

Harvard University report endorses police state measures in Boston Marathon lockdown

Nick Barrickman
7 April 2014

A new report by the Program on Crisis Leadership of Harvard University's Kennedy School, entitled "Why was Boston Strong?", examines the response of police and other government agencies to the events of April 15 last year, when two pressure cooker bombs detonated near the finish line of the Boston Marathon. The report purports to "analyze how both prior preparation and action-in-the-moment contributed to the effectiveness of response." In the process, it uncritically endorses the anti-democratic methods utilized in the aftermath of the bombings.

The report was released last week in the run-up to the one-year anniversary of the Boston bombings, in which three people lost their lives and more than 260 were injured. It also comes on the heels of a congressional report that whitewashes the extensive links between federal intelligence officials and Tamerlan Tsarnaev, the elder of the two brothers charged with carrying out the bombings.

Tamerlan Tsarnaev was killed in a shootout with police in the early morning hours of April 19. His younger brother, Dzhokhar Tsarnaev, was captured that evening. He is imprisoned and faces capital charges in Massachusetts.

The authors of the report state that they "are not trying to tell the full story of the Boston Marathon bombings." "Instead," they write, "through analysis of selected aspects of these events, we are seeking lessons that can help response organizations in Boston and other locales improve their preparation" for similar events in the future.

The report argues that the "shelter-in-place" order issued by authorities on the morning of April 19 was simply a means to trap the surviving suspect, Dzhokhar Tsarnaev. After his older brother was fatally wounded by police in a shootout in the Boston suburb of

Watertown, the younger Tsarnaev had fled into the neighborhood amidst a "hail of gunfire" from pursuing officers.

"As the situation stabilized overnight with no further sign of the assailant, the determination was made at the command post to organize a systematic search within the cordoned-off area starting at dawn the following morning," the report continues, adding that "the affected communities... cooperated to a very considerable extent with this request." Armed officers were "courteous and highly professional throughout the day," the report states.

In fact, the imposition of virtual martial law in the city of Boston and its suburbs, on the pretext of searching for one suspected bomber, was a dry run for the suspension of constitutional rights and imposition of dictatorial rule. Federal, state and local police and intelligence agencies seized on the bombings as an opportunity to test out in a major metropolitan area—the birthplace of the American Revolution—plans for mass repression that had long been on the drawing boards, prepared under the cover of the post-9/11 "war on terror."

For one day, citizens of Boston were forced to "shelter in place" as armed police, backed by military helicopters and machine gun-mounted armored vehicles, conducted door-to-door warrantless searches of the homes of terrified residents of entire communities.

There was at the time no significant protest from any section of the political establishment or mass media of the unprecedented and wholesale violation of the US Constitution and the democratic rights of the residents of an entire urban area, signaling the readiness of the official institutions of the American ruling class to acquiesce in the de facto establishment of police state

rule.

The Harvard University Kennedy School report demonstrates that one year later, the political establishment in general, and those sections aligned with the Democratic Party in particular, continues to cover up the grave and reactionary implications of the Boston lockdown, as well as the many aspects of the Boston bombings that point in the direction of complicity by elements within the intelligence apparatus.

The report makes certain tactical criticisms of the response of the authorities to the bombings, largely for not doing enough to “secure” the city and close off all avenues of escape for the suspect. It chides officials for having devised “no simple way... to hold the ground that they had already searched,” concluding “it might therefore have been possible for the suspect, even if he were in the area of the search, to move from an unsearched area to an already-searched area.”

The report deals briefly with the security preparations for the marathon, a major international sporting event that draws tens of thousands of people to Boston. It makes no mention, however, of the evident failure of government officials to monitor the movements of Tamerlan Tsarnaev, a Chechen, despite warnings received by both the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) from Russian officials that he was a dangerous radical with connections to Islamist separatist terrorists.

The FBI claims to have investigated Tsarnaev and questioned him and his parents in 2011, only to close its inquiry having found no “derogatory” information. The following year he was allowed to fly unhindered to Dagestan in Russia’s North Caucasus, where he reportedly met with known terrorists, and return to the US without being stopped or questioned. This despite his having been previously placed on a terrorist watch list.

The defense lawyers for Dzhokhar Tsarnaev have submitted court papers alleging that the FBI sought to recruit Tamerlan Tsarnaev as an informant.

Nor did the Harvard study note the testimony of the Boston police commissioner at the time of the bombings, who told a congressional panel last year that his department was never told by the FBI of the federal agency’s knowledge of or extensive contacts with Tamerlan Tsarnaev, despite the presence of Boston

police officials on a joint terrorist task force with the FBI and other federal agencies.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact