

# The 1993 World Trade Center Bombing: Decoys, Aliases and NeoConspiracy Theories

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*Like so many major terrorist attacks, the World Trade Center (WTC) bombing of February 1993 occurred shortly after the US presidential election. The incoming Bill Clinton was confronted with a new menace: Islamic terror had for the first time carried out a major strike on US soil. The first new president after the end of the Cold War and the previous president's announcement of a 'new world order' was within weeks given a stark reminder that with the Soviet Union out of the way the US still faced a clear and present danger.*

Of course, I speak rhetorically. Six people died in the blast, and while it was tragic for their bereaved families and painful for the over 1000 people injured, the bark was worse than the bite in this attack. The bomb built by Ramzi Yousef shocked many, and managed to destroy a surprisingly large amount of the underground parking garage at the WTC, but given that the idea was to topple one tower into the other potentially killing 250,000 people, it was a miserable failure. Nonetheless, the bombing remains the subject of much conjecture, some well evidenced and some not, and served to implant the idea in the American and Western consciousness of Islamic terrorists attacking the WTC.

## The Blind Sheikh

The first major port of call in any investigation of the bombing, or telling of the story, is the Blind Sheikh, Omar Abdel Rahman. He was the leader of the Egyptian Islamic Group (IG, or al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya), at the time perhaps the largest overtly militant Islamic group in the country. The crackdown following the assassination of Anwar Sadat had produced in typically polarising fashion a backlash in favour of Islamic radicalism. That this happened at the same time as the extremely well-funded NATO effort to use radical Islam as a weapon against the Soviet Union is no coincidence.

Towards the end of the 1980s, as the Soviet-Afghan war was coming to its inevitable conclusion, the Blind Sheikh escaped from house arrest in Egypt and paid several visits to the US. Specifically, he fostered a following at the Al-Kifah Refugee Centre at the Al Farooq mosque in New York. Al-Kifah was the local branch of the Maktab Al-Khidamat or Services Office for the Mujahideen in Afghanistan, and was central to the process by which young men were recruited, moved around the world for training and ultimately deployed against the Soviets.

The CIA has remained tight-lipped about their involvement in Al-Kifah but given the timing of its development, its location and the fact that their agents posing as consular officials

arranged the visas that allowed the Blind Sheikh to enter the US, it is obvious that they were at the least happy about Rahman's growing influence there. In April and May 1989 US officials secretly met with followers of the Blind Sheikh in Egypt, including a lawyer representing the group. The cables recording these meetings were signed by Frank Wisner — the US ambassador to Egypt and the son of the veteran of CIA black ops. A year later the Blind Sheikh moved to New York permanently.

Six months after that El Sayyid Nosair, a follower of Rahman, assassinated prominent rabbi Meir Kahane, founder of the Jewish Defence League and a former FBI informant. A few weeks later the State Department revoked all of the Blind Sheikh's visas, but nothing else happened to him. Nosair was arrested but the investigation didn't reach into the question of what was going on at the Al-Kifah. Rahman was never arrested or deported.

A couple of months later the Emir of the Farooq mosque Mustafa Shalabi was murdered, almost 2 years to the day prior to the WTC bombing. Rahman effectively took over the mosque and the Al-Kifah center at that point. Meanwhile, notorious triple agent Ali Mohamed had been providing training sessions in intelligence and paramilitary operations to those who frequented the mosque, including Nosair. He also trained virtually the entire group involved in and ultimately convicted for the WTC bombing.

### **The Decoy**

It is at this point in the story that the alternative explanations of the bombing focus on one Emad Salem — a former Egyptian army officer recruited as an informant by the FBI. He had infiltrated the Al-Kifah and the circle around the Blind Sheikh and was provided regular intelligence on what they were doing. However, what almost every alternative theory about WTC93 gets wrong is that they claim Salem built the bomb that was used, usually based on a few seconds of audio of Salem talking to one of his FBI handlers, John Anticev.

In reality, Salem was fired by the FBI in bizarre circumstances in the summer of 1992. He didn't build the bomb - terrorists do not build a bomb and then wait around for six months before using it. Exactly why Salem was fired is not clear, but when his original handler Nancy Floyd started asking questions the FBI leaked stories to the press that she was sleeping with Salem and ultimately subjected her to a career-damaging internal affairs investigation. As a result, six months before the bombing the FBI lost their eyes and ears inside the Blind Sheikh's group.

