

Tortured Confessions

by Paul Wolf, 24 September 2003

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Introduction

The "confessions" of Abu Zubaydah and Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, made under CIA interrogation, should be treated with skepticism rather than accepted at face value. While the circumstances of Mohammed's interrogation are not known, according to book author Gerald Posner, Zubaydah's confession was made under the alternating influence of sodium pentathol and another unnamed drug, providing him with a rollercoaster-like experience during questioning.

This technique was explored in depth in the CIA's secret MKULTRA drug and torture experimentation program. Unfortunately, most of the records from the program were apparently destroyed. The 1963 CIA "Kubark" interrogation manual is available online, though. It provides some good background reading on theories of prisoner interrogation, if you can stomach it.

Here is the pertinent section on the use of drugs during questioning:

"Like other coercive media, drugs may affect the content of what an interrogatee divulges. Gottschalk notes that certain drugs "may give rise to psychotic manifestations such as hallucinations, illusions, delusions, or disorientation", so that "the verbal material obtained cannot always be considered valid." For this reason drugs (and the other aids discussed in this section) should not be used persistently to facilitate the interrogative debriefing that follows capitulation. Their function is to cause capitulation, to aid in the shift from resistance to cooperation. Once this shift has been accomplished, coercive techniques should be abandoned both for moral reasons and because they are unnecessary and even counter-productive."

I'm disappointed that the confessions were leaked to publicly discredit these individuals. It's an old technique, often used by the FBI when the evidence they have doesn't stand up in

court. Their goal in doing this is extra-legal punishment of the individuals.

Another goal in this case is obviously to try to put the 9/11 matter to rest -- any explanation will do. Just ask Mr. Hatfill, widely believed to have been responsible for the anthrax mailings which followed shortly after 9/11. He was never charged with a crime. The same thing happened with the bombing at the Olympics in Atlanta a decade ago, and in many other high profile cases over the years.

A further goal is to implicate the Saudi and Pakistani governments in the 9/11 attacks.

In 1936 the U.S. Supreme Court set the standard for the admissibility of confessions in court, in *Brown v. Mississippi*, 297 US 278. In *Brown*, the defendants were whipped with a leather strap with buckles until they agreed to confess. Then the defendants were forced to memorize detailed confessions provided by their interrogators, and whipped until they could repeat the confessions perfectly. The Supreme Court held that this method violated the defendants' due process rights under the 14th Amendment and that "voluntariness" was an essential element of a confession.

However one feels about the use of torture or drugs in interrogation to protect public safety, these are not "confessions" in any sense.

One should take into account that the defendants had probably not slept in weeks, and may have been tied to chairs, with serums pumping into each arm, perhaps even screaming in pain at the time the statements were made. Without knowing the circumstances of the "confessions" it's hard to say whether they were coerced. But the reference to the use of drugs during interrogation implies that no holds were barred.

- Paul

September 11 plan was to hijack ten planes, says mastermind

By Katherine Butler, *The Independent*, September 24, 2003

The original plan for the September 11 attacks involved up to 10 planes and targets on the American west coast, the al-Qa'ida mastermind of the atrocities, has told interrogators.

Khalid Sheikh Mohammed who was seized in Pakistan in March and is being held by the CIA at a secret location, said he first broached the hijack plot with Osama bin Laden in 1996.

Interrogation records obtained by the Associated Press show the plan was to hijack five commercial jets on both US coasts but that was considered impractical by bin Laden.

An early version of the plot also envisaged blowing up 12 western aircraft simultaneously over Asia in a second wave of attacks which would be done by groups allied to al-Qa'ida in South-East Asia. Mohammed's statements also indicate Al-Qa'ida is planning fresh attacks on western targets.

Until the confessions, investigators had assumed the ringleader of the 19 men who committed the 11 September attacks was the Egyptian, Mohammed Atta. But two of the hijackers on the plane that crashed into the Pentagon were more pivotal to the plot, the interrogation records suggest.

Mohammed said Khalid al-Mihdhar and Nawaf al-Hazmi were among the four original operatives bin Laden assigned to him. Yemenis Walid Muhammed bin Attash and Abu Bara al-Yemeni were the others named.

Mohammed's statements claim he communicated with the ringleaders in internet chat rooms while they lived in the US preparing for the atrocities.

Originally, hijackers were to be picked from different countries on the al-Qa'ida recruiting list, Mohammed's answers reveal. But as the plan advanced, bin Laden decreed the hijackers would be composed of a large group of young Saudis.

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Confessions of a Terrorist

By Johanna McGeary, *Time Magazine*, August 31, 2003

Author Gerald Posner claims an al-Qaeda leader made explosive allegations while under interrogation

By March 2002, the terrorist called Abu Zubaydah was one of the most wanted men on earth. A leading member of Osama bin Laden's brain trust, he is thought to have been in operational control of al-Qaeda's millennium bomb plots as well as the attack on the U.S.S. Cole in October 2000. After the spectacular success of the airliner assaults on the U.S. on Sept. 11, 2001, he continued to devise terrorist plans.

Seventeen months ago, the U.S. finally grabbed Zubaydah in Pakistan and has kept him locked up in a secret location ever since. His name has probably faded from most memories. It's about to get back in the news. A new book by Gerald Posner says Zubaydah has made startling revelations about secret connections linking Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and bin Laden.

Details of that terrorism triangle form the explosive final chapter in Posner's examination of who did what wrong before Sept. 11. Most of his new book, *Why America Slept* (Random House), is a lean, lucid retelling of how the CIA, FBI and U.S. leaders missed a decade's worth of clues and opportunities that if heeded, Posner argues, might have forestalled the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Posner is an old hand at revisiting conspiracy theories. He wrote controversial assessments dismissing those surrounding the J.F.K. and Martin Luther King Jr. assassinations. And the Berkeley-educated lawyer is adept at marshaling an unwieldy mass of information-most of his sources are other books and news stories-into a pattern made tidy and linear by hindsight.

His indictment of U.S. intelligence and law-enforcement agencies covers well-trodden ground, though sometimes the might-have-beens and could-have-seens are stretched thin.

The stuff that is going to spark hot debate is Chapter 19, an account based on Zubaydah's claims as told to Posner by "two government sources" who are unnamed but "in a position to know" -- of what two countries allied to the U.S. did to build up al-Qaeda and what they knew before that September day.

Zubaydah's capture and interrogation, told in a gripping narrative that reads like a techno-thriller, did not just take down one of al-Qaeda's most wanted operatives but also unexpectedly provided what one U.S. investigator told Posner was "the Rosetta stone of 9/11 ... the details of what (Zubaydah) claimed was his 'work' for senior Saudi and Pakistani officials." The tale begins at 2 a.m. on March 28, 2002, when U.S. surveillance pinpointed Zubaydah in a two-story safe house in Pakistan. Commandos roused out 62 suspects, one of whom was seriously wounded while trying to flee.

A Pakistani intelligence officer and hastily made voiceprints quickly identified the injured man as Zubaydah. Posner elaborates in startling detail how U.S. interrogators used drugs -- an unnamed "quick-on, quick-off" painkiller and Sodium Pentothal, the old movie truth serum -- in a chemical version of reward and punishment to make Zubaydah talk. When questioning stalled, according to Posner, CIA men flew Zubaydah to an Afghan complex fitted out as a fake Saudi jail chamber, where "two Arab-Americans, now with Special Forces," pretending to be Saudi inquisitors, used drugs and threats to scare him into more confessions.

Yet when Zubaydah was confronted by the false Saudis, writes Posner, "his reaction was not fear, but utter relief." Happy to see them, he reeled off telephone numbers for a senior member of the royal family who would, said Zubaydah, "tell you what to do." The man at the other end would be Prince Ahmed bin Salman bin Abdul Aziz, a Westernized nephew of King Fahd's and a publisher better known as a racehorse owner. His horse War Emblem won the Kentucky Derby in 2002. To the amazement of the U.S., the numbers proved valid. When the fake inquisitors accused Zubaydah of lying, he responded with a 10-minute monologue laying out the Saudi-Pakistani-bin Laden triangle. Zubaydah, writes Posner, said the Saudi connection ran through Prince Turki al-Faisal bin Abdul Aziz, the kingdom's longtime intelligence chief. Zubaydah said bin Laden "personally" told him of a 1991 meeting at which Turki agreed to let bin Laden leave Saudi Arabia and to provide him with secret funds as long as al-Qaeda refrained from promoting jihad in the kingdom. The Pakistani contact, high-ranking air force officer Mushaf Ali Mir, entered the equation, Zubaydah said, at a 1996 meeting in Pakistan also attended by Zubaydah. Bin Laden struck a deal with Mir, then in the military but tied closely to Islamists in Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), to get protection, arms and supplies for al-Qaeda. Zubaydah told interrogators bin Laden said the arrangement was "blessed by the Saudis."

