

Current and Emerging Threats of Homegrown Terrorism: The Case of the Boston Bombings

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Abstract

On April 15, 2013, two coordinated Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) exploded near the finish line of the famous Boston Marathon. The fatalities were low but the symbolism was high: more than a decade after 9/11, the United States is still not safe from militant jihadist terrorist attacks. The bombers, Tamerlan and Dzhokhar Tsarnaev had planned on killing and dying in the name of the global jihad after their second set of attacks on New York's Time Square. They were stopped before getting to New York where the fatalities could have been much greater. The two brothers were self-radicalised homegrown terrorists. At this moment of writing, existing evidence points to the fact that, while inspired by militant jihadism and in loose contact with terrorists in Dagestan, they operated alone. This is an analysis of the radicalisation process that led those two young men to adopt violent jihad, and the failures of U.S. counterterrorism efforts that enabled them to kill three people and injuring some 250 others. This analysis shows that much still needs to be done in international inter-agency collaboration and in community engagement to prevent further attacks of this sort from happening on U.S. soil.

Introduction

On April 15, 2013, another attack shook the United States. Two coordinated Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) exploded near the finish line of the famous Boston Marathon. This marked another significant event highlighting the continued danger posed to the United States by extremist ideologies. In 2012, a survey had shown that the U.S. population was less concerned about terrorism,[1] but this attack reminded them and the world that terrorism is an on-going threat. Furthermore, the attack was the work of two immigrants who had spent the last decade living in the United States; the ideological radicalisation that led them to adopting militant jihadism was done at least in part in the U.S. Their radicalisation process was complex and is worth an in-depth analysis. Building on intense feelings of isolation and failure, they found purpose through personal and online contacts with militant jihadists. They did not belong to any organised terrorist organisation but felt kin to the global jihad. The two brothers aimed to kill and die. They believed that it would be their ticket to heaven, a better life in the afterlife. In *Inspire*'s recent issue, a full page image features Tamerlan Tsarnaev writing an SMS to his mother saying "My dear mom, I will lay down my life for Islam." [2] The two brothers had extremist Islamist beliefs and resented the U.S. government for its policies in Iraq and Afghanistan. Yet they were not the instruments of a formal terrorist group. Evidence points to the fact that, while inspired

and guided by Al-Qaeda related militant jihadist materials and in loose contact with terrorists in Dagestan, they operated alone.

Since the attacks, it has been revealed that the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) had alerted the FBI and the CIA several years prior to the attacks to share suspicions about the two brothers. It was also found that Tamerlan, the older brother had visited Dagestan in 2012 and that he had links to radical Islamists both there and in the United States. Tamerlan - the apparent mastermind of the attacks - had been put on the U.S. Terrorist Identities Datamart Environment (TIDE) database, but being one of over 400,000 people on the list he was not followed closely. Some radical comments in his mosque in the U.S., his trip to Dagestan and the FSB intelligence point to gaps in the U.S. and international counterterrorism efforts. The U.S. needs to emphasize transnational collaboration against transnational threats and must acknowledge the need for community engagement both to prevent such attacks and to deflect the potential backlash resulting from such acts of violence.

The Context

The Boston bombings took place on April 15, 2013. At 2:49 PM local time (EDT), the first bomb exploded. 10 seconds later another one went off. Three persons were killed and 264 injured.[3] Quickly, the Boston community came together. While bystanders and first-responders mobilized to evacuate and heal those who were maimed, the rest of the world held its breath, waiting to hear who would claim the attacks. The media response was controlled and did not feed the ambient fear. The IEDs, the coordinated multiple explosions, and the high-visibility symbolic location pointed to an Al-Qaeda style-attack. But, the lack of statement claiming the attacks went against the Al-Qaeda *modus operandi*; while they don't always claim the attack, they are often eager to point out their successes especially abroad. Indeed, since then Tamerlan's ideological sympathies were exposed and he was featured as martyr in a full-page tribute of Al-Qaeda's *Inspire* magazine.

Three days after the attacks, on Thursday, April 18 at 5 PM Eastern Time the FBI released the pictures of the two suspects.[4] That evening, the two brothers, Tamerlan and Dzhokhar Tsarnaev hijacked a car and shot an MIT police officer, which led the police to their trail. During an exchange of fire with the police in the early hours of Friday morning, Tamerlan died and was run over by his wounded brother during the latter's escape. The city of Boston was put on lockdown while the police tried to find Dzhokhar. He was eventually found when a resident of a suburban neighborhood of Boston saw something suspicious on his boat stored in his backyard whereupon he called the police. When apprehended, Dzhokhar had multiple wounds and was immediately taken to the hospital. He has since been transferred to a cell and is awaiting trial.

The Boston Bombers' Background

The two Boston bombers, Tamerlan and Dzhokhar Tsarnaev were respectively 26 and 19 year old brothers of Chechen origin who had been living in the U.S. for the last decade. Tamerlan Tsarnaev was born in 1986 in Kalmykia when it was still part of the former USSR. The family soon after moved to Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, where the father, Anzor Tsarnaev, landed a job in the prosecutor's office. Dzhokhar, the younger brother, was born in 1993 in Kyrgyzstan. In 1999, as the Russians tried to stop an insurgency in Chechnya, Tsarnaev was fired from his job, allegedly the result of political discrimination against people of Chechen origins.^[5] The family then moved to Dagestan.^[6] In 2002, the family sought political asylum in the U.S., claiming that they feared deadly persecution based their ties to Chechnya.^[7]

Life in the United States was difficult for the Tsarnaev parents; Anzor could not practice law and took a job as an unlicensed mechanic while his wife tried making a living by giving home care and later worked in cosmetology.^[8] Their oldest son Tamerlan had always dreamed of becoming a boxer, and as a teenager he showed promise. He won a New England Golden Glove championship but was eliminated at the first round of the Golden Gloves Championship in Salt Lake City in 2009.^[9] Before he could give another shot at the National Championship the rules changed and only U.S. citizens could partake.^[10]

Tamerlan then quit boxing but his studies at the regional community college did not go well. He soon dropped out. He married Katherine Russell, a middle-class U.S. citizen. She was a Christian who converted to Islam and they had a child in 2010. Tamerlan was unable to keep a job for long and was denied U.S. citizenship. Unable to support his family, his wife was the main breadwinner. It was during that period of turmoil, which began in 1999, that he increasingly turned to religion, encouraged by his mother, Zubeidat.

On September 11, 2011 one of his friends, Brendan Mess, was murdered; the case is still unsolved.^[11] It is likely that it affected Tamerlan. During the same time Zubeidat and Anzor divorced in 2011 and both moved back to Dagestan; first the father went back to Dagestan, sick with cancer. Then Zubeidat left the U.S. after being caught shoplifting and subsequently skipped bail.^[12] Those subsequent losses as well as the estrangement from their sisters who moved to New York, brought the brothers closer together.

Around that time, in March 2011, the Russian Intelligence Service (FSB) warned the FBI of the potential danger posed by Tamerlan. After having interviewed him, the FBI added him to the TIDE database but did not find anything that would indicate him as a threat to the U.S. In the fall of the same year, the FSB reached out to the CIA to warn again of the potential malevolent intents of Tamerlan.

In January 2012, Tamerlan flew to Dagestan for a stay that would last six months. One of the overt goals of the trip was to renew his Russian passport. He stayed with his father who reported that Tamerlan spent his time sleeping, praying at the mosque or reading online.^[13] As the

investigation continues there are suspicions of possible links between Tamerlan and William Plotnikov,[14] and other Dagestani insurgents as we will be discussed below.

In the meantime, the quiet Dzhokhar started college at the University of Massachusetts at Dartmouth in the fall of 2011.[15] He was majoring in Marine Biology but it seems that he spent more time smoking pot than studying. He became a U.S. citizen on September 11, 2012. He and his brother remained in close contact. The younger brother looked up to his older brother and their relationship became closer after their parents had left the United States.

According to Boston Police officials interviewed, the brothers first planned on fulfilling their militant jihadist mission by attacking the celebrations on Charles River and police stations on Charles River on Independence Day (July 4), 2013.[16] When it turned out that putting together the bombs was easier than planned they decided to move the attack up. In February 2013, they purchased the fireworks from New Hampshire as detonators.

They decided to attack the Boston Marathon, a target of opportunity, to be followed by Times Square in New York. They planned on detonating the bombs and dying with the second set of attacks. On April 15, 2013, the Boston bombs went off. Three days after the attacks, they hijacked a car and were heading for Times Square. They had planned to die in Times Square while exploding their six remaining IEDs. The police caught up with them when they stopped to refuel the car en route. Tamerlan died in the shootout with the police and Dzhokhar was apprehended eighteen hours later. From the way that Tamerlan confronted the police it was very clear that he was aiming to kill and was ready to die. The conviction of their belief that they were going to paradise apparently motivated the two brothers. Dzhokhar is now in police custody and has admitted that he and his brother planted the bombs.

The Islamist Radicalisation Process

Several elements must be set in place to enable ideological radicalisation. Islamist radicalisation does not necessarily lead to violence. Recently, John Horgan has been extensively quoted saying that “The idea that radicalisation causes terrorism is perhaps the greatest myth alive today in terrorism research.”[17] Taken out of context, this made a great headline for *Rolling Stone*. Professor Horgan explains that watching YouTube videos alone does not make a terrorist and that “the overwhelming majority of people who hold radical beliefs do not engage in violence.”[18] We agree with John Horgan that many who hold radical ideas are not violent. However, adopting a radical ideology that holds that the only answer to the woes of this life is violent jihad defines the actions of the Tsarnaev brothers. Thus, when describing the process of radicalisation we will use the term to describe fanatically adopting a violent Islamist belief.

In 2007, the New York City Police Department published a comprehensive study of Islamist radicalisation. This study, entitled *Radicalisation in the West: the Homegrown Threat* [19] sought to explain the process that leads to Islamist radicalisation. Its authors divided the phases of

radicalisation into four: pre-radicalisation, self-identification, indoctrination, and jihadization. [20]

In the pre-radicalisation phase, before the radicalisation process happens, there must be a void to be filled by the ideology. Psychology professor Arie Kruglanski, referring to the pre-radicalisation and self-identification phases, explains the incentive for terrorism as a response to a “significance quest.”[21] Radicalisation happens after an individual suffers from a strong loss of significance (perceived or real). This lays the ground for radicalisation.

In the self-identification phase, the radical ideology is then perceived as giving an opportunity to regain that significance.[22] The individuals “gradually gravitate away from their old identity and begin to associate themselves with like-minded individuals and adopt this ideology as their own.”[23]

The indoctrination phase solidifies the now all-encompassing ideology and the individual embraces the idea of militant jihad as the only solution. The NYPD report states that this is more easily done with the guidance of an individual or leader.[24] But a combination of influences and the belonging to online groups can also spur this process outside of a formal terrorist group framework. In 2008, Mark Sageman’s book *Leaderless Jihad* already explored that idea of dissociated radicalisation.[25] In a subsequent article, he explained, “They have no physical headquarters or sanctuary, but the tolerant, virtual environment of the Internet offers them a semblance of unity and purpose.”[26] Tamerlan found this unity and purpose online and that led him to Dagestan where he solidified his resolve in militant jihadism.

The Radicalisation of Tamerlan and Dzhokhar Tsarnaev

In the case of Tamerlan and Dzhokhar Tsarnaev, there were at least five factors that lay the ground for radicalisation, but new information is still coming in. This is a preliminary analysis of what led the brothers to adopt this fanatical view of jihadist Islam. Several events shook Tamerlan and Dzhokhar’s sense of identity, creating a vulnerability to an extremist ideology. In the case of the two brothers it is clear that the aspects of the “significance quest” described by Arie Kruglanski were present. The social and familial context, growing up in a restive region of the world, the lack of integration in American society, the personal failures of Tamerlan – all these created a sense of stigmatization and loss. To fill that void and overcome this deep sense of loss, Tamerlan found radical Islam. Dzhokhar saw his brother as his most important role model. Especially with the departure of his parents and the distancing of his sisters, the older brother took on a greater importance. The extremist ideology was introduced through influence of personal links with radical individuals as well as through online media; it was solidified by Tamerlan’s trip to Dagestan. We flesh out below some of the factors that led to the two brothers’ radicalisation.

Growing up as a Member of a Discriminated Minority in a Conflict Zone

Growing up during the collapse of the USSR and being part of a religious or ethnic minority wherever they lived, certainly laid the ground for the feeling of alienation that would never leave the Tsarnaev brothers. The collapse of the USSR opened the door to ethnic revival in the Caucasus and in Central Asia.[27] With it, the Russian government's fear of separatism and of religious fundamentalism led to extremely repressive tactics. Today in Dagestan it is not unheard of to get searched just for having a beard,[28] while in Kyrgyzstan both Christian and Muslim need not to be too vocal about their religious beliefs.[29] Both of the Tsarnaev parents are Muslim; Zubeidat is Chechen while her ex-husband Anzor is Avar, an ethnic group native to the Caucasus and predominant in Dagestan.

