

- Anthrax Attacks Still a Mystery: Justin Raimondo
- The Rights of Detainees: George Hunsinger
- The Antiwar Movement Goes on Trial: Leigh Saavedra
- Prelude to an Exit Strategy: Ari Berman
- Democrats Ignore the Public: David Sirota

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– Volt

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Home

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TUE FRI
WED SAT
SUN

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Covering the Tracks of the Anthrax Attacks

What, where, why – who?

by Justin Raimondo



Four years ago today, letters containing **anthrax** were postmarked from Trenton, N.J., to five major American media outlets, including **ABC News**, **NBC News**, **CBS News**, the *New York Post*, and **AMI Media**, a publisher of supermarket tabloids. Thus began **a series of attacks** over several weeks that terrorized the nation, infected 22 people, killed five – and played a key role in **amplifying** the post-9/11 hysteria and paranoia that took the nation on a course set for war.

Three weeks after the first mailings, two letters containing **highly weaponized**

Archives

Covering the Tracks of the Anthrax Attacks
9/19/2005

The Imperial Delusion
9/16/2005

Next Stop: Syria
9/14/2005

Katrina, Iraq, and the End of 'Nation Greatness'
9/12/2005

A Time for Action
9/9/2005

Katrina and the Era of Illusions
9/7/2005

anthrax – far **more deadly** than the relatively crude concoction contained in the first letters – showed up in the offices of two Democratic senators, Tom Daschle and Patrick Leahy. The Capitol emptied, most members of Congress **fled** Washington, and the country – already jumpy as a result of the 9/11 terrorist attacks – was practically prostrate with fear.

Remember how the War Party used these attacks to stoke up sentiment for attacking Iraq? **Andrew Sullivan declared:**

*"At this point, it seems to me that a refusal to extend the war to Iraq is not even an option. We have to extend it to Iraq. It is by far the most likely source of this weapon; it is clearly willing to use such weapons in the future; and no war against terrorism of this kind can be won without dealing decisively with the Iraqi threat. We no longer have any choice in the matter. Slowly, incrementally, a Rubicon has been crossed. The terrorists have launched a biological weapon against the United States. They have therefore made biological warfare thinkable and thus repeatable. **We once had a doctrine that such a Rubicon would be answered with a nuclear response. We backed down on that threat in the Gulf War but Saddam didn't dare use biological weapons then. Someone has dared to use them now. Our response must be as***

A Death Threat
9/5/2005

Katrina, Iraq, and the Know-It-All Syndrome
9/2/2005

Israel and 9/11: New Report Connects the Dots
8/31/2005

The War Party Unhinged
8/29/2005

Iraq: The Democrats Are Just As Bad
8/26/2005

Recanting the War
8/24/2005

Why Are We In Iraq?
8/22/2005

Antiwar Populism The Floodgates Open
8/19/2005

In Defense of Cinc Sheehan
8/17/2005

Bush Against the Generals
8/15/2005

9/11 Revisionism, Revisited
8/12/2005

No Sympathy for the Neocons
8/10/2005

Bizarro Iraq
8/8/2005

AIPAC Spy Nest Exposed
8/5/2005

With Friends Like This...
8/3/2005

Taking Down the Neocons
8/1/2005

Over There – Hollywood Joins the Fight

grave as this new threat."

Nuke 'em!, said Andy – without a single iota of evidence that Iraq was involved. But who needs evidence? **That's soooo September 10th. Everything's changed**, we were told: we don't require evidence, not anymore. All we need are vaguely portentous phrases, such as "a **Rubicon** has been crossed." We can **make up the rest** as we go along...

Over at the *Weekly Standard*, **Bill Kristol** was gleefully rubbing his hands together and cackling that the administration seemed finally to have signed on to the **neocon prescription** for taking the "war on terrorism" **beyond** Afghanistan, to Iraq:

"Has the administration come around thanks to repeated efforts at persuasion by The Weekly Standard (and a few other hawks)? Perhaps. But a likelier explanation is that they have come to believe we'll have to take the war beyond Afghanistan – to Iraq and other state sponsors of terror – because they've found evidence of support by 'other states' for very recent and sinister bin Laden-related activities.

"What if the anthrax cases in Florida are an act of terrorism? What if the presence of the anthrax spores there is connected to the fact that a few of the September 11 terrorists, led by Mohammed Atta, lived within a few miles? What if Atta – or

War Party
7/29/2005

Blowback in Iraq
7/27/2005

Cheney's Plan: Nu
Iran
7/25/2005

Iraq: What Are We
Fighting For?
7/22/2005

Patrick J. 'Bulldog'
Fitzgerald, Americ
Insurgent
7/20/2005

Judith Miller:
Hearsted on
Her Own Petard
7/18/2005

Rove-gate: Who
Leaked
to the Leakers?
7/15/2005

Iraq: The Phony
'Withdrawal'
7/13/2005

A Prescription for
Fascism
7/11/2005

London Terror
Mystery
7/7/2005

Iraq: A Right-Win
Alternate Reality
Show
7/6/2005

Summer Scandals
7/4/2005

How to End the W
Negotiations Now
7/1/2005

Comrade
Aaronovitch
Strikes Again
6/29/2005

Biden's BS on Irac
6/27/2005

Iraq: What Price
'Victory'?
6/24/2005

Walter Jones, Pati

some other bin Laden operative – had access to anthrax from the terrorist-sponsoring country that we know has a long record of developing anthrax as a biological weapon, Iraq?"

Unlike the more emotive Sullivan – for whom evidence of an Iraq connection would only be an unnecessary drag on his breathy imprecations – the **cool-headed** Kristol came up with a scenario meant to convince the reader that such a connection was at least possible. It involved the now famous – and **decidedly disproved** – meeting between **Mohammed Atta** and an **alleged** Iraqi intelligence agent in Prague. Although the Czech police **denied** it, the myth persisted, and **grew**: not only did Atta plan the 9/11 terrorist attacks in collaboration with Iraqi intelligence on his trip to Prague, he also – according to **Kristol** and **James "World War IV" Woolsey** – hatched the anthrax plot. However, given that this mythical meeting, conducted in the course of six busy hours, was **alleged** to have taken place at the Prague airport, and was conducted within range of security cameras, one wonders if passing **vials** of anthrax under such circumstances might have proven somewhat problematic.

Oh well, the War Party didn't need especially logical arguments in stoking the fires of American rage: the **smoke** had yet to lift from downtown Manhattan, and **the victims** of the Twin

for Peace
6/22/2005

The Great Awakening to the Iraq Deception
6/20/2005

Behind the Downii Street Memos
6/17/2005

Indictment Shows Washington Is 'Israeli-Occupied Territory'
6/15/2005

Solzhenitsyn's Maxim
6/13/2005

The Democratic Delusion
6/10/2005

Catering to Kazakhstan's Kleptocracy
6/8/2005

The War Party on Trial
6/6/2005

Nancy Pelosi as 'Winged Victory'
6/3/2005

Follow That 'Revolution'
6/1/2005

Why Did Feith Resign?
5/30/2005

The Pipeline From Hell
5/27/2005

The Franklin Affair: A Spreading Treason
5/25/2005

Our Uzbek Problem and Theirs
5/23/2005

Uzbekistan: The Revolution Betrayed
5/20/2005

Karimov's America: Fan Club
5/18/2005

Towers and Pentagon attacks were still being counted. As **anthrax panic** gripped the nation, the White House was **preparing** to extend the war to "other countries" – a prospect Kristol & Co. found thrilling. If the administration wouldn't bow to the bellicose blandishments of the *Weekly Standard*, then perhaps they would bend before the amplified fear of terrorism raised by the anthrax attacks.

And so **they did**.

