

Final pre-trial hearing held for Boston Marathon bombing suspect Dzhokhar Tsarnaev

Nick Barrickman
20 December 2014

The final pre-trial hearing for Boston Marathon bombing suspect Dzhokhar Tsarnaev was held in US federal court on Thursday. Tsarnaev is facing 30 charges, 17 of which carry the death penalty, for placing homemade pressure cooker bombs behind the finish line of the 2013 Boston Marathon, which killed three and injured over 260 others. His trial is scheduled to begin on January 5.

The hearing this week was the first public appearance of Tsarnaev in nearly 18 months, his previous being in June of 2013 when he pled not guilty to all charges. Tsarnaev spoke little at the pre-trial hearing, answering perfunctorily “yes, sir” when asked by US District Court Judge George A. O’Toole if he approved of his defense’s handling of the case and if he wished to forego any further pre-trial procedure.

Tsarnaev’s attorney David Bruck indicated his intention to file for a continuance to further prepare for the trial, which is scheduled to commence in less than three weeks. The judge has denied a number of the defense’s requests, including a motion to transfer the trial out of the Boston area. A request that the US government reveal all evidence pertaining to claims it has made that Dzhokhar’s older brother, Tamerlan Tsarnaev, had participated in a grisly triple-homicide in the Boston suburb of Waltham in 2011 was also denied.

Tamerlan, who is also a suspect in the bombings, was killed in a shootout with police days after they took place. In the wake of the Boston Marathon bombing in 2013, a state of de facto martial law was implemented in Boston and surrounding suburbs. Residents of the city and its environs were told to “shelter in place” as militarily-armed police conducted warrantless searches through homes while armored vehicles patrolled the

streets and helicopters flew above, all purportedly in search of the then 19-year-old Dzhokhar.

The proceedings at the pre-trial were momentarily disrupted when a relative of Ibragim Todashev, a Chechen national who was shot to death by FBI agents in May last year while being questioned about his relations with the Tsarnaevs, shouted to Dzhokhar in Russian before being led out of the courtroom by armed guards. Elena Teyer, who was Todashev’s mother-in-law, shouted “We’re here for you, Dzhokhar. We know you’re innocent. Be strong, son,” and pled for the US government not to put him to death.

Tsarnaev’s attorneys have requested a hearing to investigate claims that federal prosecutors have been systematically leaking details about the case to the press in an attempt to poison public opinion against their client.

In addition to the killing of Ibragim Todashev in May 2013, the US government has sought to persecute numerous associates of the Tsarnaevs. Dias Kadyrbayev and Azamat Tazhayakov, both Kazakh nationals and friends of Dzhokhar, have pled or been found guilty for conspiracy to obstruct a federal investigation into the bombings and lying to investigators. Both are facing possible sentences of more than 20 years imprisonment. A third friend, Robel Phillipos, was found guilty of lying to investigators. Khairullozhon Matanov, a Kyrgyz national and friend of the suspects, has been charged with lying to investigators about his dealings with the two brothers and erasing data from his computer pertaining to his sympathies with radical Islam.

On Friday, attorneys for Matanov were successful in obtaining a court-ordered investigation into the

prosecution after numerous leaks of classified FBI information on their client had found their way into the media. Also on Friday, Stephen Silva, another acquaintance of the Tsarnaevs, pled guilty to possessing a gun with rubbed-off serial numbers that had been tied to a shootout between the suspects and the police in the days after the bombing. Additionally, numerous friends and associates of the Tsarnaevs and Todashev have been deported by the federal government.

The US government has also sought to cover over its own previous connection to the Tsarnaevs. The FBI, after receiving warnings about Tamerlan Tsarnaev's proclivities for Islamic extremism from both Russian and Saudi Arabian security services in 2011, subjected the older brother to a "threat assessment," in which his communications and internet activity were monitored and face-to-face interviews were conducted with him and his family members. Several months later, authorities inexplicably closed their assessment, having found "nothing incriminating" about Tsarnaev.

Just weeks later, homicides in the Boston suburb of Waltham, of which Tamerlan Tsarnaev is now suspected, occurred on the ten-year anniversary of 9/11. Despite one of the victims, Brendan Mess, being identified as a "best friend" of Tsarnaev, and the proximity of the killings to Tamerlan's own threat assessment, authorities did not seek to question the latter, allowing the case to go cold.

Tsarnaev was then permitted to fly to Russia in early 2012, where he stayed for six months attempting to establish ties to various Islamic separatist movements in the Northern Caucasus region of Dagestan. This occurred despite FBI officials placing him on a "no fly" list in late 2011 with strict orders that he be detained "immediately" if found trying to leave the country, and despite Russian officials requesting that they be notified should Tamerlan attempt to enter Russia.

In May of 2013, Massachusetts state and local police officials testified before a congressional investigation that they had never been told of the existence of Tamerlan Tsarnaev by federal officials, despite his dubious conduct in the period leading up to the internationally attended Boston Marathon.

In addition to being well-known to federal officials, the Tsarnaevs also have family connections to the

intelligence community. For years, Ruslan Tsarni, an uncle to Tamerlan and Dzhokar, 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.



To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact