



The Tampa Bombers: Jihadists or "Beach Boys?"

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Six years after 9/11, the mainstream reading of the war on Terror still circles around the essence of the conflict. Two young men indicted for charges of possession of explosives aren't yet perceived as part of an Urban Jihadist campaign inside the United States, despite the fact that a number of cells and of individuals have been arrested over the past years, all linked to Jihadism. Ahmed Abdellatif Sherif Mohamed, 24 and Youssef Samir Megahed (in Egyptian accent it reads "Mujahid") 21, are affiliated with South Florida University in Tampa. As one reviews all news reporting (until this day), no link was made yet to an ideology which is the master chain between the perpetrators and their action. The AP story begins with "two Egyptian students at the University of South Florida were indicted Friday on charges of carrying explosive materials across states lines and one was accused of teach-

ing the other how to use them for violent reasons." The News Agency doesn't explain what these violent reasons are. Was it about drugs, social crisis, Palestine, Americans Politics, Egyptian politics, Abortion, or other matters? The mainstream media says "Terrorism," and so advances the Government, so far.

Ahmed Mohamed is an engineering graduate student and teaching assistant at the Tampa-based University. He and Megahed are facing "terrorism" charges for "teaching and demonstrating how to use the explosives." The question is: using them against whom, in which war, by whose instructions, under which doctrine? If none of this information is available how to define the terror factor beyond criminal charges?

According to AP, Mohamed was charged with "*distributing information relating to explosives, destructive*

devices, and weapons of mass destruction, which is a terrorism-related statute, a Justice Department official said. The crime carries a maximum of 20 years in prison." Fine, but the American public needs to know more about the motives. The story doesn't begin with a Police unit stopping them on a highway and charging them of transporting explosives in interstate commerce without permits. This is not a criminal story happening on an ordinary day. The media reports said in South Carolina, where Mohamed and Megahed have been held in the Berkeley County jail, "U.S. Attorney Reginald I. Lloyd praised state and federal authorities for cooperating in the four-week investigation that initially did not look like a terrorism case." So what caused the mutation from crime to Terrorism? The AP writes that "since the Aug. 4 arrest, authorities sought to determine whether Mohamed and Megahed were fledgling terrorists or merely college students headed to the beach with devices made from fireworks they bought at Wal-Mart in their car, as they claimed. The local sheriff in South Carolina said the explosives were "other than fireworks." A non expert reader would conclude that it is the "type" of explosives that made the case into Terrorism, not the actions, intentions and the combat doctrine of the perpetrators. Had the explosives been licensed, the two men would be free now. Had the material been large fireworks, they would have also been free. So, short of capturing them moving with illegal explosives, they wouldn't have been persons of interest. But is there any other way in our legal system to

arrest Terrorists than catching them with explosives? Other than presenting an evidence that they "want" to cause harm, actually there isn't. That's why we weren't able to capture Mohammed Atta and Ziad Jarrah on 9/11 before they dive with the captured airliners. Mohammed and Ziad didn't have illegal explosives in their hands before they board, and not even after they boarded. Because they chose not to use explosives, and yet they were Jihadi Terrorists who have intended to massacre thousands of Americans. So, in fact, as I made the case several times to Government and NGO entities, including legislative committees, our legal system doesn't enable the Government to stop the Terrorists before they are caught armed or with sufficient evidence that they were about to detonate the material. The next question is: can we change the system? The answer is fast and natural: no we can't and we shouldn't on the essence. All persons are presumed innocents until proven guilty.

But what we can and should do is to learn from each case: If we are lucky enough to catch them before they act, at least we have to learn from the operation all what is needed to abort other potential ones. What we must know are the motives, the big picture and the positioning of the perpetrators in the larger war. Are they part of a cell and of a movement? What are their doctrinal beliefs, their ideology, their objectives, the literature and material that indoctrinated them and transformed them into Jihadi Terrorists? Short of this information, we wouldn't (the

public, the Government and the experts) be able to assess the "Terror act" and place it in the widest context. If this action is the result of two persons who were planning on having fun blasting explosives, but didn't obtain a license is one thing, with no value related to the ongoing War on Terror; but if Mohamed and Megahed were part of a larger picture, even of a homegrown experiment, this would have tremendous consequences on Homeland Security. So which is the case?

