

Miami “terror” arrests—a government provocation

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There are many incongruities surrounding the arrest of seven men from the impoverished Liberty City neighborhood of Miami on charges of conspiracy to “wage war on the United States” that suggest it, like so many previous “terrorist plots” announced by the Bush administration, is a government-inspired provocation mounted for reactionary political ends.

None of the claims made by the government and repeated uncritically by the media concerning the arrest of these young working-class men can be accepted as good coin. Both the flimsiness of the criminal indictment and the lurid headlines surrounding it mark this event as an escalation in the anti-democratic conspiracies of the Bush administration.

There is every indication that this latest purported terrorist threat—described by some media outlets as “even bigger than September 11”—was manufactured by the FBI, which used an undercover agent posing as a terrorist mastermind to entrap those targeted for arrest.

While the Justice Department declared that the arrests had foiled a plot to blow up the tallest building in the US, the Sears Tower in Chicago, authorities in that city assured its residents that there had never been any threat to the structure.

The four-count indictment presented by the Justice Department in a Miami federal court on Friday contains not a single indication of an overt criminal act or even the means to carry one out. The brief 11-page document consists almost entirely of alleged statements made by the defendants to the FBI informant, referred to in quotes throughout the indictment as “the al Qaeda representative.”

The government chose to consummate its entrapment plan by unleashing dozens of combat-equipped federal agents, dressed in olive drab fatigues and carrying automatic weapons, on the predominantly African-American Liberty City neighborhood, one of the poorest in the country. Liberty City was the scene of riots that broke out in 1980 after the acquittal of white police officers for the beating death of a black motorist.

On Thursday, the government’s paramilitary squads confronted residents with pictures of the accused, demanding to know their whereabouts. The seven defendants are representative of the impoverished working class population of Miami, including Haitian immigrants.

It appears they were targeted by the FBI because they had formed a religious group, calling themselves the “Seas of David,” which reportedly incorporated elements of Christianity and Islam. One of their crimes, according to the FBI’s deputy director, John Pistole, was that the Seas of David “did not believe the United States government had legal authority over

them.”

According to some residents of the neighborhood, the group lived together in the warehouse that was raided by the FBI, using it for religious worship and as a base of operations for a construction business.

Elements of the federal indictment are so self-incriminating as to border on the ludicrous. Among the charges are that the defendants “swore an oath of loyalty to al Qaeda.” Who administered this oath? The “al Qaeda representative,” AKA, the paid informant of the FBI.

Aside from this “loyalty oath” solicited by the FBI, only one of the seven defendants is accused of any overt act, outside of driving the FBI informant to meetings.

The only action with which this one individual is charged—all else is words—is taking pictures of the FBI headquarters in Miami. Who supplied the camera? The “al Qaeda representative”—i.e., the FBI agent provocateur.

The indictment further charges two of the accused with driving “with the ‘al Qaeda representative’” to a store in Dade County, Florida to purchase a memory chip for a digital camera to be used for taking reconnaissance photographs of the FBI building. The document does not say who paid for the chip, but there is hardly room for doubt.

In one of the more curious sections of the indictment, one of the accused, Narseal Batiste, is accused of asking the FBI informant to provide various items for his group, including footwear, for which he provided a “list of shoe sizes.” Apparently the FBI delivered the shoes.

Pistole, the FBI deputy director, admitted that the supposed plots to blow up buildings had been “more aspirational than operational.” In the raids carried out by the FBI squads, no weapons and no explosive substances were found.

“We preempted their plot,” declared Pistole. But the indictment and the facts of the case indicate that the alleged plot would never have existed had the government not planned and instigated it in the first place.

At a Washington press conference, US Attorney General Alberto Gonzales acknowledged that the alleged plot had posed no actual danger. He claimed this was because the authorities had intervened “in its earliest stages.”

So “early” was the preemption that officials associated with the supposed targets of the plot dismissed the government’s indictment. Barbara Carley, the managing director of the Sears Tower, told the press, “Federal and local authorities continue to tell us they’ve never found evidence of a credible terrorism threat against Sears Tower that’s ever gone beyond just talk.”

Her remarks were echoed by Chicago Police Superintendent Phil Cline, who said, “There never was any credible threat to the Sears Tower at all.”

In his press conference, Attorney General Gonzales asserted that the Miami group represented a “new brand of terrorism” created by “the convergence of globalization and technology.”

What these words mean is anyone's guess. There is no indication that those charged, who were living in a warehouse in the poorest city in America, had access to any technology, and their supposed contact to the wider world was an informer planted by the FBI. The suggestion that the seven men were a "home-grown" terrorist group inspired by contact with Al Qaeda elements over the Internet is supported neither by evidence nor the charges contained in the government's own indictment.

R. Alexander Acosta, the United States attorney in South Florida, told the media that the defendants had "lived in the United States for most of their lives, but developed a hatred of America." This is presented as though it constituted evidence of a crime.

It is hardly surprising for someone living in Liberty City to hate the poverty and oppression that prevail there, or for Haitian immigrants to despise the imprisonment and repression that Washington metes out to those attempting to escape the brutal conditions imposed by US imperialism upon their homeland.

What is highly noteworthy is that the federal government decided to intervene in this situation to concoct a phony Al Qaeda connection and trumped up "terror plot."

What is the government's motive in manufacturing such a plot? Whose interests are served? Under conditions in which the majority of the American people have turned against the Iraq war and support the withdrawal of American troops, the Bush administration is desperately attempting to once again link its neo-colonial venture in Iraq with a supposed "global war on terror" waged to defend the American people against another 9/11.

To sustain such a fiction, fresh evidence of terrorist threats is periodically required. And it has been forthcoming on a regular basis. Every several months another "conspiracy" is unveiled, invariably involving an FBI informant and hapless individuals ensnared in a plot orchestrated by the government.

Until now, these "sting" operations have been targeted at Muslim immigrants. Last month, for example, Pakistani immigrant Shahawar Siraj in New York City was found guilty of plotting to blow up the Herald Square subway station in a "plot" that the evidence indicated was based entirely on suggestions from an FBI informant. The FBI agent provocateur taunted the defendant with photographs of Abu Ghraib torture victims and demanded to know how, as a Muslim, he could fail to take action.

Similarly, in Albany, New York two years ago, the FBI recruited a Pakistani immigrant, promising him leniency on minor fraud charges, to ensnare two other immigrants in a fictitious scheme to help a non-existent person buy a weapon for a fake terrorist plot.

These provocations and conspiracies are symptomatic of a government that is both ruthless and desperate. Confronting a population that is increasingly hostile to its political agenda of reaction at home and war abroad, it is driven to manufacture an endless series of terrorist threats aimed at disorienting and intimidating public opinion.

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