Zubeidat and Anzor who had studied law saw a brief glimpse of potential social upward mobility in Kyrgyzstan when Anzor started working for the prosecutor in Bishkek. This perspective was quickly denied to them as the regional tensions grew; discriminations against the Chechen minority in Kyrgyzstan became more frequent.[30] The Tsarnaev's ethnic background most likely contributed to the change in circumstances and the firing of Anzor in 1999.[31]

The family was granted political asylum in the U.S. but the parents could not practice in the legal field. Anzor worked as a car mechanic while Zubeidat became an esthetician. The family struggled to support their four children. The fall in their social status must have been felt by all in the family. The father had been talking about moving to the U.S. since their days in Kyrgyzstan but the Promised Land ended up being less of a dream. Not being able to achieve their dreams could have also fed resentment towards the country that earlier looked like the answer to their woes.

Personal Grievances

Tamerlan's teenage years and twenties were marked with many failures. He failed to become the boxer that both he and his father wanted him to be. There are contradictory reports about whether he really would have had the talent to go to the Olympics and to what extent the lack of U.S. citizenship blocked his ascent in the sport. What matters, is that in this young man's mind the U.S. government barred him from a chance at the Olympics.

In his 2010 photo essay interview with a student magazine, Tamerlan said, "I don't have a single American friend, I don't understand them." [32] This was after having spent eight years in the United States. Tamerlan still felt alien and alienated. He was quoted as saying that he would box for the U.S. if he were granted citizenship. Following his admission of having hit his girlfriend and the concerns from the FSB, his U.S. citizenship was put on hold indefinitely.[33] The citizenship was never granted and Tamerlan was barred from entering the U.S. National Championship.[34]

Tamerlan also failed to get into university and then failed to finish community college.[35] The abandonment of his boxing career and the loss of interest of any particular career path coincided with his increased religiosity and probably fed a vicious circle of detachment and retreat into Islam. He was unable to hold a permanent job or find a career purpose.

He married and his wife converted and gave birth to a daughter but he was still not capable of supporting his family. He worked the odd shift delivering pizza but mostly stayed at home and took care of their daughter while his wife worked. In 2010, the youth unemployment rates hit record highs in the U.S.[36]. A disaffected college-dropout probably had few options for work that he thought was appropriate for him. For a self-professed traditional and religious man, this must have felt like a failure. The only way he could remedy that was to justify it to himself as part of his path towards jihadism: the same reasons that make sense of why he left his family for six months in 2012 to go to Dagestan.

External Influences

There are still uncertainties as to the extent of the external influences of the various people who contributed to Tamerlan's adoption of an extreme strain of Islam.

First, one of the most important persons in Tamerlan's life was his mother. She had turned again to Islam, coming back from an earlier non-religious period. She admits to have urged him to pray while he was going through the beginning of his period of distress in 2009. She became more pious as he became more radical. She says that she hoped it would steer him away from drinking alcohol and smoking.[37] Since the beginning of the investigation about the Boston bombings, we learned more about her. She knew about the radicalisation of her son; it was an intercepted conversation between him and her that led the FSB to warn the FBI about Tamerlan. She too was in the TIDE database and had been banned from coming back to the U.S. after skipping bail after the theft of over \$1,600 worth of clothes. In an interview after the bombings she declared, "I don't care if my youngest one is going to be killed today. I want the world to hear this. And I don't care if I am going to get killed too. And I will say Allahu Akbar!"[38]

In addition, early on after the bombing, Tamerlan's uncle, Ruslan Tsarni, claimed that a certain "Misha", an Armenian extremist Muslim "just took [Tamerlan's] brain." [39] The uncle believed that that friend had contributed to Tamerlan's shift towards radical Islam. The man (his real name is Mikhail Allakhverdov) was subsequently questioned by the news media and by the F.B.I. and although he admitted to praying with Tamerlan, he denied having anything to do with the promotion of violent jihad.[40] Misha was an Armenian Christian but converted to Islam. Many new converts show more cut-and-dry beliefs; there were reports that he had pointed Tamerlan toward the more strict Salafi beliefs that forbid playing music for example.[41]

Another important connection was William Plotnikov, a Russian-born Canadian boxer who returned to Dagestan in 2010 to wage violent jihad only to be killed in July 2012. It is easy to

imagine why Tamerlan identified with William, given that they were both expatriates belonging to an ethnic minority and shared a common passion for boxing. William's radicalisation preceded Tamerlan's only a short period of time. Some people have declared seeing the two together in Dagestan while others deny that there were any face-to-face connections. If the two did not meet during their overlapping time in Dagestan, they did have online contacts.

