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## NATIONAL COMMISSION ON TERRORIST ATTACKS UPON THE UNITED STATES

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### **Third public hearing of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States**

### **Statement of Laurie Mylroie to the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States July 9, 2003**

### **STATE SPONSORSHIP: WHO ARE THE TERRORIST MASTERMINDS?**

The reasons why we went to war with Iraq--as an integral part of the war on terrorism--are not as well-understood as they might be. Indeed, a major misunderstanding regarding terrorism exists.

Prior to the February 26, 1993, bombing of the World Trade Center, it was assumed that major terrorist attacks against the U.S. were state-sponsored. But that bombing is said to mark the start of a new kind of terrorism that does not involve states.

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That notion is dubious. Rather, the claim that a new, stateless terrorism emerged with the 1993 Trade Center bombing was a convenient explanation in that it required no military response. Once promulgated, it was hastily accepted--even before much progress had been made in the investigation of that attack itself.

There isn't time to properly address that issue in this testimony. *Study of Revenge: Saddam Hussein's Unfinished War against America* contains the fullest account of this author's argument that there is no new source of major terrorist attacks on the U.S. They were state-sponsored--and remain so. That that is not understood is the result of a major intelligence and policy failure that occurred in the 1990s.

In the time allotted here, I want to address three major terrorist plots that have been attributed to so-called "loose networks," including al Qaeda, and illustrate that there is significant evidence to suggest that Iraq was involved: the 1993 Trade Center bombing; the 1995 plot in the Philippines to bomb a dozen US airplanes; and the 9/11 attacks.

The key point I want to stress is the identity of the terrorist masterminds, individuals like Ramzi Yousef and Khalid Shaikh Mohammed. Their identities rest on documents in Kuwait that predate Kuwait's liberation in 1991, and *those documents are unreliable, because of the Iraqi occupation.*

### **1993 Trade Center Bombing: New York FBI Suspected Iraq**

New York FBI was the lead investigative agency and its head, the late Jim Fox, thought Iraq was behind the bomb.

1) The bomb was huge, meant to topple one building onto the other. It left a crater six

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stories deep in the basement floors of the North Tower. Fox's background was counter-intelligence. He believed the inexperienced individuals he was arresting immediately after the bombing--like Mohammed Salameh, the 26-year old Palestinian, detained as he returned to the Ryder rental agency for his deposit on the van that carried the bomb--were incapable of carrying out such an attack themselves.

The arrests were too easy and their ease suggested to Fox a conspiracy masterminded by others, with Salameh et al. left behind to take the blame.

2) There were Iraqis all around the fringe of the plot. One, Abdul Rahman Yasin, came from Baghdad before the bombing and returned to Iraq afterwards, stopping in the Iraqi embassy in Jordan on his return. Yasin is the sole indicted fugitive from that attack and remained in Baghdad until at least 2002, when *60 Minutes* interviewed him there.

3) It was just two years after the Gulf War. In terms of enemies wishing America harm, Iraq was on the top of the list.

4) Mohammed Salameh had many communications with Iraq in a crucial, early stage of the plot. Between June 10 and July 9, 1992, when his phone service was cut off, he made 46 calls to Iraq (see GX 824, US vs. Salameh et. al.)

But one can do more than just suspect Iraq's role, which, of course, is important. It can be demonstrated to a high standard, perhaps even "beyond a reasonable doubt," that Iraq was behind the attack. That demonstration revolves around the identity of the mastermind, Ramzi Yousef, without whom the bomb could not have been built.

He entered the U.S. on an Iraqi passport as

Ramzi Yousef. He fled the U.S. the night of the Trade Center bombing on a Pakistani passport in the name of Abdul Basit Karim.

In December 1992, Yousef went to the Pakistani consulate in New York with xerox copies of pages from Karim's 1984 and 1988 passports. Yousef claimed to be Karim and said he had lost his passport and needed a new one to return home.

The consulate did not like the documentation, because there were no original documents, but still gave Yousef a temporary passport, which he used to flee the U.S.

### **Abdul Basit Karim: A "Legend" For Yousef?**

There really was an individual, Abdul Basit Karim, born and raised in Kuwait. He graduated high school in Kuwait, at age 18; studied in Britain for three years, receiving a degree in June 1989; before returning to Kuwait, where he got a job in Kuwait's Planning Ministry. Apparently, Karim was in Kuwait a year later, when Iraq invaded.

