

US media silent on anthrax cover-up charge

Patrick Martin
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Several days have passed since a leading writer for the *New York Times* charged that the FBI and the Bush administration were refusing to arrest the man believed responsible for last fall's anthrax attacks that killed five people. But not a single major American media outlet has reported or commented on the charge, nor has the issue been raised at the daily press briefings given by White House spokesman Ari Fleischer and other government officials.

The American media is thus complicit in the cover-up being orchestrated by the Bush administration. The media justifies the repression and anti-democratic actions of the government as necessary steps in the "war on terrorism," even while the administration is protecting a suspected terrorist who shares its right-wing, militaristic standpoint.

Columnist Nicholas Kristof, writing in the July 2 issue of the *Times*, suggested that the FBI was deliberately sabotaging the anthrax probe and the CIA and military intelligence were refusing to cooperate because the suspected terrorist is not an Arab or Muslim, but rather "a true-blue American with close ties to the US Defense Department, the CIA and the American biodefense program."

While Kristof did not publish suspect's name—referring to him only as "Mr. Z"—he provided a description so specific that there can be no doubt that his identity is well known in official circles, and that the suspect enjoys powerful support in sections of the military and intelligence apparatus.

Among the details were that the suspect was a former biowarfare scientist at the US Army germ warfare lab at Ft. Detrick, Maryland; that he has been repeatedly interrogated, polygraphed and had his home searched; that he lost his security clearance in August 2001, an event that may have embittered him towards the government; that he was trained by Army Special Forces (the Green Berets); and that he attended medical school in then white-ruled Rhodesia, after which he worked in a military and intelligence capacity, first for the white racist regime of Ian Smith in Rhodesia and then for the apartheid regime

in South Africa.

Kristof concluded his column with a series of questions directed to the FBI, including the following:

"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."

Kristof certainly knew the name of the suspect when he wrote the column, and it can be easily inferred from other press coverage of the anthrax investigation. There is only one person mentioned in the press who shares all the characteristics listed by the *Times* writer: Stephen Hatfill, a former researcher at Ft. Detrick who in 1999 went to work for a military research contractor, SAIC, and there commissioned a classified study on how an anthrax terrorist could distribute the toxin through the mail.

On June 25, FBI agents working on the anthrax probe searched Hatfill's home in Frederick. A report the next day in the *Baltimore Sun* described the biowarfare specialist as a physician, pilot and graduate of Army Special Forces (Green Beret) training. He attended medical school in Zimbabwe, then white-ruled Rhodesia, and was present during the anthrax outbreak there.

During that time he lived near a Greendale School, the fake return address used on last fall's anthrax mailings to Congress. The Pentagon revoked Hatfill's security clearance on August 23, 2001, for undisclosed reasons, and he was later fired by SAIC as a consequence.

A lengthy article in the liberal magazine *American Prospect*, dated June 27, provides additional details. Hatfill's work at Ft. Detrick, from 1997 to 1999, involved the Ebola virus. Since then he has worked for a government contractor that trains US Special Forces, emergency workers and others in the methods for responding to biological warfare attacks.

According to Hatfill's resume, obtained by the

magazine, he claimed to have worked concurrently for the US military and the Rhodesian Special Air Squadron, and several friends told the magazine he had “bragged of having been a double agent in South Africa.” This would mean that when Hatfill was working in organizations that specialized in the murder of African freedom fighters in Rhodesia and South Africa, he was doing so at the instruction of the Pentagon.

A Zimbabwe newspaper has reported that Hatfill “has ties to imprisoned Afrikaner Weerstand Beweging (AWB) leader Eugene Terre’Blanche.” Hatfill reportedly engaged in training the AWB’s Aquila Brigade in 1987 at a shooting range near Table View, South Africa. During this period he was working in the department of hematology at the University of Stellenbosch.

American Prospect said that Hatfill was denied renewal of his security clearance because he had failed a routine polygraph examination when asked questions about his activities in Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe).

Hatfill was seen removing some old equipment from Ft. Detrick in August 2000, nearly a year and a half after he left the facility to work for the military contractor. A spokeswoman for the US Special Forces told the magazine that Hatfill had used the equipment to simulate a makeshift germ warfare lab for a Green Beret training session, after which it was destroyed.

Despite the mass of circumstantial evidence, the FBI maintains that Hatfill is not a suspect and that it has no active suspects in its anthrax investigation. The Bush administration’s continuing refusal to make an arrest in the anthrax case is in stark contrast with its conduct in relation to Jose Padilla, the supposed “dirty bomber,” and other individuals with suspected links to Al Qaeda and Osama bin Laden. In those cases officials have leaked sensationalized charges to the media, held press conferences warning of immediate death and destruction, and trampled over constitutional procedures to jail the alleged terrorists indefinitely, without offering any evidence.

A further press account, published June 28 in the *Hartford Courant*, provided another link between Hatfill and top-secret US military-intelligence operations—and an even more compelling reason for the FBI and CIA to cover up his activities. The newspaper wrote:

“Hatfill later became a member of UNSCOM, the United Nations-sponsored group that went into Iraq after the Gulf War to look for that country’s biological weapons stockpiles. Another member of UNSCOM was David Franz, who later became the colonel in charge of

the Fort Detrick infectious disease center.”

Hatfill’s role confirms previous revelations documenting the fact that UNSCOM was used by the US military and intelligence apparatus as a front for conducting spy operations and other provocations against the Iraqi regime.

The Bush administration and the most right-wing sections of the media, such as the *Wall Street Journal*, initially sought to focus attention on Iraq as a likely perpetrator of the anthrax attacks, thus providing a suitable pretext for a renewal of full-scale war against the Baghdad regime. That the most likely suspect is a former US weapons inspector in Iraq must be considered a rather remarkable coincidence. In some complex and as yet unexplained way, the anthrax attacks may have been the product of the preparations of the Bush administration for new military aggression.

While it cannot be said for certain that Hatfill is the perpetrator of last year’s anthrax mailings, it is indisputable that a mass of evidence points in his direction. There is no innocent explanation for the failure of the Bush administration and the FBI, which have boasted of using all possible means to arrest and jail suspected terrorists, to name this long-time military and intelligence operative and take legal action against him.

The *World Socialist Web Site* has warned repeatedly that the US government and the American media are concealing links between the anthrax mailings and fascist-minded elements in the ultraright and the American military. We have highlighted the findings of investigators who traced the anthrax used in the mailings to US weapons labs at Ft. Detrick and Dugway.

Nearly two months ago the WSWWS wrote: “This cover-up has a clear political motivation: either the perpetrator is an individual with powerful friends in high places in the Bush administration, whose influence is stalling the probe, or the perpetrator is actually a US government agency—in which case the anthrax mailings to two top Senate Democrats constitute an attempted political coup against the official opposition party.” [See: “Anthrax attacks: FBI cover-up and *New York Times* whitewash”] This analysis has now been completely vindicated.



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