Tamerlan's Trip to Dagestan

The Tsarnaev parents claimed that Tamerlan only slept and read while he was in Dagestan.[42] It has come to light that what he read was the Quran and, according to his aunt, he was becoming more pious.[43] This period led him to come into contact with several key Dagestani terrorists. [44] It was also reported that Tamerlan visited the radical Kotrova mosque in Makhachkala. This mosque is known for preaching an extremist form of Salafi Islam.[45] Moreover this could have been a place for Tamerlan to enter into contact with local insurgents.

Tamerlan's third cousin, Magomed Kartashov, is an Islamist political activist in Dagestan. [46] The two met during Tamerlan's stay in Makhachkala. According to Zubeidat, "the two became very close." [47] Magomed Kartashov's organisation called "Union of the Just" seeks the implementation of Shari'a law and often bashes the U.S. government and American foreign policies. It has officially renounced violence but several members have close links with militants. [48] Being interrogated by the FSB, Kartashov (via his lawyer) asserted that Tamerlan came to Dagestan with aspirations of violent Jihad and that Kartashov tried to dissuade him. [49] Whether or not Kartashov's claims are true, Tamerlan's links with the "Union of the Just" apparently opened many doors. Some publications have recently claimed that there is no way that Tamerlan could have befriended militants just by wandering the streets of Makhachkala." [50] Tamerlan did not just wander the streets but came to Dagestan prepared and with contacts.

A Russian investigative newspaper, *Novaya Gazeta*, has reported that Mahmud Mansur Nidal was one of Tamerlan's contacts.[51] With little corroboration or denial from either the FSB or FBI, it is hard to gauge the extent of the ties between the two men. Mahmud Nidal was a suspected recruiter for Islamist militant forces in Dagestan. He died at the age of 19 on May 19, 2013, in Makhachkala, killed by the Russian security forces. The death of Nidal could have rattled Tamerlan and that of Plotnikov most certainly precipitated Tamerlan's return to Boston. Most likely, this also confirmed in his eyes the importance of his role in the violent jihad.

Online Radicalisation and Training

Tamerlan's social media trail shows that he was viewing the speeches of Sheikh Feiz Mohammad, a radical Muslim preacher from Australia. He was also influenced by Anwar al-Awlaki's sermons online.[52] The American-Yemeni Al-Qaeda preacher was killed in 2011 but he lives on in his online video recordings. His appeal to Tamerlan and other American youths is

that he preached in English and Arabic. Professor Bruce Hoffman explained, "All over the world I've encountered people who've got his sermons about marriage and fidelity. The fact that he wasn't exclusively about terrorism and violence against the West ensures he has a certain resonance." [53] Both Sheikh Feiz and Anwar al-Awlaki preach often about daily lives, marriage, or even boxing, and moral issues in a way that makes them attractive to youths seeking guidance. Georgetown professor Dan Byman adds, "These videos make these ideas seem more relevant, powerful and legitimate and as a result we'll see from time to time some young men embrace them. It will be hard to stop." [54]

Tamerlan had subscribed to *YouTube* channels under the keywords terrorists and Islam and one channel entitled "Allah is the One." [55] While choosing those channels would not be the ground for putting someone on a watch list, they sustained his ideas in the radicalisation process. The importance of the online tools to create contacts and radicalise individuals cannot be overemphasized. Even if Tamerlan was indeed influenced by Misha and by his own mother, it is through an online forum that he came in contact with William Plotnikov. Additionally, it was through online readings and through online videos that he sustained the conviction of his beliefs. Most importantly, investigators said that most likely it is online that he learned to build the bomb from an online source [56] which resulted in the death of two adults and one child while wounded some 250 other people. At first, news reports pointed to the 2010 article of Al-Qaeda's famous *Inspire* magazine called "How to Make a Bomb in Your Mother's Kitchen" that Dzhokhar said taught them how to construct a pressure cooker bomb. [57] *Inspire* magazine claims that this is the best way to create IEDs and it is a fact that instructions from *Inspire* have been increasingly used in the Af-Pak region. Investigators noticed, however, some changes in the design of the explosives. [58] This points to either alternate source of information or Tamerlan's own experimentations during his long periods of time alone at home.

