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Artikel

Promisgate: World's longest spy scandal still glossed over /Part II

PROMIS sold to bin Laden

 **David Dastych** - There were also two reported connections between the U.S. intelligence failure relating to the terrorist attacks on 9-11 and unauthorized derivatives of the PROMIS software.

First, unnamed government sources familiar with the debriefing of Hanssen in 2001 reportedly told the Washington Times, Fox News, and the washingtonpost.com that year that someone in Russia had sold copies of PROMIS-derivative software source codes, which Hanssen had stolen from the FBI and U.S. intelligence agencies for the Russians, to Osama bin Laden for \$2 million and that al Qaeda had used the stolen U.S. intelligence software to access the U.S. intelligence database systems in order to evade detection and monitoring before 9-11 and to move funds undetected through the banking system.

Osama bin Laden received PROMIS software, bought for him by wealthy Saudis through their connections with the Russian mafia. An American intelligence expert told Wprost:

"Salah Idris, along with members of the Saudi Royal family, arranged for the sale of PROMIS to Bin Laden. Yes, it came from the Russians, but not in as big a part as the spook community would have you believe. Nor was it entirely the work of Robert Hanssen. He was merely available to point the finger at."

Thanks to PROMIS, computer wizards working for al Qaeda could move funds and avoid tracking by U.S. and other intelligence, at least until the assaults on the United States, on September 11, 2001.

Secondly, the 9-11 Commission in the United States reported, in its April 14, 2004 report on the U.S. intelligence failure, that the FBI had failed to connect the dots between leads in its computerized case management system from two different field offices during the summer of 2001 about Arab men taking flight training courses, blaming the FBI's failure on the fact that its case management software "employs 1980's technology that is by all accounts user-unfriendly."

What was the main reason for the FBI's failure? The inventor of PROMIS and President of its producer, Inslaw Inc. company in Washington D.C., Mr. William L. Hamilton, told Wprost that:

"The 9-11 Commission called attention to the fact that the FBI did not install the current version of its case



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management software, called the ACS (Automated Case Support) system, until October 1995 and [to the fact that ACS was obsolete from the time the FBI developed it in the mid-1990s because it was based on '1980s technology.'

Although the 9-11 Commission offered no explanation for why the FBI used obsolete technology to develop its ACS case management software in 1995, the apparent explanation is that the FBI simply re-named its 1980s technology case management software, which was called FOIMS and was based on PROMIS, and translated it in October 1995 into a different computer programming language in order to obstruct a court hearing that the U.S. Senate had ordered earlier that year.

The Senate had ordered the court in May 1995 to determine whether the United States owes Inslaw compensation for the government's use of PROMIS, and the court, in turn, ordered outside software experts to compare the FBI's software with PROMIS, but the FBI modified its software and told the court that it no longer retained the unmodified first 11 years (1985 through 1995) of its own case management software].

"A June 2001 front-page story in the Washington Times quoted unnamed federal law enforcement sources familiar with the Hanssen case as stating that al Qaeda had been able to use a copy of the FBI's FOIMS software, [purchased on the Russian black market], for espionage against the United States as late as 2001, six years after FOIMS had supposedly been replaced by ACS. This may be an additional indication of what the FBI actually did in 1995. Instead of using its ACS software project in 1995 to take advantage of early 1990s improvements in computer technology in order to make FOIMS easier for FBI agents to use, the primary purpose of the FBI's ACS project in 1995 was obstruction of justice."

To put this into simpler words, the FBI (and possibly a number of other agencies of the U.S. Government) still use unauthorized derivatives of the PROMIS software. This means that foreign intelligence agencies, which have bought or otherwise acquired PROMIS, can easily "break in" into such FBI and U.S. intelligence data bases, posing a serious threat to the national security of the United States.

➡ Contribution: Bill Hamilton (Washington D.C.)

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