

The New York Bombings: Feeding The “War on Terror”

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Global Research, September 24, 2016

[World Socialist Web Site](#) 23 September 2016

Ahmad Khan Rahami was charged Tuesday night with nine counts of attempted murder and using weapons of mass destruction in connection with last weekend’s terror bombings in New York City and New Jersey.

As more details emerge, it is becoming clear that these bombings are part of a disturbing and ever more familiar pattern that dates back at least to the 9/11 attacks on New York City and Washington in 2001. In virtually every terrorist act carried out on US soil, the perpetrator is someone who is known by and previously identified to the FBI or other US police and intelligence agencies.

On the other hand, with those “terrorist plots” that are “foiled,” also almost invariably, those charged are patsies, set up in sting operations by federal agents who in many cases provide weapons, money and targets to individuals who would never have embarked on such operations on their own.

Rahami, a naturalized American citizen who immigrated to the US with his family from Afghanistan at the age of seven, is charged with planting explosive devices—pipe bombs and pressure cooker bombs—one of which injured 31 people on a street in Manhattan. He was arrested after being shot in a gunfight with police that also left two cops wounded.

In the immediate aftermath of the bombings, authorities issued statements declaring that there was no link between the attacks and “international terrorism.” It would now appear that this story was floated by officials who were well aware of such connections and concerned about the record of their own decisions to ignore them.

The *New York Times* revealed Thursday that Rahami’s father, Mohammad Rahami, gave a detailed warning to the FBI in 2014, saying that his son represented a threat and was increasingly attracted to Al Qaeda and other terrorist groups. Federal agents spoke to the elder Rahami during a police investigation following his son’s stabbing of a sibling in a domestic dispute.

“I told the FBI to keep an eye on him,” he told the *Times*. “They said, ‘Is he a terrorist?’ I said: ‘I don’t know. I can’t guarantee you 100 percent if he is a terrorist. I don’t know which groups he is in. I can’t tell you.’”

The father added that the FBI never followed up by interviewing his son.

This contact was not the only one between Rahami and federal intelligence agencies. Only

five months before his father's discussions with the FBI, Rahami returned from a yearlong visit to Pakistan, where he visited Quetta, the capital of Pakistani Baluchistan, which is the headquarters of various Islamist factions. The trip prompted a secondary screening by customs officials, who were concerned enough to notify the National Targeting Center, a division of the Homeland Security Department that is supposed to assess potential terrorist threats. This prompted a notification to the FBI and other agencies.

It has further emerged since the bombings that federal officials were aware that Rahami may have made another trip to Ankara, Turkey, apparently with the aim of joining the Islamic State (ISIS) or one of the militias connected to Al Qaeda that are engaged in the US-backed war for regime change in Syria.

Finally, federal authorities were informed of Rahami's purchase last July of a Glock 9mm handgun, the weapon he is charged with using in shooting two Linden, New Jersey policemen as they tried to take him into custody.

Once again, the refrain made famous in the wake of 9/11 is being heard again: there was a failure to "connect the dots."

In some cases, the similarities to previous incidents are stark. As in Rahami's case, the father of Nigerian student Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, who attempted to bring down a Northwest Airlines jet on Christmas Eve 2009 with a bomb hidden in his underwear, also warned US authorities of his son's terrorist ties, but was ignored.

Then there was the case of the 2013 Boston Marathon bombing, in which the principal organizer was Tamerlan Tsarnaev. Russian intelligence had identified Tsarnaev to US authorities in 2011 as a suspected radical Islamist who was seeking to link up with armed groups in the Northern Caucasus. He was subsequently interviewed by the FBI and then allowed to travel to the Caucasus and return, with no questions asked.

Given the vast intelligence apparatus maintained by the US state and the sweeping mass surveillance it conducts, the failure to pursue such leads does not lend itself to innocent interpretation or a mere failure to "connect the dots."

On the one hand, the decision not to impede the travel of individuals identified as "terrorists" stems from the fact that the US government is utilizing such elements in pursuit of its foreign policy aims. It has done so at least since the late 1980s, when Rahami's father fought with the Afghan mujahedeen in the CIA-orchestrated war against the Soviet-backed government in Afghanistan. Foreign Islamists have been the backbone of the proxy forces fighting the US war for regime change in Syria, as they were in Libya, and US intelligence has long had relations with similar forces in both Russia and China.

On the other hand, giving a free rein to those identified as potential terrorists and letting nature take its course serves a definite political agenda, providing grist for the mill of the "global war on terror." This "war" has provided the pretext for both unending bombings and invasions to further the strategic interests of US imperialism, and the escalating repression within the US itself.

Terrorist acts are also magnified and endlessly sensationalized by the corporate media as a means of undermining the broad popular opposition to war.

Finally, such acts can be exploited to further the aims of one faction within the state apparatus against another. The bombings in New York and New Jersey coincided with evidence of just such divisions within the Obama administration, as sections of the military brass have recently made statements approaching insubordination in relation to the abortive ceasefire deal in Syria.

It is impossible to say at this early stage what relation these bombings have to the murky and sinister world in which US intelligence agencies and Islamist terrorist groups intersect.

Nor are the precise motivations of Rahami known. Sections of a notebook in his possession at the time of his arrest include praise for Osama bin Laden; Anwar al-Awlaki, the US-born, Al Qaeda-linked cleric assassinated in a US drone strike; as well as an ISIS leader.

Rahami's alleged act may have been the product of his own emotional or mental distress, or psychological factors combined with what the state and the media habitually refer to as "homegrown terrorism" or "self-radicalization." Whatever the case, the state of American society on the eve of the 2016 elections provides fertile ground for such violence.

Over 15 years of uninterrupted US wars, with over a million killed, many millions more driven from their homes and entire societies left in shreds, cannot help but produce deadly consequences within the US itself. Bloodshed abroad is combined with the ceaseless brutalization of society at home. Rahami grew up in Union County, New Jersey, where the poverty rate is over 27 percent and the social inequality between its working-class residents and the concentration of billionaires and multimillionaires in nearby New York City could not be starker. The pervasive social alienation among broad layers of society is intensified by the continuous demonization of Muslims.

The existing political setup, moreover, provides no progressive outlet for the increasingly explosive buildup of social discontent. The pseudo-left elements who, in an earlier period, protested against US wars are now to be found among their most enthusiastic supporters.

Less than seven weeks before the election, these latest bombings are being utilized to shift the political debate within the two major parties even further to the right, with the fascistic Republican candidate Donald Trump and the Democratic favorite of the military and intelligence apparatus Hillary Clinton vying with each other over who is best prepared as "commander-in-chief" to escalate war abroad and intensify repression at home.

The reactionary and noxious atmosphere of American politics will only ensure further attacks like that which occurred last weekend.

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