Political Dissatisfactions

Both brothers expressed real dissatisfaction with the U.S. government's foreign policy. Dr. Sageman's description of "The Next Generation of Terror" that "consists mostly of would-be terrorists, who, angered by the invasion of Iraq, aspire to join the movement and the men they hail as heroes" [59] is proving rather accurate. Tamerlan expressed profound antipathy towards the U.S. wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. During the process of radicalisation, Tamerlan started to believe more far-fetched conspiracies such as that the United States had instrumented the 9/11 attacks to propagate hate of Muslims. He gained those ideas through reading online propaganda and conspiracy theories.

Becoming religious after living a much less religious life and finding his identity and a catalyst for his grievances might have had a powerful effect on Tamerlan's worldview. Nevertheless, no single factor explanation can account fully for his radicalization towards

extremism and terrorism. Put it differently, the cumulative effects of the points raised earlier could be the cause and not a “cut and paste version of Islam.” As for Dzhokhar, Tamerlan’s overwhelming influence on him could be the single most important factor, which compelled him to turn to terrorism.

The Warning Signs

The Russian Intelligence

The FSB intercepted calls between Tamerlan and his mother talking about militant jihad and the possibility of Tamerlan joining the fight in Palestine. Subsequently, the FSB signaled to the FBI that they were concerned about Tamerlan’s increasingly extremist religiosity.[60] The FSB also mentioned that they believed Tamerlan “had changed drastically” since 2010 and was preparing to leave the United States “to join unspecified underground groups.”[61] They did not tell the FBI that the intelligence came from intercepted calls. The FBI now claims that Russia did not respond to the later inquiries for more details from them. The FBI interviewed Tamerlan but did not find any cause to put him on the terrorist watch list. In the fall of 2011, the FSB reiterated its concern, this time to the CIA. Neither of those prevented Tamerlan to leave the country for six months and re-enter it in July 2012. Senator Lindsey Graham declared on April 22, 2013 that a misspelling of Tamerlan’s surname enabled him to exit the country unnoticed by the FBI.[62] This fact was not corroborated by the FBI. Either way, the fact that one of the people in TIDE can “disappear” for six months and reenter the country without increased suspicion should raise eyebrows.

U.S. intelligence blames the lack of resources that does not allow them to follow up on the hundreds of U.S. residents flagged in the TIDE database. They must prioritize and the Russian tip did not raise the level of concern about Tamerlan high enough. Although his U.S. citizenship was put on hold, he was not followed more closely.

The repeated Russian intelligence was not given high priority. The U.S. and Russian interests do not always align. However, in this case, the Russian warning does not lend itself to any easily assessable ulterior motives. Tracking a two-people cell across continents is very difficult - if not impossible - in the midst of the thousands of other suspects of radicalisation. It is always impossible to rewrite history and it is plausible that even with heightened vigilance the two brothers could have still executed their operation. In the United States people are less willing to give up liberties for increased security and the intelligence agencies are still supposed to operate within strict laws protecting the privacy of civilians.

The Community Environment: Radical Language and Behavior

The lack of communication between the Muslim community and the city of Boston or the state of Massachusetts was another failure that led to these bombings. Tamerlan's radical ideas did not go unnoticed at the mosque that he frequented. He interrupted the imam to insult his leniency. According to attendees, Tamerlan was enraged that the imam would praise Martin Luther King and lashed out saying "you cannot mention this guy because he's not a Muslim!"[63] The mosque elders admonished Tamerlan for it but never really engaged him in a discussion about his beliefs.

The Islamic Society of Boston released a statement saying, "in their visits, [the Tsarnaev brothers] never exhibited any violent sentiments or behavior. Otherwise they would have been immediately reported to the FBI." [64] The two brothers were only infrequent visitors of the mosque; it was too moderate for their taste. It was therefore less visible to the clergy that their beliefs had radicalised. This points to the importance of engaging in conversation with dissatisfied youths. The increasingly radical Tamerlan was not addressed in his beliefs. Although the mosque thought it was addressing the problem it just caused Tamerlan to keep his beliefs to himself. The mosque's community missed an important sign by not encouraging Tamerlan to speak and engaging him in respectful conversations.

*Assessing the Responses**Media*

Terrorists need an audience. The media are often responsible for propagating and amplifying the terror element in terrorism. In her 1985 speech to the American Bar Association, former U.K. Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher had explained, "we must try to find ways to starve the terrorist and the hijacker of the oxygen of publicity on which they depend." [65] Of course, terrorist attack are dangerous intrinsically but what produces the terror is the audience and the propagation of the idea of general vulnerability; the media helps spread the feeling that we are all at risk of terrorist attacks while only professional military and those living in conflict zone are at risk from conventional wars. This amplifies the effect of an attack that in terms of lives lost is less lethal than most other violent attacks happening every day, except in countries like Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq and Syria.

Several aspects make the Boston bombings an irregular terrorist attack. First, it was conducted by two dissociated youths without direct sponsorship from a formal terrorist group. It is true that they were inspired by Islamist movements; *Inspire*'s latest issue claims them as one of their own, [66] but there is still no real ties to any cell structure. There were no real political claims or exhortations following the explosions. However, in the uncertainty that followed the attacks, with few exceptions, news reports resisted amplification and conjectures. The media did not start

pointing fingers based on conjectures nor did they spread panic; they reported information as it came in and urged calm and patience.

Community and Law Enforcement

In a similar vein, community efforts and law enforcement were calm and effective. There are numerous pictures of people aiding each other after the bombings. Professor Bruce Hoffman noted the increased preparedness of the U.S. police, saying that after September 11, “There’s been a complete cross-fertilization across the United States with, in many respects, the New York City Police Department serving as the exemplar and model,”[67] When the police ordered a citywide curfew, the people of Boston complied. The search for the two responsible attackers was rather fast even though their baseball caps and sunglasses inhibited the use of facial recognition software. Spreading their picture around spooked them and prompted their eventual capture.

The Potential Fallouts

In the aftermath of such attacks, there are several heightened dangers. First, the relative success of the Tsarnaev brothers may inspire others. Their attack exposed vulnerabilities in the U.S. intelligence system. Secondly, the attacks may provoke a backlash against ethnic or religious minorities related to that of the culprits.

Inspiring Others

9/11 and the subsequent ill-named “War on Terror” contributed to make the name popular among radical youths. Being able to wage attacks of this size and putting a whole country on alert was no small feat. Since then, the Al-Qaeda affiliated groups have multiplied and Al-Qaeda inspired a generation. Every time there is a major attack against one of the “evil” foreign powers, it reinforces the belief in others holding similar beliefs that they too can wage violent jihad.

Therefore, every successful militant jihadist event becomes an example for radicalized youth that may have been hesitant to act through violence. Contrary to many people’s beliefs in the United States in particular, and in the West more generally, this inspiration is mostly independent from the ultimate fate of the perpetrators. The fact that the brothers were apprehended after the fact does not make the event less of a success in the eyes of like-minded extremist jihadists. In addition, this shows that despite years of increased emphasis on security, there is often a way to circumvent professional intelligence agencies.

Free Publicity for Radical Videos Online

Sheikh Feiz Mohammad never had as much publicity as in the days following the attacks. When Tamerlan’s social media trail came out, it was immediately reported that he was following

Sheikh Feiz Mohammad's sermons. That day, the influential mentions of his name on Twitter increased sevenfold.[68] While the peak on Twitter did not continue, the increase in followers on the top YouTube channels that disseminate his videos increased greatly. Furthermore, the frequency of uploads of videos increased as well.[69] The preacher took advantage of this moment of fame to reinforce his brand. The Facebook fan pages linked to Sheikh Feiz tell an interesting story. The two most prominent pages about him ('Sheikh Feiz' and 'Fans of Sheikh Feiz') had the biggest number of new recruits in the summer of 2012. However, they had the most activity on those pages in the weeks since the attacks.[70] This could lead us to think that those who were already inclined to follow him may rally around those new events. The Facebook page called 'Sheikh Feiz' has over 10 thousand "likes" and there are more than 500 "fans" of Sheikh Feiz. Furthermore, the Facebook demographic analysis tool shows that for both pages the average age is between 18 and 24 years old. This also was the age range of the bombers when they radicalized. This ought to ring alarm bells and give us a sense of the potential new recruits getting radicalized (or already being so).

The name *Inspire* has become famous almost as much among those who fear Al-Qaeda's influence as much as among those who welcome it. Talking so much about that magazine may have given it too much publicity. On April 23, 2013, in the wake of the attacks, John M. Berger contributed an article to *Foreign Policy* explaining that *Inspire* magazine had become "the worst kind of self-fulfilling prophecy, in which our collective worries about terrorism magnified our enemies' reach."[71] He rightfully argues that we may increase the popularity of an extremist propaganda tool by demonizing it. Here he points to magazines but the same is valid for the preaching of Sheikh Mohammad.