The copies of the Karim passports that Yousef presented to the Pakistani consulate to obtain the passport on which he fled were evidence in the trials. They appear to have been tampered with.

Notably, the signature in the 1984 passport is quite different from the signature in the 1988 passport (see GX 739-C and 739-B, US vs. Salameh et. al).

Also, a Pakistani passport has entries for both a "permanent address in Pakistan" and a "present address in Pakistan." The line for "present address in Pakistan" is blank, presumably because the family lived in Kuwait.

The permanent address is the family's place of

origin. By definition, it does not change. Yet this permanent address did. The 1984 passport gives a permanent address in Karachi. The 1988 passport gives a permanent address in Baluchistan.

The copies of these two passports have different signatures and different permanent addresses. It looks like at least one page went through a scanner and was changed.

A similar problem exists with Abdul Basit Karim's file in Kuwait. As a routine matter, the Kuwaiti Interior Ministry maintained a resident alien file on Karim. That file was tampered with

Information was taken out. The file should have included copies of the front pages of Karim's passport with the picture, signature, etc. That is missing, and the Kuwaitis attributed it to Iraq's occupation. But the Kuwaitis did not recognize that the whole file had been corrupted.

There is information that should not be in the file, above all the notation that Karim and his family left Kuwait on August 26, 1990, traveling from Kuwait to Iraq, crossing from Iraq to Iran at Salamchah, on their way to Pakistani Baluchistan, where they live now.

When someone crosses a border, he does not give authorities his whole itinerary; just where he came from directly and where he is going to directly. Moreover, on that day--August 26, 1990--there was no Kuwaiti government; there was an Iraqi army of occupation. Iraq had to have put that information into the file.

But tens of thousands of people were fleeing Iraq and Kuwait for their very lives. Iraqi authorities were not recording the travel itineraries of all those people. Karim's file received special attention.

Finally, Ramzi Yousef's fingerprints are in

Karim's file in Kuwait. Since everyone's fingerprints are unique, that can mean only one of two things: 1) Yousef is really Karim; or 2) someone switched the fingerprint cards, replacing the original with Karim's prints, with another card bearing Yousef's prints.

Thus, it is a very important question: is Yousef really Karim or were the fingerprint cards switched and the file otherwise tampered with to create a false identity for a terrorist mastermind?

Many points indicate that Yousef is not Karim. That was the view of Jim Fox. That was also the view of Judge Kevin Duffy, who presided over Yousef's two trials (Trade Center bombing and plot against US airplanes.) At the end of the trials, during the sentencing hearing, Judge Duffy told Yousef, "We don't even know what your real name is."

That is correct. "Ramzi Yousef" is an alias and so is "Abdul Basit Karim."

In 1996, I met with two of Karim's teachers at the Swansea Institute in Britain. They did not believe their student was the terrorist mastermind who appeared in New York three years after Karim graduated from their school.

Karim had been a quiet, pleasant, hard-working young man, whose most immediate professional ambition was to get a master's degree. He went to the mosque on Fridays, but was not extreme in his politics or his religion.

Above all, their heights are critical. Yousef, in a US prison, is 6' tall, according to his FBI arrest card. Karim was short, according to his teachers.

In fact, when I asked Karim's teachers about his height, I was very careful not to prejudice their answer. First, I first asked how tall he was. They

replied that he was short, maybe 5'6." One report, as well as a document, suggests he was 5'8." So I asked whether Karim could have been 5'8." That was possible, they replied. Then I asked if he could have been 6' tall. They both said no. They looked at each other and asked, "Did you look up at him or did you look down at him?" They agreed that they had looked down at him and that he was not 6' tall. They were sure of that.

But given the importance of this question, they felt they would have to meet Yousef in prison to be 100% certain that Yousef is not their student.

If that is right and Yousef is not Karim, that means the fingerprint card in Karim's file was switched, and the file otherwise tampered with. The evident purpose would have been to create a false identity for Yousef.

Indeed, this is a standard practice of Soviet-style intelligence agencies. As is well known, intelligence agents not posted to an embassy (and not enjoying diplomatic immunity) are "illegals." They are routinely given false identities, or "legends," to prevent their actions from being traced back to the country they work for.

If Karim's file in Kuwait was tampered with to create a legend for Yousef, there is only one party that reasonably could have done so: Iraq while it occupied Kuwait.

