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Daniel Pearl and the Paymaster of 9/11: **9/11 and The Smoking Gun that Turned On its Tracker**

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For a simplified synopsis and summary of this important article, [click here](#).

It was supposed to be the key chain of evidence linking the September 11 hijackers to Osama bin Laden -- a wire transfer of \$100,000 to lead hijacker Mohamed Atta. For a public increasingly skeptical of evidence culled from passports in the rubble and flight manuals in the glove compartment, here was the "money" shot, a financial trail leading to the fall of the Twin Towers. Yet less than five months later, the man initially fingered as the paymaster of 9/11 would be sitting in a Pakistani jail, accused of a wholly different crime -- the murder of Daniel Pearl.

Depending on where or when you have read his name, he is known as Ahmad Omar Saeed Sheikh, or Umar Sheikh, or Syed Sheikh(if you write for *CNN*). For simplicity's sake, we will refer to him as Omar Saeed, a Pakistani-born former student of the London School of Economics who grew up in the suburbs of Great Britain. Under the alias of Mustafa Mohammed Ahmad, he was reported to have wired \$100,000 to a bank account in Florida belonging to 9/11 hijacker Mohamed Atta.

"U.S. investigators believe they have found the 'smoking gun' linking Osama bin Laden to the September 11 terror attacks," wrote Julian Borger and John Hooper of *The Guardian* on October 1, 2001. That very same day, a terror group based in Pakistan, the Jaish-e-Mohammed, claimed responsibility for a suicide attack against the provincial legislature in Kashmir, leaving 38 dead -- and Pakistan on the brink of war with India.

As reported by Maria Ressa of *CNN* on October 8, 2001, here is Omar Saeed's connection to that incident:

"The Pakistan-based group, Jaish-e-Mohammad, initially claimed responsibility for the attack. It was formed by Pakistani cleric Maulana Mazood Azhar, shortly after he was released from an

Indian prison in 1999. Azhar was one of three jailed Islamic militants freed by Indian authorities in exchange for passengers of the hijacked Indian Airlines 814. Indian and U.S. authorities now see a link between that hijacking and the September 11 attacks in the United States. Freed with Azhar was Ahmed Umar Syed Sheikh [Omar Saeed], whom authorities say used a pseudonym to wire \$100,000 to suspected hijacker Mohammad Atta, who then distributed the money in the United States."

According to a *CNN* posting dated October 6:

"[Omar Saeed] would still be in prison were it not for the December 1999 hijacking of Indian Airlines Flight 814 -- an ordeal strikingly similar to the four hijackings carried out on September 11. The plane, with 178 passengers on board, was en route from Katmandu, Nepal, to New Delhi, India, when terrorists used knives to take control of the aircraft, slitting the throat of one passenger to force the pilots to open the cockpit door? Because investigators have now determined that [Omar Saeed] and Mustafa Muhammad Ahmad [the pseudonym] are the same person, it provides another key link to bin Laden as the mastermind of the overall [9/11] plot."

Notice the implication here: the bin Laden connection to 9/11 is considerably strengthened by reason of bin Laden's connection to Omar Saeed, whose own connection to the 1999 Indian Airlines hijacking bears a gruesome similarity to the modus operandi reportedly employed in commandeering the airplanes on September 11. Lest there be any doubt as to Omar Saeed's status in al-Qaida, terrorism expert Magnus Ranstorp offered this assessment in the same October 6 article: "He [Omar Saeed] is also linked to the financial network feeding bin Laden's assets, so therefore he's quite an important person...because he transfers money between various operatives, and he's a node between al Qaeda and foot soldiers on the ground."

That is the testimony from *CNN*. And, as far as I can tell, *CNN*'s October 8 article was -- at least for several months -- practically the American "mainstream" media's last mention of Omar Saeed and his \$100,000 deposit for 9/11. For on that very next day -- October 9 -- *The Times of India* broke with this bombshell:

"While the Pakistani Inter Services Public Relations claimed that former ISI [the "Pakistani CIA"] director-general Lt-Gen Mahmud Ahmad sought retirement after being superseded on Monday, the truth is more shocking. Top sources confirmed here on Tuesday that the general lost his job because of the "evidence" India produced to show his links to one of the suicide bombers that wrecked the World Trade Center. The U.S. authorities sought his removal after confirming the fact that \$100,000 were wired to WTC hijacker Mohammed Atta from Pakistan by Ahmad Umar Sheikh [Omar Saeed] at the instance of General Mahmud [Ahmad]. Senior government sources have confirmed that India contributed significantly to establishing the link between the money transfer and the role played by the dismissed ISI chief. While they did not provide details, they said that Indian inputs, including [Omar Saeed's] mobile phone number, helped the FBI in tracing and establishing the link."

Thus, courtesy of *The Times of India*, by October 9, Omar Saeed was not only tagged as the "bagman" of 9/11, but he was now reported as acting under the orders of the chief of Pakistani intelligence. That in itself is not so surprising, as the ISI was long acknowledged as being the primary backer -- pre-9/11 -- of the Taliban. Yet why, then, would the U.S. government insist on nothing more punitive than the general's immediate retirement? Here is one possible reason, courtesy of the archives of Karachi News, datelined September 9, 2001 (two days before 9/11, for those who didn't notice):

"ISI Chief Lt-Gen [Mahmud Ahmad's] week-long presence in Washington has triggered

speculation about the agenda of his mysterious meetings at the Pentagon and National Security Council. Officially, State Department sources say he is on a routine visit in return to CIA Director George Tenet's earlier visit to Islamabad...What added interest to his visit is the history of such visits. Last time Ziauddin Butt, [General Ahmad's] predecessor, was here during Nawaz Sharif's government, the domestic politics turned topsy-turvy within days. That this is not the first visit by [General Ahmad] in the last three months shows the urgency of the ongoing parleys."

In the light of what followed, one might hazard a guess as to what was so urgent. Whatever the case, Omar Saeed, by way of General Mahmud Ahmad, had now garnered his very own -- albeit indirect - connection to the Pentagon. Under normal circumstances, *The Times of India* article could be effectively quashed simply through being ignored by the mainstream American media (which it was, save for a brief, almost sluggish, mention from the *Wall Street Journal*). Nevertheless, there now remained the sticky matter of dealing with that \$100,000 money trail -- possibly one of the greatest examples (if the only one) of a smoking gun turning on its tracker.

Put simply, here was the problem: as early as September 18, the gun was simmering on low heat, gradually drawing flavor as the days passed. As reported by Jim Stewart of CBS News that day: "From apartments, homes and cars once belonging to the dead hijackers, agents have uncovered a money trail that they hope will lead to the hijackers' accomplices." And, sure enough, by September 30, it did, when ABC News "This Week" reported:

"...federal authorities have...tracked more than \$100,000 from banks in Pakistan to two banks in Florida to accounts held by suspected hijack ringleader Mohamed Atta. As well this morning, TIME magazine is reporting that some of that money came in the days just before the attack and can be traced directly to people connected to Osama bin Laden."

