

# The Center for Grassroots Oversight

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## Context of 'September 25, 2002: FBI Director Mueller Denies Moussaoui Leads Could Have Prevented 9/11'

This is a scalable context timeline. It contains events related to the event **September 25, 2002: FBI Director Mueller Denies Moussaoui Leads Could Have Prevented 9/11**. You can narrow or broaden the context of this timeline by adjusting the zoom level. The lower the scale, the more relevant the items on average will be, while the higher the scale, the less relevant the items, on average, will be.

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### May 21, 2002: FBI Whistleblower Reveals Slip-Ups in Moussaoui Arrest Before 9/11

Minnesota FBI Agent Coleen Rowley, upset with what she considers lying from FBI Director Mueller and others in the FBI about the handling of the Zacarias Moussaoui case, releases a long memo she wrote about the case two weeks before 9/11. (Time 5/21/2002) She also applies for whistleblower protection. Time magazine calls the memo a “colossal indictment of our chief law-enforcement agency’s neglect” and says it “raises serious doubts about whether the FBI is capable of protecting the public—and whether it still deserves the public’s trust.” (Ratnesar and Weisskopf 5/27/2002) Three days after 9/11, Mueller made statements such as “There were no warning signs that I’m aware of that would indicate this type of operation in the country.” Rowley and other Minnesota FBI agents “immediately sought to reach [Mueller’s] office through an assortment of higher-level FBI [headquarters] contacts, in order to quickly make [him] aware of the background of the Moussaoui investigation and forewarn [him] so that [his] public statements could be accordingly modified.” Yet Mueller continued to make similar comments, including in a Senate hearing on May 8, 2002. (Time 5/21/2002; Shenon 5/31/2002) Finally, after Rowley’s memo becomes public, Mueller states, “I cannot say for sure that there wasn’t a possibility we could have come across some lead that would have led us to the hijackers.” He also admits: “I have made mistakes occasionally in my public comments based on information or a lack of information that I subsequently got.” (Shenon 5/31/2002) Time magazine later names Rowley one of three “Persons of the Year” for 2002, along with fellow whistleblowers Cynthia Cooper of WorldCom and Sherron Watkins of Enron. (Ripley and Sieger 12/22/2002; Ripley and Sieger 12/22/2002)



Coleen Rowley. [Source: Publicity photo]

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### June 6, 2002: FBI Whistleblower Says FBI Is Overwhelmed with Paperwork, ‘Roadblocks’ to Investigations

FBI agent Coleen Rowley, the whistleblower who wrote a stinging memo questioning the bureau’s handling of the Zacarias Moussaoui case (see May 21, 2002), testifies before the Senate Judiciary Committee. Her memo, in which she accused FBI Director Robert Mueller of participating in what she called “a delicate and subtle shading/skewing of facts... at the highest levels of FBI management,” has become a focus of Congressional probes into what many lawmakers perceive as a systemic failure of

intelligence gathering preceding the 9/11 attacks. Rowley calls the FBI a bureaucracy rife with “risk aversion,” “roadblocks” to investigations, and “endless, needless paperwork.” Rowley says she is concerned that the FBI has moved towards even more bureaucracy and micromanagement in the months following the attacks. (CNN 6/6/2002; BBC 6/6/2002; Senate Judiciary Committee 6/6/2002) “Seven to nine layers” of management “is really ridiculous,” she says. “We need a way to get around the roadblocks.” But Rowley is more sympathetic to Mueller in her testimony than in her memo, and praises him for appearing willing to consider some of the new ideas and approaches that she says need to be implemented. (Johnston and Lewis 6/7/2002; Lichtblau 6/7/2002) In his own testimony before the same committee just hours before Rowley speaks, Mueller promises that Rowley will not be punished for speaking out, and admits that some of Rowley’s assessments are correct (see June 6, 2002). (CNN 6/6/2002) The questioning and commentary by the committee members varies somewhat by party affiliation, with Democrats such as Charles Schumer repeatedly praising Rowley “for performing a national service in coming forward,” but even committee Republicans such as Arlen Specter and Jeff Sessions engage in criticizing the FBI. (Johnston and Lewis 6/7/2002) Charles Grassley (R) calls Rowley “a patriotic American who had the courage to put truth first and raise critical but important questions about how the FBI handled a terrorist case before the attacks, and about the FBI’s cultural problems.” (Lichtblau 6/7/2002)

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#### September 25, 2002: FBI Director Mueller Denies Moussaoui Leads Could Have Prevented 9/11

In an interview with CBS, FBI Director Robert Mueller states, “I can tell you there are things I wish we had done differently. That there are things we should have followed up on. But the bottom line is I do not believe that we would have been able to prevent 9/11.” Speaking about the Zacarias Moussaoui case, he says, “That took us several months, to follow that lead, and it also required the full support of the German authorities, and it would have been very, I think impossible to have followed that particular lead in the days between the time in which Moussaoui was detained and September 11th.” (CBS News 9/25/2002) This negativism is in sharp contrast to a previous statement he made on May 21, 2002 (see May 21, 2002), as well as the opinion of many rank and file FBI officers, some of whom have made a chart showing how all the hijackers could have been caught if certain leads had been followed. (Isikoff and Klaidman 6/2/2002) Mueller’s opinion on the Moussaoui case is contradicted by many, including FBI agents working on that case. (Time 5/21/2002) The media also does not agree. For instance the Independent suggested information on Moussaoui’s computer “might have been enough to expose the Hamburg cell, which investigators believe was the key planning unit for 11 September.” (Burrell, Gumbel, and Sengupta 12/11/2001)

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#### Between December 2002 and May 2003: Staffer Moves from One 9/11 Inquiry to Another



Barbara Grewe. [Source: Barbara Grewe]

Barbara Grewe, a key investigator on the Justice Department inspector general’s investigation of the FBI’s failures before 9/11, moves to the 9/11 Commission. (University of Michigan Law School 3/7/2005) She was recommended to the Commission by a former colleague who worked at the office of inspector general at the Justice Department. (Wadley 3/14/2005) As special investigative counsel at the Justice Department’s office of the inspector general between July and December 2002 she had investigated and reported on the FBI’s handling of intelligence prior to 9/11, and directed part of the investigation into information sharing between the FBI and CIA, missed opportunities to locate the hijackers before 9/11, and earlier warnings about terrorists using airplanes as weapons. This is similar to the work she does on the 9/11 Commission. According to a press release for a lecture she will give in 2005, Grewe also “drafted and edited” the “relevant sections” of the Justice Department’s final report. (University of Michigan Law School 3/7/2005; Center for American Progress Action Fund

4/16/2008) However, it is unclear how she could have done this, as she left the Justice Department's investigation in 2003. Although December 2002 is early on in the Justice Department inspector general's probe, the following important interviews have been conducted by this time:

