

Portland teen ensnared in FBI sting operation pleads not guilty

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A 19-year-old Oregon youth, Mohamed Osman Mohamud, pleaded not guilty in federal court to terrorism charges based on FBI allegations that he intended to detonate bombs at a Portland Christmas-tree lighting ceremony on Friday.

There was no real terror threat. According to both the government and Mohamud's defense lawyers, the youth was recruited by undercover FBI agents posing as Islamists, supplied with phony bombs and a vehicle, and encouraged to detonate them. The government alleges that Mohamud attempted to carry out the false terror attack of his own accord.

Mohamud's defense lawyers argue, with considerable justification, that the FBI perpetrated a frame-up on a vulnerable youth.

The FBI supplied six 55-gallon drums of fuel, the vehicle, and a phony bomb igniter kit that involved Mohamud, who is a naturalized US citizen of Somalian birth, dialing a cell phone to set off the bomb during the lighting ceremony in Portland's Pioneer Courthouse Square. It is his alleged attempt to dial this number that is the government's central evidence for its sole charge of attempting to deploy weapons of mass destruction. Agents will also present recorded conversations with Mohamud in which he expressed his desire to kill US civilians.

Mohamud's defense attorneys contend he is the victim of entrapment, noting that he was recruited and then groomed for six months by "quite sophisticated government agents" for his role in the faux bomb threat.

"The information released by the government raises significant concerns about the government manufacturing crime—or entrapment. The affidavit reveals the government agents suggested key actions to this teenager, spent thousands of dollars on him,

specified components, drove Mr. Mohamud around, and were instrumental in setting up Friday's events," Mohamud's public defenders wrote in a statement to the press.

Defense lawyers have also focused on the FBI's dubious claim that it lost recordings of its first meeting with Mohamud due to malfunctioning equipment. The FBI alleges it established contact with Mohamud after he attempted to contact jihadists in Pakistan in 2009, although he was allegedly first reported to the FBI by his father, an engineer with computer hardware giant Intel. There is no evidence to suggest he was in direct contact with terrorists.

"In the cases involving potential entrapment, it's the initial meeting that matters," Mohamud's public defender Stephen Sady argued. Judge John Acosta agreed, ordering the FBI to preserve the recording equipment used for the case.

US Attorney General Eric Holder has personally intervened in the case, attempting to stir up public fear. On Monday, Holder claimed that Mohamud decided to dial up the detonator in spite of being "told that children—children—were potentially going to be harmed."

Such hysterics raise the risk of violence against Muslims, Africans, Middle Easterners, and South Asians. Already on Monday an Islamic center in Corvallis, Oregon was burned in what police said is likely a case of arson, after the media "revealed" that Mohamud prayed at the center while he briefly attended Oregon State University. He left the university in October, also presumably at the behest of FBI agents.

After the attack on the Islamic center in Corvallis, police surveillance against possible attacks on mosques in Portland has been raised.

Public defender Stephen Sady also criticized the

FBI's decision to turn the affidavit of Mohamud's arrest into a "press release" within one hour of its production on Friday. "The arrest is obviously timed for maximum impact and maximum publicity," Sady said.

Indeed, the sort of FBI counter-terrorism sting has come to follow a well-worn pattern that has nothing to do with "keeping Americans safe" and everything to do with keeping the public in a state of fear, the better to justify police state measures in the US and wars abroad. In particular, this most recent arrest comes amidst growing public outrage over new airline screening methods.

Unsuspecting Muslim men—generally poor, young, or mentally impaired—are recruited by FBI agents posing as Islamic extremists. (In the case of the recent Washington DC subway bomb plot, the individual arrested—Farooque Ahmed—turned out to have been the only would-be terrorist in a cell otherwise entirely comprised of agents.) It is highly doubtful that these men would have engaged in terrorist activities were it not for this "recruitment" and the coordination of the FBI, which supplies all the material for the attack and facilitates the would-be perpetrators until the moment of their arrests, which are invariably made with sensational media coverage about the FBI "breaking up terror rings." This is, in every case, coupled with assurances that "the public was never in danger," demonstrating that these "crimes" have been entirely arranged by the FBI.

Nonetheless, courts have again and again ruled in favor of the government, rejecting defense attorneys' claims of entrapment.

One interesting element of the Mohamud case is that it has been revealed the Portland police were purposefully kept in the dark over the FBI operation, most likely because the city had opted out of the Joint Terrorism Task Force, a policing operation that subsumes within its broad parameters all federal, state, and local policing agencies. Portland Mayor Sam Adams has already indicated Portland will consider reentering the Task Force.

By most accounts Mohamud seems an unlikely candidate for a terrorist mastermind. Family and friends describe him as "a typical college kid who liked to drink, smoke and play video games," according to one local press account.

"I do want to urge everybody that everyone is innocent until proven guilty," said family friend Saba Ahmed outside Mohamud's federal court appearance Monday. "The guy has been framed really badly."

Judge Acosta tentatively established February 1 as the start of the jury trial.



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