

US media, Ashcroft silent on conviction of right-wing terrorists in Texas

Conspirators built chemical bomb

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The US government and media continuously bombard the American public with scare stories about terrorist threats. The “war on terrorism” is invoked by the Bush administration to justify every facet of its policy—from the war in Iraq, to the abrogation of civil liberties, to economic measures designed to further enrich America’s financial elite.

Bush has declared that the fight to eradicate terror around the globe is the overriding mission of his administration. Yet, a recent study has found that in the more than two years since September 11, 2001, the number of defendants receiving substantial jail sentences on terrorism-related charges has actually declined compared to the two previous years.

According to the study by the Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse (TRAC), a nonpartisan research center at Syracuse University, of the 184 people convicted of terrorism over the last two years, 171 received either no prison time or less than one year in prison.

The median jail sentence for all those convicted on such charges was just 14 days. For the most part, the light sentences reflect a lack of evidence linking the indicted individuals to actual terrorist acts or conspiracies to carry out such acts. In case after case, prosecutors have had to accept pleas on minor charges.

Given this unimpressive track record, one would think that the conviction of two individuals in a terrorism-related case involving actual “weapons of mass destruction” and a conspiracy to carry out large-scale terrorist attacks on US soil would be major news.

The threat was serious enough to be included regularly in the presidential daily briefings and to trigger a nationwide FBI manhunt. Yet, outside of Texas, the case remains virtually unknown. The reason for the silence is clear.

The convicted individuals were not Arab or Muslim immigrants, nor could they be linked to any Islamist groups. Rather, they were native-born US citizens connected to the extreme right.

William J. Krar, 62, pleaded guilty last month in a Texas federal court to possession of a chemical weapon, a charge punishable by up to life in prison. He received an 11-year sentence. His common-law wife, Judith Bruey, pleaded to a lesser charge of conspiracy to possess illegal weapons and faces up to five years in prison.

A third individual, Edward Feltus of New Jersey, is in custody in connection with the case, accused of receiving false identification cards for the United Nations and the US Defense Intelligence Agency from Krar. Feltus has also pleaded guilty and is awaiting sentencing.

According to a statement by the US Attorney’s Office for the Eastern District of Texas, “Krar accumulated a large quantity of sodium cyanide and acids such as hydrochloric, nitric and acetic acids.” It noted that the chemicals are “extremely lethal.” Under the proper conditions, a chemical bomb using these materials could kill hundreds. The statement said in addition that a search of Krar’s home turned up “multiple illegal weapons including machine guns, silencers, destructive devices, thousands of rounds of ammunition and a handgun with an obliterated serial number.”

An affidavit submitted by the FBI to obtain a search warrant described Krar as someone “actively involved in the militia movement ... a good source of covert weaponry for white supremacists and anti-government militia groups in New Hampshire.”

According to KTVT, the CBS affiliate in Dallas-Fort Worth, federal authorities seized “at least one weapon of mass destruction—a sodium cyanide bomb capable of delivering a deadly gas cloud” as well as “at least 100

other bombs, bomb components, machine guns, 500,000 rounds of ammunition and chemical agents.”

The station reported that Krar had been the subject of government attention since 1995, when he and another man were investigated on weapons charges. The second suspect told the authorities that Krar had planned to bomb federal facilities. This was the same year that right-wing militia-connected conspirators used a truck bomb to demolish the federal building in Oklahoma City, killing 168 people. After the second suspect recanted this claim, the government dropped the case.

It was evident from the quantities of chemicals and other materials recovered by the authorities that Krar and his collaborators were running a bomb-making facility out of a storage facility in the small east Texas town of Noonday. Federal investigators told KTVT that they suspected Krar may have been selling chemical weapons and bomb components to extreme right-wing groups around the country. Neither he nor the other two people in custody divulged any information about their activities to authorities.

The television station reported: “Evidence seized and the fact that none of the defendants will talk has given rise to speculation that unknown conspirators may still be involved in a broader plot to use Krar’s home-built chemical weapons, government officials say.” Included in the material seized in the case were copies of far-right literature as well as detailed notes indicating planning for attacks with other co-conspirators.

Federal authorities have reportedly issued hundreds of subpoenas nationwide in an attempt to track down other chemical weapons that may have originated with Krar.

The silence of the media on this case echoes that of the Bush administration itself. Had the defendants been Arab or Muslim immigrants, there is little doubt that the administration would have organized a nationally televised press conference by US Attorney General John Ashcroft and Homeland Security Secretary Tom Ridge to claim credit for foiling a major terrorist plot.

Publicizing a conspiracy by the extreme right, however, cuts across the administration’s aims on two counts. First, it diverts from the principal tactic pursued by the Bush White House ever since September 11: exploiting alleged terrorist threats to justify US military aggression first against Afghanistan and then against Iraq. Second, the fascistic politics of the defendants present a major problem because of the political ties of the Bush administration and the Republican Party to extreme right-wing elements, including militia fanatics and white

supremacists.

The virtual blackout of the Texas case follows a pattern established with the anthrax attacks that claimed five lives beginning in October 2001. Initially, the media devoted blanket coverage to the attacks, as attempts were made to attribute them to either Osama bin Laden or Iraq.

As the facts began to emerge, however, it became clear that the principal targets of the deadly anthrax letters were the media and the Democratic leadership in Congress, suggesting that their most probable source was the homegrown fascistic right. Tests on samples of the anthrax further indicated that whoever was responsible had obtained the materials from a US military facility. The media’s response was to drop the story. Two years later, no one has been charged with these fatal terrorist attacks.

The case in Tyler, Texas constitutes a serious warning. It demonstrates that fascistic elements like Krar and his associates have both the capability and motivation for carrying out a major terrorist attack in the US.

Moreover, the blackout of this case suggests that if such an attack were to take place, both the government and the media could well attempt to blame it on foreign terrorists in order to further the administration’s foreign policy agenda and provide the pretext for even more sweeping attacks on democratic rights.

Given the affinity between the politics of these terrorists and those of extreme right-wing layers within the Republican Party, the question arises: could such an attack be in preparation as part of a provocation aimed at keeping the Bush administration in power?



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