

The Graham / Goss / General Ahmed Breakfast on September 11, 2001

from the introduction to Graham's 2004 book, *Intelligence Matters* (pp. ix-xi)

This excerpt provides former Senator Graham's own account of a breakfast that became famous as the result of a widespread allegation that the breakfast guest had, the day before, ordered the wiring of \$100,000 to alleged hijacker Mohammed Atta. No mention of this well-known allegation appears in Senator Graham's account.

INTRODUCTION

The Realities of Today

When I entered the conference room on the fourth floor of the U.S. Capitol, the other meeting participants were already there -- General Mahmood Ahmed, the director of the Pakistani intelligence service (ISI); Representative Porter Goss, a former CIA agent and the chairman of the House Intelligence Committee; Senator Jon Kyl, a member of the Senate Intelligence Committee; as well as a number of staff members.

The breakfast was in reciprocation for General Ahmed's hospitality during our trip to Pakistan two weeks earlier, although the scrambled eggs and sausages we had to offer didn't compare with the exotic menu at the nighttime tribal feast that General Ahmed had hosted on the spacious rear lawn of ISI headquarters in Islamabad.

General Ahmed was a Civil War enthusiast and was studying the Civil War pictures on the walls. Knowing this, Porter Goss had bought him a one-volume history of the Civil War as a gift.

As we were sitting down, I glanced at my watch and checked the time -- 8:00 A.M. -- against my printed schedule for the day: September 11, 2001.

The first half-hour of our conversation was on the subject of Pakistan's tense nuclear standoff with India. We then turned to the intelligence that the ISI had developed on the Taliban, the Afghan government, and al-Qaeda, Osama bin Laden's terrorist organization.

General Ahmed was a career military officer. In Pakistan, he wore a brown-olive uniform, but this morning he was dressed in a blue English suit. Since he was the man in charge of the ISI, keeping up Pakistan's relations with the Taliban was his jurisdiction. This was a delicate dance for Pakistan. Bordered on one side by India, an avowed enemy, Pakistan saw Afghanistan as strategic depth should India ever attack. Thus, Pakistan invested a great deal of time and energy in keeping Afghanistan's government, such as it was, friendly, and Ahmed was often the point of contact. Where his loyalties actually lay was an open question. In our visit with him in Pakistan, he seemed personally torn, favorably inclined toward America but aware of the necessities of his job. It seemed as if he wanted to help us more and to tell us more than he actually did. Or perhaps that was just a show put on for our benefit; there was no way to know. One thing was certain, though: of all the people we could talk to, he was the one who best knew the Taliban and al-Qaeda, and that is what we began asking him about. For a man of his commanding presence, with the arms and chest of a weight lifter, he spoke softly and precisely, with a British accent:

"Most people live in three stages of life -- the accumulated experiences of the past, the realities

of today, the dreams of tomorrow."

He was interrupted by a young aide to Congressman Goss, who slid into the room and delivered a yellow note card to Tim Sample, the staff director of the House Intelligence Committee, who read it and passed it on to Congressman Goss.

The congressman read the single sentence and turned to his guests: "An airplane has hit the World Trade Center's North Tower."

I was perplexed but not stunned. There has been a history of airplanes crashing into tall buildings, and that knowledge kept me from feeling a sense of alarm. Congressman Goss requested more details, and then urged General Ahmed to continue.

"Most people are aware of their past and fantasize about the future. But their primary focus is on the present -- getting along day by day. The Taliban and al-Qaeda are different. For them, only the future of paradise after death matters. Any activities of the present are trivial interludes until the ultimate is achieved.

"The discipline, the norms of behavior which influence today, are irrelevant for those who dismiss the worthiness of today."

The same young staffer entered with a second yellow note. It made its way to Congressman Goss, who read it. This time Goss passed the note to Ahmed. As Ahmed was reading it, Goss said, "Another plane has struck the South Tower."

The color drained from General Ahmed's face. Seeing Ahmed's immediate reaction, I recalled a moment from the trip I had taken two weeks earlier, when I stood above the Khyber Pass and looked into Afghanistan. Could this primitive country be attacking the United States of America?

Though we hadn't finished our meeting yet, the breakfast disbanded. Senator Kyl escorted General Ahmed down to his waiting car. Porter, who had been informed by a staffer that there might be more planes in the air, headed directly for the office of the House Speaker, Dennis Hastert. Leaving the room, I noticed that our gift for General Ahmed had been left behind. I ran down three flights of stairs to my hideaway office on the first floor of the Capitol. On most days, I will meet there with key members of my staff to start the day with a review of my schedule and the priority items I have listed in my spiral notebook to accomplish that day. On that Tuesday morning, we were captivated by the images on the television screen: smoke pouring from the crippled Twin Towers. Nearly as soon as we sat down, Capitol Police officers began running down the halls, banging on doors, and shouting for everyone to leave the complex.

After a chaotic race through the tunnels underneath the Capitol Building, we emerged out onto the Capitol's East Lawn. Out into a changed America.

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