

WOULD OBAMA ISSUE FIRST VETO TO PROTECT ANTHRAX WHITEWASH?

Bloomberg is reporting that Office of Management and Budget head Peter Orszag has told the intelligence committees Obama will veto the intelligence authorization because—among other reasons—it calls for re-examining the FBI’s conspiracy theory-as-investigation summary finding that Bruce Ivins acted alone. (h/t fatster)

President Barack Obama probably would veto legislation authorizing the next budget for U.S. intelligence agencies if it calls for a new investigation into the 2001 anthrax attacks, an administration official said. A proposed probe by the intelligence agencies’ inspector general “would undermine public confidence” in an FBI probe of the attacks “and unfairly cast doubt on its conclusions,” Peter Orszag, director of the Office of Management and Budget, wrote in a letter to leaders of the House and Senate Intelligence committees.

Whaa???

To sustain its claim that Ivins, rather than an accomplice, mailed the anthrax from Princeton, FBI engaged in addled speculation worthy of the Kennedy assassination. And now Obama is worried about “public confidence” in those addled speculations?

And shouldn’t there be an investigation of the investigation, at the least, because of the way FBI botched the investigation and framed Steven Hatfill?

If the investigation can’t bear any scrutiny, then I’d say there’s probably a good reason, and

therefore a good reason to do an Inspector General investigation.

But I guess the President who advocates transparency is against that.

RawStory has a good summary of both this issue and the other targets of Obama's veto threat: Congressional notification and GAO oversight of intelligence.

NADLER: FBI'S NOT DONE ON AMERITHRAX

I know that Rush Holt has already called for further investigation in the anthrax case, but having a Sub-Committee Chair at HJC make the same call might carry different weight.

Congressman Jerrold Nadler (D-NY), Chair of the House Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights and Civil Liberties, reiterated his call for an independent investigation into the 2001 anthrax attacks which killed five people and sickened 17. He issued the following statement:

"Despite the FBI's assertion that the case of the anthrax attacks is closed, there are still many troubling questions. For example, in a 2008 Judiciary Committee hearing, I asked FBI Director Robert Mueller whether Bruce Ivins was capable of producing the weaponized anthrax that was used in the attacks. To this day, it is still far from clear that Mr. Ivins had either the know-how or access to the equipment needed to produce the material. Because the FBI has not sufficiently answered such questions, I join Congressman Holt in urging an independent investigation

of the case.”

DOJ ANTHRAX REPORT WORKING THREAD

DOJ has posted its Anthrax Report and related documents.

The Justice Department, FBI and U.S. Postal Inspection Service today announced that the investigation into the 2001 anthrax attacks, which killed five individuals and sickened 17 others, has formally concluded.

Earlier today, representatives of the FBI and Justice Department provided a 92-page investigative summary along with attachments to victims of the attacks, relatives of the victims and appropriate committees of Congress. This document sets forth a summary of the evidence developed in the “Amerithrax” investigation, the largest investigation into a bio-weapons attack in U.S. history. As disclosed previously, the Amerithrax investigation found that the late Dr. Bruce Ivins acted alone in planning and executing these attacks.

The investigative summary and the attachments are now accessible to the public and have been posted to the Justice Department Web site at www.usdoj.gov/amerithrax under the Freedom of Information Act. In addition, roughly 2,700 pages of FBI documents related to the Amerithrax case are now accessible to the public and have been posted to the FBI website at <http://foia.fbi.gov/foiaindex/amerithrax.htm> under the Freedom of Information

Act.

The Amerithrax Task Force, which was comprised of roughly 25 to 30 full-time investigators from the FBI, U.S. Postal Inspection Service and other law enforcement agencies, as well as federal prosecutors from the District of Columbia and the Justice Department's Counterterrorism Section, expended hundreds of thousands of investigator work hours on this case. Their investigative efforts involved more than 10,000 witness interviews on six different continents, the execution of 80 searches and the recovery of more than 6,000 items of potential evidence during the course of the investigation. The case involved the issuance of more than 5,750 grand jury subpoenas and the collection of 5,730 environmental samples from 60 site locations.

Use this as a working thread.

Update: Ah jeebus. Here's half of what they say about Hatfill:

B. The Elimination of Dr. Steven J. Hatfill as a Suspect

In August 2002, it became widely known that Dr. Steven J. Hatfill was a person of interest to the Task Force. Early in the investigation, numerous individuals who suspected that he might be involved in the letter attacks contacted the FBI. While working as a researcher at USAMRIID from 1997 to 1999, Dr. Hatfill had virtually unrestricted access to the Ames strain of anthrax, the same strain used in the 2001 mailings. Dr. Hatfill also appeared to know the intricacies of conducting a successful anthrax dissemination by mail, although it was not uncommon for those in the bio-defense community to develop such

scenarios for training exercises. In addition, he had filled multiple prescriptions for the antibiotic Cipro® in 2001, which was the only drug approved by the Food and Drug Administration for the treatment of inhalational anthrax; however, its use also was consistent with treatment for a persistent infection from which Dr. Hatfill was suffering at the time.