In retrospect, outrage and fear generated by the anthrax attacks were essential elements of the **propaganda campaign** designed to link Iraq to terrorism in the U.S. and drag us into war. The attacks were so **propitious** in this regard that one might be forgiven for wondering if the perpetrators had this as their intention. Certainly they took great pains to convey **the impression** that the postal pestilence was authored by angry Arabs of one sort or another.

Also, in retrospect, the investigation into the anthrax mystery seems remarkably **botched**, a kind of pre-Katrina premonition of a dangerous – even criminal – incompetence. The authorities quickly seized on one **Steven J. Hatfill**, a government scientist and a somewhat hapless figure, against whom not a single shred of solid evidence could be marshaled. Yet Hatfill was branded a "**person of interest**" and relentlessly

Uzbekistan's
Nightmare:
Made in Washing
5/16/2005

Iraq Falls Apart
5/13/2005

America's Global
Fifth Column
5/11/2005

Commemorating a
World War
5/9/2005

Larry Franklin
and the
Axis of Espionage
5/6/2005

The War Party's
War on the Media
5/4/2005

Iraq: 'Mission
Accomplished?'
5/2/2005

The Thirty Years V
4/29/2005

In Defense of Mar
Ruzicka
4/27/2005

Prime Minister
Chalabi?
4/25/2005

Shaking Up Israel
Spy Nest
4/22/2005

More Archi

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harassed by government agents, who – in collaboration with a **certain** *New York Times* columnist – destroyed his reputation. U.S. government agents followed him everywhere, made his life a misery, and refuse to this day to either apologize or offer some small compensation to a man whose life they have **ruined**.

It is interesting that the U.S. government was all too eager to follow the path suggested by journalists such as **Nicholas Kristof**, one of Hatfill's earliest and most relentless nemeses, while studiously ignoring the clues provided by others. The *Hartford Courant* ran a **series of articles** by Dave Altimari, Lynne Tuohy, and Jack Dolan that not only pointed in the direction of the possible perpetrators, but named names and implied a political-ideological motive behind the crime.

The anthrax strain has been **positively identified** as being of the Ames variety, of the sort stored at **USAMRIID**, the U.S. government biological weapons facility at Fort Detrick, Md., and a few other such labs. Soon after the anthrax attacks, the *Courant* **exposed** the weird problems besetting the Ft. Detrick facility, which had apparently been **missing** large quantities of biological toxins, including not only anthrax but also hanta virus, Ebola virus, and other lethal pathogens. These mysterious disappearances apparently occurred:

"During a turbulent period of labor complaints and recriminations among rival scientists there, documents from an internal Army inquiry show. The 1992 inquiry also found evidence that someone was secretly entering a lab late at night to conduct unauthorized research, apparently involving anthrax. A numerical counter on a piece of lab equipment had been rolled back to hide work done by the mystery researcher, who left the misspelled label 'antrax' in the machine's electronic memory, according to the documents obtained by The Courant."

This "mystery researcher" may have been someone at the very center of that "turbulent period," one **Philip Zack**. Zack and a group of personnel at Ft. Detrick had been systematically harassing an Egyptian co-worker, Dr. **Ayaad Assaad**. *The Courant* reports:

"Documents from the inquiry show that one unauthorized person who was observed entering the lab building at night was Langford's predecessor, Lt. Col. Philip Zack, who at the time no longer worked at Fort Detrick. A surveillance camera recorded Zack being let in at 8:40 p.m. on Jan. 23, 1992, apparently by Dr. Marian Rippey, a lab pathologist and close friend of Zack's, according to a report filed by a security guard."

The harassment of Assaad, detailed **here**,

took on bizarrely juvenile forms: an obscene poem, a rubber camel delivered to his mailbox, a constant stream of racist anti-Arab remarks such as one might find posted these days on **Little Green Footballs**. Court documents reveal a harrowing experience of cruel and relentless persecution carried out by a small clique, including Zack, who called themselves the "camel club."

