

II. Research Notes

The Boston Marathon Bombers: the Lethal Cocktail that Turned Troubled Youth to Terrorism

by Anne Speckhard

Abstract

The Tsarnaev brothers came from the war-torn Chechen diaspora and found asylum in the United States. The elder brother, Tamerlan, carried actual memories of fleeing from the 1994-96 Chechen war. He also lived in Dagestan for a year at the time when the Chechen warlord Basayev was engaging in a campaign of more than thirty suicide attacks, including mass hostage takings. When Tamerlan made it to the United States, he tried to assimilate but failed to make it. The family struggled hard to make a living in the U.S.; but in the end the parents divorced and the father returned to Dagestan. Dzhokhar, the younger brother, made it into an American university but Tamerlan did not succeed in higher education, trying to pursue a boxing career instead. When his immigration status precluded a boxing career, he became disillusioned. Meanwhile his mother, concerned about his descent into smoking marijuana and drinking alcohol, arranged an Islamic tutor for him. The ingredients for the lethal cocktail of terrorism came together when Tamerlan's individual vulnerabilities made him seek online contacts via the Internet and brought him in touch with offline mentors, militants and extremists who glorified Al-Qaeda's global jihad. Through these channels he became receptive to the terrorist ideology, found a jihadist group with global reach to align with, received technical instructions from the Inspire magazine and found enough support for executing the Boston marathon attack, pulling his younger brother along and dying in the process as he had expected.

Introduction

Since 9-11 the U.S. has been spared any successful Al-Qaeda inspired attacks on its own soil, although some serious plots have been attempted—and a few have been carried out. With the Boston marathon bombings, Americans are once again confronted with what looked first like homegrown terrorism. They are still puzzling over the motivations of the Tsarnaev brothers, what inspired them and what made them into terrorists.

Days after the event, writing answers from his hospital bed, nineteen-year-old Dzhokhar Tsarnaev admitted to federal investigators that he and his older brother Tamerlan had placed the bombs. He explained that they acted alone and had received no training or support from outside terrorist groups and planned their attack following instructions from the Al-Qaeda in the Arab Peninsula's online magazine Inspire [1]

From Dzhokhar's statements it appears that Tamerlan Tsarnaev was the main instigator behind the Boston marathon bombings—bringing his younger brother along with him into his murderous acts.

After interviewing over four hundred extremists and terrorists, their family members and close associates and even their hostages in many countries all over the world (Gaza and the West Bank; Morocco, Iraq, Lebanon, Jordan, Belgium, the UK, France, the Netherlands, Russia and Belarus) I have come to the conclusion that there are four essential elements to concocting the lethal cocktail of terrorism:

1. A group with political motivations willing to use terrorism to try to achieve its aims;
2. An ideology that is used to justify intentionally targeting and killing civilians to create terror and thereby advance the group's political goals;
3. Some level of social support from the constituency that the group purports to represent; and
4. Psycho-social vulnerabilities within individuals that motivate them to join and activate into terrorist groups.[2]

I also found in my research that terrorism is highly contextual and that the psycho-social vulnerabilities that motivate individuals into terrorism can be broken down by those that live in conflict zones versus those that live outside conflict zones. Inside conflict zones individual motivations are driven by violence—and terrorism on the individual level is very revenge and trauma driven, with additional motivations mixed in, including frustrated aspirations; blocked life paths; losses of power, territory, resources, etc. But in most cases the killing, torture or injury of community members—particularly of loved ones—alongside the exposure to a terrorist group, social support for that group and its ideology are sufficient to motivate individuals into taking part in terrorism. In conflict zones the perceptions of threat are usually high and this often also contributes to high levels of social support for endorsing terrorism as a potential answer. In other words, the lethal cocktail leading to acts of terrorism in conflict zones is quite straightforward.[3]

In non-conflict zones where terrorists arise—such as in cities like Antwerp (Belgium), Casablanca (Morocco), or Boston (Massachusetts)—the individual motivations are quite different. Individual motivations in non-conflict areas relate much more to issues of identity and those who get involved in terrorism often feel disempowered, alienated, marginalized, discriminated against and have frustrated aspirations. They also often harbor a desire for adventure, wish to obtain a sense of life's meaningfulness and a longing to belong. Terrorist groups relate to these desires and vulnerabilities by delivering a strong sense of positive identity, belonging and purpose alongside of conveying a sense of the manly, heroic and sense of standing up for the collective.[4]