The next day, October 1, 2001, the smoking gun sprouted an alias -- Mustafa Ahmad, as reported by Judith Miller of the *New York Times* (and not to be confused with General *Mahmud* Ahmad, the ISI Chief). Similarly, Borger and Hooper of *The Guardian* that very same day named bin Laden's paymaster as Mustafa Muhammad Ahmad, pointing out that this was the alias for a "Sheikh Saeed", who was reported to have wired the money from the United Arab Emirates before he left for Pakistan.

The money trail story was now in full swing, yet trouble -- perhaps traces of the brewing ISI revelation -- now seemed to be lurking in the background. By October 3, 2001, things started to get unsettlingly murky. For on that day, British Prime Minister Tony Blair released his infamous report, summarizing -- for a skeptical public -- the "persuasive" case against bin Laden for involvement in the events of September 11. Yet amid all the innuendo that was employed in the report to nail down bin Laden's culpability, there was nary a mention of that key piece of evidence - the \$100,000 pay-off to the hijackers.

Even more curiously, on that very day, New York Newsday reporters John Riley and Tom Brune provided an alternative suspect for the Mustafa Ahmad alias:

"Mustafa Ahmad is an alias used by Shaykh Sai-id, who has been identified as a high-ranking bin Laden financial lieutenant. In the wake of the bombing of the U.S. embassy in Tanzania in 1998, Tanzanian officials arrested and charged with murder an Egyptian named Mustafa Ahmed. After alleging that he had confessed to being a high-level al-Qaida operative, Tanzania then released him without explanation a few months later, according to news reports at the time."

Put simply, if Riley and Brune are correct, then "Shaykh Sai-id", alias Mustafa Ahmad, could not possibly be Omar Saeed, as Omar was nicely locked away in an Indian prison in 1998. Keep in mind, too, that this article appears to be one of the first American references to Mustafa Ahmad as being an alias for a "Shaykh Sai-id."

A follow-up article by The Guardian's Julian Borger, dated October 5, 2001, does not make matters any clearer. Critiquing Blair's definitive report on al-Qaida, he wrote:

"It omits mention of a key link in the evidential chain discovered by U.S. investigators: the money trail between a group of the hijackers and an al-Qaida operative in Dubai, known as Mustafa Ahmad. It is not clear whether it is Ahmad, an al-Qaida paymaster, that Mr. Blair has in mind when the document claims 'one of Bin Laden's closest and most senior associates was responsible for the detailed planning of the attacks.' He could instead have in mind someone higher up in the chain of command such as Mohamed Atef or Abu Zubeidah, both of whom are al-Qaida military commanders."

As to Borger's consideration of Mustafa Ahmad's status in the al-Qaida hierarchy: "A lower-level al-Qaida figure, known as Sheikh Saeed, alias Mustafa Mohamed Ahmad, organized money transfers from Dubai to the hijackers and received return transfers of unused money before leaving for Pakistan on September 11." By the end of the first week of October, various news correspondents had apparently provided alternative personas for the Mustafa Ahmad alias -- and nobody seemed to notice.

That first week of October 2001 was indeed a busy one in the War Against Terror. It began with a high-profile terror attack in Kashmir, perpetrated, reportedly, by a group with links to the man tagged by *CNN* as paving the money trail to 9/11. Mid-week saw the release of Tony Blair's much-touted report on the evidence against bin Laden, conveniently timed for the invasion of Afghanistan by week's end. If, by late September, the smoking gun was shaping up to be the *starting* gun for the race into Afghanistan, at some point in that first week of October, there was enough smoke blowing in all directions to keep everyone well and thoroughly diverted.

On December 18, 2001, the *Associated Press* -- acting as the mouthpiece for the mainstream press in absentia -- would officially (and matter-of-factly) put on record for us the identity of the paymaster behind 9/11, unveiling him as:

"Shaikh Saiid, also known as Sa'd al-Sharif and Mustafa Ahmad al-Hisawi. A Saudi, Saiid, 33, is bin Laden's brother-in-law and financial chief. Saiid has been with bin Laden since his time in the Sudan. Saiid allegedly wired money to Atta in preparation for the Sept. 11 attacks, according to court documents."

The "court documents" in question are, presumably, the Zacarias Mossaoui indictments released earlier that week, listing "Mustafa Ahmad" as paymaster. With a deft sleight of hand, and seemingly from out of nowhere, the *Associated Press* had managed to replace a 28-year old Pakistani militant tied to the ISI (Omar Saeed) with a 33-year old Saudi (Shaikh Saiid) tied - by marriage- to Osama bin Laden himself.

The *Associated Press* had gradually edged toward its December 18 announcement, supported by a convenient paper trail -- in particular, President Bush's Global Terrorist Executive Order, signed September 23, 2001, in which a "Shaykh Sai'id (aka Mustafa

Muhammad Ahmad)" was mentioned as a financial operative in al-Qaida, among a list of 27 individuals and entities slated to have their assets frozen. On October 13, 2001 (four days after *The Times of India* bombshell), the *Associated Press* announced that "the government [had] widened its financial dragnet," including on a "new list": "Sa'd Al-Sharif, a brother-in-law of bin Laden and a senior associate believed to head bin Laden's complex financial network." Note that the October 13 piece made no mention of any aliases for Sa'd al-Sharif, nor did it connect him to the -- by then -- well-publicized money trail. It took a third list, announced on December 18, for the *Associated Press* to complete the syllogism: Sa'd al-Sharif = Shaykh Sai'id = Mustafa Ahmad = 9/11 bagman. By then, however, bin Laden's culpability was long settled, and any money trail long forgotten.

More conveniently, an alternative home could now be found for that \$100,000 revelation, distancing it from *The Times of India* and *CNN*, circa Oct. 6-8. Now all that remained was to prepare alternative "lodgings" for Omar Saeed and the retired ISI general. Sometime in November 2001, the Justice Department complied by laying out the bedding, "secretly" indicting Omar Saeed for a 1994 kidnapping, and thus setting the stage for his later appearance in an entirely different performance -- the murder of Daniel Pearl.

The Disinformation Thickens

If, by December 18, the money trail to 9/11 was now a settled fact, nobody seemed to take much notice. Earlier that week, on December 13, the Bush Administration had presented a new, more "sexy", smoking gun -- the certified Osama bin Laden Videotape Confession. That would probably explain why, five days later, no headlines were screaming "Bin Laden Brother-In-Law Linked To 9/11!" And perhaps that would be for the better, as such a headline might have triggered a keen sense of *deja vu* in anyone who was able to recall another bin Laden brother-in-law who was linked to the first World Trade Center bombing in 1993 -- Mohammed Jamal Khalifa. Ramzi Yousef, the alleged terrorist bomber convicted of that crime, was "said to have received money from bin Laden's brother-in-law," according to Steve Macko in a July 25, 1997 item from ERRI.

Curiously, it was this particular brother-in-law who was first mentioned in connection with the events of September 11, as early as two days after. According to correspondent Jaime Laude of Philippine Headline News Online, "...the government announced it is stepping up efforts to hunt down Mohammad Jamal Khalifa, a brother-in-law of Bin Laden, the prime suspect in Tuesday's terrorist attacks on the U.S." A *CNN* article by Maria Ressa, dated September 28, 2001, linked Khalifa to the terrorist Abu Sayyaf group in the Philippines, and, through Ramzi Yousef, to the 1993 WTC attack. As reported by Ressa in that article, "Part of the Osama bin Laden money trail [for September 11] may lead to the Philippines and the Abu Sayyaf terrorist group." In other words, if the money trail did lead to Abu Sayyaf, we would possibly be faced with the following syllogism: Abu Sayyaf = Mohammad Khalifa = Mustafa Ahmad = 9/11 bagman. As Ressa, by October, had explicitly tagged Omar Saeed as the alleged paymaster, we can safely assume that *CNN* was no longer pursuing the brother-in-law angle to the money trail.

And what of this other brother-in-law -The "Shaihk" With The Many Aliases? It appears that with the authoritative -- and shockingly brief -- proclamation from the *Associated Press* on December 18, no further commentary on the Man Behind The Money Trail was needed. The

Shaihk's disappearance from the world's headlines was as sudden as his appearance. In any case, the world was by then distracted by the December 13 attack by Kashmiri terrorists on the Indian Parliament in Delhi -- an attack that once more placed India and Pakistan on the brink.

Coincidentally enough, Omar Saeed was linked to that attack by -- another coincidence -- Maria Ressa, in a *CNN* article dated June 7, 2002. If, by then, she had already forgotten her previous designation of Omar Saeed as the 9/11 bagman, her memory was now jogged by the revelation that "Al Qaeda funded the [1999 Indian Airlines] hijacking operation" that resulted in Omar Saeed's release from prison. Omar Saeed, through his purported membership in Jaish-e-Mohammed, would now find an alternative bin Laden link (and cover story), courtesy of Maria Ressa and colleagues. As the above-mentioned July 7 article reports: "Evidence is surfacing that al Qaeda is controlling key Kashmiri separatist groups and fueling tensions -- something al Qaeda successfully did in Chechnya and Southeast Asia." In a June 12 report, Maria Ressa elaborated: "What Osama Bin Laden has done, intelligence officials say, is to hijack regional movements and exploit them for his purpose." The CIA must be green with envy.

One wonders if the October 9 *Times of India* article might have aroused bin Laden's wrath toward India, for it was a mere five days later -- on October 14, 2001 -- that *The Times of India* reported:

"Osama Bin Laden's Al Qaeda terrorist group has now formally and publicly adopted the Kashmir issue as one of their causes...In a new video-taped message released through Al-Jazeera television network, an unnamed Al-Qaeda spokesman added the Kashmir cause to their familiar list of grievances that include US presence in Saudi Arabia, the Palestinian issue, and the situation in Iraq."

Now that bin Laden's people had formally announced his updated business plan, he was free to plan some spectacular mischief in India -- presumably while dodging all those "daisy cutter" bombs being hurled his way. And his "apparent" agent of choice -- Omar Saeed, by way of the Jaish-e-Mohammed terror group.

The Developing Cover Story

While *CNN*'s October articles on Omar Saeed linked him to the September 11 hijackers, it made no mention at all of any links to ISI Chief Mahmud Ahmad. As to those mainstream news outlets that neither mentioned Omar Saeed nor the ISI Chief in their reports on the money trail, frequent reference was made to the paymaster's alleged pseudonym -- Mustafa Muhammad Ahmad. By fortuitous happenstance, the pseudonym also had the odd feature of sounding confusingly similar to the ISI Chief's name. Thus, in the early days of October, one could read an American article about the paymaster *Mustafa* Ahmad and, assuming he came across *The Times of India*'s piece on ISI General *Mahmud* Ahmad, conclude that the Indian article was just an alternative version of the American articles on *Mustafa* Ahmad. Assuming a reader caught the anomaly early on, he would have a hell of a time making his case at any dinner parties. *Mahmud Mustafa? Muhammad Ahmad?* This, in intelligence parlance, would be a textbook example of "muddying the waters" over the ISI Chief's link to the money trail.

Similarly, bin Laden's brother-in-law, "*Shaihk Saiid*," bears more than a passing

resemblance to the name Omar *Saeed Sheikh*. Drop the "Omar", and one could easily see how a well-intentioned correspondent (like Maria Ressa) and a well-informed terrorism expert (like Magnus Ranstorp) could mistaken bin Laden's 33-year old V.P. of Finance for bin Laden's 28-year old V.P. of Finance In Kashmir.

Whatever the case, after October 9, Omar Saeed, as a news item, largely receded into the background while the money trail story died a slow, subtle death. In the meantime, an explanation was gradually being elaborated for the ISI Chief's "sudden" retirement. As early as October 10, 2001, Vernon Loeb and Alan Sipress of the *Washington Post* reported that Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf "ousted several influential intelligence and military leaders who remained close to the Taliban, most notably purging Gen. Mahmoud Ahmed of the [ISI], which long served as the Taliban's patron." Vernon Loeb here seemed to be replicating a technique that was used to great effect the day after September 11 -- briefly reporting on an anomaly with an authoritative tone that appeared to say, *Move on, folks. Nothing to see here.*

For the sake of economy, we will refer to it as the *Shrug Technique* of disinformation. Loeb had previously provided a demonstration of the technique soon after the Twin Towers had collapsed, in a brief capsule obituary on World Trade Center security chief John O'Neill, where Loeb blandly informed us that: a) John O'Neill was formerly the main FBI agent in charge of investigating all terrorist acts linked to bin Laden; b) O'Neill was banned from Yemen by Ambassador Bodine; c) O'Neill recently left a 30-year career in the FBI "under a cloud" to d) take up the position at the WTC only two weeks before 9/11. *Nothing to see here, folks. Move on.*

On October 22, more than a week after President Bush decided to freeze bin Laden brother-in-law Sa'd al-Sharif's assets (presumably to accompany his "Shaykh Sai'id" alias, whose assets were frozen on September 23), Johanna McGeary of *Time Magazine* drew a lawyerly distinction between President Musharraf and the policies of his ISI:

"Most startling was the premature retirement of [Musharraf's] trusted friend Lieut. General Mahmoud Ahmad, chief of the formidable...ISI, widely regarded as the country's invisible government. As a staunch patron of pro-Taliban policies, Ahmad is thought to have opposed Pakistan's new alliance with the U.S. Musharraf had reason to fear that segments of the ISI might thwart promised cooperation with U.S. intelligence."

