

9/11 Analysis: The Claim that 'Able Danger' Failed to Identify Mohamed Atta's Probable Presence in the US in January 2000

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Consensus 9/11

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Introduction

Able Danger was the code name for a high-level intelligence operation co-founded by Generals Hugh Shelton and Peter Schoomaker, Commanders in Chief of the Defense Department's Special Operations Command (SOCOM).

Telling the story about Able Danger takes time, but it is important, because its work strongly indicated that the man identified as "Mohamed Atta" had been in the United States in January-February 2000, about 18 months before the 9/11 attacks, whereas the official story said he arrived in June, 2000.

Furthermore, the official story claimed that US intelligence didn't know he was in the country before 9/11, whereas an important part of US intelligence knew he had been there since Jan-Feb, 2000. (For the reason why we speak of "the man identified as 'Mohamed Atta,'" see the footnote. [1])

However, the Able Danger evidence was consistently ignored by government officials; the 9/11 Commission failed to mention the evidence; and the Defense Department's Inspector General covered it up. [2] Louis Freeh, the former director of the FBI, called the 9/11 Commission's claim that it was not historically significant "astounding."

Background

Here are the details of this story:

Tasked with collecting open-source Internet data on worldwide al-Qaeda networks and terrorist financing, this massive "data- mining" operation employing 80 people began in late 1999.

It used a link-mapping strategy to download and analyze data from thousands of websites. The terrorist network data were then presented visually on wall charts.

The Able Danger leadership team included:

Navy Captain Scott Phillpott (the head of Able Danger)

- US Army Lt. Col. Anthony E. Shaffer (on loan from the Defense Intelligence Agency)
- Erik Kleinsmith (Army Major and the Chief of Intelligence of the Land Information Warfare Activity)
- James D. Smith (a civilian defense contractor from Orion Scientific Systems)
- Dr. Eileen Preisser (Dual PhD, analytical lead, from the Land Information Warfare Activity)

By January-February 2000, the team had discovered the surprising probability of al-Qaeda members within a terrorist cell in Brooklyn. [3]

In mid-2000, Lt. Col. Shaffer was asked by Captain Phillpott to open communications between the head of Able Danger and the FBI in order to collaboratively take down the cell in Brooklyn. However, SOCOM attorneys rejected this effort three times, leaving the FBI unaware of information that suggested the man identified as Atta was inside the U.S. in early 2000. [4]

Soon after 9/11, when photos of the suspected terrorists were released, Phillpott, Shaffer, Preisser, and Smith were shocked to recognize alleged lead hijacker Mohamed Atta and two other alleged hijackers from an Able Danger chart.

Two weeks later, Dr. Preisser, along with three Republican Congressmen – Curt Weldon, Chris Shays, and Dan Burton – showed the "Atta chart" to Deputy National Security Advisor Stephen Hadley in the White House, who said he would show it to President Bush. [5]

In October 2003, Lt. Col. Shaffer contacted 9/11 Commission Executive Director Philip Zelikow, while both were in Afghanistan, to report that Able Danger had identified Atta over a year before the attacks.

In March 2004, Shaffer's Defense Intelligence Agency security clearance was suspended, preventing him from further accessing the documents. [6]

In June 2005, Congressman Curt Weldon (Vice Chairman of the House Armed Services and Homeland Security Committees) told about Able Danger in an interview with the Norristown Times Herald, [7] and in a subsequent speech on the floor of the House he called for an investigation. [8]

Thomas Kean and Lee Hamilton, the co-chairs of the 9/11 Commission, which had not mentioned Able Danger in its July 2004 final report, stated in August 2005 that Able Danger was not "historically significant." [9]

One day before a 2005 U.S. Senate Hearing on the matter, key Able Danger witnesses Shaffer, Phillpott and Smith were placed under a gag order by Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld. [10]

At the same Senate Hearing, Able Danger team member Erik Kleinsmith testified that he was ordered, under Army oversight regulations, to destroy all 2.5 terabytes of the Able Danger material, which he did in May or June of 2000. [11]

In October 2005, Congressman Weldon called for "a full independent investigation by the Inspector General [IG] of the Pentagon." [12] The IG investigation reported that the five Able

