

Why is the US government protecting the anthrax terrorist?

The Editorial Board
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An extraordinary commentary published in Tuesday's *New York Times* declares that the FBI is refusing to arrest or seriously investigate the most obvious suspect in the anthrax attacks last fall which killed five people.

The allegations made by *Times* columnist Nicholas Kristof are so serious that they deserve immediate and thorough public investigation. But so far, both the Bush administration and the media have remained silent on what is, without exaggeration, one of the most astounding articles ever to appear in a major American newspaper.

Kristof indicts the FBI's "lackadaisical ineptitude in pursuing the anthrax killer," writing: "Almost everyone who has encountered the FBI anthrax investigation is aghast at the bureau's lethargy. Some in the biodefense community think they know a likely culprit, whom I'll call Mr. Z. Although the bureau has polygraphed Mr. Z., searched his home twice and interviewed him four times, it has not placed him under surveillance or asked its outside handwriting expert to compare his writing to that on the anthrax letters."

Kristof confirms that the identity of the prime suspect is well known in media and government circles, although he chooses not to name the name. "If Mr. Z. were an Arab national," Kristof comments, "he would have been imprisoned long ago. But he is a true-blue American with close ties to the US Defense Department, the CIA and the American biodefense program."

The columnist places this negligence in the context of a larger pattern, including a decision to allow anthrax stocks held by Iowa State University—in Ames, Iowa, namesake of the toxic strain used in the letters—to be incinerated rather than tested. The FBI delayed testing the anthrax in the unopened letter to Senator Leahy

until December, and has still not finished testing anthrax strains obtained from private, US government and overseas labs for comparison. Lie detector tests were not administered to biowarfare scientists at Ft. Detrick, Maryland and Dugway Proving Ground in Utah until last month.

Kristof concludes his column with a series of pointed questions to the FBI. He writes:

"Do you know how many identities and passports Mr. Z. has and are you monitoring his international travel? I have found at least one alias for him, and he has continued to travel abroad on government assignments, even to Central Asia.

"Why was his top security clearance suspended in August, less than a month before the anthrax attacks began? This move left him infuriated. Are the CIA and military intelligence agencies cooperating fully with the investigation?

"Have you searched the isolated residence that he had access to last fall? The FBI has known about this building, and knows that Mr. Z. gave Cipro to people who visited it. This property and many others are legally registered in the name of a friend of Mr. Z., but may be safe houses operated by American intelligence.

"Have you examined whether Mr. Z. has connections to the biggest anthrax outbreak among humans ever recorded, the one that sickened more than 10,000 black farmers in Zimbabwe in 1978-80? There is evidence that the anthrax was released by the white Rhodesian Army fighting against black guerrillas, and Mr. Z. has claimed that he participated in the white army's much-feared Selous Scouts. Could rogue elements of the American military have backed the Rhodesian Army in anthrax and cholera attacks against blacks? Mr. Z's resume also claims involvement in the former South African Defense Force; all else aside, who knew that

the US Defense Department would pick an American who had served in the armed forces of two white-racist regimes to work in the American biodefense program with some of the world's deadliest germs?"

This extraordinarily detailed description reveals that the identity of the anthrax mailer is well known in official Washington circles. Hundreds of people in the Bush administration, Congress and the media must have access to this information, but it has been deliberately withheld from the American people. The FBI has issued statement after statement suggesting that there has been little progress in the investigation, declaring that no definite suspects have been identified, or appealing to the public for "tips" which might lead them to a terrorist whose name they were apparently given last October.

Kristof's central accusation is that the anthrax investigation has reached a dead end, not because of the lack of evidence, but because the prime suspect has powerful friends in high places and enjoys official protection. "Mr. Z." can't be arrested because he knows too much, and because his backers in the US military-intelligence apparatus won't permit it. To arrest him would entail the exposure of the US government in horrific international and domestic crimes, including the deliberate killing of American citizens.

Moreover, as one of Kristof's questions indicates, "Mr. Z." is still on active service for the Bush administration, traveling to Central Asia "on government assignments," despite being suspected of murdering five people in the United States. He is truly an untouchable.

The anthrax terrorist targeted the Democratic leadership in the US Senate, sending the two letters with the deadliest doses of anthrax to Senate Majority Leader Thomas Daschle and Judiciary Committee Chairman Patrick Leahy. Kristof's column points inexorably to the conclusion that the Bush administration is an accessory after the fact—if not before it—in the attempted assassination of the official political opposition.

The very fact that such a charge is suggested on the editorial pages of the leading US newspaper is an indication of the extent to which "normal" democratic processes and procedures have disintegrated in America. The *Times* is a major institution of the

American ruling elite, and a longtime conduit for sections of the US national security apparatus. It could only publish such a column under circumstances of a raging subterranean battle within the state—one in which the American people have no say.

Kristof's column gives a rare glimpse of a sort of parallel universe, one which normally goes unreported and unacknowledged in the "mainstream" media. Top officials of the US government—President Bush, Vice President Cheney, Attorney General Ashcroft, CIA Director Tenet, FBI Director Mueller—are linked to a criminal conspiracy to protect a government-trained military assassin. And their Democratic opponents, the apparent targets of the killer, are too cowed to say anything publicly, although one can imagine the private discussions on Capitol Hill Tuesday morning as congressmen and senators read the *Times* column. This is not a Costa-Gavras film, but the real state of affairs in the America of 2002.



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