Jim Fox shared this view. He believed that the file in Kuwait was decisive evidence tying Iraq to the attack. In late 1994, Fox, then retired, passed it on to New York FBI.

The question of Ramzi Yousef's identity-whether he is Abdul Basit Karim or not--can be resolved in a definitive fashion by bringing Karim's teachers to the prison to meet and speak with

Yousef. Yet this simple task has not been taken, largely because of very considerable bureaucratic obstructionism in the US and UK.

### **The 1995 Plane Bombing Plot; Three Baluch: Yousef, Murad, & Mohammed**

After the Trade Center bombing, Yousef reappeared in the Philippines in September 1994, plotting to bomb a dozen U.S. airplanes. In January 1995, while mixing explosives in the kitchen sink of his Manila apartment, Yousef started a fire and had to flee. He left behind a computer with information that led to his arrest a month later in Islamabad.

A co-conspirator, Abdul Hakam Murad, was arrested in Manila the night of the fire. Like Yousef, Murad was tried and convicted for that plot. Murad is supposed to be a childhood friend of Yousef, and he is also supposed to be born and raised in Kuwait.

Khalid Shaikh Mohammed was also involved in this plot. Mohammed managed to flee the Philippines and was subsequently indicted, even as he went on to become head of al Qaeda's military committee after Sudan, under U.S. pressure, expelled Usama bin Ladin to Afghanistan in 1996.

Notably, Yousef, Murad, and Mohammed did not behave like Islamic militants while in the Philippines. As the *Los Angeles Times* reported, "In Manila, the trio acted like anything but Islamic terrorists. All had local girlfriends. They hung out at karaoke bars and strip clubs."

### **9/11: A Family of Masterminds or Terrorists with Legends?**

Following the 9/11 attacks, there was much speculation about Iraq's possible role. I won't address those points, although some information, like the claim of two Iraqi defectors



that Iraqi intelligence trained non-Iraqi Arab militants to hijack airplanes at Salman Pak deserves more attention than it has received. That is particularly so, because when U.S. Marines took Salman Pak, they captured such individuals and learned from the interrogations that they were training as terrorists.

I want to focus on the terrorist masterminds. U.S. authorities have learned much more about al Qaeda since the 9/11 strikes, than they knew before them.

That includes the key role played by Khalid Shaikh Mohammed. As one U.S. intelligence official explained after Mohammed's capture (March 1, 2003), "It wasn't until recently that any of us even realized he was part of al Qaeda. . . . The big problem nailing him down is that the informants we relied on, especially before 9/11, were mujaheddin. They'd been in Afghanistan, in Sudan, back in Afghanistan. *Khalid was never a part of any of that.*" (emphasis added).

In addition, two of Ramzi Yousef's older brothers--Abdul Karim and Abdul Monim--have been identified as al Qaeda masterminds, capable of assuming Mohammed's role. Also, an individual, Ali Abdul Aziz, who played an important role in the financial transfers involved in the 9/11 attacks, is said to be Yousef's "younger cousin."

Thus, according to U.S. officials, at the core of the terrible series of attacks against the U.S., starting with the 1993 Trade Center bombing and culminating in the 9/11 assaults, is an unusually talented and murderous family: Yousef, his uncle, his two brothers, his cousin, and his childhood friend.

This is without precedent; no terrorist organization has at its core a family. Also, all these masterminds are Baluch. And with the

possible exception of the cousin, all are supposed to have been born and raised in Kuwait--*and their identities are based on documents in Kuwait that predate Kuwait's liberation.*

### **The Baluch and Iraq**

The Baluch are a Sunni Muslim people, with their own language, who live on both sides of the Iranian-Pakistani border. Like the Kurds, the Baluch aspired to a state of their own, but failed to achieve it. Most Americans know nothing about the Baluch, because the U.S. has virtually nothing to do with them.

No Baluch organization is on the State Department list of terrorist states. Prior to the 1993 Trade Center bombing, no Baluch was ever involved in a terrorist attack on the U.S.

The Baluch have no evident motive for engagement in these monstrous assaults against the U.S.-save for one notable point: their ties with Iraqi intelligence.

The Iranian Baluch have long been at odds with the Shi'a government in Tehran. Those tensions were much exacerbated by Iran's Islamic revolution in 1979.

