

Robert Baer and Daniel Pearl: On The Trail Of The 9/11 Mastermind?

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“Former” CIA agent Robert Baer has recently weighed in with his own assessment of how we should view Khalid Sheikh Mohammed’s recent testimony

(see “Why KSM’s Confession Rings False” <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1599861,00.html>).

In Baer’s view, we should take it with a grain of salt. He further hints that, in the light of Khalid Sheikh Mohammed’s current lack of gravitas and obvious reliability as a witness, we should perhaps look to the contributions of other agents and state actors in our evolving understanding of the dynamics of al Qaeda. And though he now seeks to minimize the role of KSM in the Pearl killing – Baer considers him, as he has now learned through the proverbial grapevine, as more of a standby eyewitness than as an actual hands-on participant – Baer neglects to inform his readers of his own personal role in Daniel Pearl’s investigation, a role that could arguably be said to have set Pearl directly on the course toward his tragic fate.

Nevertheless, since Baer did insinuate himself personally into the Pearl legend, as of his September 30, 2002 revelation to UPI, one would expect that he would – at least someday – have to give a more detailed description of the nature of his “joint investigation” of the 9/11 mastermind with Daniel Pearl – that is, unless it can be shown that Khalid Sheikh Mohammed is not “all that” in the end. As Baer seems to be suggesting in his recent Time magazine piece, Khalid Sheikh Mohammed is damaged goods, a thoroughly brain-addled and water-boarded “clown” from whom little of any reliable intelligence value may be wrung.

When Baer had first offered up the account of his personal role in Daniel Pearl’s investigation, many of the discrepancies surrounding Khalid Sheikh Mohammed had yet to fully disseminate among some of the more discerning members of the public. Yet with the 9/11 mastermind officially in custody, Baer now strongly hints that perhaps we should direct our lingering questions elsewhere, to the roles of other actors, and different horizons.

And thus does Baer continue to postpone his own accounting with the historical record, which is provided below

Excerpted from Chaim Kupferberg’s 2003 analysis:

Stacking the Patsies of 9/11
by Chaim Kupferberg

December 22, 2003: <http://www.globalresearch.ca/articles/KUP312B.html>

Former CIA agent Robert Baer claimed that he and Daniel Pearl were working together on a joint project when Pearl disappeared. Has Baer been caught in a lie?

Who, exactly, is Robert Baer? In the months after 9/11, Baer first emerged on the public radar scope as a “former” CIA official involved in counter-terrorism. After publishing his widely acclaimed book, *See No Evil*, Baer established himself as the mainstream media’s “go-to” guy when making the case for pre-9/11 complacency and opportunistic blindness. But his contributions to our understanding of 9/11 didn’t end there. In addition to focusing attention on Saudi Arabia and the dominating influence of the neo-conservatives on foreign policy, Baer has personally insinuated himself into the Daniel Pearl story. On September 30, 2002, Richard Sale of UPI reported:

“Wall Street Journal reporter Daniel Pearl was investigating the man who allegedly planned the Sept. 11 airplane hijackings and attacks on New York and Washington when he was kidnapped and murdered in Pakistan, according to two Central Intelligence Agency officials...

...‘I was working with Pearl,’ said [Bob] Baer, who had written a book about his time as a CIA official and has acted as a consultant and source for numerous media outlets. ‘We had a joint project. [Khalid Shaikh] Mohammed was the story he was working on, not Richard Reid [a.k.a. the shoe bomber].’ “

Was Baer being truthful, or rather was he disseminating a blatant slice of disinformation? You be the judge. In Baer’s latest widely acclaimed book, *Sleeping With The Devil* – published after the September 30, 2002 UPI article – Baer blatantly contradicts himself, as evidenced on p.199:

“I have no way of knowing whether Pearl went to Karachi and asked about Khalid Sheikh Mohammed. The Wall Street Journal says no, that he was working on the shoe-bomber case.”

No way of knowing? What about that “joint project” with Pearl? According to Baer’s UPI version, back in 1997, Baer learned of efforts by the government of Qatar to shield Khalid Shaikh Mohammed from FBI apprehension. Khalid, at the time, was wanted for his alleged role in the aborted 1995 Bojinka plot. Yet when none of his former colleagues in counter-terrorism would follow up on Baer’s leads, according to UPI, “Baer said he was frustrated and called Pearl...” telling him that “he had a hot story on terrorism...”

However, in Baer’s book version, it was Pearl who had first initiated contact after hearing of Baer’s leads from other sources:

“In 1998, when I was living in France, I got a call from a young Wall Street Journal reporter named Danny Pearl.”

As for that “joint project” alluded to in the UPI article, here is how Baer sums up the course of their interaction in his book:

“We met in Geneva...I told him about KSM [Khalid] and Qatar. He listened, took notes, and promised to follow up on it one day. We saw each other from time to time in Washington. He

would bring up the Khalid Sheikh Mohammed story, but neither of us had anything new to add.”

And here is the version that Baer offered to UPI, describing the aftermath of his very first telephone contact with Pearl:

“Baer said to his annoyance, Pearl did not begin to work on the story. Nothing was done until the day of the Sept. 11 attacks when Pearl called to talk to Baer.”

Thus are we faced with two alternate realities. In the quantum reality offered in Baer’s book, Daniel Pearl is the dogged investigator who tracks down Baer for his story on Khalid, following it up on subsequent meetings with further queries of Baer, though neither has “anything new to add.” Yet in the quantum reality offered to UPI, it is Baer who tracks down Pearl, and who subsequently becomes annoyed with Pearl’s presumed disinterest in Baer’s revelation – that is, until September 11, 2001. In Baer’s book, three days after September 11, Pearl called Baer after sending him an email the day before. What follows is Baer’s account of their very last conversation:

“I reminded him about our talks on KSM [Khalid] and Qatar. ‘Worth thinking about,’ [Pearl] replied.”

Thus, in Baer’s book version, that fateful phone call signals the end of their interaction, consequently leaving Baer with “no way of knowing” whether or not Pearl had picked up the ball and hustled on over to Karachi to flesh out Baer’s initial lead on Khalid. Meanwhile, over in the UPI parallel universe, that post-9/11 phone call marks the beginning of their “joint project”:

“Baer said he gave Pearl all the old information he had and new information he had since obtained — for example, that there are files on [Khalid] in the Qatari Embassy in London.

Baer said he and Pearl then ‘began to work together’ — in other words, Pearl would get info and check it out with Baer and Baer would feed Pearl what he was getting. It was ‘a joint project,’ said Baer. Baer was giving direction, but Pearl’s contacts were not confined to Baer.”

Simply based on the foregoing, one might reasonably conclude that Baer is either a quantum leaper or a bona fide fibber. But even if Baer’s credibility is undermined by all this, what’s the big deal? Isn’t Baer, after all, just a retired CIA guy far out of the loop, trolling the media circuit as an “independent” critic? Or is he, rather, a key operative among an insular (though by no means rogue) counter-terror clique involved in the formation and presentation of the Official 9/11 Legend and its off-shoots?

At the time of Baer’s UPI revelation, Khalid Shaikh Mohammed had only been known to the public for less than four months – dating from the time in June 2002 when he was first introduced as the “official” 9/11 mastermind. Prior to that date, scarcely any details at all were offered to the public concerning Khalid – other than a generic “wanted” listing for his alleged role in the 1995 Bojinka plot. And, perhaps, a very brief, general reference to Khalid as an expert in the hijacking of planes in Baer’s first book. Yet if we are to believe Baer’s post-June 2002 account, Khalid was the object of intense concern to both Baer and Pearl – neither of whom had ever gone on record as evincing any substantive interest in Khalid at any time prior to Baer’s September 30 UPI account. More curiously, by June 2002, with

Khalid now making the headlines as the brains behind 9/11 – and coming more than four months after Pearl’s own widely publicized kidnapping – Baer was continuing to do the media circuit, promoting his earlier book along with his version of the 9/11 Complacency Theory, yet still no word on his purported “joint project” with Pearl on the newly unveiled 9/11 mastermind. Rather, Baer waited until three weeks after the well-publicized apprehension of Khalid’s alleged co-plotter, Ramzi Binalshibh, and only then broached the news of his “joint project” with Pearl, tying this in with the latest bombshell that Khalid had also likely killed Daniel Pearl. Curious timing, that.

So who, exactly, is Robert Baer – and, more to the point, why should this question matter? Baer – along with the likes of Vincent Cannistraro and Milt Bearden – is among the select few who have managed to “dirty” their hands with past CIA involvement with the Afghani mujahedin. Terror, drugs, arms-smuggling, and the Byzantine workings of Mideast geopolitics – Baer has personally seen it all. In Baer’s chronicle of the past CIA/Bin Laden/Muslim Brotherhood nexus, there is really nothing particularly sinister in the fact that the CIA had originally fostered and funded a network that would later go on to unveil itself as America’s foremost enemy. Baer characterizes it all as blowback.

