qaeda members who were already in custody. According to their statements, the terror organization had long thought about hijacking airplanes in order to use them as missiles."

With a little over a month to apprehend Mohammed Atta & Co., U.S. law enforcement and intelligence agencies bungled the job so thoroughly that, as FBI agent [Coleen Rowley half-jokingly remarked](#):

"I know I shouldn't be flippant about this, but jokes were actually made that the key FBIHQ personnel had to be spies or moles, like Robert Hansen, who were actually working for Osama Bin Laden to have so undercut Minneapolis' effort."

While different agencies had disparate pieces of vital information about the terrorists – who they were, where they were located, how they entered the U.S. – no one but the Israelis seemed to have a comprehensive overview of Al Qaeda's activities on American shores, and, as Schröm relates, they didn't share their intelligence until it was nearly zero hour:

"Langley, August 23, 2001. The Israeli Mossad intelligence agency handed its American counterpart a list of names of terrorists who were staying in the US and were presumably planning to launch an attack in the foreseeable future. According to documents obtained by Die Zeit, Mossad agents in the US were in all probability surveilling at least four of the 19 hijackers, among them [Khalid] al-Midhar. The CIA now does what it should have done 18 months earlier. It informs the State Dept., the FBI and the INS. The names al-Midhar and [Nawaf] al-Hazmi are promptly put on an investigation list, as probable members of Al Qaeda. Al-Midhar is expressly noted as a probable accomplice in the USS Cole attack. The first acknowledgement arrives quickly. The INS writes that according to its information, both men are currently in the US.

"Now both men are pursued vigorously...."

But not too vigorously. The FBI Washington headquarters put the kibosh on the search for the terrorists almost immediately. In her testimony before the 9/11 Commission, National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice blamed the failure to prevent the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the lack of a PATRIOT Act, and the legal and institutional barriers obstructing the free flow of information between the CIA and the FBI, but [the ACLU notes](#) that:

"The FBI failed to make effective use of legal tools it already had. On May 24, 2002, in response to an FOIA lawsuit filed by the Electronic Privacy Information Center, the FBI released a confidential memorandum sent by a Justice Department official to an FBI lawyer in April 2000. The memo voiced concern about mistakes made by the FBI's International Terrorism Operations Section, and in particular, by that Section's (UBL)

Osama Bin Laden Unit: 'You have a pattern of occurrences indicating an inability on the part of the FBI to manage its FISAs [foreign intelligence surveillance operations].'"

One frustrated agent wrote a memo in which he bitterly remarked: "Someday someone will die – and wall or not – the public will not understand why we were not more effective and throwing every resource we had at certain 'problems.'"

Schröm also authored another very interesting piece in *Die Zeit*, published in the Oct. 14 issue, entitled "[Next Door to Mohammed Atta](#)," which relates how, in the spring and summer months of 2001, U.S. authorities had detected a massive Israeli covert operation in the U.S. apparently targeting federal buildings and other government facilities: the Israelis, who claimed to be "[art students](#)," were deployed throughout the U.S., but were particularly concentrated in certain areas:

"Not until after the attacks of September 11 did the consequences of the spy ring become clear. Apparently the agents were not interested in military or industrial facilities, but were shadowing a number of suspects, who were later involved in the terrorist attacks against the US. According to a report of the French intelligence agency that Die Zeit examined, 'according to the FBI, Arab terrorists and suspected terror cells lived in Phoenix, Arizona, as well as in Miami and Hollywood, Florida from December 2000 to April 2001 in direct proximity to the Israeli spy cells.'"

Let's see if I've got this straight: Atta and his jihadist crew were being "constantly observed" by Israeli agents in the U.S., as Schröm avers, for months – but the Mossad didn't give us their names and whereabouts until the plot was about to be executed. And then the FBI hierarchy stepped in and quashed the investigation on dubious "legal" grounds.

The incomplete one and a half page version of the Aug. 6 PDB is damaging enough: it relates not only the extent of Al Qaeda's penetration of the U.S., but also communicates a sense of imminent danger related to "suspicious activity" in the New York area. As to the contents of the remaining ten and a half pages, one can only speculate. Whatever else the government is trying to hide, however, odds are the Israeli factor figures prominently.

The purpose of a PDB is to synthesize the latest intelligence and give the President an overview of the day's threats to the nation's security. The unredacted Aug. 6, 2001 edition, if we can imagine it for a moment, must have described what was basically a three-sided game, in which the U.S., Al Qaeda, and Israel were all players. It also must have noted the ambivalent role played by the Mossad: After all, they were shadowing Mohammed Atta and his cohorts for nearly half a year before they told us much of anything about it.

No wonder the White House took the enormous risk of releasing a radically abbreviated version of the Aug. 6 PDB: this is hardly something they are eager to have out there on the table. The whole notion of an Israeli spy operation in the U.S. is politically explosive: the revelation that the Mossad was monitoring the 9/11 plotters – while keeping us

largely in the dark – is political dynamite. Their solution: redact it, along with all that other incriminating stuff, and hope nobody but George Tenet notices.

My longtime readers will note that I have dealt with these [topics](#) in [previous](#) columns, [relying](#) on Schröm's work, among others. I have also dealt with these same themes in my recent short book, [The Terror Enigma: 9/11 and the Israeli Connection](#). These latest developments are merely confirming and elaborating on the general thesis pursued in this space since December, 2001: that the events surrounding 9/11 were not as simple as the "us versus them" scenario painted by the Bush administration, but a more complex, multi-leveled conflict – in which the role played by our supposedly faithful allies, the Israelis, can be characterized as passive complicity, at best.

No one should be surprised that this administration would dare to release a redacted version of the Aug. 6 PDB while giving the appearance of cooperation. This is the same gang that [lied us into war](#), lied about "[weapons of mass destruction](#)," lied about Iraq's [alleged links](#) to Al Qaeda, and even relied on [forged documents](#) to bamboozle us into invading a country that posed no military threat to the U.S. Why would they stop there?

A cornered rat fights to the death, and don't think the Bushies and their [neocon](#) Svengalis are going to give up without a tremendous struggle. They are forthcoming about *nothing*: prevarication is second nature to them. Getting at the truth about the crucial period leading up to 9/11, if it is going to be gotten out of them, will be like pulling teeth. Now is the time for the 9/11 Commission, and the Congress of the United States, to get out the pliers, and start yanking.

~ Justin Raimondo

<http://www.antiwar.com/justin/?articleid=2306>