Zubaydah said he attended a third meeting in Kandahar in 1998 with Turki, senior ISI agents and Taliban officials. There Turki promised, writes Posner, that "more Saudi aid would flow to the Taliban, and the Saudis would never ask for bin Laden's extradition, so long as al-Qaeda kept its long-standing promise to direct fundamentalism away from the kingdom." In Posner's stark judgment, the Saudis "effectively had (bin Laden) on their payroll since the start of the decade." Zubaydah told the interrogators that the Saudis regularly sent the funds through three royal-prince intermediaries he named. The last eight paragraphs of the book set up a final startling development.

Those three Saudi princes all perished within days of one another. On July 22, 2002, Prince Ahmed was felled by a heart attack at age 43. One day later Prince Sultan bin Faisal bin Turki al-Saud, 41, was killed in what was called a high-speed car accident. The last member of the trio, Prince Fahd bin Turki bin Saud al-Kabir, officially "died of thirst" while traveling east of Riyadh one week later. And seven months after that, Mushaf Ali Mir, by then Pakistan's Air Marshal, perished in a plane crash in clear weather over the unruly North-West Frontier province, along with his wife and closest confidants. Without charging any skulduggery (Posner told TIME they "may in fact be coincidences"), the author notes that these deaths occurred after cia officials passed along Zubaydah's accusations to Riyadh and Islamabad.

Washington, reports Posner, was shocked when Zubaydah claimed that "9/11 changed nothing" about the clandestine marriage of terrorism and Saudi and Pakistani interests, "because both Prince Ahmed and Mir knew that an attack was scheduled for American soil on that day." They couldn't stop it or warn the U.S. in advance, Zubaydah said, because they didn't know what or where the attack would be. And they couldn't turn on bin Laden afterward because he could expose their prior knowledge.

Both capitals swiftly assured Washington that "they had thoroughly investigated the claims and they were false and malicious." The Bush Administration, writes Posner, decided that "creating an international incident and straining relations with those regional allies when they were critical to the war in Afghanistan and the buildup for possible war with Iraq, was out of the question." The book seems certain to kick up a political and diplomatic firestorm. The first question everyone will ask is, Is it true? And many will wonder if these matters were addressed in the 28 pages censored from Washington's official report on 9/11. It has long been suggested that Saudi Arabia probably had some kind of secret arrangement to stave off fundamentalists within the kingdom.

But this appears to be the first description of a repeated, explicit quid pro quo between bin Laden and a Saudi official. Posner told TIME he got the details of Zubaydah's interrogation and revelations from a U.S. official outside the cia at a "very senior Executive Branch level" whose name we would probably know if he told it to us. He did not. The second source, Posner said, was from the cia, and he gave what Posner viewed as general confirmation of the story but did not repeat the details. There are top Bush Administration officials who have long taken a hostile view of Saudi behavior regarding terrorism and might want to leak Zubaydah's claims.

Prince Turki, now Saudi Arabia's ambassador to Britain, did not respond to Posner's letters and faxes. There's another unanswered question. If Turki and Mir were cutting deals with bin Laden, were they acting at the behest of their governments or on their own? Posner avoids any direct statement, but the book implies that they were doing official, if covert, business. In the past, Turki has admitted -- to TIME in November 2001, among others-attending meetings in '96 and '98 but insisted they were efforts to persuade Sudan and Afghanistan to hand over bin Laden. The case against Pakistan is cloudier. It is well known that Islamist elements in the isi were assisting the Taliban under the government of Nawaz Sharif. But even if Mir dealt with bin Laden, he could have been operating outside official channels. Finally, the details of Zubaydah's drug-induced confessions might bring on charges that the U.S. is using torture on terrorism suspects. According to Posner, the

Administration decided shortly after 9/11 to permit the use of Sodium Pentothal on prisoners. The Administration, he writes, "privately believes that the Supreme Court has implicitly approved using such drugs in matters where public safety is at risk," citing a 1963 opinion. For those who still wonder how the attacks two years ago could have happened, Posner's book provides a tidy set of answers. But it opens up more troubling questions about crucial U.S. allies that someone will now have to address.