While the anthrax letters received enormous publicity, one mailed missive that might provide a key clue to the identity of the perpetrators has received very little: an anonymous **letter**, sent in late September before the anthrax drama unfolded, to the military police at the Marine base in Quantico, Va., accused Dr. Assaad of being behind a terrorist plot to unleash biological horrors in American cities. The author revealed a detailed knowledge of Dr. Assaad's career at USAMRIID and claimed to have formerly worked with him.

Assaad was interrogated by the FBI on Oct. 3, then let go after the letter was determined to be a hoax. When the effects of the anthrax attacks began to make themselves known, the full horror of what had happened began to dawn on Assaad – but not, apparently, on the authorities. **Says Assaad:** "My theory is, whoever this person is knew in advance what was going to happen (and created) a suitable, well-fitted scapegoat for this action." The odd timing of the letter –

sent after the anthrax letters were mailed, but before their deadly contents were known – certainly seems to point in this direction. *The Courant* reports FBI spokesman Chris Murray saying "the FBI is not tracking the source of the anonymous letter, despite its curious timing, coming a matter of days before the existence of anthrax-laced mail became known." Instead of following the trail of this important clue, investigators went off on a tangent with the Hatfill angle, which **proved** [.pdf] to be a dead end.

An Egyptian scientist, albeit one who is an American citizen and had lived in this country for quite some time, had been set up as the scapegoat for the crime – *before* knowledge of the mailed anthrax was generally known. This same scientist had been the object of a hate campaign generated by virulently anti-Arab co-workers at Ft. Detrick, at least one of whom was videotaped **surreptitiously** entering the lab at night (after he had been dismissed from his position and was not authorized to enter in any event).

Whoever wrote the poison pen letter denouncing Dr. Assaad as a potential terrorist in all likelihood **knows something** about the origins of the anthrax attack. In this context, the crudeness of the messages accompanying the anthrax – "death to America" and "death to Israel" – seems like an obvious effort to divert attention away from the

real authors of a crime that goes unsolved to this day.

Just as the Bush administration was **looking for an excuse** – any excuse – to take out after Iraq, the anthrax horror reared its head and silenced any remaining opposition to the war plans of this administration, at least momentarily. It all seems like such a terribly convenient coincidence. In retrospect, it was as much a part of the vortex of **fearmongering** that sucked us into war as **tales** of Iraqi WMD palmed off by **Ahmed Chalabi's "heroes in error"** and the extravagant effusions of **Dick Cheney** and **Condoleezza Rice**. No, I am not suggesting that the U.S. government or the Bush administration carried out these attacks: yet whoever did surely had in mind making it easier for the War Party to unleash **mass death** and destruction in the Middle East, a veritable wave of hate that would carry us to Baghdad and beyond.

Why isn't Congress investigating this? Where is the probe into the "intelligence failure" that managed to target and destroy an innocent person while pulling investigators away from evidence pointing in a more plausible direction? Whoever pulled off the anthrax attacks is still out there, waiting for the right moment to strike. This is a case that must be solved – because there's more where that came from.

NOTES IN THE MARGIN

The Huffington Post **reports** Dr. Zalmay Khalilzad, our ambassador to Iraq, predicted U.S. troops will enter Syria – ostensibly in "pursuit" of "terrorists" – in private remarks at Republican tycoon **Teddy Forstmann's** annual "off the record" Aspen conclave of Movers and Shakers. Just remember, **you read it here first.**

UN conferences are usually quite boring, which is why many who may otherwise lack admiration for Hugo Chavez found considerable entertainment value in the Venezuelan Bolivar's remarks, **to wit:**

"The only place where a person can ask for another head of state to be assassinated is the United States, which is what happened recently with the Reverend Pat Robertson, a very close friend of the White House. He publicly asked for my assassination and he's still walking the streets."

