

New Cracks in Russia-gate 'Assessment'

Exclusive: President Obama's ex-intelligence chiefs admit they limited input into the Russia-gate "assessment," which was handled by "hand-picked" analysts, raising the specter of politicized intelligence, Robert Parry reports.

By Robert Parry

At the center of the Russia-gate scandal is a curious U.S. intelligence "assessment" that was pulled together in less than a month and excluded many of the agencies that would normally weigh in on such an important topic as whether Russia tried to influence the outcome of a U.S. presidential election.

The Jan. 6 [report](#) and its allegation that Russia "hacked" Democratic emails and publicized them through WikiLeaks have been treated as gospel by the mainstream U.S. media and many politicians of both parties, but two senior Obama administration intelligence officials have provided new information that raises fresh doubts about the findings.

On Tuesday, former CIA Director John Brennan told the House Intelligence Committee that only four of the 17 U.S. intelligence agencies took part in the assessment, relying on analysts from the Central Intelligence Agency, the National Security Agency and the Federal Bureau of Investigation, under the oversight of the Office of the Director of National Intelligence.

Brennan said the report "followed the general model of how you want to do something like this with some notable exceptions. It only involved the FBI, NSA and CIA as well as the Office of the Director of National Intelligence. It wasn't a full inter-agency community assessment that was coordinated among the 17 agencies, and for good reason because of the nature and the sensitivity of the information trying, once again, to keep that tightly compartmented."

But Brennan's excuse about "tightly compartmented" information was somewhat disingenuous because other intelligence agencies, such as the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research (INR), could have been consulted in a limited fashion, based on their areas of expertise. For instance, INR could have weighed in on whether Russian President Vladimir Putin would have taken the risk of trying to sabotage Hillary Clinton's campaign, knowing that – if she won as expected and learned of the operation – she might have sought revenge against him and his country.

The Jan. 6 report argued one side of the case – that Putin had a motive for undermining Clinton because he objected to her work as Secretary of State when

she encouraged anti-Putin protests inside Russia – but the report ignored the counter-argument that the usually cautious Putin might well have feared infuriating the incoming U.S. President if the anti-Clinton ploy failed to block her election.

A balanced intelligence assessment would have included not just arguments for believing that the Russians did supply the Democratic emails to WikiLeaks but the reasons to doubt that they did.

Pre-Cooked Intelligence

However, the restricted nature of the Jan. 6 report – limiting it to analysts from CIA, NSA and FBI – blocked the kind of expertise that the State Department, the Defense Department, the Department of Homeland Security and other agencies might have provided. In other words, the Jan. 6 report has the look of pre-cooked intelligence.

That impression was further strengthened by the admission of former Director of National Intelligence James Clapper before a Senate Judiciary subcommittee on May 8 that “the two dozen or so analysts for this task were hand-picked, seasoned experts from each of the contributing agencies.”

Yet, as any intelligence expert will tell you, if you “hand-pick” the analysts, you are really hand-picking the conclusion. For instance, if the analysts were known to be hard-liners on Russia or supporters of Hillary Clinton, they could be expected to deliver the one-sided report that they did.

In the history of U.S. intelligence, we have seen how this approach has worked, such as the determination of the Reagan administration to pin the attempted assassination of Pope John Paul II and other acts of terror on the Soviet Union.

CIA Director William Casey and Deputy Director Robert Gates shepherded the desired findings through the process by putting the assessment under the control of pliable analysts and sidelining those who objected to this politicization of intelligence.

The point of enlisting the broader intelligence community – and incorporating dissents into a final report – is to guard against such “stove-piping” of intelligence that delivers the politically desired result but ultimately distorts reality.

Another painful example of politicized intelligence was President George W. Bush’s 2002 National Intelligence Estimate on Iraq’s WMD that removed INR’s and other dissents from the declassified version that was given to the public.

Lacking Evidence

The Jan. 6 report – technically called an Intelligence Community Assessment (or ICA) – avoided the need to remove any dissents by excluding the intelligence agencies that might have dissented and by hand-picking the analysts who compiled the report.

However, like the declassified version of the Iraq NIE, the Russia-gate ICA lacked any solid evidence to support the conclusions. The ICA basically demanded that the American public “trust us” and got away with that bluff because much of the mainstream U.S. news media wanted to believe anything negative about then-President-elect Trump.

