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The Iraq Connection

By MICAH MORRISON

OKLAHOMA CITY -- With the Sept. 11 anniversary upon us and President Bush talking about a "regime change" in Iraq, it's an apt time to look at two investigators who connect Baghdad to two notorious incidents of domestic terrorism. Jayna Davis, a former television reporter in Oklahoma City, believes an Iraqi cell was involved in the 1995 bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building here. Middle East expert Laurie Mylroie links Iraq to the first bombing of the World Trade Center in 1993, and has published a book on the subject.

Both cases are closed, of course -- in the public mind if not quite officially. Timothy McVeigh was convicted of murder in the Oklahoma City bombing and executed in June 2001; Terry Nichols was sentenced to life in prison for conspiracy and manslaughter, and faces a further trial on murder charges. In the World Trade Center bombing, prosecutors convicted six men of Middle Eastern origin on the theory that they operated in a "loose network." One suspect remains at large, but the apparent ringleader, known as Ramzi Yousef, was captured in Pakistan and is now in federal prison in the U.S.

The prosecutors in both episodes believe they got their men, and of course conspiracy theories have shadowed many prominent cases. Still, the long investigative work by Ms. Davis and Ms. Mylroie, coming to parallel conclusions though working largely independently of each other, has gained some prominent supporters. Former CIA Director James Woolsey, for example, recently told the Journal that "when the full stories of these two incidents are finally told, those who permitted the investigations to stop short will owe big explanations to these two brave women. And the nation will owe them a debt of gratitude."

The Vanishing John Doe No. 2



Jayna Davis

Ms. Davis, for example, has a copy of a bulletin put out by the Oklahoma Highway Patrol immediately after the Murrah bombing. It specifies a blue car occupied by "Middle Eastern male subject or subjects." According to police radio traffic at the time, also obtained by Ms. Davis, a search was on as well for a brown Chevrolet pickup "occupied by Middle Eastern subjects." When an officer radioed in asking if "this is good information or do we really not know," a dispatcher responded "authorization FBI." Law-enforcement sources tell Ms. Davis that the FBI bulletin was quickly and mysteriously withdrawn.

The next day, the federal government issued arrest warrants and sketches of two men seen together, John Doe No. 1 and No. 2. John Doe 1 turned out to be McVeigh, who was quickly picked up on an unrelated charge. Following the arrest of McVeigh and Nichols, the Justice Department changed course, saying the witnesses were confused and there was no John Doe 2 with McVeigh.

But Ms. Davis, who was covering the case at the time for KFOR-TV in Oklahoma City, says in fact there was a John Doe No. 2, and that she has identified him. The original warrant for John Doe No. 2 described a man about 5 feet 10 inches, average weight, with brown hair and a tattoo on his left arm. She says the man matching this description is an Iraqi political refugee named Hussain al-Hussaini, an itinerant restaurant worker who entered the country in 1994 from a Saudi Arabian refugee camp and soon found his way to Oklahoma City. She says she has more than 20 witnesses who can place him near the Murrah Building on the day of the bombing or finger him in parts of the conspiracy.

Seven weeks after the bombing, Ms. Davis's KFOR television station began broadcasting a series of reports on a possible Middle East connection. It did not name Mr. al-Hussaini, but did include photographs of him that digitally obscured his face. Mr. al-Hussaini sued for libel and defamation, denying any association with the bombing. In November 1999, U.S. District Court Judge Tim Leonard dismissed the lawsuit.

Citing defense contentions Mr. al-Hussaini's counsel failed to dispute, the judge ruled that Ms. Davis had proved that Mr. al-Hussaini "bears a strong resemblance to the composite sketch of John Doe #2," including a tattoo on his left arm, that he was born and raised in Iraq, that he had served in the Iraqi army, and that his Oklahoma City employer had once been suspected by the federal government of having "connections with the Palestine Liberation Organization."

Mr. al-Hussaini appealed Judge Leonard's decision to the 10th Circuit Court, where a ruling is pending. He is represented by Gary Richardson, a well-known Oklahoma lawyer who currently is an independent candidate for governor. In an interview, Mr. Richardson denounced the treatment of Mr. al-Hussaini as anathema to American values, saying he had been singled out because he was an Arab. "There is no evidence that Hussain al-Hussaini is John Doe No. 2," Mr. Richardson said. "He was grossly mistreated by the media in Oklahoma."