Iraqi intelligence has deep and well-established ties with the Baluch on both sides of the Iran-Pakistan border and used them against Iran. So explained Gen. Wafiq Samarraï, who headed Iraqi Military Intelligence until 1991, before he later defected. Iraqi Military Intelligence ran the Baluch as spies during the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988) out of the Gulf shaykhdom of Dubai, according to Samarraï.

That is a critical point. The only apparent motive of these Baluch individuals for involvement in assaulting the U.S. would appear to be the ties that the Baluch have with Iraqi intelligence. That

is particularly so as Yousef, Murad, and Mohammed do not really appear to be Islamic militants, judging from their behavior in the Philippines.

Let us consider two hypotheses to explain the identities of these terrorist masterminds. The official U.S. explanation is that they are a murderous family.

There is another explanation: these individuals are elements of Iraq's long-standing Baluch network. And while Iraq occupied Kuwait, Iraqi intelligence used documents in Kuwait to create legends for these illegals.

I recently asked a colleague, retired from the position of #2 in Israeli Military Intelligence, which explanation made more sense: a murderous family vs. illegals with legends. He replied, "It's obvious."

Indeed, Jim Hoagland has suggested the same. Hoagland asked, "How did al Qaeda, within two or three years, go from obscurity to becoming super-terrorists capable of blowing up U.S. embassies, warships, and skyscrapers with astonishing precision?" He raised the question asked here: how did a group of Baluch who grew up in Kuwait acquire such remarkable skills as terrorist masterminds, and why would they devote their lives to killing Americans? He then hinted at an answer. "Could al Qaeda have been the target of a takeover operation by an intelligence service with good legend-manufacturing skills and a great, burning desire for revenge on the United States?"

That is what happened, I think. After al Qaeda moved to Afghanistan, Iraqi intelligence became deeply involved with it, probably, with the full agreement of Usama bin Ladin. Al Qaeda provided the ideology, foot soldiers, and a cover for the terrorist attacks; Iraqi intelligence provided the direction, training, and expertise in

the form of figures like Khalid Shaikh Mohammed.

Both sides benefited: bin Ladin was able to carry out major attacks for which al Qaeda had previously lacked the skill and training; Iraq escaped detection and punishment, because every attack was blamed on al Qaeda alone.

This hypothesis is easy to test. How to pursue Ramzi Yousef's identity has already been explained in terms of Karim's teachers. In addition, certain documents should be obtained pertaining to Yousef, Khalid Shaikh Mohammed, and the other Baluch terrorists.

As for Khalid Shaikh Mohammed, US records also exist, as there really was an individual, Khalid Shaikh Mohammed, born and raised in Kuwait. After graduating high school, Mohammed attended college in the U.S. The key question-- whether the terrorist known as Khalid Shaikh Mohammed is the same person as the student--can be pursued, in a manner similar to the pursuit of Yousef's identity. If the terrorist is not the student, then Khalid Shaikh Mohammed is--like Abdul Basit Karim--a legend for a terrorist, whose real identity we do not know. And the only party that, reasonably, could have created that legend is Iraq, while it occupied Kuwait.

## **Conclusion**

A major misunderstanding regarding the nature of terrorism arose in the wake of the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center, with the claim that a new form of terrorism had emerged that was no longer state-sponsored.

On the contrary, the major terrorist strikes against the U.S. that were attributed to "loose networks" of Islamic militants, including al Qaeda, are much better explained as Iraq, working with and hiding behind the militants. In

short, the 1991 Gulf War did not end with the cease-fire declared back then.

The failure to pursue the question of the identities of the terrorist masterminds is a major lapse in the investigation. Most likely, if that issue were pursued it would provide a definitive tie between Iraqi intelligence and the 9/11 strikes, as well as other major attacks.

It is unlikely that these Baluch masterminds are a family; it is far more likely that they are Iraqi "illegals," given "legends" on the basis of Kuwaiti documents, while Iraq occupied Kuwait.

The principle reason this issue has not been pursued is strong bureaucratic obstructionism in the US and UK, by individuals who cannot (or will not) recognize they have made a major mistake. Almost certainly, neither President Bush nor Prime Minister Blair understands how easy it may be to demonstrate Iraq's link to the 9/11 attacks and other acts of terrorism. It may require intervention from such a senior level to overcome the bureaucratic obstructionism.

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