Because of that, the American people were repeatedly – and falsely – informed that the findings about Russian “hacking” reflected the collective judgment of all 17 U.S. intelligence agencies, making anyone who dared question the conclusion seem like a crackpot or a “Russian apologist.”

Yet, based on the testimonies of Clapper and Brennan, we now know that the ICA represented only a hand-picked selection of the intelligence community – four, not 17, agencies.

There were other biases reflected in the ICA, such as a bizarre appendix that excoriated RT, the Russian television network, for supposedly undermining Americans’ confidence in their democratic process.

This seven-page appendix, dating from 2012, accused RT of portraying “the US electoral process as undemocratic” and offered such “proof” as RT’s staging of a debate among third-party presidential candidates who had been excluded from the Republican-Democratic debates between Mitt Romney and Barack Obama.

“RT broadcast, hosted and advertised third-party candidate debates,” the report said, as if allowing political figures in the United States who were not part of the two-party system to express their views, was somehow anti-democratic, when you might think that letting Americans hear alternatives was the essence of democracy.

“The RT hosts asserted that the US two-party system does not represent the views of at least one-third of the population and is a ‘sham,’” the report continued. Yet, polls have shown that large numbers of Americans would prefer more choices than the usual two candidates and, indeed, most Western democracies have multiple parties, So, the implicit RT criticism of the U.S. political process is certainly not out of the ordinary.

The report also took RT to task for covering the Occupy Wall Street movement and

for reporting on the environmental dangers from “fracking,” topics cited as further proof that the Russian government was using RT to weaken U.S. public support for Washington’s policies (although, again, these are topics of genuine public interest).

Assessing or Guessing

But at least the appendix offered up some “evidence” – as silly as those examples might have been. The main body of the report amounted to one “assessment” after another with no verifiable evidence included, at least in the unclassified version that the American people were allowed to see.

The report also contained a warning about how unreliable these “assessments” could be: “Judgments are not intended to imply that we have proof that shows something to be a fact. Assessments are based on collected information, which is often incomplete or fragmentary, as well as logic, argumentation, and precedents.”

In other words, “assessing” in intelligence terms often equates with “guessing” – and if the guessers are hand-picked by political appointees – it shouldn’t be surprising that they would come up with an “assessment” that would please their bosses, in this case, President Obama and his appointees at CIA, NSA, FBI and ODNI.

The timing and speed of the Jan. 6 report also drew some attention at Tuesday’s House Intelligence Committee hearing, where Rep. Elise Stefanik, R-New York, noted that President Obama requested the ICA on Dec. 9 and the last entry was dated Dec. 29.

“This report was produced in just 20 days in December,” Stefanik said, adding: “It’s of concern to me that there was a two-month lag” between when Obama’s intelligence agencies first alleged Russian “hacking” of Democratic emails and when Obama ordered the ICA.

Of course, the ICA’s flaws do not mean that Russia is innocent or that WikiLeaks is telling the truth when it asserts that the two batches of Democratic emails – one from the Democratic National Committee and the other from Clinton campaign chairman John Podesta – did not come from the Russians.

But the Jan. 6 report has served as the foundation for a series of investigations that have hobbled the Trump administration and could lead to the negation of a U.S. presidential election via the impeachment or forced resignation of President Trump.

The seriousness of that possibility would seem to demand the most thorough

examination and the fullest vetting of the evidence. Even just the appearance that the ICA might be one more case of politicized intelligence would do more to destroy Americans' faith in their democratic system than anything that Putin might dream up.

Investigative reporter Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for The Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s. You can buy his latest book, *America's Stolen Narrative*, either in [print here](#) or as an e-book (from [Amazon](#) and [barnesandnoble.com](#)).

Turkey's Varied Tactics of US Lobbying

Exclusive: Turkey has built one of the premier foreign lobbies in Washington by paying powerful politicians, spreading around money to arms manufacturers, and teaming up with the Israel Lobby, writes Jonathan Marshall.

By Jonathan Marshall (This is the fifth in a series on foreign lobbying.)

For all the furor over retired Lt. Gen. Michael Flynn's ties to Russia, which got him fired after just [24 days on the job](#) as President Trump's first national security adviser, his biggest legal risks may relate to his unregistered lobbying for agents of the Turkish government. A federal grand jury has [subpoenaed all records of that work](#) as part of a major ongoing investigation of Flynn's foreign ties.

Although details of Flynn's work on the account remain murky, and his own story has characteristically shifted over time, his job put him in crowded company. The Turkish lobby has long been one of the most active and unrestrained in Washington. An article in *Politico* last fall [called](#) Turkey "the poster child when it comes to foreign lobbying opportunities for former members of both parties."

In the past few years, the article noted, "the country's increasingly autocratic government has employed an army of lobbyists, including [former Missouri Democrat and House Minority Leader Richard] Gephardt, [former Mississippi Republican and Senate Majority Leader Trent] Lott, [former Louisiana Democrat and Senator John] Breaux, former House Speaker-elect Bob Livingston (R-La.), the late Rep. Stephen Solarz (D-N.Y.), former House Speaker Dennis Hastert (R-Ill.), former CIA director and longtime House member Porter Goss (R-Fla.) and former

Reps. Albert Wynn (D-Md.) and Jim McCrery (R-La.).”

Turkey has also multiplied its lobbying clout by allying with various “defense contractors, finance and energy corporations, trade groups . . . and a well-financed network of domestic advocacy nonprofits,” according to the Sunlight Foundation.

Cognizant of Turkey’s importance as a major NATO arms market, for example, the Aerospace Industries Association helped coordinate lobbying by major military contractors such as Northrop Grumman, Lockheed Martin, Raytheon, and Textron on issues important to Turkey.

The American Turkish Council, which promotes “stronger U.S.-Turkey relations,” is chaired by retired Gen. James L. Jones, former U.S. national security adviser and commander of NATO. Its board members have included representatives of Lockheed Martin, PepsiCo., Pfizer, Boeing, General Electric, Raytheon, and Bechtel.

Another friend in Washington is the Atlantic Council, a widely quoted, pro-NATO think tank, whose vice chairman, Stephen Hadley, was national security adviser to President George W. Bush. The Atlantic Council’s top financial supporters include no fewer than five major Turkish government and business organizations, along with Lockheed Martin, Raytheon, and other large military contractors.

The Atlantic Council’s annual Istanbul Summit drew fire this year for allegedly excluding critical journalists and opposition politicians, at the request of the Erdogan regime. The council’s CEO said that it supported Turkey in today’s turbulent times, adding, “the Atlantic Council is not a fair weather friend.”

Fighting the Armenian Genocide Resolution

One longstanding issue for Turkey has been fighting perennial efforts in Congress to adopt a resolution condemning as genocide the mass killing of 1.5 million Armenians by the Ottoman Empire, starting in 1915. A study published in 2009 by ProPublica and the Sunlight Foundation reported that Turkey was the fifth biggest spender on foreign lobbying, at more than \$3.5 million. Turkey ranked number one in contacts with members of Congress, as a result of its ongoing fight to block the genocide resolution.

A big chunk of the \$1.7 million raked in by former Rep. Gephardt from the Turkish government in 2015 was dedicated to that end. Buying his services was a real coup for Ankara. During his long career in Congress, Gephardt had been a champion of the Armenian-American community’s campaign to officially recognize the genocide of their ancestors.

Turkey found a powerful ally for its genocide denial campaign in the Israel Lobby, which backed Ankara out of gratitude for the Muslim state's recognition of Israel. In 2007, as they had for many years, the American Jewish Committee, Anti-Defamation League, B'nai B'rith International, and Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs joined Turkey in opposing the congressional genocide resolution.

Abraham Foxman, longtime head of the Anti-Defamation League, told one reporter bluntly, "Our focus is Israel. If helping Turkey helps Israel, then that's what we're in the business of doing."

"Since the 1990s, Turkey has turned into a key strategic ally," explained *Jerusalem Post* writer Herb Keinon. "What Israel gets from Turkey is clear: a friendly Muslim face in a sea of hostility; a geographical asset; a huge market for military wares and other products. . . . And what do the Turks get? Firstly, they benefit from our geography, just as we do from theirs. Both countries box in Syria for the other, and Syrian-Turkish relations, put mildly, have known their ups and downs. Secondly, they buy our arms. . . ."

"And the final thing the Turks 'get' from Israel is access to the Jewish lobby in Washington. . . . Turkey looks to these organizations to put in a good word in Congress or with the administration when issues of importance to Ankara – such as issues regarding the Armenians or Cyprus – make their way to those bodies."

Years of genocide denial by major American Jewish organizations finally caused a furor in 2007, not only among Armenian-Americans but among many progressive Jews who decried the cynicism of their community leaders.

