

9/11 Contradictions: Mohamed Atta's Mitsubishi and His Luggage

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Theme: [Terrorism](#)

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At the core of the official story about 9/11 is the claim that the four airliners that crashed that day had been taken over by a band of al-Qaeda hijackers led by Mohamed Atta. No proof was ever provided for this claim. But various kinds of evidence have been offered, the most important of which was reportedly found in Atta's luggage after the attacks. The materials in this luggage were said to confirm the suspicion that the planes had been hijacked by Atta and fellow Muslims. As Joel Achenbach wrote in a *Washington Post* story on September 16, 2001:

Atta is thought to have piloted American Airlines Flight 11, the first to slam into the World Trade Center. A letter written by Atta, left in his luggage at Boston's Logan Airport, said he planned to kill himself so he could go to heaven as a martyr. It also contained a Saudi passport, an international driver's license, instructional videos for flying Boeing airliners and an Islamic prayer schedule. ("'You Never Imagine' A Hijacker Next Door.")

This discovery was clearly very helpful in making the case against Atta and al-Qaeda.

But why was Atta's luggage there to be discovered? Achenbach said: "Officials believe that Atta and [Abdul] Alomari rented a car in Boston, drove to Portland, Maine, and took a room Monday night at the Comfort Inn . . . They then flew on a short flight Tuesday morning from Portland to Boston, changing to Flight 11."

But why did Atta's luggage not make it on to Flight 11? A 9/11 staff statement suggested that it was a tight connection, saying: "The Portland detour almost prevented Atta and Omari from making Flight 11 out of Boston. In fact, the luggage they checked in Portland failed to make it onto the plane" (Staff Statement No. 16, June 16, 2004). When *The 9/11 Commission Report* appeared the following month, however, this suggestion was missing. Indeed, the Commission, after saying that "Atta and Omari arrived in Boston at 6:45," added that "American Airlines Flight 11 [was] scheduled to depart at 7:45" (*9/11 Commission Report* [henceforth 9/11CR], 1-2).

If there was almost an hour for the luggage to be transferred, why was it left behind? We might suppose that the ground crew was careless. American Airlines reported, however, that "Atta was the only passenger among the 81 aboard American Flight 11 whose luggage didn't make the flight" (Paul Sperry, *WorldNetDaily.com*, September 11, 2002).

There was, moreover, even a bigger mystery: Why did Atta, if he was already in Boston on September 10, take the trip to Portland and stay overnight, thereby necessitating the early morning commuter flight? If the commuter flight had been delayed by an hour, Atta and al-Omari would have missed the connection. There would have been only three

hijackers to take control of Flight 11. Atta, moreover, was reportedly the designated pilot for this flight and also the ringleader of the whole operation, which, after years of planning, he might have had to call off.

Why he would have made such a risky trip has never been explained. A year after the attacks, FBI Director Robert Mueller, testifying to the Congressional Joint Inquiry into 9/11, said:

[T]he day before the attacks, Mohamed Atta . . . picked up Abdul Aziz . . . and drove to Portland, Maine. They checked into the Comfort Inn in South Portland. . . . [T]heir reason for going there, to date, remains unclear. ("Statement for the Record," Joint Intelligence Committee Inquiry, Sept. 26, 2002)

Two years later, the 9/11 Commission wrote: "No physical, documentary, or analytical evidence provides a convincing explanation of why Atta and Omari drove to Portland, Maine, from Boston on the morning of September 10, only to return to Logan on Flight 5930 on the morning of September 11" (9/11CR 451n1).

We have, therefore, two mysteries. Why would Atta have risked the trip to Portland? And why did his luggage fail to get loaded onto Flight 11? My book, *9/11 Contradictions*, is about contradictions, not mysteries. Clues to these mysteries, however, can be found by exploring a full-fledged contradiction: the fact that the Atta-to-Portland story contradicts stories that appeared in the press in the first days after 9/11.

The Original Story: Boston and the Bukharis

According to the official account, as we have seen, Atta drove to Portland in a blue Nissan Altima, then flew on the morning of September 11 from Portland to the Boston airport, where the incriminating materials were found in his luggage later that day. In the first few days after 9/11, however, the story was very different.

On September 12, a CNN report distinguished between Atta and the men who flew from Portland to Boston.

Law enforcement sources say that two of the suspected hijackers . . . are brothers that lived [in Vero Beach, Florida]. . . . One of them is Adnan Bukhari. We have a photograph of him. . . . Also living in Vero Beach, Bukhari's brother, Ameer. . . . Law enforcement sources . . . tell CNN that the Bukhari brothers were believed to have been on one of the two flights out of Boston Also we can report to you that a car impounded in Portland, Maine, according to law enforcement authorities, was rented at Boston Logan Airport and driven to Portland, Maine. Now the Maine state police confirm that two of the suspected hijackers were on a U.S. Air flight out of [the Portland airport]. . . . The FBI is also looking at two more suspected hijackers . . . , Mohammad Atta and Marwan Yusef Alshehhi." ("America Under Attack: How Could It Happen?" Although the reporter, Susan Candiotti, said "Logan Airport," the information she received had to have referred to the Portland airport, from which the U.S. Airways flight originated, and about which the Maine state police would have had information.)

