

New evidence of US intelligence links to Boston Marathon bomber

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Last Friday, lawyers for Dzhokhar Tsarnaev, the suspect charged with detonating pressure cooker bombs near the finish line of last year's Boston Marathon, alleged in a court statement that FBI agents had attempted to force Dzhokhar's older brother Tamerlan to inform on the Chechen and Muslim community in the Boston area, contributing to the latter's decision to carry out the attacks on April 15 last year.

Dzhokhar Tsarnaev is facing capital charges in connection with the bombing, which killed three people and wounded an estimated 264 others. His older brother Tamerlan was killed in a shootout with police four days after the bombings.

"The FBI... asked [Tamerlan Tsarnaev] to be an informant, reporting on the Chechen and Muslim community," said defense lawyer David Bruck, adding that he had "reason to believe that Tamerlan misinterpreted the visits and discussions with the FBI as pressure [that had] amounted to a stressor that increased his paranoia and distress."

Bruck based his allegations "on information from our client's family and other sources that the FBI made more than one visit to talk with (Tamerlan's parents) and Tamerlan, questioned Tamerlan about his Internet searches, and asked him to be an informant." The attorneys for Dzhokhar Tsarnaev added that Tamerlan had previously been under investigation by the FBI Joint Terrorism Task Force due to a warning sent by Russian intelligence officials in 2011 concerning the older brother's links to Islamic extremists.

Just days prior to this legal brief from Dzhokhar Tsarnaev's attorneys, the House Committee on Homeland Security released a report noting that Russian officials had urged the "mandatory" detention of Tamerlan Tsarnaev should he attempt either to leave or reenter the US. The report states that this warning

was ignored by federal officials.

Lawyers for Dzhokhar Tsarnaev requested all information pertaining to the FBI's investigation of Tamerlan as well as attempts to recruit the older Tsarnaev brother as an informant. The government is objecting to any release of such documents to the defense.

These developments, adding to evidence pointing to extensive contacts between US intelligence and security agencies and Tamerlan Tsarnaev, have come in the aftermath of both federal and Florida state reports released last week whitewashing the FBI in the May 22, 2013 killing of Ibragim Todashev, a friend of Tamerlan Tsarnaev and, like Tsarnaev, an ethnic Chechen.

Todashev was shot multiple times and killed by an FBI agent [whose name has never been released] who was interrogating Todashev in the latter's Florida apartment (see: "Florida prosecutor's report whitewashes FBI killing of Ibragim Todashev").

The US government seized on the Boston Marathon bombing and the police manhunt for the suspects to impose a lockdown and virtual martial law on Boston and its surrounding communities. In a chilling dry run for the establishment of a dictatorship, civil liberties were effectively suspended, residents were ordered to stay in their homes, and police conducted house-to-house searches of entire neighborhoods without warrants. For several days, Boston was occupied by thousands of troops and riot police, accompanied by machine gun-mounted armored vehicles and police helicopters.

FBI officials have denied the claims made by Dzhokhar Tsarnaev's lawyers. The bureau released a statement reiterating a talking point from a memo issued last year, declaring that "Members of the Joint

Terrorism Task Force did not know their [the two bombing suspects'] identities until shortly after Tamerlan Tsarnaev's death, when they fingerprinted the corpse."

The allegation that the FBI sought to recruit the older Tsarnaev brother as an informant provides a highly plausible explanation for an otherwise inexplicable—and to date unexplained—failure of federal, state or local authorities to monitor the activities of the Tsarnaevs in the run-up to the marathon, an international event that draws hundreds of thousands of spectators to downtown Boston—a prime target for a potential terrorist attack.

It also would explain the failure of the FBI, the CIA and the Homeland Security Department to heed the urgent calls from Russian authorities in 2011 to prevent Tamerlan Tsarnaev from leaving the US. In early 2012, Tsarnaev was allowed to travel unhindered to Dagestan in Russia's North Caucasus region, where he made contact with known Islamist separatist terrorist leaders. He was allowed to return to the US without being stopped or questioned later in the year. This was despite his being named on a US government terrorist watch list.

There is also the official claim that the FBI investigated Tamerlan Tsarnaev in 2011 but could find no derogatory information and gave him a clean bill of health. But the FBI also claims, in connection with the killing of Todashev, that both Todashev and Tamerlan Tsarnaev were involved in a triple slaying in the Boston suburb of Waltham, Massachusetts that occurred on September 11, 2011. There has been no attempt by officials to square these contradictory claims.

The Tsarnaev brothers also had family connections to both Chechen rebels and the US intelligence apparatus through an uncle, Ruslan Tsarni. For years, Tsarni ran an organization that funneled funds and equipment to Islamist separatists in Russia's Caucasus region. Tsarni based his operation in the home of Graham Fuller, former vice-chairman of the US National Intelligence Council and ex-CIA station chief in Kabul, Afghanistan.

Last May, the Boston police commissioner and a top Massachusetts Homeland Security official told a congressional panel that local and state police were never informed by the FBI or the federal Homeland Security Department in the lead-up to the April 15

marathon of the FBI investigation of the Tsarnaevs or the warnings from Russian intelligence. This was despite the presence of the Boston police commissioner and Massachusetts state police officials on a joint terrorism task force alongside FBI officials.



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