Mitigating the Risks

The numbers can be disputed, but according to the START Database from the University of Maryland, there have been over 210 incidents of violence or attempted violence perpetrated by Al-Qaeda and associate groups and individuals in the United States since 1990.[72] Trevor Aaronson in his writings about how many of apprehended terrorist plots were actually FBI entrapment cases estimates that about half of the 500 cases of terrorist prosecutions since 9/11 were led by the FBI: which still leaves us with several hundred attempted acts of terrorism.[73] A conservative estimate published in *Slate* magazine is that since September 11, 2001, suspected perpetrators for 52 cases were apprehended.[74] Either way, the events of April 15 in Boston remind us that the threat has not disappeared. It is important to assess what can be done to mitigate the risks of a militant jihadist attack.

Community Engagement

Community engagement can and should be used to prevent radicalisation. It provides an early general intervention mechanism, providing a platform to prevent extremist Islam to fill the space created by discontent and isolation. In his speech to the ADAMS Muslim Community Center in Virginia, Denis McDonough, deputy national security advisor to U.S. President Barack Obama, stressed the need to partner with communities to counter violent extremism.[75] Yet community engagement efforts are complex and still need to be redoubled.

Community engagement includes heightened communications between the city and the religious communities, between the Muslim community and other religious communities, and within the mosque's followers. Imams should be encouraged to interact with and listen to those within their communities expressing radical interpretations of Islam.

When he spoke up at his mosque and insulted the imam, Tamerlan was not pushed to have a conversation about his beliefs; a practice that Sheikh Musa Admani from London explains is crucial to prevent radical acts. The Sheikh and the Luqman Institute organise a place where debate can happen and work to engage radicalising youth in controversial debates.[76] Instead of repressing and alienating them, the clerics work on countering the ideology. This also permits a higher visibility into the intentions of those who hold violent discourses.

A key target audience that should be included in community programs are the migrant communities. The engagement could help prevent or lessen ideological slippage between the migrant communities and citizens of host countries. It also keeps in check social developments and changes such as anti-Western sentiments and adoption of radical doctrines in communities of immigrants. The economic crisis in the U.S. has heightened anti-immigrant sensitivities and hence it is important to enable conversations between residents and newcomers to avoid alienation on one side and scapegoating on the other.

This is not to dismiss the work already being done by various organisations in the United States. Several community-based organisations as well as the U.S. chapter of Religions for Peace work on inter-faith dialog and integration. They have provided a moderate voice to counter the extremist Muslim-bashing discourses that only help feed radicalisation. In the wake of the Boston bombings, Nihad Awad, executive director at the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), announced, "American Muslims, like Americans of all backgrounds, condemn in the strongest possible terms today's cowardly bomb attack on participants and spectators of the Boston Marathon."[77] His statement was seen as a preventive gesture of goodwill and an attempt at mitigating backlash.

International Collaboration between Intelligence Agencies

Modern terrorism in its present form is often a transnational issue. The non-state actors that have been threatening civilians are numerous and are not bound by the traditional frontiers. It is important that the means of countering this threat mirror it and incorporate international collaboration. Some experts in international security have criticized the centralization of intelligence and contrasted it to the network structure of the adversary. Therefore, it is important to point out that international cooperation does not mean centralization. It means a fluid structure that allows for both community engagement and the sharing of information. It means that when a terrorist group moves across borders, the agencies of that nation can use information gathered by others and do not have to start from scratch.

Conclusions

The Boston bombings were a horrific event because of the location, the timing, and the victims. Most media have done well in their restraint from making blanket comments, conjectures or amplifying the consequences. While we should not make more of this than is necessary, lessons should be learned. As written in *Slate* magazine, the difference between this event and the 52 other attempts of the last decade is that “for the first time, terrorists actually were able to assemble and detonate bombs.”[78] More than bad luck, some mistakes were made and some red flags were ignored. This event should be taken as an opportunity to reflect on how we can prevent radicalisation in the U.S. This is another proof of the mounting dangers of homegrown terrorism.

While new information about the exact motives for the attacks and process of radicalisation and execution of the bombings is still coming in, two clear lessons can be drawn out. Firstly, community engagement must be emphasized and involve the different segments of the population. This should be a two-way process and those working with communities at risk should listen to the youths and let them express their beliefs. Secondly, transnational collaboration between intelligence agencies is vital to counter this transnational threat. Progress has been made in the United States’ counterterrorism response; what is still lacking is operational proficiency in making this a collaborative effort – both within the United States and internationally.

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