



THE BIG STORY WEEKEND EDITION
W/RITA COSBY

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Big Story Weekend with Rita Cosby

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More now on the emerging link between possibly Iran and Al-Qaeda. Joining me now is one of the reporters who broke the story, investigative correspondent, Michael Isikoff of Newsweek magazine and also joining us is Fox News foreign affairs analyst Alireza Jafarzadeh. Let me start if I could first of all, Michael what is the 9/11 commission going to report?



Michael Isikoff: Well they're going to report some new evidence suggesting that Iranian secret services helped facilitate the 9/11 attacks essentially, because of a apparent policy by elements in the Iranian government to provide free passage and clean passports for Al Qaeda members coming from the Afghan training camps through Iran, and what the report also says is that eight to ten of the 9/11 hijackers went through from the training camps to Iran and on to the United States. This took place; their passage through the camps took place between October 2000 and February 2001. And they began entering the United States with clean passports no stamps that might have sort of set off alarm bells among US border inspectors in April of 2001.

Rita Cosby: Now, Alireza these borders are very porous right? It's not a surprise that they would go through Iran?

Alireza Jafarzadeh: No it's not a surprise. But the fact that there were special instructions issued by the Iranian authorities to the borders to specifically facilitate the passage of these Al-Qaeda members who were coming from Afghanistan I think is a big development. I think it shows clearly that Iran played a significant role in the tragedy of September 11th and I think it should lead the policy makers to rethink their policy regarding state sponsors of terrorism, regarding Iran and by extension fine tuning their policy regarding Iraq.

Rita Cosby: How damaging Alireza, do you think this is to Iran, if it's true?



Alireza Jafarzadeh: I think it is clearly true because of clear evidence that is there.

Rita Cosby: But if it goes to the highest levels in the Iranian government, and right now we're talking about other folks.

Alireza Jafarzadeh: Well it does go to the highest level Rita, we're talking about a country that has had a policy of state sponsor of terrorism and been involved in various terrorist attacks around the world. This is not an isolated act. We're talking about a government that has made it its policy. So there is no such thing that such an action could have been carried out without the absolute authority and confirmation coming from the supreme leader Khamenei and all the relevant agencies.

Rita Cosby: Michael, also one of the other things that I understand that the 9/11 Commission is going to report that you found out is that they came to them, that Iranian officials came to Al Qaeda trying to broker some sort of alliance but Bin Laden turned them down.

Michael Isikoff: Yes, there was an overture by the Iranian Security Services to Bin Laden himself according to the 9/11 report after the bombing of the USS Cole in October 2000 to strengthen the relationship. There already clearly was a relationship and the 9/11 Commission had previously reported that actually there had even been training for Al Qaeda operatives at Iranian backed Hezbollah training camps in Lebanon during the

1990s. But what took place after the bombing of the Cole was a proposal to strengthen the relationship and in this case according to the report Bin Laden rejected the overture because he feared it would alienate his Sunni Muslim supporters and base in Saudi Arabia.

Rita Cosby: Michael what do you think is going to happen from the US government if it turns out that it keeps trickling up towards the highest levels in Iran?

Michael Isikoff: Well, this clearly doesn't help the US Iranian relationship; it already has been strained over most recently Iran's sort of thumbing its nose at international inspectors, atomic energy inspectors over its nuclear program. But I think the important point here is that the evidence that the 9/11 Commission is saying on this score appears to be far stronger evidence of state assistance to Al Qaeda than the administration was ever able to find when it came to Iraq. And of course the Iraqi Al Qaeda ties alleged by the administration was one of the prime basis for the war in Iraq. What the 9/11 Commission finds is that while there certainly were contacts between Saddam's regime and Al Qaeda, there was no operational or collaborational relationship.

Rita Cosby: And Alireza, do you certainly expect any change in policy? As Michael points out, real quick, it comes at heightened rhetoric coming from the Iranian government.

Alireza Jafarzadeh: Well, there has to be a change of policy Rita, I mean, no one can afford a continuation of this situation. Unfortunately, Iran has been emboldened by an indecisive policy pursued by the Western countries, including the United States. They have not paid a price for all of the terrorist attacks they have been committing for the past two decades, and I think this is time for the United States to pursue a policy of regime change by relying on the Iranian opposition.

Rita Cosby: Alireza, this is going to have to be the last word. Guys, thank you very much.