

# Chapter 5

## The Investigation

Almost five years after the bombing of Khobar Towers, political interests were still stonewalling the investigation. That is until the Bush administration got involved.

The families of the nineteen airmen killed in the Khobar Towers bombing wish to express our sincere thanks to FBI Director Louis Freeh for his diligent effort to find the truth and to bring about justice in the Khobar Towers bombing case without regard to his personal political consequences. We also wish to thank Attorney General John Ashcroft and President George W. Bush for their support in the effort to bring about the indictments of the perpetrators (Appendix F).

Our servicemen daily put their lives on the line for this country. They gladly did this to protect our way of life and the freedoms afforded us by the Constitution of the United States of America and they paid the ultimate price for our freedom. These servicemen were our sons, fathers, husbands, brothers and friends.

How can any politician ask our servicemen and loved ones to put their lives on the line if they are unwilling to seek justice or they obstruct justice, as was done under the Clinton administration, for those killed or wounded at Khobar Towers?

I wish to be real clear at this point. The servicemen killed at Khobar Towers were murdered. Murder is a capital offense and obstruction of justice in a murder case is usually a felony.

Any politician, including Ex-President Bill Clinton, Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright, who put politics before justice should be prosecuted or impeached for their role in the obstruction of justice in the Khobar Towers Investigation Case. Make them accountable as you or I would be.

Our families will pay forever for this hideous crime no matter who is ultimately found guilty because we will never be able to hug, see or talk to our loved ones again and where parents are concerned, there will never be the "extended" family we have looked forward to all our adult lives. Help us to continue to see justice done. Keep the politics out of this investigation.

Thursday June 21, 2001 2:38 PM ET

# 14 Indicted in Saudi Arabia Bombing

By JONATHAN D. SALANT, Associated Press Writer

ALEXANDRIA, Va. (AP) - Thirteen Saudis and one Lebanese were indicted Thursday in the 1996 bombing that killed 19 American servicemen in Saudi Arabia.

A 46-count, 29-page indictment (Appendix F) handed up by a federal grand jury charged the defendants, under the direction of Iranian officials, conspired to kill U.S. nationals.

"This indictment serves to underscore the commitment of the Bush administration and the Justice Department to bringing terrorists to account," Attorney General John Ashcroft said.

"Americans are a high-priority target for terrorists and our nation will vigorously fight to preserve justice for our citizens both here at home as well as abroad."

Some of the 14 are in custody in various countries. Officials declined to be specific.

The indictment charges that as early as 1993 members of Saudi Hezbollah began extensive surveillance in search of a U.S. target, settling two years later on the American military housing high-rise near Dhahran.

Most of the Saudis indicted are young male members of the Shiite branch of Islam who lived in the eastern province of Saudi Arabia near the Persian Gulf.

The indictment said they were trained in Lebanon in Hezbollah-controlled areas and also in Iran.

Ashcroft said the United States is charging that certain unspecified Iranian figures "inspired, supported and supervised" the activities of the terrorists.

But he said the indictment did not name any Iranians, although the investigation continues. The attorney general suggested that U.S. authorities do not yet have sufficient evidence to indict Iranians.

But he did say he was gratified that the Justice Department and FBI were able to obtain the indictment nearly five years after the Khobar Towers bombing.

"For the victims and for their families, the indictment filed today means that next week's five-year anniversary of this tragedy will come with some assurance to victim family members and to the wounded that they are not and will not be forgotten," Ashcroft said.

President Bush spoke by phone Thursday with Saudi Crown Prince Abdullah to thank

him for Saudi Arabia's cooperation in the investigation, said White House spokeswoman Mary Ellen Countryman. Bush issued a statement praising both the Justice Department and the Saudis for their work, saying more people might be charged in the case.

Bush also offered personal assurances to bombing survivors and families of the dead. ``Your government will not forget your loss, and will continue working, based on the evidence, to make sure that justice is done," Bush said.

Those with loved ones among the dead welcomed the latest development in the case.

``It's (been) five years of pure hell, with or without indictments, that part doesn't change," said Fran Heiser, of Palm Coast, Fla., who lost her only child, Michael, a 35-year-old Air Force master sergeant, in the bombing. ``It's nice to see this coming to a head."

