

Report documents government orchestration of US “terror” plots

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A new report issued by Human Rights Watch (HRW) provides a revealing if only partial look at the role of US government informants and agents in instigating and orchestrating fake terrorist plots in the years since the September 11, 2001 attacks.

The 214-page report, produced in collaboration with Columbia Law School’s Human Rights Institute, examines 27 major federal cases. It is based on more than 200 interviews with defendants, members of their families, defense attorneys, judges, prosecutors, government officials, academics and others. There have been more than 500 terrorism-related cases in the past 13 years, and the conclusions of this report apply to many if not most of them.

In a statement that confirms, in an understated fashion, what has been increasingly obvious in many cases and has been reported by the *World Socialist Web Site* over the past decade, Human Rights Watch concludes that “the FBI may have created terrorists out of law-abiding individuals by suggesting the idea of taking terrorist action or encouraging the target to act.”

“Americans have been told that their government is keeping them safe by preventing and prosecuting terrorism inside the US,” said HRW deputy Washington director Andrea Prasow. “But take a closer look and you realize that many of these people would never have committed a crime if not for law enforcement encouraging, pressuring, and sometimes paying them to commit terrorist acts.”

This statement would have been more accurate if it made clear that many of these individuals never even committed “terrorist acts.” They were supplied by government informants with fake bombs and other materials, and many were convicted on conspiracy counts, not for terrorist acts.

According to a report in the *Guardian*, 18 percent of

the 500 terrorism cases involved “material support,” a term whose flexibility was expanded by the Patriot Act and that allows prosecutors to seek convictions on the flimsiest of charges.

There is also the role of solitary confinement, in which many of the defendants are held even before their cases come to trial. These punitive conditions, amounting to a form of psychological torture in many cases, assist the authorities in securing guilty pleas, obstruct or prevent communication between the defendants and their lawyers, and lead to longer prison sentences in cases where no prison terms at all are justified.

According to Human Rights Watch, studies have shown that about 50 percent of federal terrorism convictions since 2001 have been based on informants, and 30 percent involved the informant in an active role. The details for much of the HRW report were only obtained through a lawsuit demanding the information.

Entrapment is used openly and aggressively by the authorities, who face few problems when defendants complain about these tactics. The burden is on the defendant to prove that he or she was not inclined to carry out the actions. Courts have repeatedly ruled in favor of the government in entrapment cases.

Many of the informants were themselves recruited in exchange for favorable treatment in various criminal cases. There is the prominent example of Shahed Husain, whose pending deportation to Pakistan was halted in exchange for his role in railroading defendants to 25-year prison terms in the notorious “Newburgh Four” frame-up in 2010.

The defendants’ mental and intellectual disabilities aided the informant as he proposed, guided and carried out a phony plot to bomb a synagogue and Jewish community center in the Bronx. This case was so

preposterous that the judge herself, while claiming that her hands were tied in handing down the minimum 25-year terms, said that the government “came up with the crime, provided the means, and removed all relevant obstacles.”

Human Rights Watch also gives the example of Ahmed Omar Abu Ali, a US citizen who was detained in Saudi Arabia in 2003, tortured and threatened until he provided a false confession. At a later trial in the US, the false confession was admitted into evidence and Ali was sentenced to life in prison, which he is serving at the federal supermax prison in Colorado.

The WSWS has documented the trial of suspicious and in some cases virtually invented terrorist cases for more than a decade. We have exposed the Newburgh Four frame-up, the 2007 case of an alleged plot to blow up JFK Airport jet fuel tanks, the arrests of seven Miami men in 2006 on charges that included plots to blow up the Sears Tower in Chicago, and the entrapment of a Bangladeshi student in New York City in 2012, among many others.

As the WSWS wrote in 2007 about the JFK “plot,” the indictment “included features that have become almost invariable in every such ‘terror’ case brought by the government in recent years. First, the suspects had not only carried out no acts of terror, but they apparently lacked any means to realize such an attack. Second, a central figure in the alleged plot was a paid undercover informant of the FBI.”

Human Rights Watch is one of the nongovernmental organizations that has targeted human rights and civil liberties issues but has increasingly fallen into line, as in the cases of Syria and Ukraine, with the politics of the US State Department.

The HRW report does not and cannot present any explanation of the actions of the government. The use of entrapment and frame-up has continued and even escalated under the Obama administration, and the aim of the Human Rights Watch report is to pressure and persuade the US Justice Department and the White House to modify their tactics. According to HRW, the government must recognize that its actions are angering and alienating Muslims, and that the goal of preventing terrorism can best be served by “efforts to build relationships with American Muslim community leaders and groups that may be critical sources of information to prevent terrorist attacks.”

The aim of the authorities, however, despite regularly issued claims that, in Obama’s words, “Muslims are a fundamental part of the American family,” has nothing to do with preventing terrorism, and everything to do with stoking fear in order to build support for war abroad and attacks on democratic rights at home. Testifying to the global character of the crisis, these methods have also been used in Britain, Canada, Australia and elsewhere. That is the fundamental driving force, nearly 13 years after the September 11 attacks, behind all of the invented cases and hysteria over terrorism.



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