US detains witness in FBI killing of Ibragim Todashev

Andrea Peters
11 July 2013

Amid a continuing cover-up of the FBI killing of Ibragim Todashev, US immigration officials are detaining Tatiana Gruzdeva, Todashev's roommate, and preparing to deport her from the country on charges of overstaying her visa. Civil liberties groups believe Gruzdeva has valuable information about Todashev's interactions with the FBI.

Todashev, an acquaintance of suspected Boston Marathon bomber Tamerlan Tsarnaev, was allegedly a key witness in the bombing. He was shot and killed by an FBI agent on May 22, after being interrogated in his apartment for many hours by investigators. He had been been repeatedly questioned in the days and weeks before his death.

There has been no official investigation into Todashev's murder, though government officials and media sources gave wildly conflicting accounts. Initially, officials cited in the press claimed that the 27-year-old "went crazy," lunging at officers with a knife. This then became a "samurai sword," a "metal pole," and even a "broomstick." Other sources have since reported that Todashev was unarmed when he was killed.

It also remains unclear as to who was even in the room at the time of his death, with *Washington Post* and *New York Times* accounts citing conflicting official reports.

Press reports are now circulating that just prior to his death, Todashev was preparing to sign a statement implicating himself and Tamerlan Tsarnaev in a multiple homicide in Waltham, Massachusetts in 2011. The murder evidently involved bodies found with their throats cut and covered in marijuana. Todashev's ex-wife and father firmly deny that he could have been involved in the murders, insisting that he stayed away from drugs.

Washington continues to work to silence others who might have information about Todashev's death and his relationship with the FBI. In mid-May, the young man's roommate, Tatiana Gruzdeva, a Russian national born in Moldova who was studying in the US, was detained by immigration officials.

Gruzdeva was imprisoned and slated for deportation on July 1, based on claims that she overstayed her visa. Her "voluntary departure" has now inexplicably been pushed back by 30 days, with Gruzdeva remaining in custody.

She was picked up by authorities a few days before Todashev's arrest, shortly after civil liberties groups contacted her, believing that she could provide information about the FBI's dealings with Todashev before his murder. The Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), which has called for an independent investigation into Todashev's death, believes that her detention and deportation are intended to prevent Gruzdeva from speaking publicly about the case.

Executive Director of CAIR's Tampa, Florida office Hassan Shibly told the *World Socialist Web Site*, "There is a lot of mystery around the detention. There appears to be some sort of cover-up going on."

Shibly pointed out that the onus is on the government to explain its actions. Immigration court officials working under the direction of the Department of Justice, which also oversees the FBI, have refused to comment on Gruzdeva's case, citing privacy laws.

According to Shibly, there are reports that the FBI was harassing Todashev's friends in the weeks leading up to his murder, threatening them with the loss of their green cards if they did not spy on Islamic establishments in the area and provide other information. CAIR believes that Gruzdeva can "shed light on these issues."

© World Socialist Web Site

Shibly also stated that CAIR's investigation into Todashev's killing and an independent analysis of forensic evidence established that Todashev was unarmed at the time of his death, lying on the ground. "This in and of itself is disturbing," Shibly noted.

" *At best* ," he stated, "the FBI did an incompetent job."

The refusal of officials to provide a credible explanation of Todashev's killing or a justification for Gruzdeva's detention reeks of a cover-up. Rather than make critical testimony publicly available, the state is killing and locking up witnesses in a murder case bound up with a major terror bombing that led to an extraordinary lockdown of a major US city.

This makes all the more troubling the evidence of numerous connections between US intelligence officials and the alleged perpetrators of the Boston bombings.

Tamerlan Tsarnaev was a known quantity to the US intelligence community years before the Boston Marathon bombing. In 2011, the Kremlin alerted US officials to concerns about Tsarnaev's links to Chechen jihadists. Nonetheless, he was able to move freely across the US border, visiting Russia, including regions in the country with active Islamic separatist movements.

According to his family, Tamerlan was repeatedly visited by the FBI for several years. His mother said that Tamerlan was "controlled by the FBI for three to five years" before the bombing.

The Tsarnaev brothers' uncle, Ruslan Tsarni, founded a group called the Congress of Chechen International Organizations, which helped supply Islamic insurgents in Chechnya with mine resistant boots. Tsarni was married to the daughter of Graham Fuller, the one-time vice chairman of the National Intelligence Council at the CIA. Tsarni registered his pro-Islamist organization at Fuller's home address.

Questions also remain about Todashev himself. A May 22 NBC article reported that US officials had stated that Todashev "had some connections with radical Chechen rebels."

He received asylum from the US in 2008, on the grounds that he feared for his life in his native Russia. Mark Kramer, director of the Cold War Studies program at Harvard, told the *Boston Globe* on July 5 that he "didn't see any justification for granting asylum" to Todashev. He added that he was "baffled" because he had "known of others who applied and been turned down in cases far more deserving."

Apparently, however, Todashev was in the process of moving back to Russia—the country that he supposedly fled fearing for his life in 2013—when he was questioned and murdered by the FBI. Todashev's friend, Kushen Taramov, has stated that Todashev postponed his travel plans in response to FBI demands that he stay for questioning.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site