According to the Investigative Project on Terrorism (IPT) Mohamed had "*rented a room in a house in Temple Terrace, a suburb of Tampa, which was used as the office for the World and Islam Studies Enterprise (WISE), a think-tank founded by former USF Professor Sami Al-Arian. In 2006, Al-Arian pleaded guilty to one count of conspiracy to make or receive contributions of funds, goods or services to or for the benefit of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ). Evidence presented at his trial showed Al-Arian served on the PIJ governing board.*" The next question then is: Are Mohamed and Megahed linked to the activities of Al Arian? Were the activities of the latter linked to them? Is there a wider activity linking both parties in the US? Mohamed and Megahed are Egyptians hence it is less likely that they would be part of Palestinian Islamic Jihad. But they can be Jihadist regardless of not being part of PIJ. So, if a link exists between these two parties, this could also mean that PIJ and the vast Jihadist movement operating in America are connected. We're advancing these theories because the Salafi Jihadi movement is

transnational and is operating against the US and other liberal democracies. These are the conclusions of many counter terrorism authorities such as the Task Force on Future Terrorism of the Department of Homeland Security, the New York Police Department, and recently too the US Air Force report on Terrorism. This and other arrests should be analyzed under the new parameters emerging from various centers in Government and across the specialized NGOs.

Another intriguing development was -according to the Investigative Project- that the Jury in Tampa heard from the representative of a local advocacy Islamist group: CAIR. The question is why would a particular American association testify in a Terrorism case? Logically it would be called upon if it has an expertise on Terrorism, if the two indicted persons were members of the organization, or if the latter was opposing the indictment on the basis of defending the ideology behind the act. In this case, what are the reasons invoked? CAIR isn't a qualified counter Terrorism association, which leaves the two remaining arguments: membership or advocacy. Answers on both issues are warranted to solve the enigma. But the IPT report said "*M. Ahmed Bedier, spokesman for the Tampa chapter of the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), testified under subpoena. Bedier has acted as a family spokesman for the Megahed family.*" The next question is to know if M Bedier acted personally or as a representative of his organization. This fact is important as it would open another series

of questions as to the relationship between "advocacy groups" and the Jihadist ideology. For the CAIR representative told the Tampa Tribune *"that the men were being scrutinized due to their ethnicity."* But as far as it was reported they are Egyptian citizens who have been caught with illegal explosives. There are many Egyptian-Americans, Arab-Americans, and Middle Eastern Americans who are working within Law Enforcement. Actually, when documents are translated by Government in Terrorism cases, it is often that Arab-American translators are the ones tasked with the translation. So how then are the two Egyptians scrutinized "due" to their ethnicity while among those who are protecting the Homeland Security - and often on these cases- are people who belong to the same ethnicity: Law Enforcement, analysts, translators, etc?

"Obviously their heritage and background is playing a major role in blowing this out of proportion," Bedier said. "If these were some good old boys, I doubt this [story] would be played around the world." Actually, it is the other way around. While the Government is not -unfortunately- providing the public with the ideological material leading to the actions, the "advocacy groups" who sympathize with these Jihadists ideologies are attempting to transform any arrest into an "ethnic" case. For one would ask these "groups" why don't they move with the same vigor if Copts, Sudanese, Assyrians, Kurds, Arab Christians, anti-Jihadist Muslims? If the Islamist advocacy groups are coming to the defense of

individuals just for belonging to an ethnic group, the argument is flawed, as CAIR is not representative of an ethnic group, but of a (self described) ideological agenda. But on the other hand, if CAIR comes to the defense of the indicted persons because of their affiliation with a religious group, the argument needs to be made based on statements made by the two Egyptians. That is the link between their alleged religious beliefs and the fact that they had explosives: In fact there was none, for we haven't read or heard from them or others that they were on a "religious mission." Hence, CAIR must present another reason for their involvement, assuming that Mr Bedier acts on behalf of the organization in this case.

Which brings the analysis back to the initial question: Did Mohamed and Megahed act as Jihadists or not? US law doesn't need such an answer. It has them under the charge of possession of explosives. But since CAIR and other advocacy groups are claiming that there something "else" involved, it should be beneficial to the American public -and certainly to the national security planners- to learn more about the ideological context of this case. For failing to address this dimension in the War on Terror would end up being compared with the following -virtual- dramatic interpretation: 1943: Two German young men born in Berlin were arrested in South Carolina for the possession of explosives and willing to use them against the US. While the two men were charged with this crime, regardless of WWII, an advocacy

group accused the US Government of being “Germanophobe.” Better, among the Law enforcement that

proceeded with the arrest were many German-Americans.

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