

Commander-N-Sleep

2007. Acrylic on canvas, 30 x 48"

On August 6, 2001, President George W. Bush received a Presidential Daily Briefing, also referred to as a PDB. It was an intelligence briefing from the Central Intelligence Agency. The title of the August 6 PDB was, "Bin Ladin Determined to Strike in US."¹

The August 6 briefing was not something new out of the blue. Between January 20 and September 10, 2001 there were more than forty articles in the Presidential Daily Briefings relating to Bin Ladin.²

In May 2001 there were intelligence reports that, "operatives might opt to hijack an aircraft or storm a U.S. embassy." That led to the FAA informing airlines of "the potential for 'an airline hijacking to free terrorists incarcerated in the United States.'" President Bush, Vice President Cheney and National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice were made aware of these reports by the Director of Central Intelligence, George Tenet in morning intelligence briefings.³

In June and July 2001, the threat reports were reaching a "higher peak of urgency." Though the threats appeared to focus on countries in the Middle-East, or even the G-8 summit set for Genoa, Italy.⁴ However, a threat advisory "in late June indicated a high probability of near-term 'spectacular' terrorist attacks resulting in numerous casualties." There were other threat reports titled, "Bin Ladin Attacks May be Imminent," and "Bin Ladin and Associates Making Near-Term Threats", which was reported to be multiple attacks planned over the coming days.⁵ Therefore, U.S. Central Command raised the force protection condition level on June 21, for U.S. troops in six countries, to Delta. In Bahrain, the U.S. moved the Fifth Fleet out of port, and in Jordan the U.S. Marines halted a military exercise.⁶

Richard Clark, the National Security Council Counterterrorism Coordinator, warned Condoleezza Rice and her deputy, Stephen Hadley, on June 25 "that six separate intelligence reports showed al Qaeda personnel warning of a pending attack." Intelligence reports were consistent in describing "upcoming attacks as occurring on a calamitous level."⁷

Clark, on June 28, warned Rice in writing, "that the pattern of al Qaeda activity indicating attack planning over the past six weeks 'had reached a crescendo.'" One report warned of "something 'very, very, very, very' big" was about to happen. The June 30 briefing was headlined with "Bin Ladin Planning High Profile Attacks."⁸

In July 2001, a message was sent to federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies warning of Bin Ladin threats and emphasized "that the possibility of attack in the United States could not be discounted."⁹

Richard Clark on July 27 urged Rice and Hadley to keep "readiness high during the August vacation period," and warned of an attack postponed but would "still happen."¹⁰

On July 31 the FAA alerted airlines to “reports of possible near-term terrorist operations,” and “noted that some of the ‘currently active’ terrorist groups were known to ‘plan and train for hijackings.’”¹¹

An August 1 FBI advisory noted an “increased volume of threat reporting” and again advised that “the possibility of an attack in the United States could not be discounted.”¹²

Another advisory on August 3 from the intelligence community concluded “that the threat of impending al Qaeda attacks would likely continue indefinitely,” and suggested “al Qaeda was lying in wait and searching for gaps in security before moving forward with the planned attacks.”¹³

Even though there was continual and consistent intelligence reporting of a pending terrorist attack, President Bush told the 9/11 Commission that the August 6 PDB was historic in nature. The President even said that he knew al Qaeda was dangerous. However, the President told the Commission, “if his advisors had told him there was a cell in the United States, they would have moved to take care of it. That never happened.”¹⁴

The following are entries from the declassified August 6, 2001 Presidential Daily Briefing:

*Al-Qa’ida members – including some who are US citizens – have resided in or traveled to the US for years, and the group apparently maintains a support structure that could aid attacks.*¹⁵

*FBI information [since 1998] indicates patterns of suspicious activity in this country consistent with preparations for hijackings.*¹⁶

And the final sentence of the briefing states, *CIA and the FBI are investigating a call to our Embassy in the [United Arab Emirates] in May saying that a group of Bin Ladin supporters was in the US planning attacks with explosives.*¹⁷

Notes

1. *The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States*, Authorized Edition, W.W. Norton & Company, p. 261.
2. Ibid., p. 254.
3. Ibid., p. 256.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid., p. 257.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid., p. 258.
10. Ibid., p. 260.
11. Ibid., p. 259.
12. Ibid., p. 260.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid., p. 261.
16. Ibid., p. 262.
17. Ibid., p. 262.