

George Gardner, newsroom
The Washington Post
1150 15 St.,
Washington, DC 20071

2/28/93

Dear George,

Enclosed is a copy of a letter to a New York radio reporter friend. I've known him since he was little more than a boy and he then had been honored for his enterprise in reporting. While writing him I wondered if the Post had thought of some of what I raise. On the chance it may be of any interest I send it to you.

Along with a story about what I have always thought and spoken and written of as the Cuba, not Cuban, missile crisis.

In the midst of it I had reached my own analysis that turned out to be substantially correct. This is established by several international conferences of USSR and US participants that have been published.

I discuss^{ed} my analysis with the Post's then foreign editor. I think his name was something like Thornburg or Hornberry.

He told me that the conclusion I had reached had been considered by the Post and had been abandoned. This means that the Post had reached and not reported the proper solution when any error could have triggered World War III.

I hate to think of what could have ensued if Kennedy and Khrushchev had not worked it out, which really means that Kennedy accepted Khrushchev's proposed solution.

I'd hate also to have the responsibilities editors on papers like the Post and Times now face.

I have not yet read and corrected my letter to my old friend and with the day dawning I won't until after I get and read the Post. I may after a little time not be as insensitive to my many typos. I think I may have given the wrong impression in a part of it. I do not intend to indicate the belief that only plastic explosives could have been used and I did intend what I refer to as the catalogues of them not to be so limited. There are always variations in composition between manufacturers are within manufacture, between batches. The slightest variations are usually detectable by the tests I mention and I'm certain have been made, were made almost immediately with what samples were then available.

Best,



Harold Weisberg

Dear Russ,

2/28/93

As you may remember, my abnormal sleep pattern (from sleep apnea) has me awake abnormally early. This and yesterday morning, instead of reading or writing, I listened to WCBS, which has a good signal here most nights. Other than from the WxPost's reporting, not including today's because the snow makes it unwise for me to get the paper before daylight, I know nothing about the WTC bombing. I share a few thoughts on the chance you are covering it or will.

From the earliest reporting it seemed obvious that it was a bomb and that an accidental cause was impossible. From my limited sources I'm not aware of any reporting based on thinking, expository or investigative reporting. And what I know of has not questioned the improbable if not the impossible - that a single, disgruntledly employee may have been responsible. The only probable source I can think of is terroristic. And there seems to me to be something atypical about it.

There seems to have been only a single means of placing ^{that} the bomb in a car. It is not likely that a car that could be traced to the terrorists would have been used. It also is certain that the terrorists could identify themselves by identifying the car that was used. If this was done it was not announced by them or by any public authority. Each can have its own purposes - and I am not criticizing public authority for not announcing having heard from the real terrorists, if that happened, as it may well not have happened yet because that could serve the terroristic interest^s and purposes.

I'm surprised that no reporter seems to have asked of the FBI in particular whether it had identified the explosive used. From the residues I am pretty certain that by now they can have done that by spectrographic if not neutron activation analysis. Each requires a specimen of little more than post-stamp weight or perhaps only a millimeter in length. I think that by now they have identified not only the explosive used but its probable manufacture. The slightest variations in composition can identify the manufacture. This, however, can be quite misleading because ^{of} the enormous amount of US manufacture that was sold, to Ghadafi in particular.

The public record of terroristic bombings does indicate those who seem to have the largest available supplies of this kind of explosive, the Arabs. Witness Lebanon alone. While this does not mean that the bombing was by Arabs, which I do not regard as impossible, it can indicate that they provided the explosives to those who used them. I am not inclined to believe that this quantity was readily available from the manufacturers within this country and I've heard of no accounts of such quantities having been stolen.

Of all that seems to be unusual about this what seems to me to be the most unusual is that the bombers have kept their identification secret. Secret whether reported to public authority or not. If not there is a purpose, as there is, of course, in self-identification.

But I think the question why ~~Not~~ should be explored.

And that public authority can have a perfectly proper reason for not disclosing having

been informed. Each side can have in mind, for example, that while this is the first such bombing in the US, it may not be the last. I am inclined to believe this may be probable.

Why the bombers have not identified themselves to the public seems to defeat the usual purposes of terrorism so I think ~~it~~^{that} has a purpose. As identification also does.

With the ease in which cars can be parked without any inspection demonstrated by this bombing, early detection and prevention of the next is impossible unless the terrorists select a target like the Capitol area. But public buildings generally do not provide the kind of parking spaces those owned privately do.

What the next building may be involves the thinking and purposes of the bombers. We do not know what this is, not knowing who they are.

Of the public statements by public officials the only pointing of which I am aware is to the Balkans. Where there is, as best I can remember, no history of such ^{superbombs} terrorism and no reason to believe it is pertinent. But could it be a deliberate misdirection by some public authority or is it just an idle conjecture. If the former that has its purpose but we can only conjecture about it.

Thinking usually goes to motive, means and opportunity. While there may be many with the motive, means and opportunity tend to limit unless it was a contracted job. If it were, that would mean those who had the job contracted had considerable money available some time back, especially if the explosive had to be imported.