In the parlance of propaganda, the above could be termed as an example of a "limited hangout." It begins with a frank admission of a fact that, on its surface, appears to be damaging (i.e. ISI support of the Taliban, and, through them, al-Qaida), yet instead serves to protect a far more damaging revelation (i.e. American/CIA influence over the ISI). By conceding the most transparent evidence against the ISI, one may then resort to the *Shrug Technique* to dismiss those who might be inclined to ask their own questions.

For instance: if President Musharraf "had reason to fear" being thwarted by segments of his ISI, then why would he send someone so clearly unreliable as General Ahmad to negotiate the handover of Osama bin Laden? Tim McGirk, in an April 29, 2002 piece for *Time Magazine*, provides the backdrop for that answer:

"The first move Musharraf made to tame the ISI was dumping its chief, [General Ahmad]. He and [Musharraf] were close friends and fellow plotters in the 1999 coup that brought Musharraf to

power. But the intelligence chief proved too radical for Musharraf's purposes. Former comrades of [General] Ahmed's say he experienced a battlefield epiphany in the Himalayan peaks during a 1999 summer offensive against India and began to pursue his own Islamic-extremist agenda. At a cabinet meeting, he once yelled at an official, 'What do you know? You don't even go to prayers.' Of more concern than these outbursts was [General] Ahmed's sympathy for the Taliban. When the President sent him to Kandahar six days after Sept. 11 to persuade Taliban chief Mullah Mohammed Omar to hand over bin Laden, the spymaster instead secretly told Omar to resist, an ex-Taliban official told TIME. Word of this double cross reached Musharraf, who on Oct. 7 replaced [General] Ahmed as ISI boss."

Apparently, General Ahmad was quite adept at pulling the wool over one's eyes. According to a September 12, 2001 article from the Scripps Howard News Service, Sen. Bob Graham (D-Fla.) and Rep. Porter Goss (R-Fla.) were sitting down for breakfast with the ISI Chief when they received word of the 9/11 attacks. "[He] was very empathetic, sympathetic to the people of the United States," Graham reported of Ahmad. If Ahmad was opposed to any U.S. alliance, as Johanna McGeary reported, Graham certainly wasn't seeing past the "love-me" vibes that Ahmad was apparently flashing him over coffee and danishes -- a considerable oversight for someone who is Chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee.

Incidentally, Graham and Goss are the co-chairmen in charge of the commission to investigate the events behind September 11. Graham, a former Florida governor, and Goss, a veteran of the CIA, "are guarding their intelligence turf, saying they and their staffs are uniquely qualified to sift through tens of thousands of sensitive intelligence documents and interview spies and spymasters without compromising classified sources and methods," according to an *Associated Press* item dated May 30, 2002. "Colleagues say Graham and Goss bring a pragmatic, bipartisan style to intelligence committee work that leaves politics outside their mostly secret meetings." We can trust they will give each other a probing, "independent" grilling as to their itinerary in the days leading up to 9/11.

The above-referenced article, by Curt Anderson, also contains a superb demonstration of the *Shrug Technique*. Witness:

"The morning of Sept. 11, Sen. Bob Graham and Rep. Porter Goss were doing what the two intelligence committee chairmen frequently do -- having breakfast together at the Capitol. With them was then-Pakistani intelligence chief [Mahmud Ahmad]. [General Ahmad's] task was to persuade Afghanistan's Taliban leaders to hand over terror suspect Osama bin Laden. As the three men talked over the knotty problem, an aide handed Goss a note saying an airplane had hit the World Trade Center. A few moments later the Capitol would be evacuated, and the following month [General Ahmad] was fired."

Move on, folks. Nothing to see here.

End Game

On January 22, 2002, a terror attack was launched on the American Cultural Center in Calcutta (which was eventually linked to Omar Saeed). The next day, *Wall Street Journal* reporter Daniel Pearl disappeared off the streets of Karachi, Pakistan. As the mainstream media reported it, Pearl was investigating Pakistani links to Richard Reid, otherwise known as "the shoe bomber." Yet as Tariq Ali of *The Guardian* reported on April 5, 2002: "Those [Pearl] was in touch with say he was working to uncover links between the intelligence services and terrorism. His newspaper has been remarkably coy, refusing to disclose the

leads Pearl was pursuing."

Whether Pearl's leads had anything to do with the laptop hard drive that the *Wall Street Journal* passed on to the Defense Department sometime in December 2001 is a question that some have parsed. The story, according to *Wall Street Journal* reporters Alan Cullison and Andrew Higgins, of "how a computer apparently stuffed with al-Qaida secrets came to light, involves a combination of happenstance and the opportunism of war..."

As reported by Dan Kennedy of *The Boston Phoenix*: "*The Journal's* foreign editor, John Bussey, says that Cullison had been covering the Northern Alliance for about a month and a half when his computer was destroyed." In one of those fortuitous examples of happenstance, as Cullison went computer shopping in Kabul, he was informed that a local computer merchant had on sale a genuine al-Qaida computer, certified by the looter himself, who claimed to have filched it from the bombed-out headquarters of bin Laden lieutenant Mohammed Atef. Among the incriminating hard drive documents that basically confirmed everything ever told to us by every counterterrorism expert throughout the '90's, Cullison -- who was on the Northern Alliance beat -- was lucky enough to find the smoking gun implicating al-Qaida in the assassination of Northern Alliance leader Ahmad Shah Massoud, who was mortally wounded just two days before September 11.

The smoking gun, as reported by Cullison and Higgins on December 31 2001, was a "letter, written in clumsy French in the name of an obscure, London-based Islamic information agency." The letter -- carrying the name of Yasser Al-Siri -- involved an interview request of Massoud. The Northern Alliance leader, as it turned out, was killed by "two men who posed as journalists to interview Massoud Sept. 9, both French-speaking Arabs, [who] carried stolen Belgian passports." As luck would have it, the incriminating letter also happened to confirm the hunch of Her Majesty's Government, which had already arrested one Yasser Al-Siri in London in October, charging him with conspiring to assassinate Massoud. *London. Al-Siri. Clumsy French. Stolen Belgian passports* -- to any aspiring Sherlock Holmes or Perry Mason, al-Qaida is the gift that keeps on giving.