In 1996, Mr. al-Hussaini returned to Boston, where he had first entered the U.S. He found work as a cook at Logan Airport. According to his medical records, he was haunted by the Oklahoma City episode and the publicity surrounding his libel suit. He began drinking heavily and in 1997 was admitted to a psychiatric clinic for a depressive disorder and suicidal thoughts. Mr. al-Hussaini's lawyer says his client has since moved to another part of the country and is "trying to put his life back together."

According to notes taken by a nurse at the psychiatric clinic, Mr. al-Hussaini quit his job at Logan Airport in November 1997, nearly four years before planes from there were hijacked on Sept. 11, 2001. Her notes say he stated, "If anything happens there, I'll be a suspect."

Evidence supporting Ms. Davis's suspicions surfaced during discovery for the McVeigh trial. An FBI report, for example, records a call a few hours after the bombing from Vincent Cannistraro, a retired CIA official who had once been chief of operations for the agency's counter-terrorism center. He told Kevin Foust, a FBI counter-terror investigator, that he'd been called by a top counter-terror adviser to the Saudi royal family. Mr. Foust reported that the Saudi told Mr. Cannistraro about

"information that there was a 'squad' of people currently in the United States, very possibly Iraqis, who have been tasked with carrying out terrorist attacks against the United States. The Saudi claimed that he had seen a list of 'targets,' and that the first on the list was the federal building in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma."

Stephen Jones, McVeigh's lead lawyer, discusses the FBI report in his book, "Others Unknown: Timothy McVeigh and the Oklahoma City Bombing Conspiracy." Mr. Cannistraro later told Mr. Jones that he didn't know if the caller "was credible or not." But Mr. Foust's memo says Mr. Cannistraro described the Saudi official as "responsible for developing intelligence to help prevent the royal family from becoming victims of terrorist attacks," and someone he'd known "for the past 10 or 15 years."

Ms. Davis's evidence was examined by Patrick Lang, a Middle East expert and former director of the Defense Intelligence Agency's human intelligence collection section. In a memo to Ms. Davis, Mr. Lang concluded that Mr. al-Hussaini likely is a member of Unit 999 of the Iraqi Military Intelligence Service, or Estikhabarat. He wrote that this unit is headquartered at Salman Pak southeast of Baghdad, and "deals with clandestine operations at home and abroad."

Larry Johnson, a former deputy director of the State Department's Office of Counter Terrorism, also has examined Ms. Davis's voluminous research. "Looking at the Jayna Davis material," Mr. Johnson says, "what's clear is that more than Tim McVeigh and Terry Nichols were involved. Without a doubt, there's a Middle Eastern tie to the Oklahoma City bombing."

Mr. al-Hussaini and other former Iraqi soldiers colluded with McVeigh and Nichols in the attack, Ms. Davis charges. "There is a Middle Eastern terrorist cell operating in Oklahoma City. They were operating prior to the Oklahoma City bombing and they are still operating today."

The popular stereotype of McVeigh is of a twisted "patriot" out to avenge government actions at Waco and Ruby Ridge. But in March 1998 he penned a prison-cell "Essay on Hypocrisy" obsessed with Iraq. "We've all seen pictures that show a Kurdish woman and child frozen in death from the use of chemical weapons. But have you ever seen these pictures juxtaposed next to pictures from Hiroshima or Nagasaki?" With calls for war crimes trials of Saddam Hussein, "why do we not hear the same cry for blood directed at those responsible for even greater amounts of 'mass destruction?'"

In dismissing the al-Hussaini libel suit, Judge Leonard pointedly noted the indictment of McVeigh and Nichols included a charge of conspiracy "with others unknown." In sentencing Nichols, U.S. District Judge Richard Matsch remarked, "It would be disappointing to me if the law enforcement agencies of the United States government have quit looking for answers."

World Trade Center

The Sept. 11 airline crashes were not the first attempt to topple the World Trade Center towers. In February 1993, a bomb blast in a public parking garage below the North Tower of the World Trade Center killed six people and left a crater six stories deep. It could have been much worse. In her book, "The War Against America: Saddam Hussein and the World Trade Center Attacks," Laurie Mylroie says that the bomb was designed to topple the North Tower into the South Tower and envelop the scene in a cloud of cyanide gas. Hearing the case, Judge Kevin Duffy agreed, saying that if the plan had worked, "we would have been dealing with tens of thousands of deaths." After the

bombing, the FBI rounded up four Muslims who moved in extremist circles in the New York area. Three others escaped overseas: a Palestinian, an Iraqi named Abdul Yasin, and Ramzi Yousef.

