



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on November 29, 2010

Portland: Another Terrorist Plot Courtesy of the Federal Bureau of Instigation?

On Friday, November 26, Somali-born Mohamed Osman Mohamud, 19, parked a van loaded with what he thought was a bomb near Pioneer Courthouse Square, Portland, Oregon, where the city's annual Christmas tree-lighting ceremony was taking place. He dialed a telephone number that he expected would detonate the bomb. Nothing happened. On the advice of an associate, he stepped out of the car to dial again. At that moment, FBI agents arrested him on charges of attempting to use a weapon of mass destruction; if found guilty, he could face life imprisonment.



How did the FBI know Mohamud would make such an attempt — and that it would fail? Simple: Their agents had been assisting Mohamud every step of the way, even loading the fake bomb on the van for him.

According to the FBI's version of events — which, as *Salon's* [Glenn Greenwald reminds us](#), is all we have right now — Mohamud first came to the agency's attention in 2009 when he attempted to contact a man he had met who (as the *New York Times* reports it) had since “moved to Yemen and then northwest Pakistan, a center of terrorism activity.”

As a result of the FBI's interception of Mohamud's emails to this unidentified man — described by a law-enforcement officer as “a recruiter for terrorism,” according to the *Times* — Mohamud was “placed on a watch list and stopped at the Portland airport in June 2010 when he tried to fly to Alaska for a summer job.”

Shortly thereafter, an undercover FBI agent, posing as an associate of the man in Pakistan (who had ignored Mohamud's emails), made contact with Mohamud. In July, FBI agents met with Mohamud and began helping him plan the November 26 attack.

“For the next several weeks,” writes the *Times*, “the F.B.I. let the plot play out, assisting Mr. Mohamud with the details, providing him with cash, scoping out a parking spot near the square, sketching out the plan on paper. At the end of September, Mr. Mohamud mailed bomb components to agents he thought were fellow operatives who would assemble the device.” In early November Mohamud and undercover agents “exploded a bomb in a backpack” in a remote location, according to the paper. Then, three days before the Christmas tree ceremony, “Mr. Mohamud and the undercover agents met again for final preparations, loading what seemed like parts of a bomb into a vehicle, planning details of the operation.” Finally, the night of the failed attack, the agents rode along with Mohamud to the square, where police, working with the FBI, had kindly made certain that a parking space was available for him. The agents were also the ones who instructed Mohamud to exit the van and dial the detonation number a second time.



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Now Mohamud is obviously not an innocent party here. The *Times* says that the FBI alleges that Mohamud “said that he was looking for ‘a huge mass’ of victims” in his attack and “had been dreaming of committing an act of terrorism for years.” Certainly he showed no compunction about attempting to detonate a bomb in a crowded square. Still, his inability to connect with actual terrorists and his lack of explosives expertise (he did, after all, think he had a real bomb in his car), combined with the high level of FBI involvement in the plot, raise suspicions that the plot was something cooked up by the agency so that it could then “foil” the plot amid great fanfare — not exactly a new tack for the FBI, which has done the same thing in other high-profile cases of alleged domestic terrorism.

Greenwald puts it thus:

It may very well be that the FBI successfully and within legal limits arrested a dangerous criminal intent on carrying out a serious Terrorist plot that would have killed many innocent people, in which case they deserve praise. Court-approved surveillance and use of undercover agents to infiltrate terrorist plots are legitimate tactics when used in accordance with the law.

But it may also just as easily be the case that the FBI — [as they’ve done many times in the past](#) — found some very young, impressionable, disaffected, hapless, aimless, inept loner; created a plot it then persuaded/manipulated/entrapped him to join, essentially turning him into a Terrorist; and then patted itself on the back once it arrested him for having thwarted a “Terrorist plot” which, from start to finish, was entirely the FBI’s own concoction. Having stopped a plot which it itself manufactured, the FBI then publicly touts — and an uncritical media amplifies — its “success” to the world, thus proving both that domestic Terrorism from Muslims is a serious threat and the Government’s vast surveillance power — current and future new ones — are necessary.

In fact, most of the terrorist plots the FBI has allegedly foiled seem to have been ones in which its own agents were the prime movers, while genuine terrorists such as those on United Airlines flight 93 on 9/11, the “shoe bomber,” the “underwear bomber,” and the Times Square bomber were all thwarted by civilians.

There are at least two good reasons to be suspicious of the FBI’s conduct in this case. First is the fact that the FBI prohibited Mohamud from flying to Alaska for a summer job and then turned around and offered him money, “including almost \$3,000 in cash for him to rent his own apartment,” according to Greenwald, who notes that such blandishments “surely helped make him receptive to [FBI agents’] suggestions and influence.” As noted above, the FBI was heavily involved in — even directing — Mohamud’s alleged plot every step of the way.

The second reason for suspicion is that the FBI’s recording equipment mysteriously malfunctioned during the one conversation that supposedly proves that Mohamud was not entrapped by government agents but willfully chose to commit a crime with no inducement whatsoever. During this conversation, Greenwald writes, an undercover FBI agent allegedly told “Mohamud that there were at least five ways he could serve the cause of Islam (including by praying, studying engineering, raising funds to send overseas, or becoming ‘operational’), and Mohamud replied he wanted to ‘be operational’ by using exploding [sic] a bomb.”

Greenwald continues:

But strangely, while all other conversations with Mohamud which the FBI summarizes were (according to the affidavit) recorded by numerous recording devices, this conversation — the



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crucial one for negating Mohamud's entrapment defense — was not. That's because, according to the FBI, the undercover agent "was equipped with audio equipment to record the meeting. **However, due to technical problems, the meeting was not recorded**" (para. 37 [of FBI affidavit]).

Thus, we have only the FBI's word, and only its version, for what was said during this crucial — potentially dispositive — conversation....

In other words, although to the unbiased observer it appears that the FBI set up the whole alleged terrorist plot and entrapped Mohamud into carrying it out, it was actually all Mohamud's idea — and we'll just have to take the FBI's word for it. Never mind that, as Greenwald says, "it's impossible to conceive of Mohamud having achieved anything on his own."

Why, Greenwald asks, would Mohamud, who had lived in the United States since he was three years old and was a naturalized citizen with a clean record, wish to commit such mayhem? Did he, after all this time, suddenly realize that he hated freedom, as most government officials would have us believe? Not according to the FBI's affidavit, which has Mohamud declaring that his attack, which he desired to include women and children, was "for you to refrain from killing our children, women.... And it's not fair that they should do that to people and not feeling it." Later, says the affidavit, Mohamud made a video in which he said, "For as long as you threaten our security, your people will not remain safe. As your soldiers target out civilians, we will not help to do so. Did you think that you could invade a Muslim land, and we would not invade you...."

So if the FBI's version of events is accurate — and the government certainly wants us to believe it is — Mohamud wanted to kill Americans because Americans are killing Muslims. That was also the motive that [Faisal Shahzad](#), the Times Square bomber, gave for his attempt at terrorism. And it's the motive given by practically every Muslim terrorist, up to and including Osama bin Laden. Is it possible they hate us not for our freedom but for our government's wars and behind-the-scenes machinations in Muslim countries?

Let the U.S. government mind its own business, both at home and abroad, and we will all — Muslims and non-Muslims, Americans and foreigners — be safer.

Photo of Mohamed Osman Mohamud: AP Images

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