For all their terrorism within the US the Cubans have never used any large quantity of explosives. If they can be ruled out and if the explosives were not readily available within the US, how many sources could there have been? And is any more likely than an Arab source? Perhaps Muslim rather than Arab to include Iran and Pakistan, etc., as possible sources.

In addressing motive, is there any group that today has a stronger motive than HAMAS? Which is determined to prevent any Middle East negotiation of any settlement there at all.

There may be I do not know of any with a stronger motive or more determined.

Remember the car bombings of the Marines' barracks and the US embassy in Lebanon?

They have the explosives available to them and they have the demonstrated capability to use them and a history of doing it successfully.

Can they have a purpose in not identifying themselves publicly? Can pressuring the US government be one? I think this is possible.

While I do not know how long it can take to be prepared to pull this kind of job off, dating the decision to do it to the election does not seem to me to be unreasonable as a conjecture or as a factor in trying to think this matter through. And so that it could be done so successfully, in itself an added pressure, with the ease with which it was done a weighty factor. It means it can be done with that ease again and again, in New York or in any major US city. And in a similar building or building complex, too.

With all the added security to such places as the White House not any factor at all in prevention.

I am not saying that this was a HAMAS job. I am saying it may have been.

And that there is no reason to believe that it is the last of them.

I believe that all the explosives used in such bombings left a closed to unique if not a unique signature that was established by scientific examination of their residues. I believe that all agencies, like the FBI here, Scotland Yard and the Israeli police have catalogues of these signatures not made public. But all are available to, for example, the FBI. Which has been so silent in this one. Not improperly, I add. They should be now.

There can be, perhaps I should say there are good reason for the government not to make public all its knows. I do not intend any criticism of any government or government agency in this.

Yet at the same time, particularly because the purposes of terrorism are political, there comes a time when in a society like ours more should be publicly known. I think the very beginning is not necessarily such a time.

It may even be that if pointing at the Balkans is a misdirection it also is proper in terms of what government knows or has reason to believe.

Reporters have other responsibilities. When what is known is not reported history demonstrates that the result can be disaster. Of the illustrations that come to mind is not advance knowledge of the coming Bay of Pigs disaster a good example?

All the reprotng of which I am aware is superficial. It addressed some public curiosity about casualties and bravery but it has not asked the right questions or sought any basic answers.

And there is, as with the Bay of Pigs again, always the possibility if not the probability of disaster resulting from public ignorance.

I do not mean to be simplistic in this. If this extraordinary and successful bombing was intended as blackmail is it right in a society like ours for that blackmail to be in secret or to succeed or fail in secret? If it succeeds that dominates policy and actions and if it fails it invites other such terrorism. Neither the questions nor the answers are simple or uncomplicated. This can be an extraordinarily momentous moment.

But where the press surrenders its independence we have a history of suffering the greater disasters. The Post and the Times both knew the Bay of Pigs was coming and both suppressed it at government importuning. Reporting I think could, more likely would have prevented that disaster. There are others that may have had worse consequences but this one is easy to understand and both papers made belated admissions.

It is all very complicated and decisions are very burdensome and difficult for the press. But I am old-fashioned in my beliefs about its primary responsibility and I do not see that being met or intended to be met in the reporting of this sensational New York terroristic success. Lil is still asleep but I'm sure she also ends her best wishes.

Howdy

What I regard as incorrect official thinking^{is} as two authorities are quoted in today's Post. The ATF spokesman says the car bomb is "associated with terrorists cells, which suggests a sophisticated international organization. In fact a car bomb is very unsophisticated, very unskilled method of bombings ... the opposite of sophisticated." The chief engineer of the NY Port authority asks, "If you were a real terrorist, would you want to take out [a building's] systems or people? Fasullo said 'if they had put ~~the~~ it in the lobby, they would have killed 100 people with flying ~~in~~ glass.'"

Neither statement addresses the possible intents of the bombers and I think neither reflects any real understanding of what was involved or intended.

A pen is more sophisticated than a baseball bat but would you play ball with a pen?

And does it not mean that when a smaller bomb was not placed in the lobby, the real intent was not to kill as many people as possible? A very large bomb was used because that was necessary to the purposes of those who bombed and the bomb was not in the lobby because placing it there did not serve their purposes.

If these are reflections of real official thinking officialdom is not in contact with reality and is not thinking in any way that can help solve the crime or protect in the future.

Of course it is possible that those with a perhaps correct understanding did not want to speak on the record and that they are not concerned about misleading the people.

Until there is some dependable determination of objectives any talk about sophistication or the lack of it is irrelevant.

The Post I think reports that examination determined that the residues are not of plastic explosives. This can mean that what was used was readily available, like dynamite. But that does not have to mean that it was not by foreign terrorists. They could have used it for a number of reasons one of which could be to misdirect thinking and inquiry because it can be interpreted to pointing at domestic origin.

As I indicate on page 2, this has to be regarded as the opposite of what Cuomo said, as the beginning of radical changes in this country if there is a real terrorism campaign. The case has just been established, with some sophistication the center of finance the target.