

Once again: government, media silent on right-wing role in US anthrax attacks

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The evidence continues to mount that extreme right-wing elements are responsible for the anthrax attacks that have killed five people in the United States since early October. But both the Bush administration and the American media have lapsed into virtual silence on the subject, a noticeable contrast to their portrayal, barely a month ago, of the anthrax attacks as a major terrorist threat.

The shift in the official treatment of the anthrax attacks points to the cynical political calculations that underlie both the media coverage and the policies of the Bush administration. As long as it seemed possible to attribute the anthrax attacks to Osama bin Laden or some other foreign terrorist, shrieking headlines and alarmist statements from government officials were the norm. Now that it seems certain that domestic fascists are to blame, anthrax no longer serves as a pretext for expanded US military intervention in the Middle East and Central Asia. Accordingly, the danger is being downplayed and the investigation put on the back burner.

Last week's discovery of a contaminated letter addressed to Senator Patrick Leahy further undermines suggestions that Middle East terrorists are behind the anthrax attacks.

The letter to Leahy was found as part of a systematic search of the mail delivered to Capitol Hill the week of October 15, when the first anthrax letter to Congress, addressed to Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle, was discovered. Investigators found an extremely high level of anthrax contamination in one of the 250 barrels of mail set aside for testing, and narrowed down the source to the letter addressed to Leahy. The block printing on the envelope, the Trenton, New Jersey postmark and the fictitious return address were all identical to the Daschle letter.

FBI officials said the Leahy letter confirmed their hypothesis, based on an analysis of the writing style and wording of the previous anthrax letters, that the sender was an American terrorist with some familiarity with biotechnology and relatively simple equipment—costing as little as \$2,500.

One official told the *New York Times* that sending a letter to Leahy suggested that a domestic terrorist was responsible. “No disrespect to Senator Leahy,” the official said, “but I don’t know how many foreign terrorists would want to single out the chairman of a Congressional committee. They would have other targets.”

The Judiciary Committee handles issues that are among the most inflammatory for the extreme right in the United States, including abortion rights, gun control, review of the work of the FBI, and confirmation of federal judges.

One Democratic congressman, James Moran of Virginia, drew the obvious conclusion from the targeting of Daschle and Leahy, two of the leading Senate Democrats: the anthrax attacks were carried out by “a domestic, right-wing oriented group,” he said, rather than by foreign terrorists. “Why would they choose the new Senate majority leader and the Senate Judiciary Committee chairman?” he said.

Two Bush administration spokesmen on the anthrax attacks, homeland security director Tom Ridge and Health and Human Services Secretary Tommy Thompson, have admitted that the likely source is domestic rather than foreign. Thompson told *USA Today* that investigators believe that the attacks are the work of “a disgruntled American,” and that a microbiologist working alone with only \$2,000 worth of equipment could have developed the anthrax used.

The *New York Times* concluded, in an editorial

November 22, “Discovery of an anthrax-laced letter mailed to Senator Patrick Leahy strengthened the likelihood that the terrorist is home-grown rather than foreign... Since Senator Leahy is primarily associated with social and law enforcement issues, he seems more likely to attract the attention of home-grown terrorists.”

Those involved in the investigation now admit what the facts fairly scream—that domestic fascists are responsible for the anthrax attacks. But federal authorities are noticeably reluctant to act on that conclusion. While the Justice Department has sent out instructions to local police departments, all across the country, to bring in for questioning thousands of Arab and Muslim immigrant men, aged 21 to 35, there has been no such dragnet ordered against right-wing elements such as the members of militia and gun-rights groups, white supremacists, or anti-abortion extremists.

For the Bush administration, of course, such an investigation could prove politically embarrassing, given its close ties to the ultra-right and the prominent role such forces play in the Republican Party.

The FBI and Justice Department are well aware of the links between extreme right groups and past threats of bio-terrorism. Two white supremacists have been linked with such threats: Larry Wayne Harris, a microbiologist and former member of the Aryan Nations, who obtained both bubonic plague and anthrax materials; and Alexander James Curtis, author of an Internet report entitled “Biology for Aryans,” with information on botulism, typhoid and anthrax.

An extraordinary article in the *New York Times* November 20 described the scene at a recent gun show in Salt Lake City, Utah, a virtual convention of right-wing enthusiasts, at which one individual, Timothy W. Tobiason of Nebraska, sold printed and CD copies of his self-published book “Scientific Principles of Improvised Warfare and Home Defense Volume 6-1: Advanced Biological Weapons Design and Manufacture.” According to the *Times*, the work is “a germ-warfare cookbook that bioterrorism experts say is accurate enough to be dangerous.”

The book contains directions for making “mail delivered” anthrax, and advises readers, “if you can make Jell-O, you can wipe out cities. Enjoy!” The *Times* reported that federal officials have been monitoring Tobiason for years, and that he delivered copies of his book to the offices of dozens of US

senators, including Daschle.

A former electronic warfare specialist in the Navy, Tobiason went AWOL after a conflict with an officer and eventually received a less than honorable discharge. His anti-government grievances allegedly grew when the US Patent Office failed to grant him a patent for an agricultural chemical, and then awarded a patent for a similar product to a large corporation.

While Tobiason is only one among hundreds, if not thousands, of such individuals, he and his ilk have been given little or no media attention, especially from the major television networks. Whenever the networks make mention of anthrax at all, they continue to suggest that these attacks somehow justify the Bush administration’s military intervention in Central Asia.



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