

Federal jury convicts friend of Boston Marathon bombing suspect of lying to the FBI

John Marion
30 October 2014

A 12-person jury Tuesday found Robel Phillipos guilty of lying to the FBI during questioning following the April 2013 Boston Marathon bombing. He is one of a number of Dzhokhar Tsarnaev's friends who have faced criminal prosecution in the run-up to the trial of Tsarnaev himself.

The US Attorney's office did not accuse the 21-year-old Phillipos of helping to conceal evidence of the Boston Marathon bombing, but rather of denying he knew that other friends of Zhokar Tsarnaev were disposing of evidence. He is scheduled for sentencing on January 29.

The charges against Phillipos relate to statements he made about whether he, Azamat Tazhayakov and Dias Kadyrbayev entered Tsarnaev's University of Massachusetts Dartmouth dorm room after the bombings to remove a backpack containing incriminating evidence, including fireworks.

In an April 19 text entered as evidence in the trial, Phillipos stated that he had not seen Tsarnaev since the previous fall. He had returned to campus on April 18 for a disciplinary meeting about his marijuana use. This was also the same day that the FBI released photographs of the alleged bombers, Dzhokhar and Tamerlan Tsarnaev.

At trial, Phillipos's defense attorneys argued that alleged lies to the FBI were actually the product of an inability to remember what happened on the 18th because he was under the influence of marijuana.

In July Tazhayakov was found guilty of obstruction of justice and conspiracy for his role in throwing the backpack and fireworks in a dumpster behind his off-campus apartment, while concealing a laptop taken from Tsarnaev's room. He testified against Phillipos in order to get a reduced sentence. Tazhayakov is the son of Amir Ismagulov, a Kazakh oil executive.

Kadyrbayev, who is Tazhayakov's roommate, pleaded guilty in August to conspiracy and obstruction of justice charges. His sentencing is scheduled for November, with the expectation of a shorter sentence because of the plea deal.

None of the three was accused of participating in the planning or execution of the marathon bombings, and Phillipos—who faces up to 16 years in a federal prison—was not charged in the actual disposal of evidence.

"My son has nothing to do with this tragedy," said Genet Bekele, Phillipos' mother, after the verdict. "This can be anybody's son—anybody's family." Phillipos' lawyers will likely appeal the verdict.

The government has aggressively prosecuted the associates of Dzhokhar Tsarnaev in preparation for Tsarnaev's trial itself, and potentially with the aim of securing a plea deal that would prevent a full trial of the alleged bomber. This would also help the Obama administration continue to block any investigation of the government's own ties to and knowledge of the Boston Marathon bombers. If convicted, Tsarnaev faces a possible death penalty.

While Tsarnaev's friends face years in prison, there has yet to be any serious investigation into circumstances leading up to the bombings or the police state measures deployed by the government in its aftermath.

It is widely documented that the Russian government warned the FBI about Tamerlan Tsarnaev as early as March 2011. FBI agents paid him numerous visits before the bombings, and had sought him out as an asset or informant. In October 2011, his name was entered in the Treasury Enforcement Communications System (TECS) with instructions that the National Counter-Terrorism Center be notified immediately

upon his attempt to leave the US.

A “threat assessment” on Tamerlan Tsarnaev was later closed, and he was allowed to travel in and out of the country without any problem.

In addition, the Tsarnaevs’ uncle, Ruslan Tsarni, had registered his Congress of Chechen International Organizations at the address of former CIA official Graham Fuller. Fuller, who had been forced out of the CIA because of his prominent role in the Iran-Contra scandal, was working for CIA contractor the RAND Corporation while Tsarni was operating out of his house.

The US government and intelligence agencies have worked with Chechen nationalist and separatist organizations as part of operations directed at Russia.

Despite knowing the identities of the Tsarnaevs, the FBI released their photos on April 18, 2013 with the claim that they were asking the public’s help in identifying the “unknown” suspects.

Neither has there been any serious investigation into the FBI interrogation and killing of Ibragim Todashev, an acquaintance of Tamerlan Tsarnaev, who was shot to death under suspicious circumstances in May of 2013. The unnamed FBI agent who carried out the killing has been absolved of any responsibility, and the matter has been dropped by the media.

In a press release issued after the Phillipos conviction, US Attorney Carmen Ortiz said that “in the wake of one of the most significant events in this City’s modern history—an event which left two young women and a child dead, and many more injured—thousands of ordinary citizens assisted law enforcement in identifying and locating the perpetrators.”

The last part of this statement turns reality on its head. In truth, following the bombings thousands of police, along with FBI and other federal agents, shut down a major American city and patrolled suburban streets in armored personnel carriers. US military police patrolled city streets and subway stations, in a de facto state of martial law. Rather than “assisting law enforcement,” citizens in a 20-block area of Watertown were dragged from their homes at gunpoint.

Ortiz was nominated as US Attorney for Boston in 2009 by President Obama, and confirmed unanimously by the Democrat-controlled US Senate shortly afterward. Her office conducted the vicious prosecution

of internet activist Aaron Swartz, which triggered his suicide.

Her statement on Tuesday continued in an even more chilling tone: “This case also reminds us that our public safety network relies on every citizen in the Commonwealth. We look to all of our citizens—our neighbors, our friends, our colleagues, even strangers whom we have never met before—to assist law enforcement in detecting, preventing, and solving crimes.”

In short, she is warning neighbors to spy on each other when it suits the needs of the government.



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