

Man claiming to be lover of Orlando shooter casts further doubt on “terror” claims

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The attempts to cast the horrific June 12 massacre of 49 people at the Pulse nightclub in Orlando as a case of Islamist terrorism have been further undermined by the testimony of a man claiming to have been the lover of the shooter, Omar Mateen.

In an exclusive interview Tuesday with the Spanish language television network Univision, a man who identified himself only as Miguel and who appeared with his face and voice disguised said that Mateen had attacked the gay nightclub not as an act not of terrorism, but of “revenge.”

According to his account, Mateen was enraged over a sexual encounter with two Puerto Rican men he had met at the Pulse nightclub, one of whom, he said, later acknowledged that he was HIV positive. He described Mateen as “terrified” of becoming infected with the virus.

“I’m going to make them pay for what they did to me,” he recalled Mateen telling him, adding that “he hated Puerto Rican gays” because of the incident.

The man recounted that he had met Mateen via a gay dating app and had gone with him between 15 and 20 times to the Ambassador Hotel in Orlando. A receptionist interviewed by Univision confirmed that she recognized Mateen and that the man the network interviewed had been a regular guest.

The FBI confirmed the man’s report that he had been interviewed several times by the agency, which has also sought security video from the hotel.

The testimony of “Miguel” conforms with accounts given by a number of others, including Mateen’s former wife and a number of patrons of the Pulse nightclub, who described him as a regular and reported that he had been on gay dating apps for years.

The gunman’s ex-wife, Sitora Ysufiy, an immigrant from Uzbekistan, told a Brazilian television news

interviewer that Mateen had been “mentally unstable and mentally ill,” having physically abused her during their brief marriage.

Ysufiy added that she believed he was gay, and that his father, an Afghan immigrant, had denounced him as such in front of her. According to her and her fiancé, she recounted this experience to the FBI, but had been asked by FBI agents “not to tell this to the American media.”

The media, for its part, has largely cooperated. Neither the *New York Times* nor the *Washington Post*, two newspapers that set the agenda for the national press, had published as of Wednesday a word about either the Univision interview or Mateen’s ex-wife’s account of her encounter with the FBI.

Instead, the overwhelming attention has been given to Mateen’s call to 911 during the massacre, in which he delivered “a pledge of allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi of the Islamic State,” and the controversy surrounding the FBI’s redaction of this statement from a transcript originally released to the press.

Given the widespread testimony relating to Mateen’s apparent mental illness and internal conflicts over his sexual identity, as well as the extremely repressive social attitudes within his family, there is every reason to suspect that the invocation of the Islamic State was aimed at concealing his real motives.

There is a clear political purpose behind the media’s selective reporting. The aim is to support the narrative that Mateen acted as a “domestically radicalized” Islamist terrorist, inspired to violence by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), rather than, as with the far more typical mass shooter in America, driven by mental illness, perceived grievances and the toxic social atmosphere that prevails in a country dominated by unending war and deepening inequality.

The massacre in Orlando is being harnessed to a drive by the US ruling establishment to escalate war abroad and political repression at home. The mass killing has coincided with demands by US generals for the dispatch of more American troops to Iraq as well as a call by some 50 State Department officials for the redirection of the US intervention in Syria to more directly target the Russian-backed government of President Bashar al-Assad.

Meanwhile, the US Senate Wednesday narrowly defeated legislation that would further empower the FBI to troll through the Internet browsing histories, emails and social media activity of American citizens without the necessity of securing a court order. The measure represents a significant expansion of the warrantless searches authorized under the Patriot Act, which require only an administrative subpoena, called a “National Security Letter” (NSL). Over the past decade, the FBI has issued some 300,000 such letters.

While supposedly not including access to the content of emails, the legislation in the Senate would allow the FBI to track the web sites viewed by citizens and determine how long they visited them, as well as the “to” and “from” lines of emails and location information garnered from IP addresses.

Telephone and Internet companies served with NSLs are barred under the law from disclosing either to their customers or the general public that they have received these letters.

Those backing the legislation have invoked the Orlando attack as the pretext for the further shredding of constitutional protections against unreasonable searches and seizures.

One of the sponsors of the measure, which was presented as an amendment to a spending bill that included funding for the FBI, was Arizona’s Republican Senator John McCain. “In the wake of the tragic massacre in Orlando, it is important our law enforcement have the tools they need to conduct counterterrorism investigations and track ‘lone wolves,’ or ISIS-inspired terrorists,” he said.

The vote on the measure was 58-38, just two shy of the 60 votes needed for it to go forward. Eleven Democrats joined all but six members of the Republican majority in voting to approve it. In a procedural move, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell changed his vote from “yes” to “no,”

allowing him to reintroduce the legislation during a later debate.



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