Rep. Adam Schiff, a Jewish Democrat from California and lead sponsor of the genocide resolution, condemned Israel's interference and said, "I cannot see how major Jewish American organizations can in good conscience and in any way support efforts to deny the undeniable." (Today Schiff is the ranking Democrat on the House Intelligence Committee's investigation of possible Russian interference in the 2016 U.S. presidential election.)

Leaders of conservative Jewish groups began changing their tune in 2010 – after Ankara condemned Israel for killing nine Turkish citizens aboard a flotilla bound for Gaza. In 2016, under more progressive new leadership, the Anti-Defamation League finally officially recognized the 1915 massacre of Armenians as "unequivocally genocide."

The Sibel Edmonds Affair

The Turkish lobby hasn't always played by the rules, according to former FBI-

translator-turned-whistleblower Sibel Edmonds. She testified that over the years 1996 to 2002, she had access to FBI counterintelligence wiretaps that implicated former House Speaker Dennis Hastert in taking “large sums” of cash – roughly half a million dollars in bribes – “to do certain favors . . . (for the) Turkish government’s interest.”

It is a matter of record that after leaving Congress in 2007, Hastert went on the payroll of the Turkish government as a registered lobbyist, earning \$35,000 a month. In 2016, he was convicted of bank fraud relating to allegations that years earlier he sexually abused boys he coached in high school wrestling.

Edmonds also claimed that former Rep. Stephen Solarz, who also became a registered lobbyist for Turkey, “acted as conduit to deliver or launder contributions and other bribe(s) to certain members of Congress.” She accused Rep. Tom Lantos, a California Democrat, of “bribe(ry)” and “disclosing [the] highest level protected U.S. intelligence and weapons technology information both to Israel and to Turkey [and] other very serious criminal conduct.” And she alleged that Turkish agents filmed a member of the House Intelligence Committee who was lured into a sexual affair.

Most explosively, Edmonds told a reporter that former U.S. Ambassador to Turkey and Deputy Undersecretary of State Marc Grossman sold nuclear technology to Turkish agents acting for Pakistani military intelligence, and that he revealed to Turkish diplomats the identify of a CIA front company engaged in gathering intelligence on nuclear proliferation.

Grossman strongly denied her claims, but the London *Sunday Times* found them credible enough to run a major story in 2008 (without identifying Grossman by name). Former FBI counterintelligence and counterespionage manager John Cole later went on the record, saying, “I am fully aware of the FBI’s decade-long investigation of . . . Marc Grossman, which ultimately was buried and covered up. It is long past time to investigate this case and bring about accountability.”

Evidently other officials in Washington did not find her allegations credible, however. In 2011, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton appointed Grossman to replace Richard Holbrooke as special U.S. envoy to Afghanistan and Pakistan.

It should also be noted that Edmonds’s initial allegations, given some credence by the Department of Justice’s inspector general and “60 Minutes,” concerned mainly potential espionage by a co-worker and general incompetence in the FBI’s translation department, not the much more explosive charges against major politicians. Nor is it clear how she would have had access to so many highly sensitive investigative files involving members of Congress.

The Michael Flynn Affair

President Trump's former national security adviser, Michael Flynn, is reportedly under investigation by at least two congressional committees, the Pentagon's inspector general, and a federal grand jury not only for his relations with Russia, but also about his payments from a Turkish organization while he was a top foreign policy adviser to Trump's campaign.

Investigators say they have found no evidence that Flynn sought permission from the Departments of Defense or State for his foreign payments. Flynn's consulting firm, Flynn Intel Group, did not register as a foreign lobbyist until last September, a month past the start of its work for Turkish interests.

The subject of Flynn's work was well disguised. His client was an obscure Dutch firm. An enterprising reporter who checked Dutch records discovered that its founder was military contractor and real estate magnate Ekim Alptekin, "an ally of Erdogan's who is director of the Turkey-U.S. Business Council, a non-profit arm of Turkey's Foreign Economic Relations Board. . . . In the role, Alptekin helped coordinate [President] Erdogan's visit to the U.S. [in 2016]."

Three months after signing with Alptekin's firm – on Election Day 2016, no less – Flynn published an opinion column in *The Hill* lauding Turkey as "vital to U.S. interests" and "our strongest ally" against ISIS. He denounced the coup attempt that summer, which he had once praised, and supported Turkey's controversial request for the extradition of exiled Turkish cleric Fethullah Gulen, whom Ankara accuses of inspiring the coup.