Ms. Mylroie's book argues that Iraq was complicit in this attack. At the very least, she notes, Saddam Hussein is harboring a wanted terrorist: Abdul Yasin. He came to the U.S. six months before the Trade Center attack and is charged with helping mix chemicals for the bomb. Picked up in an early sweep after the bombing, he talked his way out of an FBI interrogation and turned up back in Baghdad.

Beyond this, Ms. Mylroie contends that the bombing was "an Iraqi intelligence operation with the Moslem extremists as dupes." She says that the original lead FBI official on the case, Jim Fox, concluded that "Iraq was behind the World Trade Center bombing." In late 1993, shortly before his retirement, Mr. Fox was suspended by FBI Director Louis Freeh for speaking to the media about the case; he died in 1997. Ms. Mylroie says that Mr. Fox indicated to her that he did not continue to pursue the Iraq connection because Justice Department officials "did not want state sponsorship addressed."



Laurie Mylroie

According to phone records analyzed by Ms. Mylroie, Abdul Yasin appeared in the orbit of one of U.S. conspirators, Muhammed Salameh, some weeks after Mr. Salameh made a series of phone calls to relatives in Iraq, including to his uncle, Kadri Abu Bakr. Mr. Bakr is a senior figure in the PLO's "Western Sector" terrorist unit; at the very least, his phone calls would be monitored by Iraqi intelligence.

Ramzi Yousef also showed up after the calls to Mr. Bakr, according to Ms. Mylroie's analysis. His arrival "transformed the conspiracy from a pipe bombing plot to an audacious attack on the World Trade Center." Yousef was "the individual most responsible for building the World Trade Center bomb" -- 1,200 pounds of urea nitrate with a nitroglycerine trigger, booster chemicals, sulfuric acid and sodium cyanide.

After the bombing, Yousef vanished; he had entered with an Iraqi passport, and exited with a Pakistani passport. Yousef's Pakistani passport was in the name of Abdul Basit. He obtained it from the Pakistani consulate in New York shortly before the bombing, saying he had lost his passport and presenting photocopied pages from Abdul Basit's 1984 and 1988 passports.

Ms. Mylroie says her evidence suggests that Abdul Basit and his family were among two dozen Pakistani nationals working in Kuwait who vanished at the time of the Iraqi invasion. Law enforcement authorities believe she overplays this possibility, that Yousef is indeed Basit, and that the original Iraqi passport is the only firm link to Iraq.

After fleeing in the wake of the 1993 bombing, Yousef/Basit made his way to the Philippines, where he planted a bomb that killed the passenger taking his seat after he disembarked from a plane on the island of Cebu. Police investigating a fire in a Manila apartment he occupied found a laptop computer with plans to bomb 12 U.S. jets simultaneously. Yousef escaped but was later apprehended in Pakistan and turned over to U.S. authorities. He was convicted in both the Trade Center attack and the plane-bombing plot.

One of Yousef's confederates, Abdul Hakin Murad, was arrested at the Manila apartment and later convicted in the U.S. in the plane plot. While in custody in the Philippines, he told investigators that

he and Yousef had discussed hijacking a jet and crashing it into CIA headquarters. According to a January 1995 Manila police report, Murad said "he will board any American commercial aircraft pretending to be an ordinary passenger. Then he will hijack said aircraft, control its cockpit and dive it at the CIA headquarters. There will be no bomb or any explosive that he will use in its execution. It is simply a suicidal mission that he is very much willing to execute."

The Philippine Connection

Astonishingly, the Murrah bombing and the first WTC attack share a connection. Yousef and Terry Nichols were in the Philippines simultaneously. Nichols's trips there are undisputed; his wife's relatives lived in Cebu City. Cebu is also the territory of the Islamic terrorist group Abu Sayyaf. McVeigh lawyers sought to substantiate an "others unknown" defense theory, and made extensive filings concerning Nichols's activities there.