The FBI said the investigation into the blast moved slowly in part because the Saudi government restricted the agency's access to witnesses and other evidence. Eventually, FBI agents were allowed to formulate questions and watch as Saudi authorities posed 212 questions to eight suspects.

Saudi Arabia has yet to disclose its findings in an investigation it carried out jointly with the FBI.

A recent State Department report on terrorism referred to Hezbollah, the pro-Iranian group that led the guerrilla war against Israel's occupation of south Lebanon, as a radical Shiite Muslim group that is ``strongly anti-West and anti-Israel."



Wednesday June 20 10:27 AM ET

## **U.S. Prosecutors Prepare Khobar Towers Indictment**

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - U.S. prosecutors prepared to bring as early as Thursday the first criminal charges stemming from the 1996 Khobar Towers bombing in Saudi Arabia, which killed 19 U.S. service members, federal law enforcement officials said Wednesday.

They said prosecutors planned to ask a federal grand jury in Virginia to return an indictment against a number of Saudi militants who have been linked to the attack when a

truck loaded with explosives detonated outside a U.S. military barracks in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia, injuring about 500 people.

The criminal charges would be brought ahead of the June 25 five-year anniversary of the bombing, the officials said. For some of the charges under consideration, there is a five-year statute of limitations.

The charges also would be brought before FBI Director Louis Freeh, who has taken a strong personal interest in the case and who has pressed Saudi Arabia to cooperate, retires. He is expected to leave by the end of the week, FBI officials said.

The officials said Freeh planned to attend a news conference at FBI headquarters Thursday to announce any charges.

Saudi Arabia has been holding several suspects linked to the bombing, including Han al-Sayegh, a Saudi national handed over by the United States in 1999.

Among those expected to be charged are a number of Saudis who have been jailed in their own country for the attack, the officials said. But it is not clear whether any of them will be extradited to the United States.



**June 13, 2001**

## **GI BLAST INDICTMENTS DUE**

By **BILL SANDERSON**

Federal prosecutors will soon seek justice for 19 servicemen killed in a Saudi Arabia bomb blast by indicting several terrorists, it was reported last night.

A federal grand jury in Virginia will be asked to indict 13 people - mostly Saudi citizens - for carrying out the 1996 Khobar Towers attack, CBS News said.

But nobody from Iran will be indicted - although Iranian intelligence services are believed to have masterminded the attack against the U.S. barracks, according to the report.

Several suspects accused in the bombing are being held in Saudi Arabia. An Arab-language newspaper in London reported that three suspects have disappeared, hampering the investigation.

FBI Director Louis Freeh, who retires this month, has taken a strong interest in the case. But the FBI probe has been stymied by a lack of Saudi cooperation and U.S. efforts to improve relations with Iran.

The feds have to act soon - the five-year statute of limitations for the crime runs out June 25.



Op/Ed - New York Post - updated 4:13 AM ET Jun 11 Originally posted Sunday May 20 04:13 AM EDT

## **WHEN AMERICA CLOSES ITS EYES TO TERROR**

On the eve of the fifth anniversary of the Khobar Towers bombing, it's becoming clear why America, after all this time, has yet to hold a single individual accountable.

It's plain that the Clinton administration simply didn't want to respond.

Khobar Towers was the U.S. base in Saudi Arabia, where 19 American airmen lost their lives in the horrific 1996 terrorist attack.

Meaningful action by the United States - legal steps to prosecute perpetrators, military reprisals or other political measures - would have conflicted with the Clinton game plan for the Mideast.

That approach was appeasement, plain and simple.

President Clinton and his foreign-policy team sought to head off measures that might have upset Saudi Arabia, punished Iran for terrorism and brought those responsible to justice - because they might have damaged relations with Riyadh and Tehran.

There's no public, smoking-gun proof of this, of course. Not yet, anyway.

But such suggestions are the gist of Elsa Walsh's intriguing recent piece in *The New Yorker* about the government's investigation of the bombing.

Walsh says that FBI Director Louis Freeh - who was deeply involved in the probe - believed as much.

Freeh has drawn up a list of key suspects, and the Bush team is expected to decide soon whether to pursue indictments in the case.