While I can't agree that the Rev. Robertson should be cooling his heels and his evangelical fervor behind bars, I have to say that these distinctly un-Christian sentiments seem to reflect a general trend on the right side of the political spectrum toward outright thuggery. A good example is the recent **death threat** against myself, Howard Zinn, Noam Chomsky, Michael Moore,

and other opponents of the war published by David Horowitz's Frontpagemag.com (whole story detailed [here](#)). To follow up: my column on this subject generated a wave of protest directed at the author of the threat, one **Michael Lopez-Calderon**, a high school teacher of history at Rockville High School in Maryland. He recently sent out **this appeal** (now behind a "privacy screen"), which reads in part:

"Subject: Calderon urgently needs your help! ...

"Because of a deluge of emails, phones, and faxes from around the country, the School Board is running scared. I was placed on paid leave Thursday, September 8, 2005 at 12:25 PM.

"I am under investigation by the Board. What will they find? Nothing to substantiate any claims that I have been anything but an exemplary teacher with superb evaluations, with not a single parental or student complaint levelled [sic] against me; you guys know who I am. ...

"Guys this is not bullshit ... my career, my reputation, and my health are ON THE LINE. PLEASE HELP ME!"

Pathetic, sad, and funny all at once. Pathetic because an adult human being – and one who is furthermore charged with instructing and serving as a role model for children – is refusing to recognize

that rash actions often have unfortunate – and costly – consequences. Sad because, from the contents of Calderon's own weblog, it is clear that he regarded his job, and the subsequent uptick in his income, as a source of pride and satisfaction. Funny – if you like your humor dark – because there is not one mention of Calderon's plight on Frontpage.

David Horowitz, the **great defender** of "free speech" for conservatives in academia, is refusing to defend one of his own crazed minions: he hasn't even published Calderon's appeal, and I have seen no new blog items from the man who fantasized that one day "leftist professors will be strung up." Perhaps Horowitz is unwilling to defend someone who makes the Horowitzian action plan so vividly explicit. In any case, Horowitz has left poor deluded Calderon twisting in the wind – and isn't that just like a neocon?

Calderon wails that I'm violating his First Amendment rights, but I plead not guilty to the charge. I have no desire to prevent him from exercising his right to engage in free speech – he can issue death threats till the cows come home, for all I care – but I have the same First Amendment right, which I choose to exercise by calling attention to his incitements. It works both ways. Let the **red-state fascists** bellow and posture to their heart's content, because the louder

their unseemly threats, the more they discredit themselves and their cause. That Horowitz, who has the biggest, loudest mouth of them all, is beginning to appreciate this, however dimly, is evidenced perhaps by his deafening silence on the Calderon matter.

I also have to say that Calderon has issued **an apology, of sorts**, albeit one that goes on to assert his loyalty to the red-state fascist mindset that unconsciously plagiarized the spirit if not the letter of *The Turner Diaries*:

*"That said, let me state that I will stick to my position which holds those that Americans, e.g., the convicted radical lawyer **Lynne Stewart**, who openly aid and abet our enemies during a time when our home and hearth have been attacked and face additional attacks, should suffer the wrath of a Federal Government empowered under a revived and robust Sedition Act. That revived Sedition Act should be used only under the most extreme set of circumstances, and an America devastated by a WMD delivered by terrorists fits that description."*

Oh, I see: he doesn't want to kill me and the other devil-figures in his demonology of prominent "seditionists." He just wants to jail us. To the **red-state fascists** who have taken over the official "conservative" movement, this really is an "apology"!

These people are scary, but Horowitz's

behavior has been particularly reprehensible. Unlike Calderon, he has not apologized for publishing the death threat. Worse yet, to date he has so far failed to publicly defend one of his own writers from serious charges. Calderon may be fired from his job and suffer a significant financial and career setback as a result of remarks posted on Horowitz's own Web site, and presumably authorized by Horowitz himself or one of his employees. Horowitz, however, takes no responsibility, offers no apology, and goes about his business of **smearing** the antiwar movement and anyone who opposes the Regime as if nothing is amiss. On this matter we get from him something we don't often get to enjoy: complete silence. A true rarity, to be sure. But how long can it last?

– Justin Raimondo

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