The Official Account

- 1. As *The 9/11 Commission Report* informed us, Mohamed Atta was the "tactical leader of the 9/11 plot." [14] He first arrived in the United States on a tourist visa, June 3, 2000. [15] The 9/11 Commission also said that "American intelligence agencies were unaware of Mr. Atta until the day of the attacks." [16]
- 2. In August 2005, a year after the 9/11 Commission had closed, Commissioners Kean and Hamilton explained to the media why Able Danger had not been included in *The 9/11 Commission Report*:
 - A. They had been informed about Able Danger in 2003, but were "never told that it had identified Mr. Atta and the others as threats." [17] Although the project leader Captain Phillpott was interviewed by the Commission about Atta in July 2004, his "knowledge and credibility" were not "sufficiently reliable" to warrant further investigation of Able Danger, so they concluded that the project was not "historically significant." [18]
 - B. When the Commission asked the Pentagon for all its documents relating to Able Danger, "none of the documents turned over to the Commission mention Mohamed Atta or any of the other future hijackers." [19]

According to an Associated Press story reported in mid-September 2005:

"The commission's former chairman, Thomas Kean, said there was no evidence anyone in the government knew about Atta before Sept. 11, 2001. ... Kean said the recollections of the intelligence officers cannot be verified by any document." 'Bluntly, it just didn't happen and that's the conclusion of all 10 of us,' said a former commissioner, former Senator Slade Gorton." [20]

- 3. Although several of Able Danger's officers and intelligence analysts had been scheduled to testify at a hearing of the Senate Judiciary Committee September 21, 2005, the Defense Department said that open testimony "would not be appropriate [because of] security concerns." [21]
- 4. In a September 2006 investigative report, the DOD Office of the Inspector General (IG) wrote: "We concluded that prior to September 11, 2001, Able Danger team members did not identify Mohammed [sic] Atta or any other 9/11 hijacker. While we interviewed four witnesses who claimed to have seen a chart depicting Mohammed Atta and possibly other terrorists or 'cells' involved in 9/11, we determined that their recollections were not accurate." [22]

The Best Evidence

I. Regarding Mohamed Atta's Date of Arrival in the United States:

1. Three senior staff from the Able Danger project gave written testimony to a September 2005 Senate Hearing that Mohamed Atta was identified as a potential member of a terrorist cell in New York in January-February 2000, four months earlier than the June 2000 date stated by the official account. A fourth member of the project, Mr. Kleinsmith, was asked during the same Hearing:

"Are you in a position to evaluate the credibility of Captain Philpott [sic], Colonel Shaffer, Mr. Westphal, Ms. Preisser, or Mr. J.D. Smith, when they say they saw Mohammed [sic] Atta on the chart?"

Mr. Kleinsmith: "Yes, sir. I believe them implicitly from the time that I had worked with all of them." [23]

- 2. After 9/11, civilian sightings of Atta during the spring of 2000 were reported in the news:
 - Johnelle Bryant of the US Department of Agriculture, talking to Brian Ross of ABC News "in defiance of direct orders from the USDA's Washington headquarters," said that Atta came into her office "sometime between the end of April and the middle of May 2000," asking for a loan to buy a small airplane (which she refused to give). Bryant reported that when she wrote down his name, she spelled it A-T-T-A-H, leading him to say: "No, A-T-T-A, as in Atta boy!" [24]
 - In April 2000 and into the summer, Atta was, according to the head of security and a reference librarian, seen repeatedly using the computers in the Portland Maine Public Library. [25]
 - A federal investigator reported to Associated Press on condition of anonymity that Atta and another hijacker rented rooms in Brooklyn and the Bronx in the spring of 2000. A senior Justice Department official reported that Atta's trail in Brooklyn began with a parking ticket issued to a rental car he was driving. [26]

II. Regarding the reasons given in the Kean-Hamilton 2005 statement for not including Able Danger in *The 9/11 Commission Report*:

