

“Nothing Urgent” on 9/11: The Curious Lack of Military Action on the Morning of September 11, 2001

By [George Szamuely](#)

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Global Research Editor’s Note

Today, September 11, 2024. The anniversary of the tragic events of 9/11. 23 years later, are we any closer to the truth about what really happened on that fateful day?

George Szamuely’s incisive article published more than 22 years ago raises some “uncomfortable questions” regarding Air Force Preparedness in the case of a national emergency: “Why were no fighter planes launched until after the Pentagon was hit?”

“Talk about a lack of urgency! Assuming Otis Air National Guard Base is about 180 miles away from Manhattan it should have taken the F-15s less than six minutes to get here. Moreover, since Washington, DC, is little more than 200 miles from New York, the two F-15 fighters would have had time to get to DC, intercept Flight 77 and grab breakfast on the way.”

Michel Chossudovsky, Global Research, September 11, 2024

Nothing Urgent

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Let’s revisit the curious lack of military action on the morning of September 11.

That morning, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen. Richard B. Myers, was having a routine meeting on Capitol Hill with Sen. Max Cleland. While the two men chatted away, a hijacked jet plowed into the World Trade Center’s north tower, another one plowed into the

south tower and a third one into the Pentagon. And still they went on with their meeting. “[W]hen we came out,” Myers recounted to American Forces Radio and Television Service, “somebody said the Pentagon had been hit.” Myers claims no one had bothered to inform him about the attacks on the World Trade Center. Meanwhile, in Florida, just as President Bush was about to leave his hotel he was told about the attack on the first WTC tower. He was asked by a reporter if he knew what was going on in New York. He said he did, and then went to an elementary school in Sarasota to read to children.

No urgency. Why should there be? Who could possibly have realized then the calamitous nature of the events of that day? Besides, the hijackers had switched the transponders off. So how could anyone know what was going on?

Passenger jet hijackings are not uncommon and the U.S. government has prepared detailed plans to handle them. On Sept. 11 these plans were ignored in their entirety. According to The New York Times, air traffic controllers knew at 8:20 a.m. “that American Airlines Flight 11, bound from Boston to Los Angeles, had probably been hijacked. When the first news report was made at 8:48 a.m. that a plane might have hit the World Trade Center, they knew it was Flight 11.” There was little ambiguity on the matter. The pilot had pushed a button on the aircraft yoke that allowed controllers to hear the hijacker giving orders. Here are the FAA regulations concerning hijackings: “The FAA hijack coordinator...on duty at Washington headquarters will request the military to provide an escort aircraft for a confirmed hijacked aircraft... The escort service will be requested by the FAA hijack coordinator by direct contact with the National Military Command Center (NMCC).” Here are the instructions issued by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff on June 1, 2001: “In the event of a hijacking, the NMCC will be notified by the most expeditious means by the FAA. The NMCC will...forward requests for DOD assistance to the Secretary of Defense for approval.”

In addition, as Vice President Cheney explained on Meet the Press on Sept. 16, only the president has the authority to order the shooting down of a civilian airliner.

The U.S. is supposed to scramble military aircraft the moment a hijacking is confirmed. Myers’ revelation to the Senate Armed Services Committee on Sept. 13 that no fighter planes had been launched until after the Pentagon was hit was therefore surprising. Senators and even some tv commentators were a little incredulous. Dan Rather asked: “These hijacked aircraft were in the air for quite a while... Why doesn’t the Pentagon have the kind of protection that they can get a fighter-interceptor aircraft up, and if someone is going to plow an aircraft into the Pentagon, that we have at least some...line of defense?”

Good question. Clearly another, more comforting, story was needed, and on the evening of Sept. 14 CBS launched it by revealing that the FAA had indeed alerted U.S. air defense units of a possible hijacking at 8:38 a.m. on Tuesday, that six minutes later two F-15s received a scramble order at Otis Air National Guard Base on Cape Cod and that by 8:56 the F-15s were racing toward New York. Unfortunately, the fighters were still 70 miles away when the second jet hit the south tower. Meanwhile, at 9:30 a.m., three F-16s were launched from Langley Air Force base, 150 miles south of Washington. But just seven minutes later, at 9:37 a.m., Flight 77 smashed into the Pentagon. The F-16s arrived in Washington just before 10 a.m.

This story, which has now become the “official” version, raises more questions than it

answers. F-15s can travel at speeds of 1875 mph while F-16s can travel at 1500 mph. If it took the F-16s half an hour to cover 150 miles, they could not have been traveling at more than 300 mph—at 20 percent capability. Boeing 767s and 757s have cruising speeds of 530 mph. Talk about a lack of urgency! Assuming Otis Air National Guard Base is about 180 miles away from Manhattan it should have taken the F-15s less than six minutes to get here. Moreover, since Washington, DC, is little more than 200 miles from New York, the two F-15 fighters would have had time to get to DC, intercept Flight 77 and grab breakfast on the way.

Ah, but of course the transponders were turned off. So no one could keep track of the planes. If it were true that the moment a transponder is turned off a plane becomes invisible there would be no defense against enemy aircraft. Normal radar echo return from the metal surface of an aircraft would still identify it on the radar scope.

Luckily, we still have first-rate establishment media to make sure that we retain confidence in our government.

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