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## **No Link Between Hijacker, Iraq Found, U.S. Says**

by **Walter Pincus**

There is no evidence that the alleged leader of the Sept. 11 hijackers, Mohamed Atta, met in April 2001 with an Iraqi intelligence agent in Prague, a finding that eliminates a once-suggested link between the terrorist attacks and the government of President Saddam Hussein, according to a senior administration official.

During a visit to Washington in November, Czech Prime Minister Milos Zeman told Secretary of State Colin L. Powell that Atta had visited Prague to meet with a suspected Iraqi intelligence agent, Ahmed Khalil Ibrahim Samir al-Ani. The theory was that the two met as part of a conspiracy to attack Radio Free Europe's office in Prague, which also housed Radio Free Iraq. It broadcasts anti-Hussein programs to Iraq.

Surveillance cameras at the Radio Free Europe building picked up al-Ani surveying the site in April 2001. The tape was passed to Czech intelligence. After the Sept. 11 attacks, when pictures of Atta were widely published, a Middle East informant told Czech intelligence that he had seen the hijacker five months earlier meeting with al-Ani.

U.S. supporters of a campaign to oust Hussein pointed to the reported meeting as evidence of a link between al Qaeda and Iraq.

But after months of investigation, the Czechs said they were no longer certain that Atta was the person who met al-Ani, saying "he may be different from Atta," the administration official said. More recently, FBI and CIA analysts who went over thousands of travel records concluded that "there was no evidence Atta left or returned to the U.S." at the time he was supposed to be in Prague, the official said.

That determination was first disclosed in Newsweek magazine this week.

"We ran down literally hundreds of thousands of leads and checked every record we could get our hands on, from flight reservations to car rentals to bank accounts," FBI Director Robert S. Mueller III said in a speech in San Francisco last month, setting out for the first time the extent of the investigation and its results.

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