Ultimately, the FBI's genetic analysis of the organism used in the attacks led investigators to exclude him conclusively as a suspect. Early in the investigation, it was assumed that isolates of the Ames strain were accessible to any individual at USAMRIID with access to the biocontainment labs. Later in the investigation, when scientific breakthroughs led investigators to conclude that RMR-1029 was the parent material to the anthrax powder used in the mailings, it was determined that Dr. Hatfill could not have been the mailer because he never had access to the particular bio-containment suites at USAMRIID that held the RMR-1029. In other words, although Dr. Hatfill had access to Ames strain anthrax while at USAMRIID, he never had access to the particular spore-batch used in the mailings.

No apologies, not excuses in this.

Update: I'd love to see this explained in more detail—particularly how leaks tying this to Iraq got to the press.

For example, Task Force agents vigorously pursued the possibility that the letters were the result of a state-sponsored attack, and specifically focused on those governments known to have, or have had, an offensive biological weapons program.

Short of explaining the leaks, you've not dismissed possible other motives.

Update: On victimology:

A victimology assessment revealed few themes of commonality among the targeted victims. Three of the five known targeted victims were media/press entities: Tom Brokaw/NBC, the New York Post, and the National Enquirer/AMI. The remaining two targeted victims were United States Senators. Senators Daschle and Leahy and Tom Brokaw all were middle-aged white males who held positions of leadership in their respective fields at the time of the attacks.

That's it?!?!?! That's the best they can do with this crowd? And no mention of the fake attack to Judy Miller, which—it seems to me—might be as much a clue to motive as anything else.

Ah well, I guess that has been disappeared down the memory hole.

Update: How much is 220 ml?

According to this review, there was approximately 220 ml of RMR-1029 that was unaccounted for on Dr. Ivins's Reference Material Receipt record prior to the mailings in 2001.

Update: This is kind of a weird throwaway:

However, within a few months of the anthrax attacks, the FDA fast-tracked the approval process and approved the Anthrax Vaccine Adsorbed ("AVA"), even though it didn't meet the original potency standards. This was a significant development for the anthrax researchers.

It would seem to take away from their

explanation for motive. But it also obscures the whole political pressure driving this, coming straight from the top.

UNSOLVED ANTHRAX CASE TO BE CLOSED TODAY

Though DOJ will presumably insist that Ivins did it.

The FBI is expected to issue a final report today on its six-year investigation of the 2001 anthrax letter attacks, according to the attorney representing former Frederick resident Bruce Ivins, a Fort Detrick scientist accused of planning and carrying out the attacks that killed five people and sickened 17.

"The U.S. Attorney called me and said they would close the case today," said Rockville attorney Paul Kemp.

The report will close an investigation in which Ivins, a senior researcher at the U.S. Army Medical Research Institute of Infectious Diseases, was eventually identified as the only person suspected of mailing the deadly letters to the offices

of U.S. senators and media companies.

Well, I guess this eliminates one of the excuses Robert Mueller has used to avoid an inquiry into FBI's conduct during this investigation.

FAKE ANTHRAX ATTACKS IN TWO STATES

Someone launched a Judy Miller-type (that is, fake) anthrax attack on a bunch of Republicans in AL—and two academics in CA. (h/t TPM)

Envelopes containing white powder set off anthrax scares in five Alabama cities, shutting down two federal courthouses Monday and trapping a congressman in his office as authorities tested the substance.

No one was injured, and investigators said at least five of the letters – all sent to the offices of senators or congressmen – were believed to be from the same source.

Recipients include:

- US Rep Jo Bonner (2 offices)
- US Rep Mike Rogers (2 offices)
- Senator Richard Shelby
- Senator Jeff Sessions
- Federal Courthouse (Anniston)

- Federal Courthouse (Birmingham)
- UC Irvine professor Cynthia Feliciano
- UC Irvine professor Nancy Da Silva

TPMM notes the coincidence between this and the attempted terrorist attack on Christmas Day. Me, I'm more concerned by general anxiety in the US.

WE'RE STILL FOLLOWING GERM BOY'S BIODEFENSE STRATEGY

Holdovers from the Bush Administration appear to be in control of defining our biodefense strategy.

ANTHRAX ATTACK USED TO JUSTIFY THE IRAQ WAR

Glenn Greenwald points to proof that the anthrax attacks contributed to the push for war on Iraq. All the more reason to review the FBI's investigation of the anthrax attack.

MUELLER ALREADY REVIEWING SHORTCOMINGS OF HASAN INVESTIGATION

Robert Mueller's immediate offer to review the FBI's earlier investigation of Nidal Hasan shows how unjustified is his refusal to review the FBI's anthrax investigation.

FBI'S ROBERT MUELLER STILL ENGAGING IN AN ANTHRAX COVER-UP

Robert Mueller is still hiding the truth about the anthrax investigation.

RUSH HOLT: INVESTIGATE THE ANTHRAX ATTACKS

Rush Holt has introduced legislation to create an investigative commission into the anthrax attack.