

CIA Director Tenet: No Saddam Link to Atta

This is the July 1, 2004 response of Director of Central Intelligence George Tenet to Sen. Carl Levin's question at the March 9, 2004 Armed Services Committee Hearing.

Q: Director Tenet, do you believe it is likely that Sept. 11 hijacker Muhammad Atta and Iraqi Intelligence Service officer Ahmed al-Ani met in Prague in April 2001, or do you believe it is unlikely that the meeting took place?

Tenet: Although we cannot rule it out, we are increasingly skeptical that such a meeting occurred. The veracity of the single-threaded reporting on which the original account of the meeting was based has been questioned, and the Iraqi official with whom Atta was alleged to have met has denied ever having met Atta.

We have been able to corroborate only two visits by Atta to the Czech Republic: one in late 1994, when he passed through enroute to Syria; the other in June 2000, when, according to detainee reporting, he departed for the

United States from Prague because he thought a non-EU member country would be less likely to keep meticulous travel data.

In absence of any credible information that the April 2001 meeting occurred, we assess that Atta would have been unlikely to undertake the substantial risk of contacting any Iraqi official as late as April 2001, with the plot already well along toward execution.

It is likewise hard to conceive of any single ingredient crucial to the plot's success that could only be obtained from Iraq.

In our judgment, the Sept. 11 plot was complex in its orchestration but simple in its basic conception. We believe that the factors vital to success of the plot were all easily within al-Qaeda's means without resort to Iraqi expertise: shrewd selection of operatives, training in hijacking aircraft, a mastermind and pilots well-versed in the procedures and behavior needed to blend in with U.S. society, long experience in moving money to support operations, and the openness and tolerance of U.S. society as well as the ready availability of important information about targets, flight schools, and airport and airline security practices.