We hope so, because America needs answers to such questions as:

- Did any of the Clinton folks intentionally impede the FBI probe?
- If so, does such activity constitute an obstruction of justice?
- Did anyone suggest to the Saudis - explicitly or otherwise - that America was not interested in information Riyadh had obtained that might have implicated high-ranking Iranian officials?
- And were the Saudis led to believe that U.S. officials would rather play a game of "See No Evil, Hear No Evil" - rather than be given information on which they'd be forced to act?

That, Walsh says, was the conclusion Freeh reached.

"Freeh," Walsh wrote, "had become so mistrustful of Clinton that, although he believed that he had developed enough evidence to seek indictments against the masterminds behind the attack . . . he decided to wait for a new administration."

True, the president has the right to conduct foreign policy - and it well may be that Clinton's plans for the Middle East conflicted with Freeh's probe in an entirely legal way.

Still, it would be nice to know for sure. Besides, even if Clinton & Co. had acted legally, the question would remain: Did they act wisely?

Appeasement might be lawful, even if it hinders a federal investigation; but is it likely to advance America's interests? Is it likely to curb terrorism?

Indeed, viewed that way, Clinton's Iran policy was a colossal failure.

The attacks by Iran's terrorists, after all, are essentially acts of war. Nor did the Clinton suck-up - if that's what it was - seem to have done much to reform the Islamic republic. Instead, it has allowed the Khobar thugs to walk free - free to bomb again, if they so choose.

And it has sent a message to other would-be terrorists that they can attack Americans with impunity.

The result is tragedies like last October's bombing of USS Cole in Yemen, which claimed 17 American lives.

The Clinton folks, of course, would deny any policy of appeasement. They'd insist that they had opposed terrorism and pursued its perpetrators, no holds barred.

There's scant evidence of that, though - notwithstanding Clinton's missile attacks on suspected sites linked to master-terrorist Osama bin Laden, following the bombings of U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. (More likely, those attacks were meant to distract from Monicagate.)

Clintonites also would argue that Iran had provided real hope for change: In 1997, a "moderate," Mohammad Khatami, was elected president. Khatami publicly condemned terrorism and signaled a desire for greater contact between Americans and Iranians.

Yet, Khatami had - and still has - little power. Iran continues to back terrorism and groups like the Hezbollah. Since the election, Tehran has cracked down brutally on dissidents.

Still, Clinton moved quickly to send lollipops to the mullahs.

- He encouraged contacts: An American wrestling team visited Iran, and Clinton extended a reciprocal invitation.
- He moved to relax sanctions.
- And, in one bizarre - and audacious - twist, his aides pushed for American taxpayers to pick up the tab for court judgments against Tehran for its role in terrorist attacks against Americans.

Freeh, on the other hand, seemed genuinely committed to the Khobar case. He visited the bomb site immediately, while it still resembled a war zone. And he spent hours with the victims' families.

The director, who recently announced plans to resign, told Walsh that "the only unfinished piece of business that I have is the one you're writing about."

Now he has handed the ball to President Bush. Americans can only pray that the new president will run with it - that he'll OK the indictments and help see that those responsible pay.

If that doesn't happen, then Congress must step in and determine what really occurred.

And then there is one overriding question here, too: Why is a terrorist bombing a matter for U.S. policemen - rather than for the State Department, the National Security Council, the Defense Department and the president himself? It's not shoplifting, after all.

With the end of the Cold War, terrorism is, arguably, the most dangerous foreign-policy threat to Americans.

In deciding how to proceed on Khobar, Bush - and America - should start thinking now about how to handle the next bombing.

Which is sure to come soon enough.

# Iran behind Saudi bombing

By RICHARD SALE, UPI Terrorism Correspondent

The United States has "airtight evidence" that Iran was the chief culprit behind the June 1996 terrorist bombing of a U.S. military facility in Saudi Arabia that killed 19 airmen and injured another 250, a U.S. official told United Press International Sunday.

The FBI reached that conclusion in an early investigation but was forced to withdraw it because of political considerations, according to anti-terrorism expert Jerry Bremer.