In March 2017, a month after Flynn resigned as national security adviser for lying about his contacts with Russian officials, the White House finally admitted, in the words of CNN, that "President Donald Trump's transition team was aware that retired Lt. Gen. Michael Flynn engaged in work that would likely require him to register his consulting firm as a foreign agent before Flynn was tapped to serve as national security adviser."

A few days later, the *Wall Street Journal* reported that back in September, Flynn had met with senior Turkish government officials to discuss "the political climate in Turkey." One attendee, former CIA Director James Woolsey, claimed that when he walked into the meeting, they were reviewing options for kidnapping Gulen to avoid the extradition process. Woolsey said he "found the topic startling and the actions being discussed possibly illegal."

Flynn denied Woolsey's account. But he did belatedly file foreign agent registration papers with the Justice Department this March, acknowledging that the \$530,000 his firm received from August to mid-November "could be construed to

have principally benefitted the Republic of Turkey.”

Members of the House Oversight Committee from both parties have since said that Flynn’s failure to get permission for those payments from Turkey could subject him to criminal prosecution for violating a constitutional ban on retired military officers taking payments from foreign governments.

Trump and Turkey

Something of Flynn’s support for Turkey seems to have rubbed off on Donald Trump. The U.S. President called Turkey’s President Recep Erdogan to congratulate him after the success of April’s controversial national referendum, which greatly expanded the powers of the Turkish presidency. Trump was apparently oblivious to allegations of electoral fraud, warnings about the death of Turkish democracy, and the fate of more than 113,000 people detained since last year’s coup attempt.

Critics of Trump’s embrace of Erdogan recalled what Trump had to say on Steve Bannon’s radio show, *Breitbart News Daily*, on Dec. 1, 2015: “I have a little conflict of interest ‘cause I have a major, major building in Istanbul. It’s a tremendously successful job. It’s called Trump Towers – two towers, instead of one, not the usual one, it’s two.” Trump was no doubt grateful to Erdogan for presiding over the opening of Trump Towers in 2012.

In mid-May, President Trump also honored Erdogan as one of the first foreign leaders received this year at the White House. But while Trump lauded Turkey’s “legendary” courage in wartime, and Erdogan hailed Trump’s “legendary triumph” in the 2016 election, no one was fooled. The two countries have grave differences over how to handle the military campaign against ISIS in Syria and Turkey’s request to extradite Gulen.

In short, Turkey’s millions of dollars have bought it a few seats at the table, not a guarantee of winning its case in either Congress or the White House. But every seat counts in politics, and as the international stakes keep rising, so will Turkey’s investment in shaping policies in Washington.

[This is the fifth in a series on foreign lobbying. The previous installments were “The Open Secret of Foreign Lobbying”; “How China Lobby Shaped America”; “Israel Pays the Political Piper”; and “Saudis Win Hearts by Lining Pockets.” Next: The Ukraine Lobby.]

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Trump Lets Saudis Off on 9/11 Evidence

Like his predecessors, President Trump made nice with the rich royals of Saudi Arabia, despite damning evidence that they have supported Islamic terrorists, including the 9/11 attackers, notes 9/11 widow Kristen Breitweiser.

By Kristen Breitweiser

President Trump has cut a \$110 billion arms deal with the Saudis. As someone who is trying to hold the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia accountable for the mass murder of 3,000 on 9/11 (of which my husband Ron was an innocent victim), I'd think President Trump would be up in arms with the Saudis, not selling arms to them – especially given the information set forth below.

Many people know the explicit evidence found from 2009 that Saudi Arabia was, “a critical financial support base for al Qaeda, the Taliban, LeT and other terrorist groups.”

Just like many know the more recent and far more damning 2016 revelation that Saudi Arabia continues to provide “clandestine financial and logistical support to ISIL and other radical Sunni groups” in the Middle East.

[Also, see Consortiumnews.com's “The Long-Hidden 9/11 Saudi Trail” and “America First or Saudi Arabia First?”]

And, anyone who cares about women's rights and human rights should also know about the latest human rights report produced by Rex Tillerson's own State Department that details, “Saudi Arabia's restrictions on universal rights, such as freedom of expression, including on the internet, and the freedoms of assembly, association, movement and religion, as well as the country's pervasive gender discrimination.”

