

The New York Times

The One Percent Doctrine by Ron Suskind

'The Invisibles' tell all Ron Suskind's insider sources reveal disconnect between action and evidence in war on terror

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July 9, 2006

Updated: Aug. 12, 2011 5:12 a.m.

This is an important book, filled with the surest sign of great reporting: the unexpected. It enriches our understanding of even familiar episodes from the Bush administration's war on terror and tells some jaw-dropping stories we haven't heard before.

One example out of many comes in Ron Suskind's gripping narrative of what the White House has celebrated as one of the war's major victories: the capture of Abu Zubaydah in Pakistan in March 2002. Described as al-Qaeda's chief of operations even after U.S. and Pakistani forces kicked down his door in Faisalabad, the Saudi-born jihadist was the first al-Qaeda detainee to be shipped to a secret prison abroad. Suskind shatters the official story line here.

Abu Zubaydah, his captors discovered, turned out to be mentally ill and nothing like the pivotal figure they supposed him to be. CIA and FBI analysts, poring over a diary he kept for more than a decade, found entries "in the voice of three people: Hani 1, Hani 2, and Hani 3" — a boy, a young

man and a middle-aged alter ego. All three recorded in numbing detail "what people ate, or wore, or trifling things they said." Dan Coleman, then the FBI's top al-Qaeda analyst, told a senior bureau official, "This guy is insane, certifiable, split personality."

Abu Zubaydah also appeared to know nothing about terrorist operations; rather, he was al-Qaeda's go-to guy for minor logistics — travel for wives and children and the like. That judgment was "echoed at the top of CIA and was, of course, briefed to the President and Vice President," Suskind writes. And yet somehow, in a speech delivered two weeks later, President Bush portrayed Abu Zubaydah as "one of the top operatives plotting and planning death and destruction on the United States." And over the months to come, under White House and Justice Department direction, the CIA would make him its first test subject for harsh interrogation techniques. How could this have happened? Why are we learning about it only now? Those questions form the spine of Suskind's impressively reported book.

In interviews with intelligence officers, Suskind often finds them baffled by White House statements. "Why the hell did the President have to put us in a box like this?" one top CIA official asked about the overblown public portrait of Abu Zubaydah. But Suskind sees a deliberate management choice: Bush ensnared his director of central intelligence at the time, George J. Tenet, and many others in a new kind of war in which action and evidence were consciously divorced.

The One Percent Doctrine takes its title from an episode in late November 2001. Amid fears of a "second wave" attack after 9/11, Tenet laid out for Vice President Cheney and national security adviser Condoleezza Rice a stunning trove of new intelligence, much of which Suskind reveals for the first time: Two Pakistani scientists who previously offered to help Libya build a nuclear bomb were known to have met with Osama bin Laden. (Later, Suskind reports, the U.S. government would discover that bin Laden asked pointedly what his next steps should be if he already possessed enriched uranium.)

Cheney, by Suskind's account, had been grappling with how to think about "a low-probability, high-impact event." By the time the briefing was over, he had his answer: "If there's a one percent chance that Pakistani scientists

are helping al Qaeda build or develop a nuclear weapon, we have to treat it as a certainty in terms of our response."

This "Cheney Doctrine" let Bush evade analytic debate, Suskind writes, and "rely on impulse and improvisation to a degree that was without precedent for a modern president." But that approach constricted the mission of the intelligence and counterterrorism professionals whose point of view dominates this book. Many of them came to believe, Suskind reports, that "their jobs were not to help shape policy, but to affirm it." (Some of them nicknamed Cheney "Edgar," as in Edgar Bergen — casting the president as the ventriloquist's dummy.)

Suskind calls those career terror-fighters "the invisibles," and he likes them. His book is full of amazing, persuasively detailed vignettes about their world. At least a dozen former intelligence officials speak frankly in public here, as did former treasury secretary Paul O'Neill in Suskind's previous book, *The Price of Loyalty*.

Suskind's enterprise has turned up several scoops, including the important disclosure that First Data Corp., among the largest processors of credit-card transactions, began to give the FBI access to its records after Sept. 11, 2001. Suskind's account is fuzzy on some of the legal questions, but he argues that the operation "swept up the suspicious, or simply the unfortunate, by the stadiumful and caught almost no one who was actually a danger to America."

Suskind titles one chapter "Zawahiri's Head," a reference to Ayman al-Zawahiri, al-Qaeda's second in command, whom Suskind cheekily dubs "bin Laden's Cheney, the older man who made sure that ideas were carried to action."

At least four times in 2001-2002, reports reached Washington that Zawahiri had died. One set of Afghan tribal chiefs said they could prove it. In June, they delivered a mud-caked head, and an intelligence officer flew it in a metal box to Dulles airport for DNA analysis. Coleman, the FBI analyst, held the jawless skull "as Hamlet did with Yorick's." It felt, he tells Suskind, "like a boccie ball." Bush, who was tracking the transaction, reportedly told a briefer — "half in jest," Suskind writes — that "if it turns out to be Zawahiri's head, I hope you'll bring it here." It turned out to be someone

else's.

Reviled for failure to develop human spies inside al-Qaeda, the CIA in fact has done so at least twice, Suskind reports. One source warned in detail of a planned 2003 cyanide gas attack on New York subways — then said Zawahiri himself had inexplicably called it off. The other informant was a "walk-in" who led the CIA directly to the most significant al-Qaeda operative captured to date — Khalid Sheik Mohammed, the 9/11 plot's mastermind, known to "the invisibles" as KSM. Suskind reports that the al-Qaeda turncoat who turned KSM in collected the \$25 million U.S. reward for information leading to his capture and is now living under a new name in this country.

Tenet and his loyalists also settle a few scores with the White House here. The book's opening anecdote tells of an unnamed CIA briefer who flew to Bush's Texas ranch during the scary summer of 2001, amid a flurry of reports of a pending al-Qaeda attack, to call the president's attention personally to the now-famous Aug. 6, 2001, memo titled "Bin Ladin Determined to Strike in US." Bush reportedly heard the briefer out and replied: "All right. You've covered your ass, now."

Three months later, with bin Laden holed up in the Afghan mountain redoubt of Tora Bora, the CIA official managing the Afghanistan campaign, Henry A. Crumpton (now the State Department's counterterrorism chief), brought a detailed map to Bush and Cheney. White House accounts have long insisted that Bush had every reason to believe that Pakistan's army and pro-U.S. Afghan militias had bin Laden cornered and that there was no reason to commit large numbers of U.S. troops to get him. But Crumpton's message in the Oval Office, as told through Suskind, was blunt: The surrogate forces were "definitely not" up to the job, and "we're going to lose our prey if we're not careful."

Suskind's portrait of Tenet, respectful but far from adulatory, depicts a man compromised by "insecurity and gratitude" to a president who chose not to fire him after 9/11. "At that point, George Tenet would do anything his President asked," Suskind writes.

Which brings us back to the unbalanced Abu Zubaydah. "I said he was

important," Bush reportedly told Tenet at one of their daily meetings. "You're not going to let me lose face on this, are you?" "No sir, Mr. President," Tenet replied. Bush "was fixated on how to get Zubaydah to tell us the truth," Suskind writes, and he asked one briefer, "Do some of these harsh methods really work?" Interrogators did their best to find out, Suskind reports. They strapped Abu Zubaydah to a water-board, which reproduces the agony of drowning. They threatened him with certain death.

They withheld medication. They bombarded him with deafening noise and harsh lights, depriving him of sleep. Under that duress, he began to speak of plots of every variety — against shopping malls, banks, supermarkets, water systems, nuclear plants, apartment buildings, the Brooklyn Bridge, the Statue of Liberty. With each new tale, "thousands of uniformed men and women raced in a panic to each ... target." And so, Suskind writes, "the United States would torture a mentally disturbed man and then leap, screaming, at every word he uttered."