One former CIA official also named Syria as playing the role of "enabler" in the bombing, and other former U.S. intelligence officials said that operatives of Saudi exile terrorist Osama bin Laden were also involved.

According to U.S. government officials with close knowledge of the case, who all spoke on condition of anonymity, the languishing probe into the bombing of the Khobar Towers complex in 1996 has been picking up momentum since last month, when FBI director Louis Freeh indicated he wanted more action on the case.

A State Dept. official was hopeful that the recent change in the administration would breathe new life into the investigation. "I think we're seeing a different emphasis with this administration when it comes to terrorism and Iran," he said. "There is a new resolve on the part of the Bush people to get to the bottom of this," agreed another U.S. official.

Yet another official added that during the Clinton administration there had been a "real attempt to repair our relations with Iran" via the so-called Albright initiative. Unfortunately, it also meant "walking softly" where acts of terrorism and Iran was concerned, he said.

"There was this desire to have Iran re-enter the world diplomatic community. Iran was doing some things, like stopping Iraqi ships trying to smuggle oil, and everyone felt an effort would be worth it," he said.

When two former CIA officials, Larry Johnson and Milt Bearden, wrote an op-ed piece for the New York Times late last year quoting a confession by bin Laden operative and former U.S. Army Sgt. Ali Mohamed about a link between the bin Laden organization and the mysterious Hezbollah head of security, Iman Mughniyah, the authors met with immediate criticism from the White House, according to former U.S. intelligence sources.

Mughniyah, who is believed to have carried out the bombings of the U.S. Embassy and Marine barracks in Lebanon in 1983, was described by a former CIA official as "clearly an operative of Iran's."



"The (Clinton) White House clearly didn't want the link between Iran and bin Laden made public, even though the link was part of a court document," he added.

A U.S. government source told United Press International: "We are pretty sure that the explosives (for the bombing) came overland from stockpiles belonging to Syria and Iran in (Lebanon's) Bekaa Valley and near Damascus (in Syria)."

Iran was the chief force behind the bombing attack, with Syria "acting as an enabler," said one former CIA official.

But former U.S. ambassador to the Netherlands and anti-terrorist expert Jerry Bremer said that the question of whether the government of Syria had approved of and participated in the operation still was not clear. "I think one has to be careful," he told UPI.

A U.S. government official said that the evidence indicates the terrorists were trained at an Iranian intelligence facility in the town of Saadabad, and at a secret Iranian intelligence camp 60 miles south of Teheran. Others came from the Hezbollah training camps at Janta, Anjar, and Baalbek in the Bekaa, and some from as far away as the Balkans, smuggled in via Syria and Jordan.

One source with close knowledge of the incident said that the first Iranian operatives arrived in Dhahran, the site of the bombing, as early as April 1996 -- more than two months before the bombing. He added that the operation was characterized by "advanced reconnaissance, planning and logistical support" built up in the Dhahran area.

There were advance probes of the compound, one of which included a tanker truck like the one that carried the bomb, "entering the compound and driving around."

The bulk of the bomb's components were in Dhahran by June, where Iranian or Iranian-trained bomb experts completed it, this source said. The fuses and other sophisticated components had been smuggled into Saudi Arabia in boxes labeled "computer parts" and addressed to the Saudi National Guard, he said.

The local Iranian network stole a Caprice, which was used as a getaway car and abandoned in Dammam, six miles south of Dhahran. The Mercedes-Benz tanker truck that carried the bomb had been stolen from a construction company only a few days before the bombings, he said.

"The fuses and detonators were identical to bombings used by the Hezbollah," he said. The fact that the bomb's oil and incendiaries exploded a fraction of a second after the high explosives meant it was a bomb "meant to kill and damage human organs by means of air pressure changes," as well as explosive concussion, a signature of other Iranian bombings, he said.

One former CIA official was critical of the FBI's early investigation of the incident. He said of the FBI: "They're scalp hunters. They march in and want to clap people into jail. What we (the CIA) want is to 'turn' these people and send them back as deep penetration agents that can work for us."

Another former CIA source said of the investigative team: "They were incredibly arrogant. Some women were there as part of the team, and they wore tight slacks and short skirts, utterly ignorant of Islamic law. The FBI rode roughshod over everyone."

