

Did the FBI conceal wider right-wing involvement in the Oklahoma City bombing?

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The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) has been forced to reopen its investigation into the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing amid claims that the federal police agency suppressed information pointing to wider right-wing terrorist involvement. The Associated Press (AP) revealed last week that FBI agents destroyed evidence pointing to the possibility that bomber Timothy McVeigh, eventually executed for the crime, may have been assisted by a group of white supremacist bank robbers.

The revelation raises further questions about the federal government's ongoing efforts to conceal the activities of right-wing extremists from the American public.

The AP revealed that the Justice Department withheld evidence at McVeigh's 1997 trial, including documents showing that the Aryan Republican Army [ARA] bank robbers possessed explosive blasting caps similar to those stolen by McVeigh, as well as a driver's license bearing the name of a man robbed to help fund the Oklahoma bombing plot. The evidence was never shared with Oklahoma City investigators or McVeigh's defense attorneys. The government's official version of the bombing asserted that only two individuals were involved, McVeigh and a former army buddy, Terry Nichols.

Why did FBI agents investigating the ARA fail to alert the Oklahoma City investigators of a possible link between McVeigh and the white supremacists?

Danny Coulson, the FBI agent in charge of the Oklahoma City bomb site, said: "There are some unanswered questions here. A lot of things happened that were inappropriate. I think it needs to be reopened, but I don't think it should be reopened by the FBI. It needs to be a special investigator, a lawyer, totally independent. He needs to have subpoena power and the ability to use a grand jury."

The April 19, 1995 bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah federal building killed 168 people. McVeigh was executed for the crime in 2001. Ironically, the Oklahoma trial of McVeigh's co-defendant, Terry Nichols—on state charges that could carry the death penalty—was set to begin just as the revelations of FBI evidence tampering surfaced.

McVeigh's ex-lawyer stated that the documentation obtained by AP is the strongest to date to support his long-standing contention that the bombing may have involved more people than McVeigh and Nichols. Attorney Stephen Jones said: "I think these pieces close the circle, and they clearly show the bombing conspiracy consisted probably of 10 conspirators. They [government officials] simply turned their backs on a group of people for which there is credible evidence suggesting they were involved in the murder of 160 people."

Peter Langan, a member of the Aryan Republican Army, told the AP that he planned to testify at Nichols' trial. He disclosed that federal prosecutors several years ago had offered, and then withdrew, a plea bargain for information about the bombing. Langan, who is serving life sentences for a 1990s robbery spree, stated that the gang "had some liability problems as it related to Oklahoma City."

When another gang member, Mark Thomas, was indicted in January 1997, he told reporters that at least one gang member was involved in the bombing. FBI agents dropped the inquiry into a link between McVeigh and the ARA after Thomas and other members were captured in 1996 and 1997, claiming that the white supremacists had denied involvement in the bombing and had provided alibis. However, FBI documents show that the ARA suspects were still in the Oklahoma area after they claimed to have left it.

Dan Defenbaugh, the now-retired chief of the FBI McVeigh investigation, said his investigators were never told about the blasting caps, the license or the alibi discrepancies.

Death row inmate David Paul Hammer has written a book due out this month detailing his conversations with McVeigh inside prison. He alleges that he was told by McVeigh that the white supremacists had assisted in the bombing.

The execution of McVeigh was delayed in May 2001 following the revelation that the FBI had withheld thousands of pages of documents from his defense team. The execution proceeded after Attorney General John Ashcroft, President George W. Bush, and FBI Director Louis Freeh insisted that

there was nothing in the documents that could affect McVeigh's legal position.

A WSWs article posted on May 26, 2001, entitled, "Why the government's rush to execute Timothy McVeigh?" stated: "The withheld evidence might also contain information damaging to the FBI or other government agencies. There is good reason to suspect that FBI informants knew more about the bombing and the events leading up to it than has been revealed. It is well known that the FBI has many informants in the militia movement, among gun lobbyists, the Christian right, the Ku Klux Klan and other racist and extreme-right groups. There is a long history of FBI collusion in right-wing violence."

The FBI's destruction and suppression of evidence surrounding the Oklahoma bombing highlights the glaring contradiction between the Bush administration's pursuit of the so-called "war on terror" and its indifference to the activities of right-wing, home-grown terrorists. A pattern of covering up crimes that cannot be blamed on Islamic or foreign groups has been established by the Bush administration and its media apologists since the 2001 anthrax attacks on Congress, and continues with the recent ricin assault on Senate offices and the White House.

The insistence by the highest levels of government that McVeigh acted alone in the Oklahoma bombing is motivated, in part, by the need to conceal the close ties between numerous political figures at the federal, state and local level with the Christian right, militia groups and racist and anti-Semitic organizations. In particular, Republican Party senators, congressmen and local politicians have actively solicited support and funds from some of these fascistic outfits.

One can establish as a general rule that the degree to which the government and media downplay a given terrorist act reveals the extent to which they either know or suspect the crime has been committed by right-wing, domestic terrorists.

Jannie Coverdale, who lost two grandchildren in the Oklahoma bombing, spoke with the WSWs about the recent accusations of FBI wrongdoing.

"I lost my grandsons, Erin, 2, and Elijah, 5, in the bombing of the federal building. I worked in the county assessor's office, and the federal building, which had an excellent day care, was only a block-and-a-half away. The boys loved it.

"I don't believe Timothy McVeigh acted by himself. Over 50 witnesses came forward at the time to talk to FBI agents and the news media who had seen McVeigh in the Ryder truck in various places around the city before the bombing and he was never alone. Nobody believes the lone bomber theory.

"The FBI will not do a credible job in this investigation any more than they did during the original investigation.

Since the beginning, I have asked a lot of questions. I went the US Attorney's office asking a lot of questions and was told that if I attended the trials of McVeigh and Nichols my questions would be answered. I gave up everything and went to Denver. I learned nothing, but had more questions when the Nichols trial was over.

"No matter what the FBI says, there is no way I will ever believe that McVeigh acted alone. I've always wondered about his connection to the bank robbers of that supremacist group from Elohim City [Oklahoma]. After the Nichols trial I was given the phone number of a policeman who told me that the FBI had an informer who bungled the job of deactivating the bomb. The sting operation to prevent the bombing was screwed up and the FBI is covering up their mistake. They played with lives and lost.

"I don't trust the government anymore. I don't trust the FBI or the ATF [Federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms]. The FBI is supposed to reopen the files and reinvestigate. I wonder who's going to investigate the investigators?

"The families of the survivors of the bombing are having a hard time both financially and emotionally. We never received any compensation. We were told that the families of September 11 were the victims of international terrorism so they were compensated. But we were the victims of American terrorists, so we would receive nothing.

"I believe the government is involved because in these terrorist attacks, people are getting away with too much. Just like when the Klan would get away with crimes over and over again. They were protected. And then you look at who is in office and begin to realize that the Iraq war was not necessary. But Iraq is backfiring on the government. Maybe some things will backfire here too."



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