But perhaps Baer manages to provide us a crucial – though probably unintended – insight as to how we may characterize all that purported blowback. In Baer’s oft-repeated account of Khalid Shaikh Mohammed’s escape from Qatar, he reveals that Khalid had managed to slip away with another member of his al-Qaida cell – a man by the name of Shawqui Islambuli, whose brother happens to be the man who had assassinated Egyptian President Anwar Sadat on behalf of the Muslim Brotherhood.

It is indeed an artful pairing – for these two men serve, on a symbolic level, as the operative bookends of the Official 9/11 Legend. At the tail end, of course, stands Khalid as the 9/11 mastermind. At the front end stands the Egyptian fundamentalist clique whose 1981 move against Sadat would coincide with its recruitment by Baer’s CIA colleagues into the Afghan effort. One member of that Egyptian clique, Sheik Omar Abdel-Rahman, would go on to become a CIA asset, and, after his acquittal in relation to the Sadat killing, would then be cleared to enter the United States in 1990 by way of a CIA-approved visa. Setting up shop in a Brooklyn mosque, the men in Abdel-Rahman’s circle – Sayyid Nosair, Ramzi Yousef, etc. – would go on to be implicated in the assassination of Rabbi Meir Kahane, the plot to destroy New York City landmarks, and, most importantly, the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center.

If the early shoots of what would eventually evolve into “al-Qaida” look suspiciously like an Egyptian-CIA hybrid, that is probably due to the fact that – from the vantage point of 1993 – a suspicious number of Egyptian CIA assets (and/or FBI informants) were popping up all over the map. For one, a former Egyptian military officer (and FBI informant) named Emad Salem had managed to “infiltrate” former CIA asset Abdel-Rahman’s New York circle, giving his FBI handlers the “heads-up” on the plot to take down the Twin Towers in ’93. Meanwhile, another former Egyptian military officer (and subsequent FBI informant) by the name of Ali Mohamed would train Abdel-Rahman’s men in the arts of bomb-making, formation of operative cells, and all the sophisticated military tactics Ali had gleaned from his three-year stint as a U.S. sergeant with the Special Forces at Fort Bragg. Ali had first entered the United States on a CIA-sponsored visa in 1981, in order to serve his first four-month stint with the Green Berets at Fort Bragg – incidentally, the same year in which Ali had reportedly joined the ranks of the Muslim Brotherhood implicated in the Sadat assassination.

After being honorably discharged from service at Fort Bragg in 1989, Ali's resume would include the training of Abdel-Rahman's men, an ongoing stint as an FBI informant (carrying on even after the 1993 WTC bombing), the authorship of al-Qaida's training manuals, along with the training of bin Laden's personal security detail and the refinement of al-Qaida's military tactics. Publicly outed for the first time in 1995 as the trainer of the 1993 New York landmarks suspects, Ali would remain free to carry on his busy globe-trotting itinerary for three more years before being lured out of his cozy Sacramento digs in the aftermath of the 1998 Embassy bombings in Tanzania and Kenya. Duly subpoenaed and then "secretly" indicted, Ali would go on to plead guilty, implicate his fellow conspirators, and then forever fade from public view (and scrutiny).

With just the foregoing facts in mind, it doesn't take a forensic expert to connect the dots and draw certain conclusions as to the likely paternity of what would later become known as "al-Qaida." From the vantage point of 1993, where were those suspicious dots connecting this close-knit terrorist network to Saddam Hussein? Or the Pakistani ISI? Or the Saudis? Or the Israelis? After 1995, however, there would be new dots to connect up, with new links subsequently forming in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia, along with new al-Qaida cells springing up in London, Hamburg, and across the globe - and, in lockstep with the times, new investigative cliques forming across the US, UK, and the EU. Yet from that crucial, embryonic time period of 1981-1993, we can venture a reasonable guess as to which entity was most involved in coddling, handling, clearing, and funding this insular grouping of Egyptian-born radicals, from out of which would grow the full blossom of al-Qaida. And so we must ask what the likes of Bob Baer, Vincent Cannistraro, and Milt Bearden were truly up to in those years.

But that, perhaps, is a tale for another day.

For further reading on the Legend of 9/11, please read Truth, Lies, and The Legend of 9/11 at <http://www.globalresearch.ca/articles/KUP310A.html>

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