

Welcome!

N Netscape

Mail

Maps

IM

Search

Shopping

Netscape Presents:



Introducing the future of
global hosting and content delivery

Click for more information

DOWNLOAD
FORTUNE
500

Sponsored by **Micros**

FORTUNE

HOME

COMPANY PROFILES

INVESTING

CAREERS

SMALL BUSINESS

TECHNOLOGY

SEARCH
FORTUNE

Go

GET QUOTE

Go

COMPANIES

[Fortune 500](#)

[Global 500](#)

[Best to Work For](#)

[America's Most Admired](#)

[Global Most Admired](#)

[100 Fastest Growing](#)

[Best for Minorities](#)

[Washington Power 25](#)

[All Fortune Lists](#)

[Download the 500](#)

SUBSCRIPTIONS

Get 3 FREE Trial Issues of FORTUNE Magazine

Name

Address

City

State

Zip Code

E-mail

BREAKING NEWS

FBI's 'Phoenix' Memo Unmasked

Fortune's investigative reporter, the only journalist to see confidential document, reveals its true name and nature.

FORTUNE.COM

Wednesday, May 22, 2002

By Richard Behar

What happens when bosses ignore memos from subordinates? The country is now learning the answer to that question in a most painful way.

On July 10, 2001, an FBI agent in Phoenix wrote a memo raising serious concerns about Middle Eastern men attending U.S. flight schools. The memo never made its way up the chain of command, and no action was taken. It wasn't seen by FBI Director Robert Mueller until after Sept. 11, and President Bush wasn't made aware of its contents until a few weeks ago. The confidential document still hasn't been released, and yesterday it was the subject of a closed-door Senate Intelligence Committee session.

Recently, I had a chance to read the memo - apparently the first journalist to have done so. It was shown to me by a reliable government source, who permitted me to take notes but wouldn't let me copy it. What I learned -- and what FORTUNE aired yesterday on CNN -- is chilling. The memo raises questions about what federal law enforcement officers knew and what they did or didn't do to protect the U.S. from terror attacks in the months before Sept. 11. After reviewing the memo, one cannot help but conclude that the FBI dropped the ball -- perhaps ignoring the alert altogether.

The memo was written by Phoenix FBI Special Agent Kenneth J. Williams, described as a member of "Squad 16," and it was approved by a man named William A. Kurtz. The title reads: "Zakaria Mustapha



Ken Williams, FBI agent who wrote the "Phoenix" memo. (Photo: CNN)

MORE STORIES

- [Pakistan: Kidnapped Nation](#)
- [The Karachi Connection: bin Laden's Terror Engineer](#)
- [The Karachi Connection: Letters to Investigators](#)
- [11 Takes On Terror](#)
- [Fear Along the Firewall](#)
- [CNN.com: Senators Question 'Phoenix Memo' Author](#)
- [Time: The Man Behind the Hot Memo](#)

Offer Details:

If you like FORTUNE, you'll receive 10 more issues, 13 in all for \$19.99. That's 69%

SEND MY FREE TRIAL ISSUES

[Outside US & Canada, click here](#)

SERVICES

[Fortune Datastore Magazine Customer Service](#)
[Renew](#)
[Change address](#)
[Fortune Conferences](#)
[Special Sections](#)
[Magazine Advertisers](#)

INFORMATION

[Current Issue](#)
[Archive](#)
[Site Map](#)
[Frequently Asked Questions](#)
[Press Center](#)
[Contact Fortune](#)
[Advertising Information](#)



Soubra; IT-OTHER (Islamic Army of the Caucasus)." The "synopsis" says: "Usama bin Laden and Al-Muhjiroun supporters attending civil aviation universities/colleges in Arizona." And the memo bears the FBI codes: "Derived from G-3" and "Declassify on X1."

Soubra, the memo said, was a student at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University in Prescott, Ariz. (According to the Los Angeles Times, he was questioned by FBI agents in 2000, after he was observed at a shooting range with another Muslim, who was a veteran of Islamic jihads in the Balkans and the Middle East. No charges were brought against him, and he is currently a senior at Embry-Riddle.) The organization named in the memo's title, the Islamic Army of the Caucasus, is based in Chechnya and was at one time headed by a man named Amir Khattab, who, according news reports, is suspected of having ties to Osama bin Laden.

The FBI's probe of Soubra, according to the Williams memo, was instituted on April 17, 2000, nearly 17 months before last year's terror attacks. Williams warns in his July 10 memo of a possible "effort by Usama bin Laden to send students to the U.S. to attend civil aviation universities and colleges." He also refers to a "fatwa by Al-Muhjiroun, spiritual leader Sheikh Omar Bakri Mohammed Fostok." (Fostok, according to news reports, once ran a London-based radical group called the Islamic Liberation Party, dedicated to overthrowing Western society. He was arrested for suggesting that it was permissible to kill then British Prime Minister John Major, which he denied and was released without any charges being filed.)

The Williams memo included the names of several Middle Eastern students, one identified as a "Saudi national," who were apparently students at Embry-Riddle at the time. One reason FBI officials have given for not releasing the memo is that several of these individuals are still under investigation. So, although those names are now in my notebook, they will not be published here.

FBI officials apparently didn't do much with the Phoenix memo. It was sent to roughly a dozen FBI officials, none of whom apparently sent it to the agency's acting director. FBI Director Mueller, who took over in early September, before the attacks, concedes that the agency didn't act aggressively on the memo. Among other lapses, it never shared the memo with the CIA, which only learned of its existence a few weeks ago.

So the question is: Had senior FBI officials, the CIA, and the Bush Administration seen the Phoenix memo, could they have stitched together enough clues to prevent the terror attacks? That's something that may take months of hearings and investigation to answer. But the first step is clear: The memo should be released immediately, names blacked-out if necessary, so we can all learn what Agent Williams knew.