Another CNN report that same day stated that the incriminating materials were found in a car at the Boston airport and, while discussing the Nissan found at the Portland airport, did not connect it to Atta:

Law enforcement officials confirmed that a car was seized at Boston's Logan International Airport and that suspicious materials were found. The Boston Herald said there were Arabic language flight training manuals in the car. . . . Meanwhile, in Portland, Maine, police said that two individuals who traveled by plane from that city to Boston were under investigation. . . . Maine authorities said a car—a rented silver Nissan Altima with Massachusetts plates—was seized from the Portland airport Tuesday evening. (“US Says It Has Identified Hijackers”)

On the next day, September 13, CNN named the Bukharis as the renters of the Nissan and said that the car found at Boston, now identified as a Mitsubishi, was rented by Atta:

“Two of the men were brothers, . . . Adnan Bukhari and Ameer Abbas Bukhari. . . . The two rented a car, a silver-blue Nissan Altima, from an Alamo car rental at Boston's Logan Airport and drove to an airport in Portland, Maine, where they got on US Airways Flight 5930 at 6 AM Tuesday headed back to Boston. . . . A Mitsubishi sedan impounded at Logan Airport was rented by [Mohamed] Atta, sources said. The car contained materials, including flight manuals, written in Arabic that law enforcement sources called “helpful” to the investigation.” (“Two Brothers among Hijackers”)

Another CNN report that same day said that law enforcement authorities were led to the Bukhari brothers by documents connected to the Nissan (“Hijack Suspect Detained, Cooperating with FBI”).

A Problem Emerges

However, that same day (September 13), CNN issued a correction (“Feds Think They've Identified Some Hijackers”), pointing out that neither of the Bukharis had died on 9/11: Ameer had died the year before and Adnan was still alive. CNN apologized for the “misinformation,” which had been “[b]ased on information from multiple law enforcement sources.”

However, this discovery did not immediately lead to a complete change of story. For example, the next day (September 14), CNN said: “A Mitsubishi sedan [Atta] rented was found at Boston's Logan Airport. Arabic language materials were found in the car” (Mike Fish, “Fla. Flight Schools May Have Trained Hijackers”).

The Emergence of the Final Story

That same day, however, the story began to change more drastically. An Associated Press report, referring to “two suspects in the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center,” said:

One of the two suspects who boarded a flight in Portland was Mohamed Atta, 33. . . . The 2001 Nissan Altima used by the men came from the same Boston rental location as another car used by additional suspects that contained incriminating materials when it was seized at Boston's Logan Airport.

Once in Maine, the suspects spent the night at the Comfort Inn in South Portland before boarding the plane the next morning. (“Portland Police Eye Local Ties”)

Suddenly, the Nissan Altima had been driven to Portland by Atta and his companion, who had then flown back to Boston the next morning. But the transition to what would become

the accepted narrative was not yet complete. The incriminating materials were still found in a rental car left at Logan—although this car was now said to have been rented by unnamed “additional suspects,” not by Atta.

The complete transition was made on September 16, in the aforementioned *Washington Post* article by Joel Achenbach, which had the incriminating evidence found in Atta’s luggage.

This new story was soon fleshed out with various details, including physical evidence that Atta and al-Omari had been in Portland the night before the attacks. One article said:

The FBI released a detailed chronology Thursday [October 4] showing that two of the suspected hijackers in the Sept. 11 attack on the World Trade Center spent their final hours in Greater Portland. . . . After checking in at the motel, Atta and Alomari were seen . . . [b]etween 8 and 9 PM . . . at Pizza Hut; at 8:31 PM, they were videotaped by a KeyBank automatic teller machine, and videotaped again at 8:41 PM at a Fast Green ATM next to Pizzeria Uno. . . . At . . . 9:22 PM, Atta was caught on videotape in the Wal-Mart in Scarborough. (“The Night Before Terror,” *Portland Press Herald*, October 5, 2001)

The Mysteries and the Contradiction

This new story solved a problem created by the discovery that the Bukharis had not died on 9/11—how to explain why a rental car left at the Portland airport could have led authorities to two of the hijackers. This solution, however, created the mystery of why Atta would have taken this trip plus the problem of explaining the well-reported fact that incriminating materials had been found at Logan Airport. This latter problem was solved by saying that they were found in Atta’s luggage, which did not make it onto Flight 11. But this solution created, in turn, the mystery as to why Atta’s luggage failed to make the flight. The main problem facing the new story, however, is simply the fact that it *is* a new story, which radically contradicts what the authorities had said the first few days.

Congress and the press need to ask why this contradiction exists and why the 9/11 Commission ignored it. This essay is an abbreviated version of Chapter 16 of Dr. Griffin’s 9/11 Contradictions: An Open Letter to Congress and the Press (Northampton: Olive Branch, March, 2008).

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