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The Guilty Men of 9/11

B Raman, *Rediff*, September 10, 2003

Time magazine (August 31, 2003) has carried a commentary on Gerald Posner's book *Why America Slept*.

The commentary says: 'Most of his new book is a lean, lucid retelling of how the CIA, FBI and US leaders missed a decade's worth of clues and opportunities that if heeded, Posner argues, might have forestalled the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Posner is an old hand at revisiting conspiracy theories. He wrote controversial assessments dismissing those surrounding the JFK and Martin Luther King Jr assassinations. And the Berkeley-educated lawyer is adept at marshaling an unwieldy mass of information -- most of his sources are other books and news stories -- into a pattern made tidy and linear by hindsight. His indictment of US intelligence and law-enforcement agencies covers well-trodden ground, though sometimes the might-have-beens and could-have-seens are stretched thin. The stuff that is going to spark hot debate is Chapter 19, an account based on Zubaydah's claims as told to Posner by 'two government sources' who are unnamed but 'in a position to know' of what two countries (Pakistan and Saudi Arabia) allied to the US did to build up Al Qaeda and what they knew before that September day.'

The reference is to Abu Zubaidah, then projected by the US intelligence agencies as the No 3 to Osama bin Laden in Al Qaeda. He was arrested by the Pakistani authorities, at the instance of US intelligence, from the house of an office-bearer of the Lashkar-e-Tayiba, a member of bin Laden's International Islamic Front at Faislabad in Pakistani Punjab on March 28 last year and flown by the FBI to the US naval base on the Indian Ocean island of Diego Garcia for interrogation. It is not known where he is kept presently.

The book, according to the commentary, refers to a 1996 meeting in Pakistan between bin Laden and Mushaf Ali Mir, a high-ranking officer of the Pakistan Air Force who subsequently became chief of the air staff in November 2000 and died in a mysterious plane crash last February. The book, according to *Time*, cites Abu Zubaidah as having claimed that he was present at the meeting during which 'bin Laden struck a deal with Mir, then in the military but tied closely to Islamists in Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence, to get protection, arms and supplies for Al Qaeda. Zubaydah told interrogators bin Laden said the arrangement was blessed by the Saudis.'

The mention of Mushaf Ali Mir by Abu Zubaidah as the ISI's contact man with bin Laden is surprising for the following reasons. First, the Pakistani army, which always controls the ISI,

never associates officers of the air force and the navy with its sensitive covert operations. Second, it generally does not allow officers of the air force and the navy to head the ISI or to occupy sensitive positions in it.

Since 1988, when the Pakistani army used bin Laden and his tribal hordes for brutally suppressing a Shia revolt in Gilgit, the contacts with bin Laden had always been handled by senior army officers. **Amongst those who had handled bin Laden (in order of importance)** are General Mohammad Aziz, a Kashmiri from Pakistan-occupied Kashmir belonging to the Sudan tribe, who is now Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee, General Pervez Musharraf, General Mahmood Ahmed, director general of the ISI from October 1999 to October 2001, when he was reportedly removed under US pressure because of his links with Al Qaeda, and Lieutenant General Ehsanul Haq, DG of the ISI since October 2001, who was corps commander at Peshawar, capital of the North-West Frontier Province before his current appointment.

[Photo unavailable]
General Mohammad Aziz



President General Pervez Musharraf



Mahmood Ahmed, former Director General of ISI



Ehsanul Haq, current Director General of ISI

Aziz was deputy director general of the ISI as a major general till November 1998, when Musharraf appointed him as his chief of the general staff after his promotion as a lieutenant general. Since Musharraf did not trust Lieutenant General Ziauddin, whom Nawaz Sharif, the then prime minister, had appointed as DG of the ISI, he ordered the transfer of all files relating to the Taliban, Al Qaeda and terrorist operations in India from the ISI to the CGS' office. Aziz continued handling these operations.

There were four phases in the ISI's relations with bin Laden.

