

Federal court sentences Boston Marathon bomber Dzhokhar Tsarnaev to death

Nick Barrickman
16 May 2015

On Friday afternoon, jurors handed down a sentence of death to Dzhokhar Tsarnaev in federal court for his role in the April 2013 bombing of the Boston Marathon, in which three people were killed and over 264 others were injured. Jurors spent roughly 15 hours over the course of two and a half days in coming to the final decision.

The death sentence, fully supported by the Obama administration, is the barbaric culmination of a trial that has systematically excluded any examination of the fundamental political issues raised by the Boston Marathon bombing and its aftermath.

Tsarnaev's death sentence stems from six out of the 30 counts on which he was found guilty early last month, including the use of a weapon of mass destruction resulting in death and the use of a firearm during a crime of violence resulting in death. The latter charge pertains to his role in the shooting of MIT police officer Sean Collier days after the April 15 bombing.

Throughout the trial, the defense sought to portray Dzhokhar as subservient to his older brother, Tamerlan. They did not contest his involvement in the bombing but instead attempted to convince jurors to reach a decision of life in prison rather than execution.

From the start, the US federal government aggressively sought to pursue the death penalty against Tsarnaev. "The only sentence that will do justice in this case is a sentence of death," stated prosecutor Steve Mellin, reiterating the federal government's position prior to Tsarnaev's sentencing.

Overtures for a plea bargain made by the defense to forgo death in favor of life imprisonment without parole were rejected out of hand by the prosecution. Prosecutors got around a Massachusetts state ban on the death penalty by charging him in federal court.

There is overwhelming opposition to the death

penalty in Boston and Massachusetts as a whole. A poll conducted in late April, after Tsarnaev had been found guilty, found that less than 20 percent of the population in the state favored the death penalty for the convicted bomber—a figure that has fallen significantly over the past several months.

Only a third of state residents support any use of the death penalty. The jury in the trial, however, was unrepresentative of this sentiment, since a prerequisite for being selected to hear a capital case is a willingness to impose a sentence of execution. That is, the composition of the jury was inherently biased toward reaching the conclusion sought by the state.

Throughout the trial, prosecutors sought to stampede jurors and the public toward embrace of the death penalty for Tsarnaev by inundating them with lurid details of the carnage caused by the two brothers' homemade pressure cooker bombs.

There was an endless and degrading appeal to vengeance and violence. The announcement of the decision to execute Tsarnaev was followed by predictable self-congratulating by the media and members of the political establishment.

US Attorney General Loretta Lynch, who recently took charge of the US Justice Department, voiced the Obama administration's full support of the decision. Denouncing the bombing as a "cowardly attack," she added that "the ultimate penalty is a fitting punishment for this horrific crime."

Assistant Attorney General for National Security John Carlin, ignoring the fact that the Obama administration has declared the right to assassinate US citizens by drone without any judicial process, declared Tsarnaev an "unrepentant terrorist held to account by a justice system that provides due process of law even to those who commit the most horrific offenses."

The marathon bombing was a terrible crime, resulting in the death and injury of many innocent people. However, the trial of Tsarnaev was set up to exclude all discussion of the background of the events that took place on April 15, 2013. For all the talk in the political establishment of the death sentence providing “closure” to the families of those killed, the culmination of the trial in fact resolves nothing.

The bombing in Boston, Massachusetts is a product of the unending campaign of imperialist violence waged by the American ruling class all over the world. First of all, Tsarnaev himself declared that they were motivated in part by the wars in the Middle East and Central Asia, in the course of which the US military commits countless crimes, killing hundreds of thousands of people and laying waste entire societies.

Moreover, in the two years since the Boston bombing, the media and political establishment have worked to cover up and ignore the voluminous evidence that the US was monitoring the elder Tsarnaev brother, utilizing him as part of its destabilization campaign against Russia, which has relied in part on Islamic fundamentalist forces in Chechnya.

Efforts by Tsarnaev’s lawyers to obtain documents pertaining to the FBI’s previous knowledge of the older brother Tamerlan have been frequently rebuffed in court.

In 2011, the FBI 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. This followed warnings about the older Tsarnaev’s proclivities for Islamic extremism from both Russian and Saudi Arabian security services.

Several months later, the assessment was inexplicably ended, with “nothing incriminating” being found about Tsarnaev. Tamerlan was 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.

Also unaccounted for are the circumstances

surrounding the FBI’s killing of Ibragim Todashev in late May of 2013. Todashev, a friend of Tamerlan, was killed in a hail of bullets by the FBI while being interrogated in his Florida home.

It was later asserted that Todashev had implicated himself and the older Tsarnaev in a previously unsolved triple homicide that had occurred in 2011 on the ten-year anniversary of 9/11 in the Boston suburb of Waltham. Even though one of the victims of that crime, Brendan Mess, was identified as a “best friend” of Tsarnaev, and despite the proximity of the killings to Tamerlan Tsarnaev’s own threat assessment, authorities did not seek to question Tsarnaev, allowing the case to go cold.

The Tsarnaevs also have family connections to the intelligence community. For years, Ruslan Tsarni, an uncle to Tamerlan and Dzhokhar, 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.

The demand by the state that the younger Tsarnaev brother be put to death is of a piece with the response to the bombing itself. It became the pretext for a massive military police mobilization, in which the metropolitan area of Boston and its suburbs were placed under *de facto* martial law as people were forced to “shelter-in-place” while police conducted warrantless searches through homes as armored vehicles patrolled the streets of residential neighborhoods and Blackhawk helicopters hovered overhead.



To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact