

New Skirmish in War Over 9/11 Information

Congressman challenges Department of Defense

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Global Research, November 10, 2005

Rory O'Connor's blog 10 November 2005

Region: [USA](#)
Theme: [Terrorism](#)

Representative Curt Weldon, Republican from Pennsylvania, has just fired another salvo in his ongoing battle against the Defense Department over the Able Danger “information warfare” program. According to at least five DOD employees, the controversial data-mining project, which ended in 2000, identified Mohamed Atta and other 9/11 hijackers a year before the worst terror attacks ever on US soil.

Weldon believes that the 9/11 Commission’s work investigating the attacks has proven “to be a disappointment and a failure, especially as it pertains to Able Danger.” Possible explanations for this failure, says Weldon, include “gross incompetence either on the part of the Commissioners or the Commission staff, or both,” or more alarmingly, “a deliberate cover-up that would make the Watergate scandal pale in comparison.”

In an effort to get to the bottom of the mystery, and to get the 9/11 Commission to “take seriously its mission to gather all available facts and information relevant to whatever pre-9/11 activities might have impacted the tragedy,” Weldon has been using every opportunity to draw official and public attention to the Able Danger findings. To date his efforts have included an angry speech on the floor of Congress and letters to Secretary of Defense [Donald Rumsfeld](#) and [Senate Judiciary Committee heads](#) Senator Arlen Specter, (also a Republican from Pennsylvania) and Sen. Patrick Leahy, Democrat from Vermont. He has also given frank interviews with everyone from Lou Dobbs to Rush Limbaugh to [yours truly](#).

Dissatisfied with the response, Weldon today announced new revelations, which he says, “expose even more blunders prior to 9/11 and point to a wider coverup.” The latest findings include Able Danger information provided to defense officials about terrorist activity in the Port of Aden prior to a deadly attack on the USS Cole in October 2000; the discovery of another Able Danger member who confirms a set of data not accounted for by the Pentagon; recent statements by the 9-11 Commission about Able Danger; and the latest efforts by the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) to smear Able Danger member Lt. Col. Anthony Shaffer, who broke the silence about the Pentagon’s efforts to track al-Qa’ida worldwide prior to September 11.

Weldon says it was “the intent of Congress that the 9/11 Commission take seriously its mission to gather all available facts and information relevant to whatever pre-9/11 activities might have impacted the tragedy.” Information culled by Able Danger’s analysts, including LTC Shaffer and Captain Scott Philpott, would appear to qualify. Despite having interviewed both Shaffer and Philpott (at their initiation) and being told that “a secret military program was authorized by the previous Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Hugh Shelton, and

assigned to Special Operations Command (SOCOM) under the leadership of General Peter Schoomaker, for the specific purpose of defeating transnational terrorist threats, specifically al-Qa'ida," the Commission and its staff never undertook any investigation.

"In two months, my limited staff has done what 80 staffers at the Commission and \$15 million failed to do," says Weldon in his letter to Specter and Leahy. "In fact, when the New York Times broke this story in early August of this year, the 9/11 Commission was put in the uncomfortable position of having each of its successively evolving responses rebutted by newly emerging facts. Each time the Commission changed its story, it brought further discredit upon its work."

The best-selling 9/11 Commission Report never mentions Able Danger's existence, activities, or findings. Yet the following is now known about the program and related efforts:

- At least five professional employees in DOD have stated on the record that Mohammed Atta was identified in name and photograph prior to 9/11.
- The pre-9/11 identification of Atta was accomplished not only by Able Danger through data analysis at the Army's Land Information Warfare Activity (LIWA), but also by another completely separate SOCOM data mining effort.
- At least 2.5 terabytes of data pertaining specifically to al-Qa'ida cells, equal to one fourth of all printed material in the Library of Congress, was collected and later destroyed.
- Another massive data mining effort collected an equal or greater amount of data on al-Qa'ida and Atta at a separate location – and still may be intact.
- Five international al-Qa'ida cells, including the Brooklyn cell Atta was allegedly involved in, were identified by Able Danger data mining more than one year prior to 9/11.
- An FBI employee arranged three meetings with military intelligence officials in September 2000 to transfer sleeper cell data, including information on Atta and three other terrorists, to the FBI. The employee has stated on the record that she arranged the meetings with the SOCOM team and knew the purpose of the planned meetings. DOD canceled each at the last minute. Able Danger team members were told that lawyers were fearful of the political fallout.
- Able Danger briefs were provided to a number of operational and leadership intelligence officers prior to 9/11. In one case a Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) intelligence officer, who is now acting DIA Deputy Director, refused to listen to or even acknowledge the brief once it had started.
- A three-hour brief was prepared for the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs in the December 2000/January 2001 timeframe using information and analysis collected by Able Danger.
- Weldon personally delivered an organizational chart depicting al-Qa'ida, produced by Able Danger, to now- National Security Advisor Stephen Hadley at

the White House two weeks after 9/11. Then-Chairman of the House Government Reform Committee Dan Burton and Chairman of the Government Reform Subcommittee on National Security Christopher Shays both attended the meeting and witnessed the transfer of the chart to Hadley.

- Former FBI Director Louis Freeh appeared on Meet the Press on October 16, 2005, and told program host Tim Russert: “We have now very honorable military officers telling the United States, Tim, that in 2000, not only had Mohamed Atta had been identified by photo and name but was earmarked as an al-Qa’ida operative in the United States. Apparently this information was brought to the 9/11 Commission prior to their report. There’s no reference to it. ***That’s the kind of tactical intelligence that would make a difference in stopping a hijacking***... We’re very interested in what the 9/11 Commission didn’t do with respect to Able Danger.”

- Able Danger identified threat data in Yemen related to the Aden port in a brief given on October 10, 2000. The attack on the USS Cole in Yemen occurred two days later and may have been preventable. 17 people died as a result of the attack.

- Commander Kirk Lipold, the commanding officer of the USS Cole at the time of its attack, told Weldon that he had three options for refueling venues, was never briefed on any intelligence indicating that there might be danger at the port of Aden for an American naval vessel, and that had he been told, he would have refueled elsewhere.

Weldon also related a bizarre development that occurred last August, after the Able Danger story first broke. 9/11 Commissioner Jamie Gorelick, whom he has never met, “called my office and told my Chief of Staff to tell Congressman Weldon that ‘she had done nothing wrong.’ Senate Judiciary staff has informed me that Ms. Gorelick made similar calls to Senator Specter’s staff with the same message.”

To date, Weldon has made no accusations of specific wrongdoing against any Gorelick or any other individual.

Meanwhile, as has been [chronicled here](#), DIA officials have smeared LTC Shaffer and effectively destroyed his career since he volunteered Able Danger facts to the 9/11 Commission staff. “What kind of signal do we send when a decorated intelligence officer has his career sabotaged as retribution for telling the truth?” demands Weldon.

“The 9/11 Commission did not do its job, did not complete its assignment, either through gross incompetence or deliberate omission. If the evidence were to point towards some sort of cover-up, the American people would be outraged beyond description.”

Weldon and others knowledgeable about the affair say that Able Danger principals such as Shaffer, who have thus far been effectively muzzled by DOD, must be allowed to be heard in order to finish the work the 9/11 Commission left undone, “either accidentally or intentionally.” Instead their testimony has been blocked by DOD at the highest levels, most notably by preventing them from speaking at recent Senate Judiciary Committee hearings. “It is outrageous that DOD gagged witnesses who were all prepared to testify in open

session,” says Weldon, who as Vice Chairman of the House Armed Services Committee is accustomed to more respect and cooperation from the defense establishment. “Apparently the Department of Defense does not share my deep respect for the Committee and its authority to serve the American people through effective oversight.”

DIA spokesman Commander Terrence Sutherland denied that DIA had smeared or gagged LTC Shaffer. “Show me the gag order,” says Sutherland, who maintains that it is DOD, and not DIA, which is at the center of the Able Danger affair. And in response to my repeated queries, Commander Gregory Hicks, spokesman for DOD, could only tell me that, thus far, “I am not getting any responses yet. When I do, I’ll let you know.” [?p=148](#)

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