

THE FBI WANTED A PROPAGANDIST TO BECOME AN “INFORMANT”

In a post focusing on the First Amendment problems with Tarek Mehanna’s conviction for serving as an al Qaeda propagandist, Glenn Greenwald posted the speech Mehanna made at sentencing. Most of the attention paid to the speech has focused on the American icons Mehanna used to situate his own extremism, including Superman, Paul Revere, and Malcom X.

I’m far more interested in this bit:

In the name of God the most gracious the most merciful Exactly four years ago this month I was finishing my work shift at a local hospital. As I was walking to my car I was approached by two federal agents. They said that I had a choice to make: I could do things the easy way, or I could do them the hard way. The “easy ” way, as they explained, was that I would become an informant for the government, and if I did so I would never see the inside of a courtroom or a prison cell. As for the hard way, this is it. Here I am, having spent the majority of the four years since then in a solitary cell the size of a small closet, in which I am locked down for 23 hours each day. The FBI and these prosecutors worked very hard-and the government spent millions of tax dollars – to put me in that cell, keep me there, put me on trial, and finally to have me stand here before you today to be sentenced to even more time in a cell.

In April 2008, Mehanna alleged, the FBI approached him to become an informant.

That they asked a young Muslim against whom they had collected evidence of False Statements to become an informant is no big surprise. We know the government has actually used FISA to find evidence of criminality they can use to persuade someone to turn informant.

What's interesting is that they spent over a year (they had abundant evidence of Mehanna's false statements by February 25, 2007) working on setting up Mehanna to be an informant rather than preparing to arrest him.

What's interesting is that they made that kind of effort with a propagandist.

There is precedent, of course. We know the FBI used Hal Turner as an "informant" for five years, in an effort to entice right wingers to violence. We know there have been questions raised about Inspire, the AQAP magazine that Samir Khan edited (after having been watched by the NC FBI but then allowed to leave the country, unlike Mehanna).

But if Mehanna is to be believed, the FBI recruited him in 2008. When Mehanna said no, the FBI prosecuted him for First Amendment activities.