Indeed, according to Wikipedia, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is consistently ranked among the “worst of the worst” in Freedom House's annual survey of political and civil rights, among the 11 least free nations in the world giving the country a score of 10 out of 100 on its freedom index. Interestingly, Iran is ranked better on human rights issues than Saudi Arabia; Iran's Freedom House ranking is 17.

Zubaydah's Admissions

But perhaps what many – including President Trump and his advisers – might not know about Saudi Arabia is the information surrounding the capture and

interrogation of Al Qaeda's Abu Zubaydah, who currently remains in custody at the Guantanamo Bay prison. I'd like to share some of that information – chronicled in Gerald Posner's Why America Slept: The Failure to Prevent 9/11 – with the hope that learning this information might further crystalize why the 9/11 families are so driven to hold the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia accountable for its alleged role in the 9/11 attacks.

As Posner reported, Abu Zubaydah “was long considered to be a key member of al Qaeda's inner circle. He was born in Saudi Arabia in 1971 but grew up in the Palestinian refugee camps in the Gaza Strip. After early involvement with Hamas, he was recruited by al Zawahiri's Islamic Jihad and when al Zawahiri fused his group with bin Laden's al Qaeda in 1996, Zubaydah was appointed chief of operations. Zubaydah was in charge of the eastern Afghanistan camps responsible for training thousands of Muslim radicals. Bin Laden trusted Zubaydah, and put him in charge of the Millennium plot to bomb the Radisson Hotel in Jordan and Los Angeles International Airport on New Year's Day, 2000. Zubaydah also served as the field commander for the USS Cole Attack.”

Thankfully, Zubaydah was captured by U.S. Special Forces in 2002. During the capture, Zubaydah was severely injured and required medical care. He was given medical attention and placed on intravenous fluids including pain killers – and sodium pentothal.

At the time, U.S. intelligence decided to play a trick on Zubaydah. This trick entailed leading Zubaydah to believe that the U.S. was ready to hand him over to Saudi intelligence officials for further (even more severe) interrogation since Zubaydah wasn't “fully cooperating” with U.S. interrogators. The Saudis' reputation for interrogation was rather severe – it included extreme torture and sometimes death. U.S. intelligence surmised that in facing the threat of being handed over to the Saudis, Zubaydah would want to stay with the U.S. interrogators who were giving him medical attention and, therefore, Zubaydah might be more willing to “talk.”

What happens next is what few people know. When “handed over to the Saudis” (who were really just U.S. intelligence agents pretending to be Saudi intelligence), Zubaydah was actually relieved and started demanding to talk to his contact within Saudi intelligence – in addition to several members of the Saudi Royal Family.

According to Posner's account, “when confronted with men passing themselves off as Saudi security officers, Zubaydah's reaction was not fear, but instead relief. The prisoner, who had been reluctant even to confirm his identity to his American captors, suddenly started talking animatedly. He was happy to see them, he said, because he feared the Americans would torture and kill him. Zubaydah

asked his interrogators to call a senior member of the ruling Saudi Royal family. He then provided the home number and cell phone number from memory. "He will tell you what to do."

The Rosetta Stone

Upon further questioning by his "Saudi interrogators," Zubaydah raised his voice and unleashed a "torrent of information that one investigator refers to as the Rosetta Stone of 9/11" or what he claimed was his work for senior Saudi and Pakistani officials.

According to Posner, Zubaydah said, "he was present in 1996 in Pakistan when bin Laden struck a deal with Mushaf Ali Mir, a highly placed military officer with close ties to some of the most pro-Islamist elements in the Pakistani ISI. It was a relationship that was still active in 2002 and provided bin Laden and al Qaeda protection, arms, and supplies. And that military deal with al Qaeda was blessed by the Saudis, claimed Zubaydah. Bin Laden had personally told Zubaydah of the early 1991 meeting he had with Saudi intelligence chief Prince Turki, and again, Zubaydah claimed he was personally present several times when Turki and bin Laden met in Afghanistan and Pakistan during the 1990s.

"According to Zubaydah, he was the al Qaeda representative in Kandahar in the summer of 1998 when Prince Turki and Taliban officials struck a deal in which Turki gave assurances that more Saudi aid would flow to the Taliban and that the Saudis would never ask for bin Laden's extradition, so long as al Qaeda kept its long-standing promise of directing fundamentalism away from the Kingdom."