- 1. The 9/11 Commission staff members were briefed twice by Able Danger project members:
 - The first briefing was by Colonel Anthony Shaffer on October 23, 2003. Although he was no longer with the Able Danger project, he was given clearance to meet with 9/11 Commission Executive Director Philip Zelikow and some Commission staff members who were visiting Bagram Air Force Base, Afghanistan, where Shaffer was stationed.In an hour-long meeting, Shaffer told Commission staff about the Able Danger project and how it had identified Atta in early 2000. In 2005, answering the Kean-Hamilton claim that he had not mentioned Atta to the Commission, Shaffer insisted that he had named Atta, saying: "I kept my talking points (from the meeting). And I'm confident about what I said." [27]
 - The second briefing was by Navy Captain Scott Phillpott (who had held four US Naval commands) on July 13, 2004. Phillpott, the leader of Able Danger, was interviewed by Commission staff member Dieter Snell. [28]Although Phillpott's statement clearly reinforced Shaffer's October 2003 statement, *The 9/11 Commission Report* had included neither, because as mentioned above, the Report said that Captain Phillpott's "knowledge and credibility" were not "sufficiently reliable" to warrant further investigation of Able Danger. [29]
- 2. Kean and Hamilton also rejected Able Danger's Atta claim on grounds that the

Pentagon records contained no documentary evidence. They thus disregarded the consistent briefings and testimony from four members of the project's senior management team. A clue to why may be provided by Anthony Shaffer's report (backed up by Curt Weldon; see IV-a below) that when Christopher Kojm, Deputy Executive Director of the 9/11 Commission, was asked by Congressman Curt Weldon's chief of staff why the Commission had not included Able Danger in its report, Kojm replied, "It did not fit with the story we wanted to tell." [30]

3. With regard to the Commission's claim that Able Danger was not historically significant, former FBI Director Louis Freeh said that "[t]he Able Danger intelligence, if confirmed, is undoubtedly the most relevant fact of the entire post-9/11 inquiry," calling the Commission's claim "astounding." [31]

III. Regarding the Pentagon concern that "it is simply not possible to discuss Able Danger in any great detail in an open public forum" such as the Senate Judiciary Committee:

- Phillpott, Shaffer and Smith had already made their written submissions when testifying before the September 21, 2005, Senate Hearing on Able Danger.
- Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman Arlen Specter said he was surprised by the Pentagon's decision because "so much of this is already in the public domain," [32] and "[t]hat looks to me like it may be obstruction of the committee's activities." [33]

IV. Regarding the Inspector-General's 2006 conclusion that the Able Danger team's recollection of an Atta chart was not accurate:

 In late June 2005, Congressman Curt Weldon, during an address to the House, had presented an enlarged version of the chart that he had received from Dr. Eileen Preisser and had then given to Stephen Hadley in the White House.Pointing out Mohamed Atta's name in the center of the chart, Weldon had asked:

"Why is there no mention, Mr. Speaker, of a recommendation in September of 2000 to take out Mohammed [sic] Atta's cell which would have detained three of the terrorists who struck us?We have to ask the question, why have these issues not been brought forth before this day? I had my Chief of Staff call the 9/11 Commission staff and ask the question: Why did you not mention Able Danger in your report? The Deputy Chief of Staff [Christopher Kojm] said, well, we looked at it, but we did not want to go down that direction.

So the question, Mr. Speaker, is why did they not want to go down that direction? Where will that lead us? Who made the decision to tell our military not to pursue Mohamed Atta?" [34]

2. In late August, 2005, three members of the Able Danger team had gone public, confirming the Atta chart: Defense intelligence analyst Lt. Col. Anthony Shaffer, [35] project leader Scott Phillpott, [36] and defense contractor James D. Smith, saying he was "absolutely positive that Atta was on our chart." [37]Important testimony from Smith came in a Hearing of the House

Arms Services Committee on February 15, 2006. Explaining that he had used Arab intermediaries in Los Angeles to buy a photograph of Atta, Smith added that it was one of some 40 photos of al-Qaeda members on a chart that he had given to Pentagon officials in 2000. [38] Smith also said: "I have recollection of a visual chart that identified associations of known terrorist Omar Abdul-Rahman within the New York City geographic area. ... Mohamed Atta's picture ... was on the chart. ... The particular Atta chart is no longer available, as it was destroyed in an office move that I had in 2004. [Smith later, explaining to the Pentagon's Inspector General how his Atta chart was destroyed, said: [I]t had been up there so long I had quite a lot of tape up there because it had been rolled up. In the process the tape was tearing the chart. ... It shredded itself as I was trying to pull it off the wall carefully ... so I just threw it away." [39]During questioning by Weldon, the following exchange had occurred:

"Weldon: Mr. Smith?I have direct recollection of the chart because I had a copy up until 2004. ... At the time, after 9/11 when the pictures were released in newspapers and I did the compare on the chart, when I saw [Atta's] picture there, I was extremely elated and, to anyone that would listen to me, I showed them the chart that was in my possession.

Weldon: How sure are you that it was Mohammed Atta's name and picture [on the chart]?

Smith: I'm absolutely certain. I used to look at it every morning ...

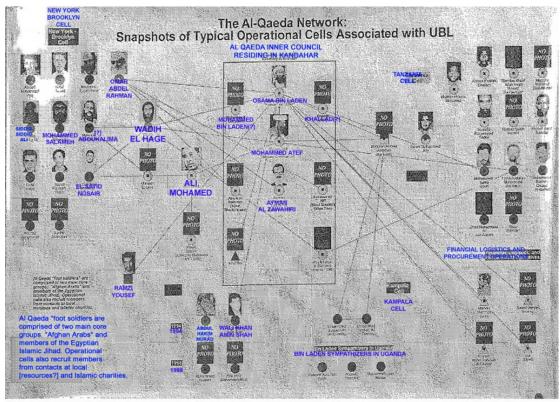
Weldon: And was that the chart you think that was given to me that I gave to the White House?

Smith: Yes, sir. It was.

Weldon: And you're aware that when I gave that chart to the White House, Dan Burton, the chairman of the Government Ops Committee, was with me and stated to the New York Times, that he actually showed the chart to Steve Hadley and explained the linkages?

Smith: Yes, sir." [40]

- 3. Confirming the public statements released in August, 2005, by Phillpott, Shaffer, and Smith, two more people reported having seen a chart with Atta's name on it when the Pentagon interviewed 80 Able Danger employees in early September 2005. Dr. Eileen Preisser and a Mr. (probably Christopher) Westphal brought the number of people who had seen the chart up to five, four of whom remembered Atta's picture. [41]
- 4. A purported image of one of Able Danger's charts, shown below, is available online, [42] supporting the existence of the charts and what they looked like:



This chart was found on a laptop used by Able Danger. Defense Department investigators photographed the screen. The DoD told INTELWIRE that this image is the best available reproduction. This is one of only two authentic Able Danger charts known to exist. The second -- on al Qaeda's links to Pan-Islamic movements -- is largely unreadable. INTELWIRE has enhanced identifiable text in blue.

- 5. Regarding the Pentagon Inspector General's 2006 90-page summary claiming that the team's recollections were not accurate, Dr. David Ray Griffin has provided a detailed analysis, showing its lack of transcripts, circular reasoning, and prejudicial treatment of witnesses. [43]
- 6. In an unusual departure from government and military investigation procedures, the Inspector General's 2006 report refers only to the positions of its witnesses, and does not identify them by name, thus offering witness protection through anonymity, although it was not a criminal investigation. [44]In Congressman Weldon's words, "The report trashes the reputations of military officers who had the courage to step forward and put their necks on the line to describe important work they were doing to track al-Qaeda prior to 9/11. ... I am appalled that the DOD IG would expect the American people to actually consider this a full and thorough investigation." [45]

Summary and Conclusion

The official 9/11 account is discredited by the evidence below:

- 1. The 9/11 Commission Report described Mohamed Atta as the "tactical leader of the 9/11 plot."
- 2. According to the official story, Mohamed Atta entered the US in June of 2000, but in fact he had come months earlier (January-February, 2000).
- 3. According to the official story US intelligence didn't know he was in the country before 9/11, whereas a major research agency co-founded by two Commanders in Chief of the Defense Department's Special Operations Command (SOCOM) produced evidence showing that the man being called Mohamed Atta was probably in the United States from January 2000 onwards.
- 4. This evidence was blocked from the FBI on three occasions.
- 5. The Commission was notified of the Atta evidence in October 2003 and July

- 2004, yet failed to include the evidence in its July 2004 Report, and later described it as having no "historical significance."
- 6. The five witnesses to the evidence were later claimed to have been unreliable or deficient in memory.
- 7. The official story may imply not just incompetence but deliberate cover-up, with serious implications.

Given this evidence, at best, the 9/11 official account is discredited, and the public is apparently faced with lies and cover-up.

At worst, the man called Mohamed Atta was protected by elements within the Pentagon and allowed to act and travel freely until 9/11.

