

# THE 2 YEAR DELAY IN GETTING ASSET X TO BRING US TO KHALID SHEIKH MOHAMMED

We've known for some time that CIA found Khalid Sheikh Mohammed with the help of a walk-in source. Terry McDermott and Josh Meyer describe the source as "Baluchi" in their book, *The Hunt for KSM*—someone, like KSM, from Baluchistan.

But the Torture Report provides a different take for the delay in having him lure in KSM, which McDermott and Meyer describe as more than a year and the Torture Report describes ASSET X, the source in question, as approaching the CIA in spring 2001. (This heavily redacted narrative starts on page 328) The CIA did not meet with him until after 9/11, probably some time after September 26, 2001. Per the Senate Report (the CIA disputes that they knew what he could bring them until after starting to torture), before the end of the year, ASSET X "proposed multiple times to the CIA that he use his contacts to locate KSM through [redacted]—the same approach that would lead the CIA to KSM more than 15 months later." He apparently argued for a "more aggressive and proactive approach" than the CIA, but was persuaded otherwise. Then ALEC Station rejected ASSET X's monetary demands.

So they lost him. For 9 months.

In July 2002, a detainee in foreign government custody confirmed that ASSET X "should know how to contact KSM."

The CIA appears to have sent ASSET X to do something else before going after KSM, during which period his handler — whom McDermott and Meyer say was an Iranian-American flying into Pakistan whenever ASSET X wanted to meet — got reassigned. When a new officer took over handling ASSET X, he almost lost him.

ASSET X was thus handled by a new CIA officer who was unfamiliar with ASSET X's potential utility in tracking KSM. Seeking guidance on how to proceed with ASSET X, the new CIA case officer sent several cables to CIA Headquarters, which he later described as disappearing into a "black hole." According to an interview of a CIA officer involved in the operation, the cables were being sent to a special compartment at CIA Headquarters which had been previously used by the team [redacted]. With the dispersal of that CIA team, however, the compartment was idle and no one at CIA Headquarters was receiving and reading the cables being sent to the special compartment. When the CIA case officer received no response to the cables he was sending to CIA Headquarters, he made preparations to terminate the CIA's relationship with ASSET X. According to interviews, in [redacted] 2002, the CIA officer [redacted] and was on his way to meet ASSET X to terminate the asset's relationship with the CIA. By chance, the CIA officer who had previously handled ASSET X [redacted] was visiting [redacted]. This visiting CIA officer overheard the discussion between the chief of Base and the CIA case officer concerning the CIA's termination of ASSET X as a CIA source. The discussion included names that ASSET X had been discussing with the case officer [redacted]—names that the visiting officer recognized [redacted]. The visiting CIA officer interceded and recommended that the CIA Base delay the termination of ASSET X as a CIA source. At the next meeting ASSET X again demonstrated that he had direct access to KSM's [redacted]. As a result, the CIA decided not to terminate ASSET X's work as a CIA source.

ASSET X then traveled on his own and set up a meeting with KSM, which set off something the report redacts entirely. The debate over whether to go after KSM's associates or directly after him appears to have continued, however.

The internal debate within the CIA continued, however, with the [redacted] and ASSET X and his CIA handlers urging the CIA to delay action and wait for an opportunity for ASSET X to locate KSM. ALEC Station initially supported immediate action to capture any KSM associate ASSET X could lead them to, before reversing its position on February [redacted] 2003. The next day, ASSET X arrived in Islamabad [redacted] where he was surprised to find KSM.

After some reservations (not included in McDermott and Meyer's description), ASSET X appears to have again been able to locate KSM, after which Pakistani authorities conducted a raid and caught the 9/11 mastermind.

That is, even aside from CIA's claims that they didn't know ASSET X could bring them to KSM without further evidence gained through torture, there seems to have been delay and debate about how to do it and in what priority. But it appears the guy who eventually led the CIA to KSM had offered up his services even before 9/11.

It just took two years before the CIA would act on his ability to bring them to KSM.