In the first phase before 1990, the ISI did not feel the need to keep the relations secret from the Central Intelligence Agency. The two were operating him jointly. In fact, the CIA brought him from Saudi Arabia initially for making use of his civil engineering skills for the construction of tunnels in difficult terrain in Afghanistan. He subsequently became the head and mentor of the Arab mercenaries who had been brought by Western intelligence agencies to Afghanistan to help the Afghan mujahideen in their jihad against Soviet troops.

In the second phase between 1990 and 1996, there were no reports of any contacts between the ISI and bin Laden. He was initially in Saudi Arabia and then the Sudan. During this period, Pakistani jihadi leaders such as Maulana Masood Azhar, then of the Harkat-ul-Ansar and now of the Jaish-e-Mohammad, Fazlur Rahman Khalil, then of the Harkat-ul-Ansar and now of the

Harkat-ul-Mujahideen, and Professor Hafeez Mohammad Sayeed, the Amir of the Markaz Dawa Al Irshad, the Lashkar's political wing, used to visit bin Laden, initially in Saudi

Arabia and then in the Sudan. Since all these jihadi leaders had close contacts with the ISI, it was very likely they kept the ISI informed of their discussions with bin Laden and of Al Qaeda's activities in Somalia and Saudi Arabia.

The third phase was between 1996 and October 7, 2001. At the beginning of 1996, the Sudanese government asked bin Laden to leave Khartoum. Through Pakistani jihadi leaders, he sought the permission of the Burhanuddin Rabbani government, then in power in Kabul, to shift to Jalalabad in Afghanistan. After consulting the Benazir Bhutto government, then in office in Islamabad, Rabbani allowed him and his entourage to shift to Jalalabad. Shortly thereafter, the Taliban captured Jalalabad and Kabul in September 1996. Mulla Mohammad Omar, the amir of the Taliban, ordered bin Laden and his entourage to shift to Kandahar where the Taliban had set up its religious headquarters.

A number of serving and retired officers of the Pakistan army and the ISI such as Mohammad Aziz, Lieutenant General (retired) Hamid Gul, former DG of the ISI, and Lieutenant General (retired) Javed Nasir, another former DG of the ISI, called on bin Laden at Jalalabad and then in Kandahar and remained in touch with him. Aziz organised periodic medical check-ups at a Pakistani military hospital in Peshawar for bin Laden. None of the reports received during this period mentioned the presence of either Mushaf Ali Mir or Abu Zubaidah at any of these meetings.



Hamid Gul, former Director General, ISI

The US was aware of bin Laden and his entourage moving to Afghanistan. Though Al Qaeda had been suspected in the attack on US troops in Somalia in 1993 and in the explosions in Saudi Arabia in 1996 targeting US troops, the US did not exercise pressure on the Taliban to hand over bin Laden to it. During this period, UNOCAL, the US oil company, was very hopeful of getting the Taliban's approval for its oil and gas pipeline project. US officials like Robin Raphael, then assistant secretary of state for South Asian Affairs, interacted with the Taliban on this issue. There were no reports of the Americans ever having raised the issue of bin Laden with the Taliban.

[photo unavailable]

Javed Nasir, former Director General ISI

It was only after bin Laden had formed his International Islamic Front in February 1998 and called for a jihad against the US and Israel that the US started pressurising the Nawaz Sharif government to make the Taliban hand over bin Laden to the US for trial. The pressure increased after the explosions organised by Al Qaeda outside the US embassies in Nairobi and Dar-es-Salaam in August 1998.

By then, UNOCAL had also abandoned its pipeline project in collaboration with the Taliban following an outcry amongst women's groups in the West over the Taliban's anti-women policies. In the midst of all these events, Mohammad Aziz and Hamid Gul kept in regular touch with bin Laden and Mullah Omar. The Taliban allowed the Harkat to set up training camps in its territory with Arab and Chechen instructors from Al Qaeda. These were amongst the camps destroyed by US Cruise missiles in retaliation for the explosions in Kenya and Tanzania.

As the US pressure increased, Musharraf and Mohammad Aziz presented to Nawaz Sharif at the beginning of 1999 a plan for shifting all the terrorists belonging to Al Qaeda and its allied organisations from Afghanistan to the Kargil heights in Jammu and Kashmir and let them loose against the Indian Army. They argued that by doing so they would be able to escape US pressure and, at the same time, add to the Indian army's difficulties. It was this plan which Nawaz Sharif approved.

