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Hundreds protest FBI raids on anti-war activists

By STEVE KARNOWSKI

9/28/2010

Hundreds of protesters gathered outside FBI offices in Minneapolis and Chicago on Monday, bearing signs and shouting chants condemning the agency's recent searches of homes and offices of anti-war activists in both cities.

About 150 people protested in Minneapolis, with signs reading: "Stop FBI harassment. Opposing war is not a crime." Roughly 120 people marched in Chicago, chanting, "Hey, hey! Ho, ho! FBI raids have got to go!"

Search warrants had indicated investigators were looking for connections between the activists and radical groups in Colombia and the Middle East. Activists interviewed by The Associated Press scoffed at the suggestion that they might have provided material support to terrorism, and denied contributing money to terrorists.

One of the homes searched was that of Jess Sundin of the Minnesota Anti-War Committee. She told protesters that she knows of 13 people who have been subpoenaed to appear before a federal grand jury in Chicago next month.

Sundin and two other Minnesotans who were searched — Mick Kelly, and Meredith Aby — acknowledged in interviews Monday that they've had ties to activist groups and have

traveled in the Middle East and-or Colombia. But they all denied contributing any money to terrorist groups.

"We have provided no material support," Kelly said. "I can't stress that long enough or loud enough, and honestly I don't believe that's why we're facing this scrutiny."

The FBI had searched five homes of anti-war activists in Minneapolis on Friday, plus the offices of the Minnesota Anti-War Committee. They also searched two homes of activists in Chicago. Agents confiscated computers, cell phones, large amounts of papers and financial records, the subjects and their attorneys said.

Agents were seeking "evidence relating to activities concerning the material support of terrorism," the FBI said. Chicago FBI spokesman Ross Rice declined on Monday to discuss what agents were looking for, citing an "ongoing criminal investigation." There have been no arrests.

Search warrants and subpoenas indicate authorities are looking for connections between the activists and groups including the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) and Hezbollah. The U.S. government considers those groups to be terrorist organizations.

Among the speakers in Chicago were two activists whose home was raided, Joe Iosbaker and his wife, Stephanie Weiner.

"We will not be intimidated," Iosbaker told the crowd, with people cheering in response.

Iosbaker told the crowd FBI agents had gone through everything in their home, including their music collection and their sons' school notebooks. He said the agents also found more than 20 boxes containing family papers and mementos dating back decades.

"What they learned is that we are packrats," he said, laughing.

All of these searched in Minnesota were involved in organizing a mass anti-war march at the start of the 2008 Republican National Convention in St. Paul.

The subpoena delivered to Kelly ordered him to produce records he might have relating to the Middle East and Colombia, along with "all records of any payment provided directly or indirectly to Hatem Abudayyeh."

The searches in Chicago also targeted Abudayyeh, a Palestinian-American and executive director of the Arab American Action Network, which has been fighting anti-Arab and anti-Muslim sentiment following the Sept. 11 attacks. Abudayyeh's attorney, Jim Fennerty, said agents took a laptop and any documents containing the word "Palestine" during Friday's search.

Fennerty said Abudayyeh doesn't have ties to terrorist groups. Abudayyeh has not responded to multiple requests for comment; voicemail boxes for his cell and work phones were full on Monday. Fennerty said Abudayyeh is with his hospitalized mother.

Sundin said Monday she met FARC rebels when she visited Colombia in 2000, but noted that the Colombian government was holding peace talks at the time with the rebels, who held public forums where she met them. She said she has had no contacts with FARC since.

Kelly and Sundin acknowledged they're active in the Freedom Road Socialist Organization, a group named in several warrants that openly supports FARC and PFLP and shares their Marxist ideologies. Two groups use the name after a 1999 split. They said their Freedom Road is a small group, but that they weren't sure how many supporters it has. Kelly edits its newspaper.

An anti-war activist in Durham, N.C., also said his home was searched Friday. Kosta Harlan said FBI agents tried to question him about an ongoing terrorism investigation, but he refused to answer questions. He would not say what the agents asked.