Posner reported that Zubaydah "insisted that the Saudis not only sent money regularly to al Qaeda, but that he personally dealt through a series of intermediaries with several members of the Royal family. He then gave more private telephone numbers from memory for a businessman and former military pilot, Prince Sultan bin Faisal bin Turki al Saud, another nephew of King Fahd's and a friend of Prince Fahd's, and also for a contemporary to his own age, another distant relative of King Fahd's, twenty-five-year-old Prince Fahd bin Turki bin Saud al Kabir."

The Saudi Cover-up

Shocked to learn this information about their Saudi and Pakistani "allies," CIA officials investigated the claims put forth by Zubaydah. And then they decided to pass some of the information to their Saudi and Pakistani counterparts hoping to gain a better understanding of the situation.

Posner continues, "The Agency was as interested in monitoring the behind-the-scenes responses of its two allies as in what they officially replied on the

record. U.S. officials were already frustrated with the lack of Saudi assistance on the hijackers, fifteen of whom were citizens of the Kingdom. Saudi authorities had released no information about them. And that all of them evaded detection by Saudi internal security forces, who maintain massive domestic files, had puzzled American officials.”

Of course, the Saudis denied all the information, secret deals, and connections put forth by Zubaydah. Soon thereafter, interestingly (and rather unfortunately), all of the individuals named by Zubaydah during his interrogation turned up dead – except, of course, Prince Turki who was removed from his post as head of Saudi intelligence and named as Saudi Ambassador to Britain.

Posner reported, “on July 22, 2002, less than four months after Zubaydah’s revelations, the Saudis announced the unexpected death of Prince Ahmed. He was forty-three. The cause of death was a heart attack, said the official Saudi news agency. The following day, the second man named by Zubaydah, forty-one year old Prince Sultan bin Faisal bin Turki al Saud was killed in a car accident as he was driving from the resort of Jeddah to Riyadh for the funeral of his cousin, Prince Ahmed. According to Saudi police, speed was the likely cause of the accident which did not involve another car.

“One week later, the third person named by Zubaydah, twenty-five year old Prince Fahd bin Turki bin Saud al Kabir was also found dead. He died while on a trip in the province of Remaah, fifty-five miles east of Riyadh. The Saudi Royal Court announced his death, saying the prince who was traveling during the height of the Saudi summer heat had ‘died of thirst.’”

Months later, Mushaf Ali Mir, the Pakistani “loose end” named by Zubaydah, was killed with several others in a plane crash. Case closed. Problem solved.

A Distracted America

Unfortunately, at the time that the Zubaydah information initially became public in fall 2003, the United States was a nation with a President preoccupied with a war in Iraq. Neither the Bush Administration nor the American public paid proper attention to the Zubaydah information and/or the alleged Saudi role in the 9/11 attacks.

Since that time, the obvious questions raised by the Zubaydah information have yet to be properly and/or publicly investigated and/or answered. All the while, Abu Zubaydah remains in U.S. custody and at least somewhat willing to talk as a prisoner at GTMO. [Similar unanswered questions were raised by another Al Qaeda member in U.S. custody, Zacarias Moussaoui, who testified about his own

collaboration with Saudi officials.]

And that's why President Trump should be up in arms – and perhaps even twisting arms – in Saudi Arabia, not selling them arms. Because the record and facts surrounding the 9/11 attacks (whether provided in the so-called “28 pages,” the 9/11 Commission report and its voluminous footnotes, or other sources like Posner's book) all point a very strong finger at the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and its role in the 9/11 attacks. The Saudis should be held accountable for that alleged role in a court of law.

Sixteen years post-9/11, the 9/11 families are still earnestly trying to receive a modicum of justice in a court of law by providing all the evidence we have gathered against the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. We simply want our day in court.

We certainly hope President Trump and Congress will continue to support us in our path to justice in holding the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia accountable for its alleged financial and logistical role in the murder of our loved ones.

Kristen Breitweiser is a 9/11 widow and activist who – working with other 9/11 widows known collectively as the “Jersey Girls” – pressured the U.S. government to conduct a formal investigation into the terror attacks on Sept. 11, 2001. Follow Kristen Breitweiser on Twitter: www.twitter.com/kdbreitweiser. [A version of this article originally appeared as a blog post at HuffingtonPost.]