After the fighting in Kargil broke out, Nawaz Sharif was surprised to learn that Musharraf and Aziz had used regular Pakistani army troops and not the terrorists for occupying the Kargil heights. Why Musharraf changed the plans is not clear. Some say he and Aziz did shift some terrorists from Afghanistan to Skardu in Gilgit and sent them to occupy the Kargil heights. They were surprised by the ease with which they moved into the heights and by reports from the terrorists that there were no Indian Army troops on the other side. They then decided to send in the army to replace the terrorists and occupy the area.

Others say Musharraf and Aziz had from the beginning planned to send the troops, and not the terrorists, but told Nawaz Sharif they would be using the terrorists since they felt he would not approve the plan if they told him they intended to use troops.

After the withdrawal of Pakistani troops from Kargil under US pressure, the US again took up with Nawaz Sharif the question of Pakistani help to get hold of bin Laden. This matter came up during Ziauddin's visit to Washington, DC. The US wanted Pakistan's help to organise a commando operation into Kandahar to catch hold of bin Laden and his entourage. Nawaz Sharif asked the US to be patient and sent Ziauddin to Kandahar to persuade Mullah Omar to hand over bin Laden to the US. He refused.

Nawaz Sharif and Ziauddin had not kept Musharraf and Aziz in the picture. On discovering Ziauddin's secret visit to Kandahar, Musharraf sent Aziz to Mullah Omar to tell him that he should not obey any instructions issued by Ziauddin. Sharif found out about this, and this was one factor which contributed to his decision to sack Musharraf on October 12, 1999, which in turn led to his overthrow and the general assuming power.

After Musharraf took over power, Aziz, who continued to be his CGS, and Lieutenant General Mahmood Ahmed, who had replaced Ziauddin as DG of the ISI, continued to remain in touch with bin Laden, who kept coming to Peshawar for medical check-ups at the local military hospital. In mid-2001, a function was held in Kabul at which the first group of Taliban officers trained by the Pakistan army passed out. Amongst those who attended this event were bin Laden, Hamid Gul and Ehsanul Haq, then corps commander, Peshawar.

After 9/11, under US pressure, Musharraf sent a team of Pakistani mullahs headed by Mufti Nizamuddin Shamzai, chief of the Binori *madrassa* in Karachi, to Kandahar ostensibly to persuade the Taliban to hand over bin Laden to the US. Mahmood Ahmed accompanied them. Surprisingly, instead of asking Mullah Omar to hand over bin Laden, the mullahs, in Mahmood Ahmed's presence, complimented him for resisting US pressure.

It was reported the US somehow discovered this and it was under its pressure that Musharraf removed Aziz and Mahmood Ahmed from their posts when the US operations began in Afghanistan on October 7, 2001.

During his interrogation by the Karachi police, Omar Sheikh, principal accused in the Daniel Pearl murder case, was reported to have stated that during a visit to Kandahar in mid-2001 he had discovered Al Qaeda's plans for the terrorist strikes in the US and had conveyed this to Ehsanul Haq at Peshawar on his return from Kandahar. Haq is a close personal friend of Musharraf and it is very unlikely that he would not have immediately informed Musharraf about it. Thus, definitely Haq and most probably Musharraf himself, were aware of Al Qaeda's plans for the terrorist strikes in the US, but for reasons not clear, they chose not to alert the US about it.

From his new post as chairman, joint chiefs of staff committee to which he had been transferred from his post as corps commander, Lahore, Aziz continued to keep in touch with bin Laden and other jihadi leaders. It was he who alerted Al Qaeda, the Harkat and Jaish of the impending freezing of their bank accounts last year and advised them to remove the bulk of their balances before instructions reached their banks.

It was Aziz, who reportedly persuaded Mufti Shamzai to give shelter to bin Laden at the Binori *madrasa* after an injured bin Laden escaped into Pakistan from Tora Bora. It was also reported that Aziz arranged for the treatment of bin Laden for a shrapnel injury by serving and retired Pakistan army doctors.