The Saudis responded angrily, sending half of the FBI specialists packing, this source said. Prince Nayef, the Saudi Minister of Interior, then cut off access to suspects being held for interrogation.

In 1986, Prince Nayef announced to the Saudi newspaper al-Rai al-Amm, that the bombing was "executed by Saudi (dissidents) alone ... No foreign power had any role in it."

According to administration officials, Freeh worked hard to undo the damage, building ties with Prince Sultan, the Saudi Defense Minister who heads a side of the family of King Fahd that favors close ties to the United States. Prince Sultan also retains the belief that Iran still poses a serious and continuing threat to the internal stability of the kingdom, they said.

To further increase his clout, Freeh also enlisted the cooperation of new Secretary of State Colin Powell, including a meeting of the two before Powell left on his Middle East tour earlier this year. When Powell met the Saudis, he brought up the subject of the bombing and stressed the urgency of U.S. concerns, these officials said.

Asked about a recent rapprochement between Saudi Arabia and Iran, one U.S. analyst said the deal had been engineered by Crown Prince Abdullah Abdul-Azzis, who he described as notoriously anti-American. A former CIA official added that Abdullah has often accepted subsidies from the British and actively worked against U.S. interests in the past.

Another U.S. government official pointed out that a similar detente had occurred between the two countries back in 1998 when former Iranian President Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani paid a visit to the kingdom announcing "a new era in Saudi-Iranian relations."

"The Saudis are very pragmatic: if a new relaxation of tensions relaxes the threat, then fine," he said.

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Sunday May 6 6:19 PM ET

## Bush Team Reportedly Gets List of Khobar Suspects

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - FBI Director Louis Freeh has given the Bush administration a list of people -- possibly including Iranian officials -- who he believes should be indicted in the 1996 bombing in Saudi Arabia that killed 19 U.S. servicemen, according to a New Yorker article released on Sunday.

The magazine story, based on interviews with Freeh and bureau personnel among others, said Freeh, who is leaving his post in June, recently briefed President Bush on the matter.

Without quoting Freeh directly, the article said, ``any indictments are likely to name Iranian government officials, especially those with ties to Iranian intelligence, commonly believed to be the source of terrorist activities."

The June 1996 bomb at the Khobar Towers military complex in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia, killed 19 servicemen and injured 500 others. The United States has maintained a military presence in Saudi Arabia since the buildup to the 1991 Gulf War.

It is unclear where any indictments might lead if the suspects live outside the United States.

Asked about the issue on the ABC's ``This Week," Bush's national security adviser, Condoleezza Rice, said she could not comment on ``legal and judicial matters that are under review at the Justice Department."

The New Yorker piece did not say how the Bush administration would proceed but it quoted one unidentified official as being open to indictments.

It said Freeh hopes to resolve the case by the time he steps down.

``The only unfinished piece of business that I have is the one you're writing about," the magazine quoted Freeh as saying.

The article said the suspicion of Iranian involvement dated to conversations a few months after the bombing between then-national security adviser Anthony Lake and his deputy, Sandy Berger, and Prince Bandar bin Sultan, the Saudi ambassador to the United States and the nephew of King Fahd.

``Bandar would always say, 'Tell me what you are going to do with the information if we share it with you.' I wouldn't play that game. I knew if we said we were going to whack the shit out of Iran we would never get anything from the Saudis -- plus we had not made a decision about what we were going to do," Berger is quoted as saying in the article.

The Saudis, who cooperated with the FBI in the investigation of the bombing, feared U.S. military action against Iran would prompt Iran to retaliate against its neighbor Saudi Arabia.

“Bandar told Freeh that he had once told White House officials that the Saudis could close the investigation, so that no one would have to retaliate against Iran,” according to the New Yorker.

“By the end of the Clinton era, Freeh had become mistrustful of Clinton that, although he believed he had developed enough evidence to seek indictments against the masterminds behind the attack, not just the front-line suspects, he decided to wait for a new administration,” the New Yorker said.

FBI spokesman Bill Carter declined to comment on whether a list of suspects had been handed to the Bush team. But the bureau issued a statement responding to the New Yorker article, saying the Khobar Towers case “remains the investigative priority of the FBI.”