

# FBI Terror Expertise Papers to Come Out

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WASHINGTON -- Lawyers for a once-decorated terror-fighting FBI agent will make public hundreds of pages of testimony from the bureau's top brass declaring that terrorism expertise has been given little weight in promoting agents since the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks.

The evidence gathered during Agent Bassem Youssef's ongoing lawsuit against the FBI includes statements from the agency's director, Robert Mueller, and many of his top supervisors on how little Middle Eastern experience, Arabic language skills or formal anti-terrorism training has played in promotion decisions.

The testimony, some of which was reported by The Associated Press in 2005, is being posted Wednesday to a Web site for the public to see. It includes:

Mueller defending the 2003 appointment of agent Gary Bald to the top terror-fighting job on grounds that he was qualified because he ran the Baltimore office when it investigated the 2002 Washington-area sniper shootings.

"He had the sniper case, which I don't know whether it was actually documented as a domestic terrorism program, but certainly it could fall under the category of domestic terrorism. So running the office gave him some exposure to terrorism matters," Mueller testified.

Bald, who retired earlier this year, was asked about his grasp of Middle Eastern culture and history, and testified: "I wish that I had it. It would be nice."

The agent assigned to oversee the Sept. 11 investigation at the Pentagon acknowledged she had no formal terrorism background. "I do not have a terrorism background myself," agent Ellen Knowlton testified.

John Lewis, a deputy assistant director for counterterrorism, testified that there was no difference in recruiting an informant to infiltrate a white supremacist group or al-Qaida. "It doesn't make any difference whether somebody's from the Middle East or a white supremacist or from Australia," he said.

Youssef, the agent suing the bureau, alleges he was passed over for several promotions that could have better utilized his skills in the war on terror. The FBI denies discriminating against him.

Youssef's lawyer said Tuesday he was making the depositions public so Americans can see the FBI answers for themselves. "The American public has a right to know what really happened inside the FBI counterterrorism division after Sept. 11," attorney Stephen Kohn said.

The documents are to be posted Wednesday to [http://www.whistleblowers.org/html/inside\\_the\\_fbi.html](http://www.whistleblowers.org/html/inside_the_fbi.html)

An FBI spokesman did not immediately return a call seeking comment Tuesday. In the past, the FBI has declined to discuss the Youssef litigation but has said the agency has fundamentally reshaped itself to ensure the field agents on the ground who work the cases have the necessary skills, training and background for fighting terrorism. It has noted it hired or redeployed more than 1,000 agents to counterterrorism and hired an additional 1,200 intelligence analysts and linguists.

Youssef was credited with improving relations with Saudi Arabia during the late 1990s as the threat from al-Qaida leader Osama bin Laden grew and the bureau struggled to solve the case of the 1996

Khobar Towers bombing. He received special awards for his performance.

But after Sept. 11, Youssef repeatedly was passed over for top-level headquarters jobs in terrorism. Instead, he was offered same-rank positions in budgeting or exploiting intelligence from terrorism documents.

Louis Freeh, the former FBI director who left that job three months before the terrorist attacks, testified he believed Youssef should have gotten an important terror-fighting job in the post-Sept. 11 era

And one FBI supervisor, just-retired agent Paul Vick, testified he was concerned that Youssef's skills weren't utilized after Sept. 11 and that some colleagues had mistaken him for another agent who was Muslim and had refused certain work assignments on religious beliefs.

Youssef is Christian and never refused any assignments, his lawyer said.

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On the Net:

FBI: <http://www.fbi.gov/>

Justice Department: <http://www.usdoj.gov/>

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