After the bombing, Salem was re-recruited by the FBI to infiltrate the Al-Kifah once more, which he did. At that point he was paid a large sum of money to act as a sting operator, encouraging the Blind Sheikh to make incriminating statements that Salem secretly recorded, and encouraging Rahman's followers to develop plans for terrorists attacks that they were then arrested for, and prosecuted and convicted. The recordings of Salem talking with Anticev come from this period, spring-summer 1993. When the FBI swooped in the summer of '93, they arrested the Blind Sheikh and most of the group around him, and Salem's evidence became the basis of the prosecution case.

At this point the State Department, having revoked the Blind Sheikh's visas 2 1/2 years earlier in late 1990 but done nothing to him in the meantime, carried out a Office of the Inspector General (OIG) investigation of the decision to grant him the visas in the first place. This involved trying to see the files in Cairo from the period when CIA agents were

granting the visas, but the papertrail from the State Department is heavily redacted and it appears the 1993 OIG investigation never actually got to see the Cairo files. Ultimately the OIG concluded that they didn't know whether the decisions to grant the visas was correct because they couldn't definitely say what was known at the time. No one got blamed, everyone kept their jobs, it was business as usual.

With Salem functioning as something of a decoy in this story, the question remains: who did build the bomb used in the WTC?

### **A.K.A.**

According to the official story, and his own extended confession, and much of the evidence, the real bomb-maker was Ramzi Yousef, born Abdul Basit but also known as Dr Paul Vijay, Dr Adel Sabah, Muhammad Azan, Rashid Rashid, Kamal Ibrahim among many other pseudonyms. Ramzi arrived in New York in September 1992, following six months training in Afghanistan in explosives. He conveniently turned up just after Emad Salem had been removed from watching the Al-Kifah. Trained in Britain in electrical engineering, Yousef was smart and capable and found in the Al-Kifah a willing reception committee for his plan to blow up something in New York.



That said, it wasn't plain sailing. In particular, Mohammed Salameh (convicted in the first of the three WTC trials) was a complete moron, managing to crash a car loaded with chemicals for making the bomb which resulted in Yousef ending up in hospital. He also forgot to give Yousef the planned early morning wake-up call on the day of the bombing. Nonetheless, this relatively ragtag group who were inspired by CIA asset the Blind Sheikh and trained by triple agent Ali Mohamed managed to pull off the bombing.

However, that is far from the end of the story. For one thing the damage to the WTC was considerable — several floors were partly destroyed, including a 5000 square foot hole on one floor. This suggests that the truck bomb may not have been the only explosive used at the WTC, that as in Oklahoma City there is a case for the prosecution case being true but being only part of the story. What is certain is that there was no trace of the main explosive charge found in the rubble of the WTC explosion, and that the FBI explosives examiner David Williams essentially guessed at what explosive was used, and then modified his guesses to fit the prosecution evidence, and he repeatedly gave untrue testimony against Salameh et al in the 1994 trial.

Due to the whistle blowing efforts of Fred Whitehurst the Department of Justice OIG carried out an investigation into the crime lab, including Williams role in the WTC investigation which concluded that, 'Williams gave inaccurate and incomplete testimony and testified to invalid opinions that appear tailored to the most incriminating result.' While not all of Whitehurst's complaints were upheld, it does put a few cracks in the official WTC bombing story.

For another, who was Ramzi Yousef? This international man of mystery was certainly not particularly religious, and enjoyed B-girls and brothels on his travels around the world. He may well have been trained by Ali Mohamed, who according to multiple testimonies from trainees was in the same area of Afghanistan as Yousef for much of 1992. When Yousef left New York on the evening of the WTC bombing he spent the next two years

on the run from the FBI, travelling all over Asia carrying out various acts of terrorism before being brought to ground in February 1995. How did he manage this?

It appears he had help from the ISI. Simon Reeve's remarkably prescient and accurate book *The New Jackals*, based on an extraordinary degree of access to the security services around the case only a year or two after Yousef had been convicted, records several instances of this. When Yousef landed in Pakistan in May 1992 his fake Iraqi passport had the wrong seal on the visa, and yet he was waived through. Similarly, when he and Ahmed Ajaj first entered the US on badly faked passports, Ajaj was arrested but Yousef was not, despite it being clear they were travelling together. When Yousef's Pakistani immigration records were checked as part of the WTC investigation, much of the paperwork had disappeared. The implication is that someone was clearing a path for him.

### **NeoConspiracy Theories**

Another misdirection in this story is the theory propounded by NeoConservative mouthpiece Laurie Mylroie, who claimed that Yousef was in fact an Iraqi spy. Prior to the Iraq invasion of Kuwait, Yousef (then known as Abdul Basit) and his family lived in Kuwait, though ethnically they were Baluchi. This is why another of Yousef's pseudonyms, given to the FBI when he signed a waiver of his miranda rights, was Adam Baloch. Due to discrepancies in official records on Yousef/Basit, Mylroie claimed that the invading Iraqi army killed Basit and his family and replaced him with a spy using the Basit/Yousef identity. Who was between 4 and 6 inches taller and has never mentioned anything about being an Iraqi secret agent even though he's now languishing in solitary confinement serving prison sentences amounting to hundreds of years and therefore has nothing to lose.

Mylroie has been widely criticised for this rather ridiculous theory, but she was still hired in 2005 to write a History of Al Qaeda for the Pentagon, and paid \$75,000 for her trouble. She once again put forth the theory that Iraq and Al Qaeda were closely related, that Yousef was an Iraqi spy, that Iraq bombed the WTC. The problem was that following the NATO invasion of Iraq in 2003 a lot of Iraqi government files were seized, and they were published alongside two Pentagon studies in 2006-2008.

One file in particular is an audio recording and a transcript of a meeting between Saddam and his ministers where they discuss the WTC bombing. There was no mention of Yousef, no hint of Iraqi involvement in the attack, nothing that would substantiate Mylroie's daft and misleading allegations, and quite a lot that contradicts her. For one thing, one of the conspirators named Abdul Yasin fled to Iraq after the bombing but he was arrested by the Iraq authorities in 1994 and held until at least 2002, though he has not been heard from since then.

In the meeting, Saddam expressed how important it was that Yasin remain alive in custody, and not be killed or commit suicide. Hussein did try to use Yasin as a bargaining chip with the Americans, but this always failed. Saddam also discussed how it was possible that the American, Israeli or Saudi governments were really behind the WTC blast, and how the Iraq government should find ways to exploit the bombing through propaganda. It was a remarkably explicit conversation, and yet nothing in any way backed up Mylroie's contentions.

### **So what the hell happened?**

With this concrete example of the story (or legend) of Ramzi Yousef being used to bolster a politically useful myth we are left to wonder what else in his story is not true. After his arrest he provided extensive confessions, all of which fits in with most of the prosecution case against the WTC accused. He even had a proffer session, recorded in an FBI 302, with the State's Attorney's office in New York where he outlined how he built and delivered the bomb. It seems that he did actually bomb the WTC, though exactly why he did that, and why those who helped him did so remains something of a mystery.

That the WTC bombing in 1993 has been used to substantiate the Al Qaeda myth, and in particular the Iraq-Al Qaeda fantasy, does show that there is a degree of spook theatre to all of this. The FBI were blindsided for reasons that have never been adequately explained, in largely the same way as happened in the run up to 9/11. Whatismore, the 9/11 Commission's records at the National Archives are woefully incomplete on the subject of the Blind Sheikh, with over 200 pages of CIA and State Department material withdrawn for National Security reasons. The 9/11 Commission barely even acknowledged Ali Mohamed's existence, let alone the importance of a triple agent who was close friends with Ayman Zawahiri and was so trusted by Bin Laden that he trained Osama's bodyguards.

With a cover-up now lasting 20 years (20 years tomorrow at the time of writing) it is difficult to know exactly what happened and why the WTC was bombed in February 1993. Nonetheless there is abundant material available on the case, which I have sought to whittle down to the key source material in the [WTC93 Document Collection](#), a free e-book comprising nearly 250 pages of material and featuring an introduction explaining the relevance of each document. There is no smoking gun, though it is interesting that in recent days a story has hit the headlines that Ramzi Yousef is suing for an explanation of why he is still subject to 'special administration measures', such as not being allowed to communicate with other people. Unsurprisingly the news coverage has portrayed Yousef solely as an inhuman bomber who deserves to be treated inhumanely and has ignored the bigger picture, and maybe that was the point all along.

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