

FBI DOESN'T CONSIDER AMERITHRAX AMONG ITS WMD "HIGHLIGHTS"

The FBI's WMD Center turned 5 on Tuesday and to celebrate, DOJ has released an interview with Dr. Vahid Majidi. (Part One, Part Two)

The interview is not all that interesting. I'm much more interested in the list of WMD cases Majidi offers as the successes the Directorate has had in the last five years. They are:

- Jirair Avanesian, Farhoud Masoumian, and Amirhossein Sairafi, conspired to ship certain prohibited technologies—notably, vacuum pumps and pump-related equipment—to Iran.
- Jeffrey Don Detrixhe, for possessing 62 pounds of sodium cyanide he intended to sell to "Fat Bob," a member of the Aryan brotherhood; Detrixhe was captured using an informant, though he did obtain the sodium cyanide on his own.
- Bechtel Jacobs employee Ron Lynn Oakley, for trying to sell uranium enrichment fuel rods to a person he thought was a foreign agent.
- Roger Von Bergendorff, for possessing ricin (and an Anarchist Cookbook to learn to make it).

- The "Newburgh Four," for plotting to attack synagogues in NY; the plot was hatched by a notorious FBI informant who offered \$250,000 for their involvement in the plot.
- Khalid Ali-M Aldawsari, for obtaining materials to make explosives to use against American targets.
- Michael Finton (aka Talid Islam), for attempting to bomb an Illinois Courthouse; the plot was a sting set up by an FBI informant, and the bomb was never live.
- Hosam Smadi, for attempting to bomb a Dallas skyscraper; the plot was a sting set up by FBI undercover agents, and the bomb was never live.
- Michael Crooker, for possessing ricin and threatening a Federal prosecutor (including by invoking Tim Mcveigh); an earlier prosecution on firearms possession was overturned.
- Najibullah Zazi, for attempting to use TATP to attack the NYC subway.
- The Hutaree, for attempting to use explosives to attack the government.

Just about all these cases were plead. And, as the list makes clear, a number of the cases (with the exception of the Zazi and Aldawsari, those involving Islamic terrorists) were stings built by informants and/or undercover agents. The “real” plots were just as likely to be launched by right wing terrorists as by Islamic terrorists.

Notice what’s not on this list, though. In addition to Mohammed Osman Mohamud (another plot created by an FBI sting) and Kevin William Harpham (the alleged MLK bomber) and a number of others, these WMD successes don’t include Amerithrax, by far the biggest investigation into WMD in the last five years.

The interview makes just one reference to a potential anthrax attack:

Q. What about all those white powder letters?

Dr. Majidi: Most turn out to be hoaxes, and they require a lot of investigative resources, but we have to investigate each and every incident. You never know when one of them will be real.

In a different interview, Majidi points to the FBI’s investigation of hoax letters—but not the real ones—among the Directorates’ work.

If you remember, after 9/11 there was a rash of hoax letters that contained white powder sent to various recipients including to U.S. legislators. People were worried about the spread of anthrax and other disastrous outcomes. Because of our work at the WMD Directorate, we realized a high rate of success in prosecuting those who sent the letters.

These threats were insidious because they terrorized people, closed down businesses, and essentially stopped the business of governing the United States until the FBI could investigate. It

involved a tremendous amount of local and federal resources, and at the same time took those resources away from other critical law enforcement and investigative needs. It cost taxpayers money, harmed businesses, essentially slowed down our society, and created measurable panic and insecurity.

No mention—in this interview or the earlier one—of the letters that didn't end up being a hoax.

And it's not that the WMD Directorate wasn't involved in Amerithrax. Indeed, when Majidi, then the WMD Directorate's Assistant Director, conducted the briefings to explain why FBI believed Ivins was the anthrax culprit, he attributed part of the "success" to the WMD Directorate.

The creation of the Weapon of Mass Destruction Directorate is another example of FBI's progressive approach focusing on prevention as well as investigations on all issues involving chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear materials.

In terms of time, cost, and attack severity, the anthrax attack has been the most important thing the WMD Directorate has worked on since its inception. So why is Majidi so reluctant to talk about it?