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## FBI TAKES A DIVE ON TERROR

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July 14, 2004 – DID top FBI officials try to railroad an agent for doing too good a job of fighting terrorism? A just-released letter from a now-retired bureau internal-affairs investigator sure makes it look that way.

Sen. Charles Grassley (R-Iowa) yesterday released the letter from John Roberts, formerly the chief of the FBI's Office of Professional Responsibility. Roberts writes that FBI Assistant Director Robert Jordan and Deputy Assistant Director Jody Weis told him to "deceive, misrepresent and hide" from Justice Department investigators "the facts of this matter" — that matter being the behavior of FBI Agent Bob Wright.

Assigned to do counter-terrorism in the FBI's Chicago office in the early '90s, Wright began to uncover a wide network of Hamas and al Qaeda financiers across the United States. His "Operation Vulgar Betrayal" uncovered:

- \* Terrorist money-laundering activities by Musa Abu Marzook, the U.S.-based political director of Hamas.
- \* Evidence that later helped the Bush administration shut down the Holy Land Foundation for financing Hamas terrorism.
- \* Financial links between Hamas funding and Yassin Al-Qadi, a Saudi sheik.
- \* Evidence that Al-Qadi was a banker for al Qaeda. The Saudi has now been placed on the Treasury Department's "specially designated global terrorist" list. (The designation lets Treasury seize the assets of terrorist groups.)
- \* Information that put several other U.S. residents and entities on the "global terrorist" list, mostly for financing Hamas.

The shocking thing is that Wright had to fight his superiors every step of the way. After Marzook was placed on the "global terrorist" list in 1995, for example, Washington refused to indict him, simply deporting him to Jordan instead. He immediately moved on to terror-sponsoring Syria, where he remains today.

Finally, in August 1999, they shut Wright's investigation down. My conversations with FBI personnel indicate that he was told informally that his work was too embarrassing to the Saudis. In support of this is the fact that Wright was shut down as he seemed to be closing in on Al-Qadi.

But the official reason was a fear that Wright's work would disrupt FBI intelligence-gathering. My sources find this dubious: After years of monitoring these individuals, the bureau had likely learned all it could.

It was a strange way to shut down an anti-terror investigation. Justice left individuals who had been designated as "global terrorists" free to wander the country.

Nor did things change when President Bush took over from President Bill Clinton: The career FBI and Justice personnel who had shut Wright down managed to keep him shut down even as Clinton, Attorney General Janet Reno and FBI chief Louis Freeh gave way to George Bush, John Ashcroft and Robert Mueller.

Justice even moved ahead with its plans to return \$1.4 million that Wright had seized from Yassin Al-Qadi, the bin Laden financier. But the transfer was set for October 2001 — and the 9/11 attacks came first, prompting wiser minds at Justice to quash the move.

Months before 9/11, Wright complained on several occasions to FBI officials that Americans would die because of the closing of his investigation and the incompetence of the FBI's International Terrorism Unit. He was told to "let sleeping dogs lie." When he didn't, he faced a series of in-house probes — all of which cleared him.

Those "sleeping dogs," after all, were known terrorists walking free. Wright passed on what he legally could to other government agencies, and to the media.

#4 In December 2002, for example, he was set to appear on ABC's "Primetime" to complain that the FBI had let Marzook, the Hamas financier, walk free. That got results: A day before the show aired, Attorney General Ashcroft announced he would indict Marzook. It's unclear whether Ashcroft realizes that it's his own employees' fault that Marzook is walking free in Syria.

Finally, after he appeared on ABC News last summer to complain that the bureau was allowing terrorists (named as such on the Treasury list) to walk free, his superiors launched another probe — the one headed by John Roberts.

Roberts says that FBI Assistant Director Robert Jordan (who reports directly to Director Mueller) and Deputy Assistant Director Jody Weis told him they wanted to keep the Wright investigation inside the FBI and away from Justice, so that they could "take him out." Roberts also refers to an e-mail from a higher up in the Chicago FBI office asking for permission to do a media smear job on the agent.

Roberts refused: Wright's TV appearance deserved at most a censure letter, as no classified information was disclosed.

After 9/11, Wright's work was picked up by David Kane of the U.S. Customs Service, who raided companies owned by Al-Qadi, leading to Al-Qadi's designation as a "global terrorist" and to money-laundering indictments of companies in Northern Virginia linked to Al-Qadi and Soliman Biheiri (another Wright investigatee). The indictments rely heavily on Wright's work.

But the FBI has gained control of that investigation, too: Homeland Security Secretary Tom Ridge recently agreed to let the FBI take back all terrorism investigations from Customs (now the Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement).

#10 It's not clear what Director Mueller knows about all this. Wright was shut down long before he took over. With so much on his plate since 9/11, the chief may have little choice but to rely on top career officials.

#11 But one problem with career officials is that they're often more concerned with covering up their own mistakes than they are with doing their jobs — even when that job is fighting terrorism and saving American lives.

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