

**A NATION CHALLENGED: BIOTERRORISM**

# ***A NATION CHALLENGED: BIOTERRORISM; F.B.I. Has a 'Short List' of Names In Its Anthrax Case, the U.S. Says***

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The Federal Bureau of Investigation has identified a "short list" of 18 to 20 people who had the means, opportunity and possible motive to have sent the anthrax-laden letters last fall, law enforcement officials said.

Officials said the list was compiled mostly through tips from scientists and an analysis by investigators of people with skills to have made the highly concentrated anthrax spores that killed five people and prompted doctors to prescribe antibiotic treatment for 30,000 people.

Ari Fleischer, the White House press secretary, said today that the F.B.I. had several "suspects" in the case, a characterization that law enforcement officials said went beyond the evidence uncovered thus far in the four-month investigation.

In fact, they said, the F.B.I. is still searching for clues that might point to a specific person. "It would be inaccurate to say that these people are suspects in the classic sense," one law enforcement official said.

The short list, officials said, has been whittled down in recent weeks from a larger group of 35 to 40 researchers or technicians believed to have the expertise needed to produce such a lethal product, access to the particularly powerful Ames strain of *Bacillus anthracis* contained in the letters and a grudge against the government or other possible motive to commit such a crime.

Law enforcement officials said that a description of individuals on the list had been shared with a few senior officials in one or two agencies, but that the names had not been widely discussed or disseminated.

Both the White House and the F.B.I. denied an article in The Washington Times yesterday that asserted that investigators had identified a chief suspect in the case who had learned how to make a weapons-grade strain of the deadly anthrax bacteria at the Army Medical Research Institute of Infectious Diseases at Fort Detrick, Md., and had twice been fired from government jobs.

"There is no prime suspect in this case at this time," said Bill Carter, a bureau spokesman.

Mr. Fleischer, the White House spokesman, gave public voice to the frustration felt by many government officials about the slow pace of the investigation.

"I wish it was that easy and that simple right now," he said, "but unfortunately, there still are several suspects."

The F.B.I. had not "narrowed it down to just one," he said. "They are continuing their investigation."

The statement by the F.B.I. and Mr. Fleischer came after several months of growing speculation about why there had been no arrests in the anthrax case.

For months, Barbara Hatch Rosenberg, a microbiologist at the State University of New York who heads an arms control panel for the Federation of American Scientists, has advanced the theory that the culprit is a federal scientist, technician or contractor who gained deadly expertise from work in a military laboratory. In a lecture this month at Princeton University's Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs, Dr. Rosenberg argued that the bureau might be "dragging its feet" in bringing charges because the suspect might be familiar with secret biodefense work that the government does not wish to disclose.

While law enforcement officials confirmed that there were military scientists and contractors on its list, they denied that the bureau was not making an arrest to keep government biodefense programs secret.

"We keep knocking that down," one official said, "but the same conspiracy theory keeps popping up in different forms."

One law enforcement official described those being investigated as entries on what he called a "floating list" of people whose names were added and removed as the bureau questioned and investigated them. He described people on the short list as being of "more logical

interest" to the F.B.I., but emphasized that any single name on the list could "wash out at any time."

The official said that at the end of every interview, federal investigators asked the person being questioned whether he knew of any individual who had the means or motive to send out the anthrax letters. Such inquiries had produced a considerable number of names, the official added.

One Washington germ-weapons insider, who spoke on the condition of anonymity, said he had provided investigators with several names. He said he had no idea whether they had made it onto the short list.

One person on the short list is from Somalia and did graduate work in biology at a Midwestern university that possessed anthrax, including the Ames strain used in the letter attacks. A Muslim, the student repeatedly sent money home to Mogadishu, the Somali capital well known for its feuding warlords and terrorists.

A senior biologist at the Midwestern university said F.B.I. agents became visibly excited when they learned of the Somali student. But the biologist insisted that the student was beyond reproach and would have no idea how to make an advanced anthrax powder.

"He's a very good guy," the scientist said. "He's one of these academic Africans who put us to shame" with their earnestness and hard work. The F.B.I.'s continuing interest in the Somali student, he added, "is an indication they're at sea."

The student made the ever-changing suspect list because his attributes matched several thought to be possessed by the anthrax killer, especially that he had physical access to the Ames strain and links, however tenuous, to terrorism.

A law enforcement official said the F.B.I. master anthrax data base had the names of hundreds of people linked to more than 30 traits, including factors like whether they had anthrax vaccinations, Ames access, knowledge of how to make biological powders and a history of resentment against the government.

A person's ranking is roughly proportional to how often the name arises in the matrix, officials said.

As Dr. Rosenberg has suggested, one place where many of the attributes exist is at military laboratories and among contractors that have worked with anthrax, the Dugway Proving Ground in Utah, the Army laboratory at Fort Detrick and the Battelle Memorial Institute, a military contractor in Ohio that does secret work for the Pentagon and other government agencies.

A scientist who talks regularly to the F.B.I. said a "recent and intense focus" of activity had been the Fort Detrick laboratory, including current and past employees.

"Tens of people," the scientist said, "have been interviewed in last few weeks."