

Capitol Hill terror suspect ensnared by US intelligence agencies

Tom Carter
20 February 2012

On Friday Amine El Khalifi was arrested on charges of attempting to carry out a suicide bombing on Capitol Hill in Washington, DC. The circumstances of his arrest immediately raise suspicions that he was the target of entrapment by US intelligence and law enforcement agencies.

El Khalifi was arrested in a parking lot near Capitol Hill with what he believed were an explosive vest and a submachine gun. Both items, which were actually inoperable dummies, had just been given to him by undercover government agents who had driven him to the scene and given him instructions. El Khalifi apparently believed he was part of an Al Qaeda terrorist cell, but the individuals he thought were his Al Qaeda companions were in fact working for the US government.

Because the explosive vest was a fake, El Khalifi “posed no threat to the public,” Justice Department spokesman Dean Boyd said Friday. Nevertheless, the Obama administration went out of its way to characterize the arrest as a “foiled terror plot” and a national victory in the “war on terror.”

Administration officials presented the case as yet another justification for the authoritarian measures enacted in the name of “homeland security” under President Barack Obama and his predecessor, George W. Bush.

“Today’s case underscores the continuing threat we face from homegrown violent extremists,” Assistant Attorney General Lisa Monaco told the *Washington Times* Friday. “Thanks to a coordinated law enforcement effort, El Khalifi’s alleged plot was thwarted before anyone was harmed.”

From the outset, the El Khalifi case is remarkable for the disproportion between the scale of the resources dedicated to the case and the threat posed by the

suspect. Agents from the FBI, Capitol Police, and Joint Terrorism Task Force (JTTF) all collaborated in the elaborate scheme to monitor a solitary individual with no criminal history, and with no connection to any terrorist groups or foreign governments.

El Khalifi, 28, was born in Morocco and emigrated to the United States in 1999. He came on a tourist visa, and lived as an undocumented immigrant in Florida and Virginia, working odd jobs. He had no criminal record outside of minor marijuana and traffic-related infractions.

According to the criminal complaint filed in the case, government agents began following El Khalifi in January 2011 after he attended a private gathering at an apartment also attended by one or more JTTF informants (listed in the complaint as “confidential human sources”).

During that gathering, an unnamed individual said: “The war on terror is a war on Muslims,” and displayed an AK-47 rifle and two revolvers. Government agents apparently targeted El Khalifi because he responded positively to this statement.

Between January 2011 and February of this year, El Khalifi was under constant surveillance. He had extended interactions with undercover agents who went by the names “Hussein” and “Yusuf.” “Yusuf” posed as an Al Qaeda ringleader, while “Hussein” pretended to be El Khalifi’s friend, driving him to meetings with “Yusuf” and suggesting various terrorist plots to him.

Many details regarding the case, including the particulars of El Khalifi’s interactions with the undercover operatives, have yet to emerge, and important questions remain unanswered.

First of all, had government agents not become involved, would El Khalifi ever have attempted to hurt anyone? So far, no evidence is available that he would

have. Instead, government agents appear to have had months of conversations with El Khalifi in which he was told that his religion required his participation in the plot. Agents then supplied him with the (inoperable) weapons, and even drove him to the site where the attack was supposed to take place.

Further, as El Khalifi was an undocumented immigrant, it is unclear why government agents spent 13 months setting up an intricate and expensive probe, when they could simply have simply deported him. In other words, was El Khalifi permitted, if not pushed, to go forward with the plot?

It goes without saying that cases such as the one involving El Khalifi raise serious questions of democratic rights. Networks of paid informants, indefinite and persistent surveillance of people who have committed no crimes, undercover agents pretending to be friends and advisers—these are the methods of a police state.

In an earlier period, a “sting” operation of this kind would have been considered an illegal form of entrapment. It is also worth noting that El Khalifi initially came under scrutiny for statements he made at a private gathering that fell entirely within the protections of First Amendment free speech.

Federal prosecutors have charged El Khalifi with “attempting to use a weapon of mass destruction against federal property.” He faces life in prison.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact