

More on the 9/11 Commission Report: Who Paid the 9/11 Hijackers?

The Pakistan ISI Connection

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Theme: [Terrorism](#)

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As I reported in the summer of 2003, US and British newspapers briefly alleged that the paymaster for the 9/11 attacks was a well-known agent of the Pakistani intelligence service ISI, Mohammed Sheikh Saeed. There was even a brief period in which it was alleged that the money had been paid at the direction of the then ISI Chief, General Mahmoud Ahmad.[1]

The London *Guardian* reported on October 1, 2001, that US investigators believe they have found the “smoking gun” linking Osama bin Laden to the September 11 terrorist attacks, ... The man at the centre of the financial web is believed to be Sheikh Saeed, also known as Mustafa Mohamed Ahmad, who worked as a financial manager for Bin Laden when the Saudi exile was based in Sudan, and is still a trusted paymaster in Bin Laden’s al-Qaida organisation.[2]

This story was corroborated by CNN on October 6, citing a “a senior-level U.S. government source” who noted that “Sheik Syed” had been liberated from an Indian prison as a result of an airplane hijacking in December 1999.

The man liberated in this way was Mohammed Omar Saeed Sheikh, a notorious kidnapper raised in England, and widely reported as a probable agent of ISI, the Pakistani military intelligence service.[3] One newspaper, the *Pittsburgh Tribune-Review*, suggested he may even have been a double agent, recruited inside al-Qaeda and ISI by the CIA.[4]

Subsequent newspaper stories reported on the undisputed relationship of Saeed to ISI, to FBI claims that he wired \$100,000 to Atta’s bank account,[5] to a CNN report that these funds came from Pakistan,[6] and the uncontested statement that “Mustafa Ahmed,” having concluded his 9/11 financial business in Dubai, flew on September 11 to Pakistan.[7]

These alarming charges are ignored in the Report. The Appendices note, in a list of names, a “Sheikh Saeed al Masri” as an “Egyptian; head of al Qaeda finance committee.”[8] But the only reference to any Sheikh Saeed in the text says that Sheikh Saeed al Masri “argued that al Qaeda should defer to the Taliban’s wishes” and *not* attack the United States directly.[9]

Instead, following a previous reversal in the US media, the financial role attributed earlier to Sheikh Saeed is now given to “Mustafa al Hawsawi,” the name (or pseudonym) used for the financial transactions. The Report treats Shaikh Saeed and al-Hawsawi as two people, whereas earlier they had been identified as the same.[10]

In this way the Report fails to confront the extent to which al-Qaeda may have been a by-

product of past US covert operations in Afghanistan with the Pakistani ISI. This would mean that the CIA, far from being too weak, has engaged in reckless covert adventures abroad that were out of its competence and depth.

[1] Peter Dale Scott, "The CIA's Secret Powers: Afghanistan, 9/11, and America's Most Dangerous Enemy." *Critical Asian Studies*, 35:2 (2003), 233-258.

[2] Cf. Griffin, 109-10. The investigators were later identified as the FBI (*Wall Street Journal*, 10/10/01, CNN, 10/28/01, *Times* [London], 11/16/01).

[3] E.g. *Newsweek*, 3/13/02: US officials suspect "that Sheikh has been a 'protected asset,' of Pakistan's shadowy spy service, the Inter-Services Intelligence, or ISI." The story was enhanced by Indian intelligence sources with a more sensational claim: that Saeed Sheikh had wired the money to Atta at the direction of Lieutenant-General Mahmoud Ahmad, the director of the Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) at the time (*Wall Street Journal*, 10/10/01). Indian sources later downplayed this anti-Pakistani allegation by suggesting that the money came instead from a ransom paid through a 'hawala' channel to another terrorist, Aftab Ansari in Dubai, when the Kolkata businessman was kidnapped in July 2001 (*The Hindu*, 2/13/02).

[4] *Pittsburgh Tribune-Review*, 3/3/02: "There are many in Musharraf's government who believe that Saeed Sheikh's power comes not from the ISI, but from his connections with our own CIA. The theory is that with such intense pressure to locate bin Laden, Saeed Sheikh was bought and paid for." The twisted story of Saeed Sheikh in the US press has been documented by Paul Thompson in his excellent time-line of 9/11 events: <http://www.cooperativeresearch.org/essay.jsp?article=saeedsheikh>.

[5] *London Sunday Times*, 4/21/02; *London Daily Telegraph*, 7/16/02.

[6] CNN, 10/1/01: "As much as \$100,000 was wired in the past year from Pakistan to Mohamed Atta." Subsequent developments lent weight to the Pakistani connection, such as the arrest of Atta's alleged controls, Ramzi Binalshibh and Khalid Shaikh Mohammed, in Pakistan.

[7] *Newsday*, 10/3/01: "Mustafa Ahmad... left the emirates for Pakistan on the day of the attacks." Cf. *New York Times*, 10/15/01: "A man thought to be one of the financial chiefs for Mr. bin Laden, Shaykh Said... flew to Karachi, Pakistan."

[8] Report, 436.

[9] Report, 251.

[10] Cf. e.g. MSNBC, http://www.msnbc.com/modules/wtc/wtc_globaldragnet/sought_uae.htm : "Mustafa Ahmed al-Hasawi [sic] was named as a "supporting conspirator" in an Dec. 11 indictment of Zacarias Moussaoui, a French citizen of Moroccan descent who U.S. authorities say was "an active participant" in the Sept. 11 plot. The indictment alleged that al-Hasawi, a Saudi native, received more than \$18,000 from three suspected hijackers in the days before the attack, then cleared out bank accounts he had control over in the United Arab Emirates and fled the country on Sept. 11. U.S. investigators suspect that al-Hasawi, whom the FBI originally identified as Mustafa Ahmed, was actually Shayk Saiid, a key figure in the financial

side of Osama bin Laden’s al-Qaida terror network. In documents sent to banks seeking to freeze terrorist assets, the government uses the names Ahmed and Saïd interchangeably.”

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