

The Wrath About Khan

Plame's not the first spy outed by the Bush team. Remember the case of the Pakistani computer tech?

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Last month's bombing of the London subways brought back memories of a botched spy plot in August 2004 in which the Bush administration unaccountably outed the only double agent we ever had inside Al Qaeda.

Working with British and Pakistani intelligence, this man was sending e-mails back and forth to the Al Qaeda network in Britain. He was a highly placed, trusted lieutenant who had been turned. Once his name was revealed by the White House, Al Qaeda people disappeared into the woodwork. The outing infuriated the Brit cops who had been working to nail down the Al Qaeda network in the U.K. before it could launch an attack.

Like the Plame-Wilson saga, last year's plot was entangled in politics. The story goes like this: Around the time of the Democratic National Convention, the Bush campaign was trying to upstage new Democratic nominee John Kerry and show the president to be a fearless—and successful—fighter against terrorism. In early August, just as Kerry was setting off on his campaign, U.S. officials leaked news of the arrest in Lahore, Pakistan, of Muhammad Naeem Noor Khan, a young Pakistani computer expert.

Pakistani officials told the Associated Press that reports in the "Western media" about Khan's capture let other Al Qaeda operatives flee. "Let me say that this intelligence leak jeopardized our plan and some al-Qaida suspects ran away," said one official. Khan was arrested July 13, 2004; his arrest was reported in American papers on August 2, a day after reporters in D.C. learned of it. Pakistani intelligence officials told the Associated Press at the time, "Khan led authorities to Ahmed Khalfan Ghailani—a Tanzanian with a \$25 million American bounty on his head for his suspected involvement in the 1998 bombings of U.S. embassies in East Africa—and the capture of about 20 other al-Qaida suspects." The arrests were followed by raids in Britain.

The Pakistanis diplomatically attributed the source of the leak to "coalition partners." However, after New York senator Charles Schumer asked the White House to explain why Khan's name was given to reporters, Condoleezza Rice, at the time the national security adviser, explained that Khan was outed "on background," which means the information could be published but not attributed. The AP reported at the time: "Officials say Ghailani and Khan's computer contained photographs of potential targets in the United States and Britain, including London's Heathrow Airport and underpasses beneath London buildings."

In its investigation of the intelligence community's operations leading up to 9-11, the congressional joint inquiry led by then senator Bob Graham concluded that the U.S. never

had penetrated Al Qaeda. This was surprising, because John Walker Lindh and several other young American recruits walked right in and mixed with the Al Qaeda leadership with little trouble.

Nearly three years after 9-11, after all the shake-ups and pledges to reform, we finally were inside Al Qaeda. Then the White House steps in and wrecks the operation. All in the interest of Bush's re-election

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