

FBI arrests acquaintance of Boston Marathon bombing suspect

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US Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) agents on Friday arrested a 23-year-old Kyrgyzstani national who is said to have been a close acquaintance of the two men suspected of detonating pressure cooker bombs near the finish line of last years' Boston Marathon.

According to court documents, Khairullozhon Matanov faces four counts of "altering, destroying and falsifying records, documents and tangible objects," thereby "obstruct[ing] the FBI's investigation of the bombings and the suspected bombers and hav[ing] caused the FBI to expend considerable additional resources during its investigation of the bombings." If found guilty of obstruction in a federal case, Matanov could face up to 44 years imprisonment.

According to officials, Matanov, an acquaintance of Tamerlan and Dzhokhar Tsarnaev, met with the two for dinner in the hours after the April 15 bombings and attempted to contact the brothers days later. Matanov is accused of concealing these facts from investigators and deleting a number of personal computer files which are said to have contained "violent content or calls to violence." This allegedly impeded the authorities from ascertaining that he possessed a "philosophical justification for violence" in common with the suspects.

"There's a lot of unsubstantiated allegations, many [that] are not material," said Edward Hayden, Matanov's court-appointed attorney. Hayden stated of his client, "He had no intent to mislead the FBI, and, from what I can see, whatever he did didn't impede the investigation." Hayden added, "He's very frightened. He's very nervous."

Tamerlan and Dzhokhar Tsarnaev, ethnic Chechens, are charged with detonating homemade explosives near the finish line of last year's marathon, killing three people and injuring more than 260 others. Dzhokhar is currently facing capital charges in a federal court, while

Tamerlan was killed in a gun battle with police as the two attempted to evade capture several days after the bombings.

The bombings served as the pretext for a de facto imposition of martial law in the city of Boston and its environs. For most of April 19, 2013, residents of the city and its suburbs were told to "shelter in place" while police carried out warrantless searches of entire neighborhoods and thousands of national guard troops and riot police, backed by helicopters and armored vehicles, patrolled the empty streets.

Matanov is not charged with knowing of the bombings beforehand or participating in them. He has maintained that he was not aware the Tsarnaev brothers were implicated in the bombings, only later realizing the extent of the two suspects' alleged involvement. Matanov has lived in the United States since 2010, when political unrest in his native Kyrgyzstan drove him to seek political asylum in the US.

The detainment of Matanov comes several months after classmates of Dzhokhar Tsarnaev at the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth were charged with similarly obstructing the investigation into the Boston Marathon events. Both Dias Kadyrbayev and Azamat Tazhayakov are currently threatened with either deportation or 25 years imprisonment and \$250,000 fines for removing evidence from the dorm room of the younger Tsarnaev after the bombings. A third acquaintance, Robel Phillipos, faces eight years imprisonment and a \$250,000 fine for lying to authorities. He was released on \$100,000 bail and placed under house confinement while wearing an ankle bracelet.

The hard line taken by the Obama Justice Department against individuals not directly involved in the bombings may be designed to increase pressure on

Dzhokhar Tsarnaev to plead guilty as part of a plea deal and thereby avoid going to trial on capital charges. The government has a definite interest in avoiding a public trial of the younger Tsarnaev given the many revelations of close contacts between the FBI and Tamerlan Tsarnaev in the months preceding the marathon bombings and the multiple warnings to the FBI and CIA of the elder brother's links to Islamist separatist and terrorist outfits in Russia's Northern Caucasus region. Dzhokhar Tsarnaev's lawyers have filed court documents charging that the US government sought to recruit his older brother Tamerlan as an informant.

Tamerlan Tsarnaev had long been known to federal authorities, having been investigated for his Islamist jihadist sympathies in 2011. Months later he was inexplicably allowed to travel to Dagestan in the Northern Caucasus, where he reportedly established ties to anti-Russian Islamic fundamentalists before returning home unhindered by US authorities. This occurred despite his having been included on a federal no-fly list.

The Tsarnaevs' ties to the US government have also been established through the activities of their uncle, Ruslan Tsarni, who for years headed an organization that ran supplies to Chechen separatist groups in the Northern Caucasus from the home of his then-father in law, Graham Fuller, a top-level CIA official in the 1980s.

There has also been a concerted cover-up by both the federal government and Florida state authorities of the FBI's fatal shooting in May, 2013 of Ibragim Todashev, a Chechen national who had lived in the Boston area and associated with Tamerlan Tsarnaev. In the months after Todashev's shooting in his Florida apartment, FBI officials subjected his close friends to harassment and the Obama administration deported his girlfriend.



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