So where was the Pearl angle in all this? In the July/August 2002 issue of *The Columbia Journalism Review*, the former president of NBC News, Lawrence K. Grossman, presented the possibility that Pearl was kidnapped due to the *Wall Street Journal's* decision to publish the laptop documents. He quoted James Goodale, a former lawyer for the *New York Times*, as saying, "No matter what, they should not have published that they cooperated with the government...I will say flat out what the WSJ did is detrimental to the safety of U.S. journalists abroad."

Columbia Journalism students take note: what Grossman has authored is a superbly crafted exercise in disinformation (for an article that runs barely 1,000 words). You can almost feel the directed implications cresting over your brain as you read Grossman's account of what those al-Qaida computer files contained: "... a remarkably detailed account of its agent Abdul Ra'uff's travels in Israel and Egypt in search of terrorist targets. Ra'uff's itinerary matched that of the would-be shoe bomber, Richard C. Reid...U.S. officials who reviewed the files are convinced that Ra'uff and Reid are the same person."

Implication #1: *The contents of those computer files might have sent Pearl on his*

purported quest for the shoe bomber. His quote of Goodale leads us to **Implication #2: *The Wall Street Journal's admitted assistance to the government may have led Pearl's captors to conclude that Pearl was a CIA agent.*** Most importantly, Grossman establishes his bona fides with this little anecdote:

"...The late William Colby, a CIA director, once confided to a reporter friend of mine, Stanley Karnow, that several major news organizations actually were complicit in helping the CIA plant agents posing as reporters in their overseas bureaus. To this day, the CIA has refused to make clear that it no longer uses reporters as agents or agents posing as reporters..."

All of which leads us to **Implication #3: *He is shocked -- shocked! -- that propaganda happens here because -- take his word as a media insider -- it's not the norm.***

Note to aspiring investigators: Be careful as to which facts you "ingest" in constructing your theories. Some stories -- like *The Al-Qaida Computer Tale* - serve as nothing more than a red herring "cluster bomb", meant to forever obscure the truth by forcing an accommodation with a "well-known fact" -- a sort of modern update on the "*Oswald In Mexico*" gambit. Whichever lead Daniel Pearl was pursuing -- which we may never know -- the important fact to keep in mind is the man who would eventually be tagged for his murder -- Omar Saeed Sheikh.

Only four days after the disappearance of Daniel Pearl, Omar Saeed once more bobbed up into the world's headlines after staying submerged for more than four months. As reported by Rajeev Syal and Chris Hastings for *The Telegraph* on January 27:

"The London School of Economics...has been host to at least three al-Qa'eda-linked terrorists, *The Telegraph* has been told. An intelligence report says that the trio studied or lectured at the London University college between 1990 and 1993, when it became a breeding ground for Islamic extremism...The three -- including one man called Ahmed Omar Sheikh [Omar Saeed] - have been revealed as having links with the LSE in an intelligence file seen by this newspaper and now being studied by police."

The reason for Omar Saeed's sudden reappearance in this article had nothing to do with Daniel Pearl. As Syal and Hastings reported:

"Omar [Saeed], 28, a former mathematics student at the LSE, is said to have been linked to last week's drive-by shooting in Calcutta that killed five policemen. He has also been named as one of the key financiers of Mohammed Atta, the pilot of one of the jets that hit the World Trade Centre on September 11."

Unfortunately, Syal and Hastings did not provide the names of the other two terrorists, but they did report that one of them "was arrested in Delhi last month for reported involvement in the recent attack on the Indian Parliament."

As we shall soon see, Omar Saeed's link to the largely forgotten money trail was now being carefully resurrected, leaving bin Laden's ever-marginalized brother-in-law off to the sidelines once more. What had changed in the interim? An October 1 attack on the provincial legislature in Kashmir, a December 13 attack on the parliament in Delhi, a January 22 attack in Calcutta, and -- the coup de grace -- the January 23 kidnapping of Daniel Pearl. If, after October 9, Omar Saeed had largely gone underground, he was purportedly a busy little mole in the months following.

While the average news reader would now care less about any arcane financial dealings, the money trail story was nevertheless "out there" and ultimately had to be accounted for in a definitive version. Somebody was playing for the history books. In the months following October 9, a working "legend" was being elaborated for Omar Saeed, one that would increasingly distance him from the implications of his relationship with the ISI chief.

Now, as the purported perpetrator of all sorts of al-Qaida-linked mischief -- helped along by bin Laden's well-timed October 14 plug for Kashmir -- Omar Saeed's link with the 9/11 hijackers could be obscured and/or minimized amid a veritable buffet of terrorist activity. By the time of Omar Saeed's debutante "outing" as a suspect in the kidnapping of Daniel Pearl on February 6, 2002, the *Omar Saeed/Money Trail Story* was now fully ripened for the *Shrug Technique*. On February 10, *Time Magazine's* Unmesh Kher offhandedly mentioned Omar Saeed's \$100,000 link to 9/11. But more importantly, that very day, the *Associated Press*, courtesy of Kathy Gannon, would officially snub bin Laden's brother-in-law (and thereby refute itself) by reporting: "Western intelligence sources believe Saeed sent \$100,000 to Mohamed Atta, the suspected ringleader of the Sept. 11 terrorist hijackings, through a money transfer system known as hawala that bypasses banks and official financial institutions." Alas, it appears in retrospect that bin Laden brother-in-law Sa'd al-Sharif (alias Shaykh Sai'id alias Mustafa Ahmad *al-Hisawi*) was merely a "temporary hide-out" for the money trail.

The February 10 article by Gannon, while making a redemptive stab at a limited hangout of the truth, nevertheless spoiled its record by grabbing at another juicy morsel of disinformation: "Kamal Shah, chief of police in Sindh province...said investigators were trying to track Saeed. 'We feel we are close,' he said. 'We can't give you a timeframe. But we don't think we are far off.'"

As far off as the upstairs bathroom, perhaps -- for Saeed had already been in custody for five days by that time. Saeed "surrendered Feb.5 in the presence of Ejaz Shah, a former top ISI official now working as home secretary of Punjab province," reported Karl Vick and Kamran Khan of the *Washington Post* on May 3. On February 12, the Pakistani authorities finally decided to formally announce the arrest of Omar Saeed. So how did he spend his week-long secret hideaway with the Pakistani authorities? As reported by the *Associated Press* on July 1 2002, "Saeed said authorities illegally detained him and tortured two of his fellow defendants in order to give police more time to fabricate a case against him."

As the *Washington Post* framed it on May 3: "Officials acknowledge that Saeed remained in ISI custody for a week while Pakistan's president, Gen. Pervez Musharraf, visited Washington and said he was 'relatively certain' Pearl was alive."

