



Case # 265A-281867
Translator # 162

Trans. Note: At the top of the page:

A joke about an ant and an Elephant.

Trans. Note: On Mohammed Atta's forehead:

Commander of 11 September units, May God bless his sole.



REACTS AND RESPONSES: Hoping to Disarm Baghdad, Dissecting a Rumor

الثمة مائة للفيل قم دلكن وصال زلام حوونى فاذا رام احمل كوصية بالة لة و بالة لة و بالة لة
احمل كوصية لى كل صاع الف قتل ضل الفيل .. فما طلة نصلا تخرى ما يرين

VIEW FROM PRAGUE

Havel Rebuffs Reports of Iraqi Meeting With Hijacker

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uding the Czech prime minister, helped turn the reports of a meeting between an important Al Qaeda operative and an Iraqi spy into an international issue. When the reports of a meeting between Mr. Atta and Mr. Ani came to the attention in October 2001, they were expected to provide the most direct connection yet uncovered between the Sept. 11 attacks and the government of Saddam Hussein, and they set off a debate in Washington that continues today over whether a possible war with Iraq should be considered an extension of the global war on Al Qaeda and terrorism. For months, American intelligence and law enforcement officials have cast doubt on the reports of the Prague meeting, which proved to be based on the statements of a single informant, and last week the director of central intelligence, George J. Tenet, told Congress that his agency could find no evidence to confirm that the meeting took place. The White House has generally been cautious about using the reports of the Prague meeting to help make the case for war with Iraq. Yet the Prague meeting has remained a sensitive issue with other proponents of military action against Iraq, both in and out of the government. The disclosure of Mr. Havel's decision to inform the Bush administration that it should ignore the reports of a meeting comes after a year of

confused and often contradictory statements from other Czech officials about the incident.

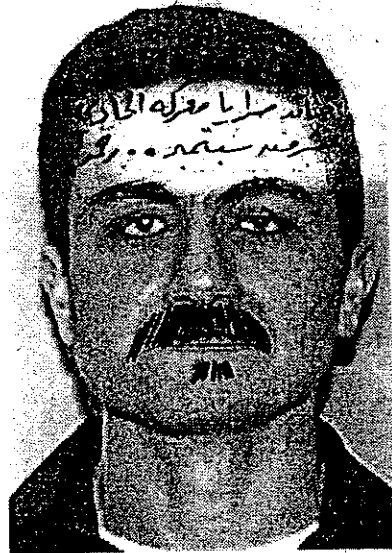
Interior Minister Stanislav Gross first gave public credence to the reports when he held a news conference in October 2001 to announce that Mr. Atta had come to Prague in April to meet with Mr. Ani, an intelligence officer who was working under diplomatic cover in the Iraqi Embassy.

More significantly, Czech officials say that Milos Zeman, then the Czech Republic's prime minister, privately informed Secretary of State Colin L. Powell about the intelligence reports, while Mr. Zeman was holding meetings in Washington in November, thus placing the credibility of the Czech government even more squarely behind the reports.

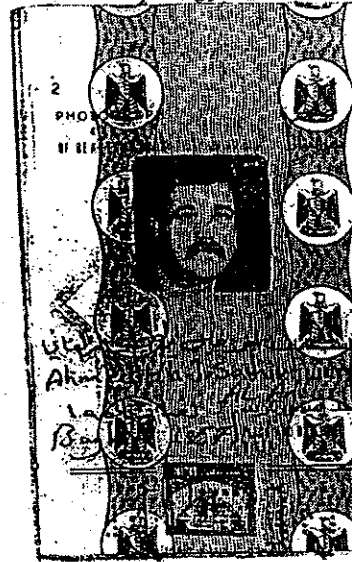
Mr. Zeman's statements, along with an assertion that Mr. Atta and Mr. Ani had met to plot an attack on the offices of Radio Free Europe in Prague, made it difficult for officials there and in Washington to easily brush aside the reports of the meeting. American counterterrorism specialists at the F.B.I. and the C.I.A. subsequently came under intense pressure to thoroughly investigate the matter.

But Czech officials who have investigated the case now say that Mr. Zeman and Mr. Gross spoke without adequately vetting the information or waiting for the Czech internal security service to substantiate the initial reports.

Officials say they also spoke with



Associated Press



Mohamed Atta, left, the operational leader in the Sept. 11 hijacking, has been traced in intelligence reports to a meeting in Prague five months before with an Iraqi embassy official, Khalil Ibrahim Samir al-Ani.

out adequately consulting Mr. Havel, who was effectively excluded as others went to the press and the Bush administration. In the Czech political system, the president is the head of state, but the prime minister manages most day-to-day government affairs and is not necessarily from the same party as the president.

Mr. Havel, the playwright and former dissident who led Czechoslovakia out of Communism in the Velvet Revolution of 1989, moved carefully behind the scenes in the months after the reports of the Prague meeting came to light to try to determine what really happened, officials said. He asked trusted advisers to investigate, and they quietly went through back channels to talk with Czech intelligence officers to get to the bottom of the story. The intelligence officers told them there was no evidence of a meeting.

It was also clear they were irked that Czech political leaders had spoken out despite the caveats that had been placed on the initial report of the meeting. "I'm sure that the report was written carefully, in guarded language," a Czech leader who has reviewed the matter said.

The intelligence report of the

about his role in the case. Mr. Ani could not be reached, but in a letter told a Czech newspaper that he was by his initial statements about the meeting.

Today other Czech officials say they have no evidence that Mr. Ani was even in the country in April. In fact, American records show he was in Virginia Beach, Va., in early April. "The interior minister claims they did meet, but the intelligence people have told me they didn't, that the meeting didn't happen," a senior official said.

The Czechs say border records show that Mr. Atta, an Egyptian who was then living in Hamburg, Germany, did come to Prague in June 2000, after obtaining a visa in May. Shortly after arriving in Prague on that occasion, Mr. Atta flew to Newark, N.J. Now Czech and German officials say their best explanation of why Mr. Atta came to Prague was to get cheap airfare to the United States.

Czech officials also say they have no hard evidence that Mr. Ani was involved in terrorist activities, though the government did ouster him in late April 2001. The