References for Point H-2

There is considerable evidence that the man who was calling himself "Mohamed Atta" in the United States prior to 9/11, and who after 9/11 was accused of being one of the (alleged) hijackers, was not the real Mohamed Atta. In the first place, the behavior and attitudes of the two men were reportedly very different:

- According to the American press, Mohamed Atta drank heavily. After downing five glasses of vodka, wrote *Newsweek*, Atta shouted an Arabic word that "roughly translates as 'F—k God.'" Investigative reporter Daniel Hopsicker, who wrote a book about Atta, stated that Atta regularly went to strip clubs, hired prostitutes, drank heavily, and took cocaine. Atta even lived with a stripper for several months and then, after she kicked him out, came back and disemboweled her cat and dismembered its kittens. (Daniel Hopsicker, "The Secret World of Mohamed Atta: An Interview With Atta's American Girlfriend," InformationLiberation, August 20, 2006.
- But according to Professor Dittmar Machule, who was Atta's thesis supervisor at a technical university in Hamburg in the 1990s, Atta was "very religious," prayed regularly, and would not shake hands with a woman to whom he had been introduced. As for drinking: "I would put my hand in the fire," said the professor, that he "will never taste or touch alcohol." (Professor Dittmar Machule, "Interviewed by Liz Jackson, A Mission to Die For," Four Corners, October 18, 2001.

Also, the physical appearances of the two men were reportedly very different.

- The American Atta was often described as having a hard, cruel face, and the standard FBI photo of him bears this out. The face of the Hamburg student was quite different, as photos available on the Internet show. (The photos can be compared at <u>911Review</u>.
- Also, his professor described Atta as "very small," being "one meter sixty-two" in height which means slightly under 5'4" whereas the American Atta has been described as 5'8" and even 5'10" tall. Professor Machule described Atta as not a "bodyguard type" but "more a girl looking type." (Professor Dittmar Machule, "Interviewed by Liz Jackson, A Mission to Die For," Four Corners, October 18, 2001.
- [2] See <u>Section IV under Best Evidence</u>.
 - "Lt. Col. Shaffer's Written Testimony: Able Danger and the 9/11 Attacks," Armed Services Committee, US House of Representatives, February 15, 2006; see also this "Statement of
- Anthony A. Shaffer, Lt.Col. ...," and Atta Reportedly Identified on Pre-9/11 Chart by Able Danger Team Members (historycommons).
- "Lt. Col. Shaffer's Written Testimony: Able Danger and the 9/11 Attacks," Armed Services
 [4] Committee, US House of Representatives, February 15, 2006; see also this "Statement of Anthony A. Shaffer, Lt.Col."
 - Representative Curt Weldon (R-Penn.), US House of Representatives, "Congressional Record: June 27, 2005 (House)," and "Lt. Col. Shaffer's Written Testimony: Able Danger and the 9/11
- [5] Attacks," Armed Services Committee, US House of Representatives, February 15, 2006, and see also this "Statement of Anthony A. Shaffer, Lt.Col."