If Musharraf was being somewhat shifty, he ratcheted it up a notch on February 9, when he suggested that Indian intelligence played a hand in Pearl's kidnapping. His evidence, according to a February 9 *Washington Post* item by Kamran Khan:

"So far, investigators said, the suggestion of an Indian connection revolves around three phone calls to New Delhi placed from the same cell phone that was used to lure Pearl to a restaurant in Karachi on Jan. 23, the last time he was seen in public. Police sources say they have traced the calls, with the help of the FBI, to numbers for an Indian cabinet minister and two members of parliament. But the sources said they believe those phone calls were made to mislead

investigators into concluding that India was involved."

In almost an exact mirror image of the October 9 Times of India allegations, Omar Saeed was now being pawned off on the Indians.

In the same article, on that very day, the disinformation was coming fast and furious:

"Police today also took the unusual step of turning for help to the jailed leader of Jaish-i-Muhammad, Masood Azhar. The sources said they persuaded Azhar to make a call from his prison cell to Saeed requesting Pearl's release."

More likely, he used string attached to two styrofoam cups to reach Saeed in the neighboring cell.

As the "official" story had it soon after Saeed's "official" arrest on February 12, the case was solved when the authorities successfully traced a series of e-mails back to one of Saeed's alleged accomplices, who then confessed that he was only acting under Saeed's orders. The government's case, as reported by Zarar Khan of the *Associated Press* on July 1, "rests heavily on technical FBI evidence, which traced the e-mails to fellow defendant Fahad Naseem."

Thus, it would appear that the FBI had a hand in linking Omar Saeed to the kidnappers of Daniel Pearl. This is an important fact to consider, for -remember -- *The Times of India*, on October 9, had linked Saeed to ISI Chief Ahmad, reporting that Indian intelligence had supplied evidence to the FBI. In the aftermath, ISI Chief Ahmad was "quietly retired" at the insistence of the U.S. government, according to the Oct. 9 Times of India. Eventually, the American mainstream media -- mostly through *Time Magazine* -- would provide the cover story for General Ahmad, tagging him as "pro-Taliban" yet omitting any suggestions that he might have been orchestrating payment for the 9/11 hijackers, with Saeed as his primary agent. And while the mainstream media began to effectively distance Saeed from the money trail soon thereafter (while simultaneously "smothering" the money trail story), the Justice Department waited a month after the October 9 revelations to finally move against Saeed by issuing an indictment -- but not by reason of any alleged 9/11 links. According to a *CNN* item posted February 28, 2002:

"U.S. officials said that [Omar Saeed] was secretly indicted in November in connection with the 1994 kidnapping in India of western tourists, including an American. Justice Department officials won't say what prompted that indictment, which came more than six years after the incident."

The revelation -- in February -- that the FBI had already moved against Saeed back in November was an excellent exercise in "plausible deniability." The indictment itself would provide a cover story for any future "limited hangout" concerning Saeed's links to the money trail. Citing "uncertainty" as to the true identity of the pseudonymous paymaster Mustafa Ahmad, the Justice Department could then claim that it played it "safe" in November by indicting Saeed for an offense to which he could definitely be linked. Any notion of a "cover-up" could then be dismissed by evidence for the admitted confusion surrounding the identity of "Shaykh Sai'id" as Mustafa Ahmad.

By late February, most of the components for the full cover story were coming together in the mainstream media. Omar Saeed could now simultaneously be linked to al-Qaida and

"rogue" elements in the ISI, distancing him from President Musharraf and the post-September 11 "good" ISI. As reported by Nancy Gibbs in a February 25 article for TIME:

"Pakistani investigators and newspapers in the U.S. have speculated that rogue elements linked to the ISI wanted to demonstrate to Musharraf and the world that they were not so easily tamed...[Musharraf] was able to cut the extremists loose after Sept. 11 and replace the hardline, pro-Taliban ISI Chief [General Ahmad]..."

In short, the mainstream media were laying the groundwork for a possible future "hangout" on explicit links between General Ahmad's "rogue" ISI clique and Omar Saeed. In this respect, Saeed and General Ahmad would be portrayed as having a common intention. As reported by Kamran Khan and Molly Moore of the *Washington Post* on February 18:

"Saeed said attacks outside the U.S. cultural center in Calcutta, the Indian Parliament in New Delhi and a legislative assembly in Kashmir were aimed at provoking India into taking action against Pakistan. Extremist organizers -- some with ties to Saeed -- hoped Musharraf would be forced to back away from his public stand against militant activities, Saeed told police."

While the *Post* item by Khan and Moore also mentioned Saeed's links to bin Laden -- "Saeed told [police] he had traveled to Afghanistan 'a few days after September 11' to meet Osama bin Laden" -- at no point was General Ahmad or the 9/11 money trail mentioned.

Yet Khan and Moore introduced a seemingly innocuous new "wrinkle" to the story -- Saeed's admitted "relationship with Aftab Ansari, the alleged gangster and chief suspect in the shooting outside the U.S. cultural center in Calcutta...Saeed said he met Ansari while the two men were jailed in New Delhi's Tihar prison." To anyone reading that snippet -- unaware of the *Saeed/ISI/9/11 Money Trail* link -- the offhand mention of Ansari would barely register. As we shall shortly see, though, the addition of Ansari to an eventual "hangout" of the full cover story would be absolutely crucial, for it also involves the participation of the *Times of India*.

As we have seen, the *Times of India*, through its October 9 revelation, set in motion a huge degree of activity surrounding the evidence implicating bin Laden for September 11. Moreover, India was repeatedly being led to the brink with Pakistan through terror attacks that would eventually be linked to Saeed and/or rogue elements in the ISI. If, theoretically, India had the "goods" on Pakistan and the U.S. government, apparently other forces were at work to maintain countervailing pressure on India. If the October 9 revelation seemed -- on its face -- to be an attempt by India to soil the reputation of Pakistan, by February 13, the *Times of India* was explicitly backing away from the sinister implications of its October 9 outing.

When the news of Saeed's "official" arrest broke on February 12, here is how the *Times of India* would describe Saeed's connection to the 9/11 money trail a day later:

"...there were allegations that [Saeed] had organized at least one bank remittance to the terrorists who were responsible for the September 11 strikes in the US and that Lt. Gen. Mahmood Ahmed had helped him in this regard. There was, however, no evidence to indicate whether Ahmed was aware that this amount was meant for the terrorist strikes in the U.S."

This was a crucial point to emphasize, for it was widely known that General Ahmad had

been involved in several intense discussions with American officials in the months leading up to 9/11. The importance of any cover story, then, would be to divert attention and thought from The Implication That Dare Not Speak Its Name -- that General Ahmad's ISI were the operational commanders of the 9/11 hijackers, acting themselves as proxies for the U.S. government/U.K./EU (i.e., the coalition spearheading the War On Terrorism).

