

Somali-Americans subjected to first Obama “terror” prosecution

Bill Van Auken
16 July 2009

The US Justice Department unsealed an indictment in Minneapolis Monday against two young Somali-Americans in what is the latest in a long line of cases charging defendants with “material support” for terrorism.

This case bears particular scrutiny in that it is the first major terror-related prosecution initiated under the Obama administration.

While most previous cases have involved hapless individuals lured into FBI-concocted “terror plots” by government agent provocateurs, Federal prosecutors are portraying this case as of a different caliber, involving “homegrown” jihadists, radicalized in the US itself. They suggest that it is an indication of how the supposedly long arm of al Qaeda can reach into the American Midwest.

Charged in the indictment are Abdifatah Yusuf Isse, 25, and Salah Osman Ahmed, 26. Court documents indicate that Isse pleaded guilty months ago and has been cooperating with the FBI investigation.

They were two of an estimated 20 young Somali-American men from the Minneapolis area who are described as “missing.” Federal investigators have charged that they returned to their families’ homeland to join a group called the Al Shabaab, which is Arabic for “youth.” The government has portrayed the organization as the Somali branch of Al Qaeda.

Relatives of some of those who returned have denied that they went back to fight, insisting that they were visiting family members in Somalia.

The indictments were preceded by an FBI dragnet in the Twin Cities area of Minnesota, with scores of Somali-Americans interrogated and three money transfer businesses serving local Somalis raided by government agents. Similar aggressive tactics are being

employed in Somali communities elsewhere, including in Atlanta, Georgia.

The national media has picked up the story, highlighting it as an ominous indication of continuing threats of terrorism in the United States.

The *New York Times*, which published a three-page feature on the Minnesota Somali-Americans just one day before the indictment was released, attributed the Somali-American’s actions to “the vulnerability of Muslim immigrants in the United States to the lure of militant Islam.” It said that they demonstrated “how a far-flung jihadist movement found a foothold in America’s heartland.”

Acting as a virtual press agent for the Justice Department and the FBI, the *Times* described the case as the “most significant domestic terrorism investigation since Sept. 11.”

Largely glossed over in the coverage of the case are the concrete circumstances that apparently prompted a number of young men, who had spent most of their lives in the US, to return to fight in their native land.

Relatively little has been revealed about the concrete charges and evidence against the two indicted men—a federal judge ordered the case sealed on Wednesday, apparently at the request of the government, and defense lawyers have made no comments. But it is clear that it was the conditions that prevailed in Somalia—not some ubiquitous “lure of militant Islam” that prompted the politicization of a number of young Somali-Americans in Minnesota and elsewhere.

In December 2006, the Ethiopian army, accompanied by US Special Forces troops, invaded Somalia to overturn the government formed by the Islamic Courts Union movement, which had brought the country a measure of social peace and economic revival for the first time in 15 years.

This act of US-sponsored “regime change” was accompanied by widespread carnage and brutality.

Testimony given to the House Foreign Affairs committee by Human Rights Watch in October 2007, around the time that the Minnesotan Somalis began returning to their homeland, gives an indication of the horrific conditions created by the US-engineered intervention.

The report spoke of the indiscriminate Ethiopian shelling of the Somali capital of Mogadishu, “a city where hundreds have died and up to 400,000 people were displaced from the past six months of intense violence.”

Ethiopian troops, the report said, had “violated the laws of war by widely and indiscriminately bombarding highly populated areas of Mogadishu with rockets, mortars and artillery. Its troops on several occasions specifically targeted hospitals and looted them of desperately needed medical equipment.” It also cited “documented cases of Ethiopian forces deliberately shooting and summarily executing civilians.”

As a result, it said, “Tens of thousands of displaced people are living in desperate circumstances without sufficient food, water, shelter or medical supplies, easy prey to extortion and abuse by the warring parties.”

It cited even more horrific crimes in the Ogaden, part of the Somali region of Ethiopia, reporting “many killings by the Ethiopian forces; the burning of villages; widespread sexual violence; the arbitrary detention and torture of thousands in military custody; denial of access to wells; confiscation of livestock and hostage-taking to compel families to turn in family members suspected of [resistance].”

During the same period, the US military carried out missile attacks on Somalia that left large numbers of civilians dead.

It was these crimes, in which the Ethiopian military was acting as Washington’s proxy, that prompted at least some Somali-American youth to go back to their homeland, apparently to defend those under attack.

The Al Shabaab group was the most prominent in organizing resistance to foreign occupation. Moreover, when the youth from Minnesota allegedly became involved with it, Al Shabaab was not classified by the US government as a “terrorist organization.” That designation came only in March 2008.

The portrayal of Al Shabaab as a Somali branch of al

Qaeda is a gross distortion. It has been implicated in no attacks or threats of attack on American targets, either in the US or elsewhere. Its Islamist ideology notwithstanding, the organization was justifiably seen by Somalis as a movement of national resistance to foreign occupation.

The definition of such resistance as “terrorism” has a long and shameful history bound up with the crimes of European colonialism in Africa. These crimes are now being repeated by US imperialism in Somalia as in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere. The violence and death unleashed by US militarism on the peoples of these countries constitute the real acts of terrorism.

The frame-up of these young Somali-Americans is an indication that the Obama administration, like its predecessor, is seeking to terrorize the American people with manufactured terror threats in order to suppress opposition to policies of aggressive war abroad and attacks on democratic rights at home.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact