

“COULD NOT BE INDEPENDENTLY CONFIRMED”

There’s a dispute brewing between the Tsarnaev brothers’ mother, Zubeidat, and the FBI about whether or not they called Tamerlan Thursday morning and told him he was a suspect.

Their mother went so far on Sunday to claim that the FBI had contacted her elder son after the deadly bombs exploded at the marathon. If true it would be the first indication that the FBI considered him a suspect before Boston descended into violence on Thursday.

At FBI headquarters in Washington, spokesman Michael Kortan stood by the bureau’s public statement of two days ago in which the bureau described a 2011 FBI interview of Tamerlan Tsarnaev. Kortan said the 2011 interview was the only FBI contact with Tamerlan Tsarnaev. The FBI statement from two days ago says that the FBI did not learn of the identity of Tamerlan and his brother until Friday after the gun battle in which Tamerlan was killed.

The mother’s claim could not be independently confirmed, and she has made statements in the past that appeared to show a lack of full understanding of what occurred in Boston.

[snip]

Tsarnaeva said her elder son told her by telephone that the FBI had called to inform him that they considered him a suspect and he should come in for questioning. [my emphasis]

I can imagine a lot of reasons for the dispute: Tsarnaeva is confused, the FBI is lying (though why they're so keen to admit their vaunted facial recognition couldn't find Dzhokhar, I don't know), or Tsarnaeva is working an angle to – as many Chechens are doing – argue that this is somehow kind of a setup.

But I thought it worthwhile to point out what AP did with this report: it presented the dispute, repeated the FBI's talking point claiming they had only contacted Tamerlan in 2011, and then said Tsarnaeva's claim could not be independently confirmed.

As if the FBI claim could be.

Which of course it couldn't. Even if they were willing to share Tamerlan's file and the communications they had with the Russians, they wouldn't do so until far later in the discovery process. And the centrality of foreign liaison communications with the Russians to this question would make the documents the most sensitive kind of classified document.

I'm not saying I believe the mother over the FBI; let's wait to see what other evidence we get (and see whether the FBI tries to explain why it set off a manhunt rather than use the facial recognition tools we taxpayer spent billions to buy). But it's worth noting that even in spite of this Administration's blatant abuse of secrecy, the press is still treating their undocumented claims as verified.