With General Ahmad's involvement in 9/11 thus somewhat obfuscated by the *Times of India* on February 13, the *Times of India* then proceeded, on February 14, to fully "inoculate" against the virus that it had released on October 9. Its main vaccine -- Aftab Ansari:

"Aftab Ansari arranged for \$100,000 for Omar [Saeed] Sheikh, prime accused in the kidnapping of WSJ reporter Daniel Pearl...Ansari arranged a series of e-mails with [Saeed] and Asif Reza Khan [who was killed on December 7] in August 2001, where he was asked to help out with a 'noble cause'... Indian officials interrogating Ansari said that, on August 8, 2001, Ansari asked Khan over e-mail whether he agreed to part with \$100,000 for a 'noble cause' as requested by [Saeed]...on August 11, Ansari sent an e-mail to Khan saying that 'the amount mentioned had been sent to [Saeed]'...On August 19, [Saeed] e-mailed Ansari again, saying, 'The money that was sent has been passed on.'"

Thus, after attempting to clip ISI General Ahmad out of the picture on February 13, the *Times of India* then attempted the next day to insert Aftab Ansari into the money trail story. Conveniently, Ansari was deported from the United Arab Emirates to India only a few days before, where he was arrested for the terror attack in Calcutta. As the UAE was previously reported by the American media to be the country from which the pseudonymous paymaster "Mustafa Ahmad" made the \$100,000 wire transfer, Ansari's link to that country would provide further confirmation for this developing cover story.

And while Pakistan was not quite let off the hook, the *Times of India* -- by way of Ansari -- now more firmly linked the money trail back to al-Qaida:

"Officials said the e-mails also hint at Ansari's possible linkages with the al-Qaeda network. The e-mails also refute Pakistani authorities' rebuttal of their nexus with the deported gangster. Interestingly, the mode of communication adopted by them is similar to that used by Mohammad Atta and other al-Qaeda members to carry out the September 11 attacks...This gives credence to the perception that Ansari had arranged \$100,000 for the terror attacks on America, officials said."

In short, by February 14, the *Times of India* was officially touting the Saeed/Ansari duo rather than the Saeed/General Ahmad coupling.

Yet this was not the *Times of India*'s first mention of Ansari in connection with Omar Saeed and the 9/11 money trail. That first mention dates, in fact, to Tuesday January 22, 2002 -- the day of the Calcutta attack, and exactly one day before Daniel Pearl's disappearance. Here, then, was the *Times of India*'s initial account of the Saeed/Ansari connection:

"[Indian] CBI Director P C Sharma told visiting FBI Chief Robert S Mueller that Ansari, who claimed responsibility for [today's Calcutta] attack, had taken a ransom of Rs 37.5 million to free shoe baron Parthapratim Roy Burman through hawala channels to Dubai, CBI sources said. Out of this amount, Omar [Saeed] ... had sent \$100,000 to Atta through telegraphic transfer, CBI sources said."

Thus, by January 22, not only was FBI Director Robert Mueller on scene in India, but he was

reportedly apprised of the Ansari/Saeed/Money Trail by Indian authorities. Conveniently, Ansari had claimed responsibility for the attack that very day, and his subsequent deportation to India from Dubai was also conveniently timed with the subsequent arrest of Omar Saeed for the kidnapping of Daniel Pearl. As Mueller's FBI was also reportedly on hand to trace the Pearl kidnapping back to Omar Saeed, it is reasonable to deduce from these facts an alternative explanation for Mueller's January 22 visit -- namely, that Mueller was "on hand" to coordinate this final leg of the Omar Saeed cover-up story, bringing in Ansari by way of the well-timed Calcutta attack, and then employing his colleagues in Indian intelligence to feed the *Times of India* its corrective "take" on the *Omar Saeed/Money Trail Story*.

With the Calcutta operation in place, in conjunction with the Pearl kidnapping, Omar Saeed would now be nicely set up for his initial January 27 resurrection in the British Telegraph, to be followed days later in the American media through his February 5 "outing" in connection with the Pearl kidnapping. I do not mean to imply by this that the Calcutta attack and the Pearl kidnapping were conducted for the *sole purpose* of establishing a cover-up legend. Far from it. Covert operations -- particularly those with propaganda value -- are often "loaded up" with a number of multi-faceted, yet related, objectives. In this way, a "rogue ISI" element could be established as standing against the interests of the U.S./Pakistani War On Terrorism, and Omar Saeed in this light could then be presented as standing at the center of the very nexus between this rogue ISI and the al-Qaida terror network that had already declared its opposition to India in Kashmir.

On July 15, 2002, Omar Saeed was sentenced to die by a Pakistani court. By this time, all contingencies had long been covered. The confusion surrounding the identity of the pseudonym Mustafa Ahmad could provide a "plausible" explanation as to why the media neglected -- even after Saeed's February 12 "arrest" -- to consistently link him to the money trail, which by then had long taken a backseat to the *Official Bin Laden Videotape Confession* of December 13. Moreover, by linking Saeed up with all that post-9/11 terror activity, Saeed's *pre*-9/11 role would be effectively minimized. Most importantly, the mainstream media would -- as of this writing -- observe an iron-clad rule for reporting on Saeed -- that is, never mention Saeed, al-Qaida, the money trail, the ISI, and General Ahmad in the same article. In those articles that would mention Saeed's links with the money trail, they would also now mention his links to al-Qaida but omit any mention of General Ahmad. Where those articles mentioned Saeed's links with the ISI, they would omit mention of the money trail and General Ahmad. Of those articles that mentioned General Ahmad and the ISI, General Ahmad would be tagged as "pro-Taliban" while "rogue" elements in his ISI would then be linked to al-Qaida -- with any mention of Saeed and the money trail safely omitted. Now, with the Ansari angle credibly in place, it is a safe bet that the mainstream media -- probably courtesy of *Time Magazine* -- will one day "put it all together" for us, detailing how Ansari and Saeed, at the behest of al-Qaida, organized the money transfers to the hijackers as rogue elements in the ISI looked the other way, possibly not realizing that their "pro-Taliban" sympathies would facilitate the actions of September 11.

The whole cover story, however -- with its endless obfuscations, diversions, and fallback explanations -- cannot obscure the fact that it depends on a huge number of coincidences and conveniently timed set-ups to keep it in place. Moreover, evidence can be marshaled to show that the mainstream media -- either as willful agents or as passive mouthpieces of the intelligence apparatus -- planted disinformation that was meant to structure perceptions in a

specific direction. The elaboration of the cover story bears the marks of its apparent mistakes and missteps.

But more disturbingly, *the Omar Saeed/ Money Trail Story* effectively shatters the credibility of the media/intelligence apparatus that provided virtually all the information on bin Laden and his al-Qaida network over the years. If this one small element of the overall 9/11 terror picture shows this much evidence of information management, one wonders how many other elements in this tale bear the marks of elaborate orchestration by the parties who have fed us all the data.