Since August last year, bin Laden has disappeared from the Binori *madrasa*. One is no longer certain whether he is alive or dead and, if he is alive, where he is. Since a number of messages purported to be his have been circulating, he is presumed to be alive unless proved to be dead. After August last year, there has not been a single reliable report of his being sighted anywhere in Pakistan or Afghanistan or elsewhere in the world. Like ghosts, he is only heard, but not seen.

Why did Abu Zubaidah mention to his FBI and CIA interrogators that Mushaf Ali Mir was in touch with bin Laden? One can only speculate. It was probably to draw suspicion away from Mohammad Aziz, Musharraf and Ehsanul Haq.

There is one intriguing aspect about Mushaf Ali Mir. He did not enjoy a great reputation in the PAF. He headed the military equipment manufacturing complex at Kamra. In November 2000, Musharraf, who liked Mushaf Ali Mir tremendously, superseded five highly distinguished PAF officers and appointed him chief of the air staff. The supersession of so many officers came in for strong criticism from a number of retired officers. Why did Musharraf feel obliged to promote this mediocre officer, even at the risk of causing widespread unhappiness in the PAF? A question to which there has been no answer.

Nuclear-tipped Pakistan Remains a Powder Keg

By Dan Rather, *dailybreeze.com*, September 22, 2003

Is Pakistan (a) America's ally in the war on terrorism; (b) America's enemy in the war on terrorism; (c) a powder keg that could explode at any moment; or (d) all of the above?

On the question of ally or enemy, the answer might well depend on what aspect of the United States-Pakistani relationship one chooses to look at, on specific events and time frames, and on just what part of the Pakistani power structure one focuses on. As to whether Pakistan is a powder keg, those who know intelligence, terrorism and the region can come up with any number of reasons to answer with an emphatic "yes".

For those who have followed only the surface narrative, the fast and fancy footwork necessitated by the immediate U.S. response to 9-11 obscured an important and inescapable fact: Afghanistan's Taliban were in no small part a creation of Pakistani intelligence and military operatives who wanted a way to keep Afghanistan under Pakistani influence. Their competitors in this were neighboring states: Iran, Russia, India and some of the Islamic former Soviet republics.

Pakistan's machinations in the early and mid-1990s have been reported to have had the tacit support of the United States, which was involved in Afghanistan for years after the 1979 Soviet invasion. When the Soviets left in 1989, the United States, too, largely abandoned Afghanistan. Then, in 1996, the Pakistani-backed Taliban were initially welcomed by the suffering Afghan population.

And somewhere along the line, under Presidents Bush I and Clinton, the United States failed to recognize the danger when Osama bin Laden first bought, then flat-out hijacked, the Taliban regime.

America, under Republican and Democratic administrations, slept. The gradual awakening to the threat, in the late 1990s, came too late. Bin Laden, with Mullah Mohammed Omar as his front man, had become the kingpin. And among his allies were some very highly placed Pakistani military and intelligence officers, along with segments of Pakistan's police force, scientists, teachers and clergy. And they still are. That's the problem.

It is most acute in the border "territories" of Pakistan's northwest, where tribal leaders are known to sympathize with al-Qaida. But the problem reaches throughout Pakistan, where President Pervez Musharraf must balance aiding the United States in its war on al-Qaida with avoiding completely alienating Taliban- and al-Qaida-sympathizing elements of the military and intelligence services that brought him to power.

And because Pakistan has nuclear weapons, it is a balancing act without a net. If Musharraf were to be overthrown, America's most bitter enemies in the war on terrorism could find themselves in possession of the bomb.

The United States has pledged billions of dollars to Pakistan to keep the government propped up. On the surface, its leaders appear friendly and allied with U.S. interests. But deeper down -- in the military, intelligence and police ranks and in the mosques -- danger lurks.

This complex, frightening situation is a factor behind the U.S. inability to find bin Laden or Mohammed Omar, and, because of Pakistani exports of nuclear and missile technology to North Korea, it is complicating U.S. foreign policy far beyond Central Asia.

So, the answer to the question at the start of this piece might very well be (d) -- all of the above. There are, however, no easy answers for what to do about it. But pretending it doesn't exist is to ensure that it will get worse. And perhaps explode. Is America sleeping again?

Dan Rather anchors the "CBS Evening News" and is a syndicated columnist. His column appears every Sunday.

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