These filings show that he was often in Cebu without his wife, and that he was in frequent contact with Ernesto Malaluan, a relative of his wife who had once lived in Saudi Arabia and owned a boarding house in Cebu City. The filing asserted that his boarding house "shelters students from a university well known for its Islamic militancy."

A defense examination of phone records found that Nichols had repeatedly called the Cebu boarding house in the weeks preceding the bombing. Some of the calls were billed to a prepaid phone card to which McVeigh also had access. The calls were often made from pay phones at truck stops and the like, and sometimes followed mysterious patterns. In one instance, for example, the same number was dialed nine times in nine minutes before someone answered and spoke for 14 minutes.

The McVeigh defense also produced two witnesses, Nichols's father-in-law and a resort worker, who said that while in the Philippines, Nichols had asked them if they knew anyone who knew "how to make bombs."

The defense team also obtained a statement from Philippines law-enforcement officials about a meeting of Nichols and Yousef. The statement was given by a putative Abu Sayyaf leader, Edward Angeles. Angeles is a murky figure. Born Ibrahim Yakub and said to be one of the founders of Abu Sayyaf, he surrendered to the Philippine Army in 1995, claiming he had been all the time a deep penetration agent for the government. Angeles was assassinated in 1999 by unknown gunmen.

The McVeigh defense filings portray the Nichols link to the Cebu City boarding house, Ramzi Yousef and Abu Sayyaf as grounds for believing that bomb-making expertise may have been passed to Nichols through "Iraqi intelligence based in the Philippines." McVeigh attorney Stephen Jones told *Insight* magazine recently that six months before the Oklahoma City bombing, "Tim couldn't blow up a rock. Then Terry goes to the Philippines," and their bomb-making skills take a great leap forward. The court did not grant Mr. Jones's request to comb through U.S. intelligence files in search of an Iraq connection to the Oklahoma City bombing.

Sept. 11 Footnotes

The principal reason for suspecting an Iraqi role in the Sept. 11 attacks is of course the much-discussed report of a meeting in Prague on April 8, 2001, between apparent hijacking leader Mohamed Atta and Ahmed Khalil Ibrahim Samir al-Ani, an Iraqi diplomat expelled as a spy shortly

thereafter. Press reports have repeatedly cast doubt on these reports, apparently because the FBI located Atta in Virginia and Florida shortly before and after the meeting and found no record of his leaving the U.S. But the latest report, in the Aug. 2 edition of the Los Angeles Times, quotes a high Bush administration official as saying evidence of the meeting "holds up." In the face of doubts and denials, Czech officials have repeatedly maintained that they're sure the meeting took place. Atta also passed through Prague on his way to the U.S. in June of 2000, returning a second time after being refused entry for lack of a visa.

There are also reports of various contacts between Iraqis and the al Qaeda terrorist network, notably a 1998 visit to Osama bin Laden in Afghanistan by Saddam Hussein's deputy head of military intelligence at the time, Faruq al-Hijazi. In congressional testimony in March, CIA Director George Tenet noted that Iraq has "had contacts with al Qaeda," adding that "the two sides mutual antipathy toward the United States and the Saudi royal family suggest that tactical cooperation between them is possible."

Espionage writer Edward Jay Epstein has pointed out that of the eight pilots and co-pilots of hijacked planes on Sept. 11, none got off a distress call. What we know of the incidents came from stewardesses and flyers with cell phones. Commercial satellite photos show the body of an airliner at Salman Pak, where the Iraqis are thought to maintain terrorist training camps. One Iraqi defector, Sabah Khalifa Alami, has stated that Iraqi intelligence trained groups at Salman Pak on how to hijack planes without weapons. Mr. Epstein details these connections at his Web site, www.edwardjayepstein.com.

None of this is "hard evidence," let alone "conclusive evidence," that Saddam Hussein was complicit in Sept. 11 or any of the other domestic terrorist attacks. But there is quite a bit of smoke curling up from various routes to Baghdad, and it's not clear that anyone except Jayna Davis and Laurie Mylroie has looked very hard for fire. We do know that Saddam Hussein plotted to assassinate former President George Bush during a visit to Kuwait in April 1993. Could he have been waging a terror offensive against the U.S. ever since the end of the Gulf War? This remains a speculative possibility, but a possibility that needs to be put on the table in a serious way.

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