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## CIA: Osama Helped Bush in '04

By Robert Parry  
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On Oct. 29, 2004, just four days before the U.S. presidential election, al-Qaeda leader Osama bin-Laden released a videotape denouncing George W. Bush. Some Bush supporters quickly spun the diatribe as “Osama’s endorsement of John Kerry.” But behind the walls of the CIA, analysts had concluded the opposite: that bin-Laden was trying to help Bush gain a second term.

This stunning CIA disclosure is tucked away in a brief passage near the end of Ron Suskind’s *The One Percent Doctrine*, which draws heavily from CIA insiders. Suskind wrote that the CIA analysts based their troubling assessment on classified information, but the analysts still puzzled over exactly why bin-Laden wanted Bush to stay in office.

According to Suskind’s book, CIA analysts had spent years “parsing each expressed word of the al-Qaeda leader and his deputy, [Ayman] Zawahiri. What they’d learned over nearly a decade is that bin-Laden speaks only for strategic reasons. ...

“Their [the CIA’s] assessments, at day’s end, are a distillate of the kind of secret, internal conversations that the American public [was] not sanctioned to hear: strategic analysis. Today’s conclusion: bin-Laden’s message was clearly designed to assist the President’s reelection.

“At the five o’clock meeting, [deputy CIA director] John McLaughlin opened the issue with the consensus view: ‘Bin-Laden certainly did a nice favor today for the President.’”

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McLaughlin's comment drew nods from CIA officers at the table. Jami Miscik, CIA deputy associate director for intelligence, suggested that the al-Qaeda founder may have come to Bush's aid because bin-Laden felt threatened by the rise in Iraq of Jordanian terrorist Abu Musab al-Zarqawi; bin-Laden might have thought his leadership would be diminished if Bush lost the White House and their "eye-to-eye struggle" ended.

But the CIA analysts also felt that bin-Laden might have recognized how Bush's policies – including the Guantanamo prison camp, the Abu Ghraib scandal and the endless bloodshed in Iraq – were serving al-Qaeda's strategic goals for recruiting a new generation of jihadists.

"Certainly," the CIA's Miscik said, "he would want Bush to keep doing what he's doing for a few more years," according to Suskind's account of the meeting.

As their internal assessment sank in, the CIA analysts drifted into silence, troubled by the implications of their own conclusions. "An ocean of hard truths before them – such as what did it say about U.S. policies that bin-Laden would want Bush reelected – remained untouched," Suskind wrote.

One immediate consequence of bin-Laden breaking nearly a year of silence to issue the videotape the weekend before the U.S. presidential election was to give the Bush campaign a much needed boost. From a virtual dead heat, Bush opened up a six-point lead, according to one poll.

### **Symbiotic Relationship**

The implications of this new evidence are troubling, too, for the American people as they head toward another election in November 2006 that also is viewed as a referendum on Bush's prosecution of the "war on terror."

As we have reported previously at Consortiumnews.com, a large body of evidence already existed supporting the view that the Bushes and the bin-Ladens have long operated with a symbiotic relationship that may be entirely unspoken but nevertheless has been a case of each family acting in ways that advance the interests of the other. [See "[Osama's Briar Patch.](#)"]

Before al-Qaeda launched the Sept. 11, 2001, terror attacks against New York and Washington, Bush was stumbling in a presidency that many Americans felt was headed nowhere. As Bush took a month-long vacation at his Texas ranch in August 2001, his big issue was a plan to restrict stem-cell research on moral grounds.

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Privately, Bush's neoconservative advisers were chafing under what they saw as the complacency of the American people unwilling to take on the mantle of global policeman as the world's sole superpower. The neocons hoped for some "Pearl Harbor" incident that would galvanize a public consensus for action against Iraq and other "rogue states."

Other senior administration officials, such as Vice President Dick Cheney, dreamed of the restoration of the imperial presidency that – after Richard Nixon's Watergate scandal – had been cut down to size by Congress, the courts and the press. Only a national crisis would create a cover for a new assertion of presidential power.

Meanwhile, halfway around the world, bin-Laden and his al-Qaeda militants were facing defeat after defeat. Their brand of Islamic fundamentalism had been rejected in Muslim societies from Algeria and Egypt to Saudi Arabia and Jordan. Bin-Laden and his lieutenants had even been expelled from the Sudan.

Bin-Laden's extremists had been chased to the farthest corners of the planet, in this case the caves of Afghanistan. At this critical juncture, al-Qaeda's brain trust decided that their best hope was to strike at the United States and count on a clumsy reaction that would offend the Islamic world and rally angry young Muslims to al-Qaeda's banner.

So, by early summer 2001, the clock ticked down to 9/11 as 19 al-Qaeda operatives positioned themselves inside the United States and prepared to attack. But U.S. intelligence analysts picked up evidence of al-Qaeda's plans by sifting through the "chatter" of electronic intercepts. The U.S. warning system was "blinking red."

### **'Something So Big'**

Over the weekend of July Fourth 2001, a well-placed U.S. intelligence source passed on a disturbing piece of information to then-New York Times reporter Judith Miller, who later recounted the incident in an interview with [Altnet](#).

"The person told me that there was some concern about an intercept that had been picked up," Miller said. "The incident that had gotten everyone's attention was a conversation between two members of al-Qaeda. And they had been talking to one another, supposedly expressing disappointment that the United States had not chosen to retaliate more seriously against what had happened to the [destroyer USS] Cole [which was bombed on Oct. 12, 2000]."

“And one al-Qaeda operative was overheard saying to the other, ‘Don’t worry; we’re planning something so big now that the U.S. will have to respond.’”

In the Alternet interview, published in May 2006 after Miller resigned from the Times, the reporter expressed regret that she had not been able to nail down enough details about the intercept to get the story into the newspaper.

But the significance of her recollection is that more than two months before the 9/11 attacks, the CIA knew that al-Qaeda was planning a major attack with the intent of inciting a U.S. military reaction – or in this case, an overreaction.

The CIA tried to warn Bush about the threat on Aug. 6, 2001, with the hope that presidential action could energize government agencies and head off the attack. The CIA sent analysts to his ranch in Crawford, Texas, to brief him and deliver a report entitled “Bin Laden Determined to Strike in US.”

Bush was not pleased by the intrusion. He glared at the CIA briefer and snapped, “All right, you’ve covered your ass,” according to Suskind’s book.

Then, putting the CIA’s warning in the back of his mind and ordering no special response, Bush returned to a vacation of fishing, clearing brush and working on a speech about stem-cell research.

### **Al-Qaeda’s Gamble**

For its part, al-Qaeda was running a risk that the United States might strike a precise and devastating blow against the terrorist organization, eliminating it as an effective force without alienating much of the Muslim world.

If that happened, the cause of Islamic extremism could have been set back years, without eliciting much sympathy from most Muslims for a band of killers who wantonly murdered innocent civilians.

After the 9/11 attacks, al-Qaeda’s gamble almost failed as the CIA, backed by U.S. Special Forces, ousted bin-Laden’s Taliban allies in Afghanistan and cornered much of the al-Qaeda leadership in the mountains of Tora Bora near the Pakistani border.

But instead of using U.S. ground troops to seal the border, Bush relied on the Pakistani army, which was known to have mixed sympathies about al-Qaeda. The Pakistani army moved its blocking force belatedly into position while bin-Laden

and others from his inner circle escaped.

Then, instead of staying focused on bin-Laden and his fellow fugitives, Bush moved on to other objectives. Bush shifted U.S. Special Forces away from bin-Laden and al-Qaeda and toward Saddam Hussein and Iraq.

Many U.S. terrorism experts, including White House counterterrorism czar Richard Clarke, were shocked at this strategy, since the intelligence community didn't believe that Hussein's secular dictatorship had any working relationship with al-Qaeda – and had no role in the 9/11 attacks.

Nevertheless, Bush ordered an invasion of Iraq on March 19, 2003, ousting Hussein from power but also unleashing mayhem across Iraqi society. Soon, the Iraq War – combined with controversies over torture and mistreatment of Muslim detainees – were serving as recruitment posters for al-Qaeda.

Under Jordanian exile Zarqawi, al-Qaeda set up terrorist cells in central Iraq, taking root amid the weeds of sectarian violence and the nation's general anarchy. Instead of an obscure group of misfits, al-Qaeda was achieving legendary status among many Muslims as the defenders of the Islamic holy lands, battling the new “crusaders” led by Bush.

### **Back in the USA**

Meanwhile, back in the United States, the 9/11 attacks had allowed Bush to reinvent himself as the “war president” who operated almost without oversight. He saw his approval ratings surge from the 50s to the 90s – and watched as the Republican Party consolidated its control of the U.S. Congress in 2002.

Though the worsening bloodshed in Iraq eroded Bush's popularity in 2004, political adviser Karl Rove still framed the election around Bush's aggressive moves to defend the United States and to punish American enemies.

Whereas Bush was supposedly resolute, Democrat Kerry was portrayed as weak and indecisive, a “flip-flopper.” Kerry, however, scored some political points in the presidential debates by citing the debacle at Tora Bora that enabled bin-Laden to escape.

The race was considered neck-and-neck as it turned toward the final weekend of campaigning. Then, the shimmering image of Osama bin-Laden appeared on American televisions, speaking directly to the American people, mocking Bush and

offering a kind of truce if U.S. forces withdrew from the Middle East.

“He [Bush] was more interested in listening to the child’s story about the goat rather than worry about what was happening to the [twin] towers,” bin-Laden [said](#). “So, we had three times the time necessary to accomplish the events. Your security is not in the hands of Kerry or Bush or al-Qaeda. Your security is in your own hands. Any nation that does not attack us will not be attacked.”

Though both Bush and Kerry denounced bin-Laden’s statement, right-wing pundits, bloggers and talk-show hosts portrayed it as an effort to hurt Bush and help Kerry – which understandably prompted the exact opposite reaction among many Americans. [For instance, conservative blog site, Little Green Footballs, headlined [its Oct. 31, 2004, commentary](#) as “Bin Laden Threatens U.S. States Not to Vote for Bush.”]

However, behind the walls of secrecy at Langley, Virginia, U.S. intelligence experts reviewed the evidence and concluded that bin-Laden had precisely the opposite intent. He was fully aware that his videotape would encourage the American people to do the opposite of what he recommended.

By demanding an American surrender, bin-Laden knew U.S. voters would instinctively want to fight. That way bin-Laden helped ensure that George W. Bush would stay in power, would continue his clumsy “war on terror” – and would drive thousands of new recruits into al-Qaeda’s welcoming arms.

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Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories in the 1980s for the Associated Press and Newsweek. His latest book, *Secrecy & Privilege: Rise of the Bush Dynasty from Watergate to Iraq*, can be ordered at [secrecyandprivilege.com](#). It's also available at [Amazon.com](#), as is his 1999 book, *Lost History: Contras, Cocaine, the Press & 'Project Truth.'*

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