

CNN suppressed leaked DHS report on Super Bowl LII security operation

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On Monday CNN published a report detailing the discovery and subsequent suppression of a Department of Homeland Security (DHS) memorandum discussing preparations for a chemical weapon attack at Super Bowl LII in Minneapolis, Minnesota on Sunday.

The incident illustrates the collaborative nature of the relationship between the mainstream media and the intelligence agencies as well as the ways in which America's most popular annual sporting event has been used to justify the further militarization of society and the buildup of police-state powers.

In December, a CNN employee discovered the documents in question in the seatback pocket on a commercial flight. Known as an "after action report," the papers detailed the results of two drills held in July and November simulating an anthrax attack in Minneapolis during the Super Bowl.

CNN reported that the documents were accompanied by the boarding pass and travel itinerary of Michael V. Walter, microbiologist and program manager of BioWatch, a highly classified DHS program that operates a "nationwide aerosol detection system designed to provide an early warning of a biological attack across all levels of government," according to CNN.

Walter, who had previously worked for both CIA and the Naval Surface Warfare Center, has been the director of the program since 2009. CNN reports that other sensitive DHS documents, whose contents were not disclosed, were also found along with the report.

According to CNN, the selection of documents which they chose to report on review the results of the exercise and disputes among various agencies involved in the effectiveness of the BioWatch operation. The limited findings released by the network suggest that the program is ineffective and poorly coordinated.

The various law enforcement and emergency management agencies participating in the exercise were reportedly at odds over how many people would be exposed in the event of an attack. There was also a lack of awareness among the various agencies involved as to what the BioWatch program was intended to do. According to one excerpt of the report, "some local law enforcement and emergency management agencies possess only a cursory knowledge of the BioWatch program and its mission."

Further excerpts from the DHS report state that there was confusion between participating agencies as to the meaning of various alerts and that there was a lack of understanding surrounding communication of the threats and the coordination of responses between the various participants. CNN quotes the document as reporting: "This made it difficult for them to assess whether their city was at risk," and "creates a situation where local officials are deciding on courses of action from limited points of view."

The highly secretive BioWatch program has been subject to criticism since its existence was first publicly acknowledged by President George W. Bush in 2003. According to CNN, more than \$1 billion has been spent on the project with limited results.

An investigation conducted by the House Committee on Energy and Commerce in 2013 concluded: "After more than a decade of operation, DHS still lacks crucial data demonstrating the effectiveness of the current technology," and that "several statements by DHS about the performance of the BioWatch program are disputed by other government scientists or contradicted by information obtained in this investigation."

The findings from the report selectively released by CNN in consultation with unnamed government officials directly contradict statements given to the

network by DHS officials, who characterized the exercise as a “resounding success.”

The decision by CNN to withhold the report until after the Super Bowl illustrates the role of the mainstream media as collaborators with and spokespersons for the military intelligence apparatus. According to Monday’s article, the network decided to withhold the story after consulting with DHS and being told that release could “jeopardize security for the event.” The article also states that the network decided to not to publish various sections of the report that DHS claims would be damaging to national security “regardless of when it was published.”

Just how the full release of the report prior to the Super Bowl could possibly imperil the event is left unexplained. As with all major sporting events in the US, the Super Bowl has become a highly militarized event involving thousands of heavily armed police and other security forces.

As the WSWS reported last week, Minneapolis was turned into a militarized zone in the week leading up to the event. Police were mobilized from across the state to patrol the streets while approximately 1,700 agents from the FBI, DHS, Immigration and Customs Enforcement, and Customs and Border Protection, as well as the Minnesota National Guard. National Guard Humvees were placed at strategic checkpoints around the city while helicopters and fighter jets patrolled the skies. The notion that terrorists could somehow exploit the findings of the DHS report to launch an attack under such conditions is absurd.

The main impression is given that the primary purpose of CNN’s article is to reprimand DHS for its carelessness. The article does not question the purpose of a simulated attack on a major city, nor does it seek to expose the antidemocratic character of the DHS as a whole. CNN has not offered any justification for suppressing the report, beyond the fact that they were requested to do so by DHS.

Indeed, the very circumstances under which CNN came into possession of the report are dubious. That the head of a classified government program would accidentally leave sensitive documents on an airplane to be subsequently discovered by an employee of CNN strains credibility. It is not out of the question that they were deliberately leaked by factions of the intelligence community opposed to the Trump administration in an

attempt to further discredit the president and lay the groundwork for his removal in a palace coup.

Since the election of Trump last year there has been an ongoing conflict within the ruling class over how best to implement imperialist policy. CNN has aligned itself with the Democratic Party in this conflict, relentlessly pushing baseless claims that the Trump administration was elected due to interference on the part of the Russian government.

Those leading the anti-Russia campaign do not criticize the administration for its right-wing policies, but rather suggest that the president is incompetent and needs to be replaced with someone who can more reliably manage the interests of the capitalist elites without constantly stirring up the anger of the working class.

A quote from Juliett Kayyem, a former DHS employee and current contributor to CNN, is typical of this line of attack. Kayyem noted, “The biggest consequence of this mistake may have less to do with terrorists knowing our vulnerabilities and more to do with confidence in the Department of Homeland Security. In the end, confidence in the federal government at a time of crisis is what the American public deserves.”



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