Report details massive police response to Boston Marathon bombing

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A new report detailing the response of various local, state and federal agencies to the events surrounding the 2013 Boston Marathon terrorist attacks gives an in-depth picture of the massive mobilization of police and intelligence forces in the aftermath of the April 15, 2013, bombings.

Dzhokhar Tsarnaev, one of the two suspects charged in the attacks, is currently on trial in Massachusetts federal court and potentially faces the death penalty for his role in the bombings. Dzhokhar and his older brother, Tamerlan Tsarnaev, who was killed in a shootout with police following the bombings, allegedly detonated two homemade pressure-cooker bombs behind the finish line of the Boston Marathon, killing three people and injuring 264 others, some requiring amputations and other emergency measures.

In what can be characterized as a dry run for the imposition of martial law in a major American city, residents of Boston and its surrounding suburbs were ordered to "shelter-in-place," while law enforcement officers from federal, state and local agencies roamed the streets conducting warrantless door-to-door searches, accompanied by armored vehicles, with Blackhawk helicopters flying overhead.

"The After Action Report for the Response to the Boston Marathon Bombings," composed by representatives of the Massachusetts State Police, National Guard, and other agencies and jurisdictions involved in the police and emergency response to the April 2013 terrorist attacks, seeks to detail "best practices, lessons learned and recommendations" in order to "hopefully provide insight to other agencies, jurisdictions and organizations across the nation and assist them in better preparing for potential incidents in the future."

Of significance is the report's detailing of the massive mobilization of police and emergency responders that occurred in the wake of the bombing. According to the report, over "80 representatives from state and local law enforcement, fire services and EMS, the BAA, the Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency (MEMA), the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH), the Massachusetts National Guard (MANG), the American Red Cross (ARC), the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) staffed the Multi-Agency Coordination Center (MACC) at MEMA Headquarters in Framingham." This group of officials would later form the Unified Command (UC), essentially acting as the governing body for the Boston region in the aftermath of the bombings.

The report notes that more than 2,500 law enforcement officials from 116 federal, state and local agencies "self-deployed" to the area to assist in the search for the suspects, often with little oversight. In this sea of federal, state and local law enforcement activity, stoked to the point of hysteria by media and police reports of terrorist suspects potentially at large, the authors state that "weapons discipline was lacking by the multitude of law enforcement officers in the field during both the firefight with the two suspects … and the standoff with the second suspect who was hiding in a winterized boat in a residential back yard."

In both circumstances, unrequested officers arriving at the scene began opening fire at what they took to be the suspects, "without necessarily having identified and lined up their target or appropriately aimed their weapons." This vigilantism led to officers opening fire at the then-19-year-old Dzhokhar Tsarnaev without provocation, as he lay hidden and wounded in a dry-docked boat in the Boston suburbs, as well as the launching of dangerous salvos of gunfire in heavily-

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populated neighborhoods. In one instance, officers opened fire on a Massachusetts State Police vehicle which had erroneously been reported as stolen.

Despite this reckless behavior by law enforcement officials, the report offers little more than hand-wringing, noting that "although officers received basic logistical support, including food, water, and toileting, few were provided oversight, situational awareness, or guidance," while declaring that "overall, the response to the Boston Marathon bombings must be considered a great success."

The report, released by law enforcement and government agencies active in the immediate aftermath of the bombings, echoes the conclusions of a previous study put out by Harvard University's Kennedy School. That study demonstrated the lack of opposition that exists within the ruling class to police-state forms of rule, as it sought to provide political cover for the mass mobilization of law enforcement and the imposition of a state of siege in Boston and its environs, offering only technical criticisms to better-facilitate such operations going forward.

Like the broader media coverage and official statements on the marathon bombings, the report makes no effort to address questions about US law enforcement and intelligence agencies' previous knowledge of Tamerlan Tsarnaev's connection to radical Islamism, stating that "the review process did not include an assessment of activities related to the investigation of crimes associated with these events, nor did it include intelligence sharing activities before, during or after the events."

Such "intelligence sharing activities" include the FBI's 2011 terrorist threat assessment conducted on the older Tsarnaev, which reportedly found nothing "derogatory" on the future bombing suspect. Tsarnaev was later allowed to travel to the northern Caucasus region of Dagestan in early 2012, despite being placed on a federal "no-fly" list as a result of multiple threat assessments conducted into his activities. It was later found that while in Russia, Tsarnaev sought to establish ties to a number of Islamic fundamentalist groups active in the region before returning, again unhindered, several months later.

Authorities are currently investigating Tamerlan's connection to a grisly triple-murder in the Boston suburb of Waltham, which occurred on the ten-year anniversary of the 9/11 attacks. Last year, Dzhokhar Tsarnaev's defense team filed papers with the court alleging that the FBI had attempted to recruit Tamerlan Tsarnaev as an informant. The defense has requested all information relating to the FBI's investigation of the older brother, but the government has blocked the release of such documents.

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