- Tom Wilshire, a CIA officer later detailed to the FBI who was involved in many pre-9/11 intelligence failures (see 9:30 a.m. - 4:00 p.m. January 5, 2000, March 5, 2000, May 15, 2001, Mid-May 2001, Late May, 2001, July 23, 2001, August 22, 2001, and August 24, 2001); (9/11 Commission 7/24/2004, pp. 502)
- "Michelle," a CIA officer who had blocked notification to the FBI saying that one of the hijackers, Khalid Almihdhar, had a US visa (see Around 7:00 p.m. January 5, 2000 and January 6, 2000); (9/11 Commission 7/24/2004, pp. 502)
- Dina Corsi, an FBI official who withheld intelligence information from criminal investigators in the summer of 2001 (see June 12-September 11, 2001, Before August 22, 2001, August 27-28, 2001, August 28, 2001, and August 28-29, 2001); (9/11 Commission 7/24/2004, pp. 474)
- Clark Shannon, a CIA officer who withheld information about Almihdhar from the FBI (see June 11, 2001); (9/11 Commission 7/24/2004, pp. 537)
- Margaret Gillespie, an FBI agent detailed to the FBI involved in information sharing problems (see (Late May-Early June) and August 21-22, 2001); (9/11 Commission 7/24/2004, pp. 538)
- Robert Fuller, an FBI agent who searched for Almihdhar in the US just before the 9/11 attacks, but failed to find him (see September 4, 2001, September 4-5, 2001, and September 4-5, 2001); (9/11 Commission 7/24/2004, pp. 539)
- Russell Fincher and Steve Bongardt, FBI agents from whom the CIA withheld information (see June 11, 2001, June 12-September 11, 2001, and August 29, 2001); (9/11 Commission 7/24/2004, pp. 537)
- Sherry Sabol, an attorney involved in errors in the Moussaoui and Almihdhar cases (see August 22-28, 2001 and August 28-29, 2001); (9/11 Commission 7/24/2004, pp. 538)
- An FBI official who handled an al-Qaeda informer in Pakistan (see January 4, 2001); (9/11 Commission 7/24/2004, pp. 537)
- Harry Samit (see August 15-20, 2001), Greg Jones (see August 27, 2001), John Weess (see August 16, 2001), and Coleen Rowley (see May 21, 2002), FBI officials who worked on the Moussaoui case; (9/11 Commission 7/24/2004, pp. 531, 540)
- Rodney Middleton, acting head of the FBI's bin Laden unit before 9/11 (see July 27, 2001 and after); and (9/11 Commission 7/24/2004, pp. 538)
- Jennifer Maitner, an FBI official involved in the Phoenix memo and President Bush's August 6 presidential daily briefing (see July 10, 2001, July 27, 2001 and after, and (August 4-5, 2001)). (9/11 Commission 7/24/2004, pp. 536)

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#### March 9 and 20, 2006: FBI Agent Testifying at Moussaoui Trial Blames FBI 'Criminal Negligence' for Not Stopping 9/11 Plot



FBI agent Harry Samit testifying at the Moussaoui trial. [Source: Agence France-Presse]

FBI agent Harry Samit testifies at the trial of Zacarias Moussaoui (see March 6-May 4, 2006). Samit was one of the main agents involved in Moussaoui's arrest and bombarded his superiors with messages about the danger Moussaoui posed (see August 21, 2001 and August 21, 2001). Under direct examination he relates what happened in August 2001 (see August 22, 2001). The prosecutor asks Samit several times what he would have done if Moussaoui had told the truth, and Samit is usually allowed by the judge to say how it would have helped the investigation and made 9/11 less likely. (US District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia, Alexandria Division 3/9/2006) However, under cross examination Samit says he was not fooled by Moussaoui's lies and that he immediately suspected him of preparing to hijack an airplane, but that the investigation was thwarted by FBI headquarters, and the Radical Fundamentalist Unit in particular. He admits that he told the Justice Department's Office of

Inspector General that FBI headquarters was guilty of “obstructionism, criminal negligence and careerism” and that its opposition blocked “a serious opportunity to stop the 9/11 attacks.” (Sniffen 3/20/2006) Similar charges were made by one of Samit’s colleagues, Coleen Rowley, after 9/11 (see May 21, 2002). The Los Angeles Times will comment “His testimony appeared to undermine the prosecution’s case for the death penalty.” (Serrano 3/20/2006)



#### September 2006: Moussaoui Agent Prevented from Speaking at Forum and Reassigned, then Moved Back

Michael Tabman, the Minneapolis FBI field office’s special agent in charge, prevents Harry Samit from speaking at a national security forum about the Moussaoui case and removes him from counterterrorism investigations. Samit was an important figure in the Zacarias Moussaoui investigation just before 9/11 (see August 15-September 10, 2001, August 16, 2001 and August 20-September 11, 2001). Unlike his former colleague Coleen Rowley (see May 21, 2002 and February 26, 2003), Samit has never gone public with his criticism of the FBI’s handling of the case. Tabman has been working at the Minneapolis office only since 2005. After Samit files a complaint, FBI headquarters will reassign him to counterterrorism and send Tabman back to headquarters. (Gordon and Chanen 9/23/2006; Karnowski 1/10/2007)



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