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Anthrax Attacks: Four Reasons for Suspecting a Domestic Terrorist Group

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It's always dangerous for law enforcement officers to speculate about the identity of a crime's perpetrator without enough facts to form a working theory. Sometimes, however, speculation is all you have and so you follow your intuition with the leads as they take you, always being mindful that you could be wrong and another avenue must be taken. If resources permit, particularly on large investigations, several theories may be pursued simultaneously through the use of investigative teams or task forces, with each team in a race to determine the truth through verification of the team's operational theory.

In the present crisis, what we don't know far surpasses what we know, but there are a few known facts. We do know on what date some of the letters were sent because of the postmarks. We know to whom these were addressed, so there are known victims. We know, despite some confusion in this area, what substances were contained in the known letters, and just as important, what substances were not present in the envelopes.

The initial letters apparently were mailed on 9/11/01, the day of the attacks. While no specific mailing hour has been widely published, it will be assumed that because the attacks were somewhat early in the day, the letters were probably mailed after the attacks had occurred. If this were so, it would eliminate the hijackers, who died in the crash, but would not eliminate accomplices.

The anthrax itself is probably not Russian in origin according to the account given by Ken Alibek in his book, *Biohazard*, [\(1\)](#) because it is obviously not resistant to antibiotics and it apparently does not have sufficient milling and additives to constitute "weapons-grade" anthrax, at least not by Russian standards. Some reports have indicated that it may indeed be of U.S. origin, [\(2\)](#) which may not be particularly significant as it could have been obtained in the U.S., transported overseas for processing and returned for delivery.

Neither al-Qaeda or Osama bin Laden have taken credit publicly for the specific anthrax attacks, although this signifies little as they made no direct statements taking credit for the Twin Trade Tower attacks either. Bin Laden hinted that the attacks were made by his people but did not directly state that they were involved.

An examination of the known anthrax victims (victims to whom the letters were mailed) reveals that most could be perceived to be left-leaning in their political beliefs. Because these would be potential allies of al-Qaeda in the event that a lengthy war ensued, the logic of assaulting them does not follow. In other words, with thousands of center-to-right targets easily available (especially representing Christians, Jews or capitalism - symbols to Muslims of America), why pick a person not truly symbolic of America, the "Great Satan," particularly when these victims may be considered to be useful in the future through bin Laden's propaganda efforts?

Another terrorist culture would seem to have much more to gain by using the anthrax - some right wing organization whose members, like many groups holding to the peculiar belief of Christian Identity, look forward to the day when the U.S. falls, for it would then usher in a new era when the group will step into the chaos and take control. Indicative of this thinking was a statement from a member of the domestic terrorist group, The Covenant, the Sword and the Arm of the Lord (his group had planned to poison city water supplies with cyanide in the 1980s):[\(3\)](#)

"We thought there were signs of Armageddon, and we believed that once those signs were there it was time for us to act, to make judgments against those who were doing wrong or who refused to repent. We felt you could kill those people, that God wanted us to kill those people. The original timetable was up to God, but God could use us in creating Armageddon. That if we stepped out things might be hurried along. You get tired of waiting for what you think God is planning."

Contacts with organizations which monitor militia and white hate group activity indicate that the response to the twin trade tower attacks among these groups has been mixed, with many expressing outrage for the attack on America, while others, especially the more militant groups, have been delighted because it signals that the end (Armageddon) is near.

So what are we to make of this? If consideration is given to motive, certainly the right wing terrorist groups (of which there are many) stand to gain much by this. If motive is combined with the perception that the targeted victims are enemies of right wing militants, while further understanding that that the anthrax is likely of U.S. origin, a strong supposition can be made that this latest series of biological attacks is of "home grown" origin.

One question remains - that of ability. Do the right wing terrorist groups possess the technical knowledge to manufacture anthrax? While not known to be as educated in the social sciences as left wing group members,[\(4\)](#) they are known to have individuals in their membership with certain technical skills who would have the capability to carry out these attacks,[\(5\)](#) and it is not beyond the realm of possibility that access to anthrax from legitimate sources or through thefts could have been engineered.

Finally, their track record in the past has shown that they are not afraid to use chemical or biological weapons in their possession. That large numbers of innocent victims may also be injured or killed along with the intended targets does not seem to bother them, for in their eyes the end always justifies the means.

Right wing terrorist groups have the motive and most likely the ability to use anthrax as a weapon. This capability, along with the selection of the victims and the probability that the anthrax used was U.S. in origin, certainly points to a strong suspicion that a domestic terrorist group was involved. Time and competent, aggressive investigation will almost certainly provide an answer one way or another.

Footnotes

1. Ken Alibek, Biohazard, (New York: Random House, 1999), p. 167.
2. Debora MacKenzie, "Trail of terror," *New Scientist Magazine*, 24 October 2001, <<http://www.newscientist.com/hottopics/bioterrorism/trailofterror.jsp>>
3. Jessica Stern, The Ultimate Terrorists, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 221.
4. Harvey W. Kushner, The Future of Terrorism, (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 1988), pp. 144-146.
5. Larry Henry, "Sun Profile" *Las Vegas Sun*, 2/28/98, <<http://www.lasvegassun.com/dossier/crime/bio/harris.html>>

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