- [6] Jacob Goodwin, "Inside Able Danger The Secret Birth, Extraordinary Life and Untimely Death of a U.S. Military Intelligence Program," Government Security News, circa August 23, 2005.
- [7] Keith Phucas, "Missed chance on way to 9/11," Times Herald, June 19, 2005.
- [8] <u>US Congressional Record</u>, June 25, 2005, p. H5249.
- [9] "Kean-Hamilton Statement on Able Danger," August 12, 2005.
 - See <u>Senator Joe Biden's comment</u> during the September 21, 2005, Senate Hearing. See also:
- [10] Shaun Waterman, "<u>Pentagon gags 'Able Danger' team</u>," *UPI Business News*, September 20, 2005.
- [11] "Able Danger and Intelligence Information Sharing," Hearing before the Committee on the Judiciary, United States Senate, September 21, 2005.
- [12] Curt Weldon Address to the House: "Able Danger Failure," US Congressional Record, October 19, 2005, p. H8983.
 - US Department of Defense. Office of Inspector General, "Report of Investigation: Alleged
- [13] <u>Misconduct by Senior DOD Officials Concerning the Able Danger Program and Lieutenant Colonel Anthony A. Shaffer, U.S. Army Reserve</u>," September 18, 2006.
- [14] The 9/11 Commission Report, July 2004, p. 434.
 - Thomas R. Eldridge et al., "9/11 and Terrorist Travel: Staff Report of the National Commission
- [15] on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States," p. 11. See also *The 9/11 Commission Report*, p. 519, and the <u>Kean-Hamilton statement</u>.
- [16] Philip Shenon, "Second Officer Says 9/11 Leader Was Named Before Attacks," New York Times, August 23, 2005.
- [17] Philip Shenon and Douglas Jehl, "9/11 Panel Seeks Inquiry on New Atta Report," New York Times, August 10, 2005.
- [18] "Kean-Hamilton Statement on Able Danger," August 12, 2005.
- [19] "Kean-Hamilton Statement on Able Danger," August 12, 2005.
- [20] Devlin Barrett, "Panel Rejects Assertion US Knew of Atta before Sept. 11," Associated Press, September 15, 2005.
- [21] Philip Shenon, "Pentagon Bars Military Officers and Analysts From Testifying," New York Times, September 21, 2005.
- US Department of Defense. Office of Inspector General, "<u>Report of Investigation: Alleged</u>
 [22] <u>Misconduct by Senior DOD Officials Concerning the Able Danger Program and Lieutenant</u>
- [22] <u>Misconduct by Senior DOD Officials Concerning the Able Danger Program and Lieutenant Colonel Anthony A. Shaffer, U.S. Army Reserve</u>," September 18, 2006.
- [23] "Able Danger and Intelligence Information Sharing," Hearing before the Committee on the Judiciary, United States Senate, September 21, 2005.
- Brian Ross, "Face to Face with a Terrorist: Government Worker Recalls Mohamed Atta Seeking Funds Before Sept. 11," ABC News, June 6, 2002.
- [25] "The Night before Terror," Portland Press Herald, October 5, 2001.
- Pat Milton, "Investigator: Hijack leader Atta visited New York before attacks," Associated Press, December 10, 2001.
 - Keith Phucas, "Able Danger Source Goes Public," The Times Herald, August 17, 2005. Shaffer's attorney Mark Zaid, testified: "It is Lt Col Shaffer's specific recollection that he informed those
- in attendance, which included Defense Department personnel, that Able Danger had identified two of the three successful 9/11 cells to include Atta." See "Prepared Statement of Mark S. Zaid," "Able Danger and Intelligence Information Sharing." Hearing before the Committee on the Judiciary, United States Senate, September 21, 2005.
- The 9/11 Commission, "Memorandum for the Record: Interview Commander Scott Phillpott," July 13, 2004.
- [29] "Kean-Hamilton Statement on Able Danger," August 12, 2005.
- [30] Lt. Col. Shaffer's written testimony to the September 21, 2005 Senate Hearing.
- [31] "An Incomplete Investigation: Why did the 9/11 Commission ignore 'Able Danger'?" Wall Street Journal, November 17, 2005.

- [32] Philip Shenon, "Pentagon Bars Military Officers and Analysts From Testifying," New York Times, September 21, 2005.
 - David Morgan, "Pentagon blocking September 11 inquiry: Senator," posted September 23,
- [33] 2005. Originally published by Reuters, September 21, 2005 (no longer available but picked up by *Pravda*.
- [34] <u>Curt Weldon, Address to the House</u>, *Congressional Record*, June 27, 2005, p. H5250.
- [35] Keith Phucas, "Able Danger Source Goes Public," The Times Herald, August 17, 2005.

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- [36] Man to Say Terrorist Was Named." New York Times, August 23, 2005, picked up by San Francisco Chronicle.
- [37] "Third Source Backs 'Able Danger' Claims About Atta," FoxNews.com, August 28, 2005. Note that Christopher Kojm's name is incorrectly reported as Cojm in the news story.
- [38] James Rosen, "Able Danger Hearing Sets Intelligence Officers at Odds," The News & Observer, February 16, 2006.
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- [42] Sherman de Brosse, "Able Danger, Mohamed Atta and Ali Mohammed," November 5, 2010.
- [43] David Ray Griffin, The New Pearl Harbor Revisited: 9/11, the Cover-Up, and the Exposé (Interlink, 2008), pp. 187-195.
 - US Department of Defense, Office of Inspector General, "Report of Investigation: Alleged
- [44] <u>Misconduct by Senior DOD Officials Concerning the Able Danger Program and Lieutenant Colonel Anthony A. Shaffer, U.S. Army Reserve</u>," September 18, 2006, p. 32.
- [45] "Weldon Rejects DOD Report on Able Danger & Harassment of Military Officer," September 21, 2006.

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