In intelligence operations, a credible "legend" is created through acting out all elements in the story rather than simply fabricating them for later use. Thus, "lead" hijacker Mohamed Atta most likely did receive a wire transfer of \$100,000, arranged by an operative who was connected to al-Qaida, an organization that was fully financed, structured and "false-flagged" by Pakistanis and Saudis acting as operative proxy agents/patsies for what appears to be a globally connected Western elite intelligence apparatus.

As a crucial element in constructing the "legend" of 9/11, it was necessary to provide the links between the hijackers and al-Qaida. The paradox is this -- an apparently sophisticated terror entity like al-Qaida would be required to maintain an elaborate evidential trail leading to its hijackers. Put simply, the names on those boarding passes would have to be the same names linked to various credit cards, witnesses, apartments, cell phone records, etc. Whether or not a hijacker by the name of Al-Suqami, al-Shehhi, or Atta was using a false passport would be largely irrelevant if it could be shown that someone employing the same false alias was linked to the same incriminating evidence. The evidence -- culled from credit card charges, Internet communications, cell phone calls, and ATM withdrawals -- revealed, according to a November 4, 2001 article in the *New York Times*, "...a picture in which the roles of the 19 hijackers are so well-defined as to be almost corporate in their organization and coordination." And that is the paradox. If the names on those boarding passes were used only once, there would be no evidence at all linking those hijackers to al-Qaida.

Here was an example of an anomaly "hiding in plain sight." With the hijackers conveniently sowing a consistent trail of the same names or aliases all over the place -- establishing a "legend" that could be corroborated by real witnesses -- the media could then be used to plant all kinds of disinformation and red herrings to divert attention from this most obvious anomaly. For example, where ABC News would report on September 12 that a passport belonging to a hijacker named Satam Al-Suqami was found in the rubble of the World Trade Center, the other mainstream outlets would widely report the discovery of the "mystery passport" days later -- on September 16 -- as having some kind of evidential significance. But it was an obvious red herring. At best, it would signify this -- that a passport was found which bore the same name as someone whose boarding pass bore the same name as someone linked to an al-Qaida training camp in Afghanistan. More "smoke" would then be wafted over the "mystery" surrounding this discovery when it was widely reported that FBI honcho Barry Mawn would not reveal the name on the passport (when all the media had to do was to check their Sept. 12 file clippings from ABC News).

Other red herrings would follow. The "full" passenger lists, for instance, would be released without the names of the purported hijackers on it -- leaving some to sniff that the

government had "something to hide." But quite simply, the main fact worth hiding is the notion that the hijackers worked so assiduously to build a convenient evidential trail with their supposed aliases. Take Mohamed Atta, for example. If he weren't so wedded to spreading his name like seed, then we would have no money trail story, no incriminating flight manuals in rented cars, no surveillance videos, no flight school witnesses -- in fact, nothing at all on which we could hinge a legend for Mohamed Atta. The mainstream media repeatedly assured us that the hijackers were quite meticulous in staying below the radar, following the professional protocols of the Al-Qaida Handbook. Yet at every step of the way, they risked blowing their cover, going so far as to book flights under names that were either already on FBI watch lists or that could easily be linked to "shady" associates.

By smothering the public with an apparent abundance of evidence, by conjuring the illusion that thousands of federal agents were compiling a comprehensive paper trail, the terror "experts" diverted us from the obvious fact that the 9/11 hijackers -- purportedly the most cunning operatives for the most sophisticated terror operation in history -- were instead certified morons, leaving us the gift of their boarding passes as the slim thread that would tie them to the Potemkin facade that is al-Qaida.

Someone by the name of Marwan Al-Shehhi was careful to rent a hotel room in Deerfield Beach, taking further care to leave behind Boeing 757 manuals and "an eight-inch stack of East Coast flight maps." Someone under the name of Marwan Al-Shehhi was also careful to use that name in activating his cell phone account so that one day, on November 4, 2001, Don Van Natta and Kate Zernike of the *New York Times* would be able to write: "Mohamed Atta, in seat 8D in business class, dialed his cellphone ... [reaching] Marwan Al-Shehhi in seat 6C on United Airlines Flight 175." How Van Natta and Zernike were also able to report that Atta called Al-Shehhi his "cousin" on that particular phone call perhaps reveals my ignorance over what can be divined through paper records of cell phone calls.

Moreover, it was convenient that someone by the name of Mohamed Atta took care to fasten his name tag on the luggage that he so thoughtfully left behind -- in addition to the rented car he abandoned in the airport parking lot -- so that authorities could find "a five-page handwritten document in Arabic that includes...practical reminders to bring 'knives, your will, IDs, your passport, all your papers.'" The existence of a written reminder for professional hijackers -- who were presumably intensively trained to commandeer those airplanes with knives -- to pack blades for their flight bears no rational explanation (except to confirm to us that, indeed, the hijackers did use sharp implements to take those planes).

But for all his credit card charges, cell phone calls, and bar tab receipts, Mohamed Atta was most fastidious in setting up a bank account in his name, so that he would be able to receive a wire transfer of \$100,000 from someone who could definitively be linked to al-Qaida. That would be the paper trail, the "money" shot, the financial link to 9/11. And, best of all, the evidence would be unimpeachable because the whole transaction was in fact carried out by this "lead" hijacker who so consistently provided the evidence in elaborating the "legend" of 9/11. But it was not meant to be. At some point, the lines crossed, a seam showed, a careless inconsistency bore its ugly head. Amid the confusion, this emergent "smoking gun" needed to be aborted.

In the aftermath, new "smoking guns" would emerge, more smoke would be blown. And

what of that illusion -- the one that in those early days after 9/11 seemed to conjure an image of thousands of federal agents building a paper forest of evidence implicating the hijackers? "The hijackers left no paper trail," declared FBI director Robert Mueller on April 30, 2002. "In our investigations, we have not uncovered a single piece of paper ... that mentioned any aspect of the Sept. 11 plot." In other words, they no longer needed to stand guard and defend the mountains of innuendo and smoke that was blown in those early days to provide you with the authorized account of 9/11. Mueller, with his carefully worded lawyerly formulation - "piece of paper", "mentioned", etc. -- would thus have it both ways: throwing up the innuendo without legally obligating himself to defend it.

In the end, the smoking gun was not the money trail. Nor was it the "whistle-blowing" article that appeared to expose it. Instead, the smoking gun lay in the actions, words, and deceptions of those who so cynically took it upon themselves to direct our perceptions -- to tell us what, why, and how we know what we know. For in so closely managing the flow of information, by weaving in so many coincidences and synchronicities that could only be explained by willful orchestration, they exposed the seams of their duplicity, and in so doing, exposed before our eyes the intricate workings of a vast, all-pervasive disinformation apparatus that now risks its own destruction -- for its contours can now be perceived by all who care to look.

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