

Congressional hearing confirms

FBI, Homeland Security withheld information on Boston bombing suspects from local, state police

By Barry Grey
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The Boston police commissioner and a top Massachusetts Homeland Security official told Congress Thursday that the local and state police were never informed by the Federal Bureau of Investigation or the Department of Homeland Security of multiple warnings about Tamerlan Tsarnaev prior to the April 15 bombings at the Boston Marathon.

Tamerlan Tsarnaev, 26, and his 19-year-old brother Dzhokhar are the only suspects to date in the twin bombings at the downtown Boston finish line of the race, which killed three people and wounded more than 160 others. Tamerlan was killed in a shootout with police on April 19. Dzhokhar is under arrest at a prison medical facility outside of Boston.

Testifying before the House Homeland Security Committee, Boston Police Commissioner Edward Davis said his department had been unaware that the Russian government contacted the FBI in 2011 to warn of Tamerlan Tsarnaev's radical jihadist sympathies and his plans to travel to the northern Caucasus and link up with Islamist separatist and terrorist elements from Dagestan and Chechnya. Nor had he been told, he said, that the FBI had questioned the elder Tsarnaev brother and his family, or that Tamerlan subsequently, in 2012, spent six months in the volatile region of southern Russia.

The FBI has acknowledged receiving the warning from Moscow and launching a probe of Tsarnaev, including an interrogation, but claims it found no "derogatory" information and closed the case. The Central Intelligence Agency has also acknowledged receiving a similar warning from Russia later in 2011. The government has also reported that it placed Tamerlan Tsarnaev on at least two anti-terror databases.

It has been widely reported that following his return from Russia, Tsarnaev posted jihadist videos on the Internet and was ejected from his mosque for making provocative anti-American statements.

There are also reports that the Russian internal security service gave the FBI a case file on Tsarnaev in November of

2012, after Tsarnaev's return from Russia, outlining multiple contacts between the ethnic Chechen US resident and known members of the Islamist underground in Dagestan, which borders Chechnya.

On May 1, moreover, the British *Daily Mail* reported that Saudi Arabian officials sent a written report in 2012 to top US Homeland Security Department officials detailing their concerns about Tsarnaev and warning that he might be planning a terror attack.

Also testifying before the House committee on Thursday was Massachusetts Undersecretary for Homeland Security Kurt Schwartz, who said, "My understanding is that at no time prior to the bombings did any member of the Massachusetts State Police or the Fusion Center have any information or knowledge about the Tsarnaev brothers."

The fusion center to which Schwartz referred was the Boston Regional Intelligence Center, one of 70 centers set up nationally in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks to bring together federal, state and local law enforcement officials for the ostensible purpose of sharing and coordinating counterterrorism intelligence.

The *Los Angeles Times* reported Wednesday that the Boston Regional Intelligence Center, which is funded in part by the federal Department of Homeland Security, issued an 18-page report five days before the Boston bombing warning the Boston police that the finish line of the Marathon was an "area of increased vulnerability" and that "homegrown extremists" could use "small-scale bombings" to attack spectators and runners.

At the same time, the report said that "The FBI has not identified any specific lone offender or extremist group who pose a threat to the Boston Marathon."

Local and state police are also included on the Joint Terrorism Task Force in Boston, but there as well, they were not told of the multiple warnings about the Tsarnaevs or the federal government's contact with the family. In his testimony,

Police Commissioner Davis said that an officer of US Customs and Border Protection, a unit of the Homeland Security Department, who served on the task force and had knowledge of Tamerlan Tsarnaev's travels did not notify any of the four Boston police officers assigned to the group.

These statements by top local and state police officials rip to shreds the official attempts to explain away the failure of US police and intelligence agencies to prevent the April 15 bombings as yet another case of "failing to connect the dots" or "failing to communicate." The identical lame phrases that were used after the 9/11 attacks to cover up the extensive advance warnings of a terror attack and the fact that both the FBI and CIA had been tracking many of the hijack-bombers are being employed once again.

There is no innocent explanation for a decision by the FBI, the CIA and the Homeland Security Department to conceal from the state and local police, in advance of a major public event, the presence of area residents widely suspected of having terrorist connections. To even suggest that such a decision would be made by these agencies out of civil liberties concerns is preposterous.

In an attempt to deflect blame, the FBI in Boston issued a statement Thursday evening declaring that state and local members of Joint Terrorism Task Forces "are responsible for maintaining awareness of possible threats to their respective jurisdictions." The FBI office added that all task force members have access to Guardian, a system that collects information about alleged threats and suspicious activity.

The hearing itself, the first held by Congress on the bombings, was a transparent exercise in cover-up and damage control. Neither the Republican and Democratic congressmen nor the officials who testified evinced any desire to seriously investigate the role of intelligence and police agencies in the bombings.

There was no suggestion that the withholding of information could involve anything more sinister than incompetence or inattention. There was no questioning of the massive buildup of domestic spying and police powers since 9/11, supposedly to "protect" the American population and pursue a "war on terror," nor any attempt to explain how, despite the panoply of Anti-Terror Task Forces and fusion centers, an evident terror threat could "drop below the radar."

Nor was there any demand that those responsible for the supposed failures be named, fired or otherwise held accountable.

Police Commissioner Davis himself was the most open in expressing the general sentiments of those at the hearing. "I'm just very happy that we can move on to other things," Davis said. "I'd personally like it if we never had to mention these names again."

The committee chairman, Rep. Michael McCaul (Republican of Texas), set the tone in his opening remarks, declaring, "We learned over a decade ago the danger of failing to connect the

dots."

Rep. Bennie Thompson of Mississippi, the ranking Democrat on the committee, hinted that more extensive and integrated domestic spying was needed, stating, "We must develop a way to fix and integrate these various databases."

Joseph Lieberman, the former Democratic senator and the party's 2000 vice presidential candidate, was more direct in seeking to utilize the Boston bombings as a pretext for intensifying the assault on democratic rights. He suggested that Justice Department guidelines were handcuffing the FBI in conducting investigations, and that the guidelines should be loosened to give the FBI more leeway.

The official story—that the police and intelligence agencies once again "failed to connect the dots" and share what they knew about the alleged bombers—lacks any credibility. More plausible is the likelihood that US intelligence agencies were using, or planned to use, Tamerlan Tsarnaev to further their machinations with Islamist separatist forces in Chechnya and Dagestan, with whom they have been working for many years.

The US has worked with such elements to pursue their geo-political aims in the region against Russia, as well as mobilizing them to participate in US-backed wars in the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s and more recently in Libya and Syria. US proxy forces from the Caucasus include those that are linked to Al Qaeda.

The bipartisan cover-up reflected at the hearing was not only about state conspiracies and intrigues against democratic rights at home, but also about their connection to US aggression and subversion abroad. The most immediate task was to conceal the *de facto* alliance of the US and Al Qaeda-associated terrorist forces, including those originating in Chechnya and neighboring Muslim-majority Russian Republics. The reality of this political and military alignment explodes the myth of a so-called "war on terror" being fought to defeat Al Qaeda.

Thus, McCaul declared: "Many Chechen rebels have forged a bond with the Al Qaeda jihadist movement. These lethal warriors have fought side-by-side with Al Qaeda and the Taliban against US soldiers in Afghanistan and Iraq."

He conveniently neglected to mention that these same forces have been armed and supported by the US in Libya and Syria.

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