Recruiters operating in non-conflict zones also adeptly bring the conflict zones into the mix—by showing their potential recruits disturbing videos and pictures of those hurt or oppressed inside conflict zones. And in doing so they take advantage of feelings of empathy and create an identification with the traumas of those oppressed elsewhere. Thus, they evoke a sense of secondary traumatization via witnessing traumas and channel the resultant feelings into a desire for revenge and to act “heroically” in the so called “defense” of others. In militant jihadi, or Al-Qaeda inspired groups, the terrorist narrative claims that Islam and Islamic lands and peoples are under attack from the West. It also claims “fictive kin” with all Muslims worldwide while it urges those who heed the call to stand up to fight in behalf of the oppressed. It’s a powerful message and infects many living far from warzones who are manipulated into violent action supposedly in behalf of others.[5]

The Lethal Cocktail of Terrorism

In the case of the Tsarnaev brothers we see the four levels of the lethal cocktail of terrorism coming together in a new and unusual way. Firstly, in terms of individual vulnerabilities Tamerlan, at least, had lived briefly inside a conflict zone (Chechnya) and had exposure to Dagestan which also was fast becoming a conflict zone. As an ethnic Chechen he was likely well aware of the traumatic nature of the conflicts there. But he also evidenced many of the same individual vulnerabilities that we have found among first and second-generation immigrants living in Europe and the U.S. who have activated into terrorism. He was a first generation immigrant, was having trouble assimilating and realizing his potential in the United States. At the same time he became exposed to those who glorified the militant jihad as an alternative life path and may have also wanted to embrace “martyrdom” as a way to “cleanse” himself of “bad” habits he picked up in the West. Troubling in the Tsarnaev case is that their exposure to a terrorist group, its ideology and social support appears to have occurred in large part via the Internet—showing the power of extremist communities to radicalise and activate online recruits—although the full story on that is still being uncovered.

Terrorist Group

In the case of the Tsarnaev brothers there was at first a great deal of confusion over what terrorist group they related to. Their ethnic Chechen background and Tamerlan’s travels back to Dagestan immediately raised questions as to whether the Chechen terrorist groups active in their country of origin, and extremism that had spilled over into the region (infecting Dagestan and Ingushetia as well), would have turned the U.S. into a target for terrorist attacks.

The answer on that is—highly unlikely. The terrorist group active in Dagestan put out a statement in the days immediately following the discovery of the Tsarnaevs’ participation in the

attacks, denying any involvement. Likewise the history and motivations of the Chechen terrorist groups does not lend much support for that hypothesis.

If one looks at the evolution of the Chechen terrorists groups it becomes clear that the Chechen militant “jihad” and its spillover into the region began first with a secular nationalist uprising in 1991. In that year the Chechen people wished to separate from what was left of the USSR and gain the same freedoms as afforded to Belarus, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and the other republics that had declared and were given their independence from the former Soviet Union. Chechnya however, having existed uneasily inside the Russian Federation for more than a century, did not receive permission to secede nor did it receive support from the West to do so. The Chechen leader Dudaev had in 1991 declared independence and, after his assassination by Russian armed forces, Chechen warlord Basayev led the rebel movement that culminated in the first Chechen war of independence with Russia (1994-1996) followed shortly thereafter by a second war (1999-2004).

It was in between these two wars that former Afghan militant jihadis arrived in Chechnya to support the Chechen uprising. These foreign fighters were still euphoric from winning their war with the former Soviet Union. One of them, Saudi born, Khattab befriended Basayev and convinced him to take up the “martyrdom” ideology of Al-Qaeda, incubated in Afghanistan, to transform the Chechen movement into a militant jihad. Convinced of the “martyrdom” ideology, Basayev began a campaign of terrorism against Russia, starting from the year 2000 onward, with the Chechen terrorist groups sending over 112 suicide bombers to carry out over thirty suicide attacks. These included truck and car bomb suicide attacks, suicide bombings on regional trains and in the Moscow metro, two female bombers exploding themselves on internal domestic flights. Their most dramatic attacks were the Nord Ost hostage taking in Moscow in which eight hundred theatergoers were held hostage by forty Chechen suicide bombers as well as the infamous Beslan school hostage taking in which over 1200 mostly mothers and children were held for three days by suicide terrorists. In both cases hundreds of hostages were killed.[6]

In 2005 the Chechen terrorist movement had already spread across the North Caucasus and Basayev announced the formation of the Caucasus Front. Their aim was to break free from Russia and establish the Caucasus Emirate in Dagestan, Ingushetia and Chechnya. The Chechen terrorists use the Kavkaz website as their main mouthpiece and have been very vocal about their aspirations. While they have made statements such as “our enemies are the enemies of Islam”, they only named the Russians as their actual enemies and have never made attacks at any Western power.

The Chechen groups have also never formally joined Al-Qaeda. They do, however, have a great deal of crossover with the “martyrdom” ideology that was imported directly from Al-Qaeda. And Chechens *individually* have joined Al-Qaeda and been active in Afghanistan and elsewhere, involved in training and as recruiters and operators for Al-Qaeda. Indeed, ethnic

Chechens working as Al-Qaeda operatives have been arrested in Western Europe as well in recent years. When Chechen immigrants were found to be involved in the Boston attacks many wondered if this was the first sign of a merger of Al-Qaeda with the Chechen terrorists and if Tamerlan Tsarnaev had been launched out of Dagestan to attack the U.S. on behalf of Al-Qaeda. From all available data, including a very clear disavowal by the Dagestani militant group, it appears not the case.

Terrorist Ideology

Al-Qaeda—specifically Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP)—is the group that is responsible for inspiring the Tsarnaev brothers to attack against the U.S.—although from all reports it appears that no one from this group ever met with either Tsarnaev brother in person—all contact was virtual and indirect. Speaking to FBI agents, Dzhokhar admitted that he and his brother studied and found their inspiration, as well as their logistical instructions for their terrorist attacks in *Inspire*, the online magazine of AQAP. They also found ideological inspiration from listening to and watching sermons given by AQAP’s Anwar al Awlaki who was already dead at the time they were watching his sermons. The Spring 2013 issue of the *Inspire* magazine exulted in that they had inspired the Boston bombings, lionizing the two brothers as heroes of the global Al-Qaeda movement.[7]

Awlaki, the ideologue, as well as Samir Khan responsible for *Inspire* magazine had been killed on September 30, 2011, in Yemen by a U.S. drone strike but their writings and video presence are unfortunately immortal as they continue to appear in what Al-Qaeda scholar Reuven Paz labels as their Internet based “University of Jihad”. [8]

In order for a terrorist to carry out his (or her) evil intents s/he must be convinced that joining a terrorist group is a good thing and more importantly that carrying out attacks of terrorism—intentionally attacking civilians for the purpose of creating terror in the hope of advancing the groups political goals—is justified. To be effective in convincing a potential adherent, a terrorist ideology must resonate with his or her internal psychic needs and offer him or her a positive identity in his or her new role as terrorist.

The militant jihadi ideology of Al-Qaeda-linked groups and the martyrdom ideology, in general, fit well with Tamerlan Tsarnaev’s individual psyche as will be discussed further on. Tsarnaev, as an ethnic Chechen who had lived inside and nearby a conflict zone bought on to the Al-Qaeda narrative that Muslims around the world are oppressed and under attack by Western powers. He posted to his You-Tube channel a video glorifying a Dagestani terrorist group and also one that showed Assad’s crushing of the Syrian rebel movement resulting in many civilian casualties. Clearly as a Chechen, and having witnessed many stories of the human rights violations in Chechnya and the crushing of their independence movement, Tamerlan Tsarnaev’s mind easily resonated to the Al-Qaeda narrative.

When he expanded his views to believe that terrorism—attacking innocent civilians, and Americans in specific, was justified is still not fully understood. It is likely he took that understanding partly in Dagestan from nonmilitants who believed in a global jihad and from Inspire magazine after returning from Dagestan. Tsarnaev, encouraged by the writings and the sermons of Awlaki, took on the call to strike out at Western powers, including the United States on behalf of downtrodden Muslims—a narrative that AQAP and Awlaki in his continued online presence still promotes.

Social Support

There is usually some degree of social support that makes it possible for individuals to become terrorists. As all human beings are social creatures we rely on others as reference groups and look to them for social mirroring in terms of whether our choices are good or bad. In some places such as the West Bank and Gaza social support for being part of a militant or terrorist group is high. Tamerlan traveled to Dagestan where there is also a much higher degree of social support for being involved in rebel and terrorist activities. In the U.S. he likely found little social support, but now, given the worldwide links available on the Internet he could find social support via a virtual community—a troubling development when one considers how to dampen homegrown terrorism in Western nations.

Regarding social support, it has been discovered that as Tamerlan became more radicalised and began moving down his terrorist trajectory he had begun corresponding with William Plotnikov, a boxer, who was himself also a first generation immigrant from Russia. Plotnikov ultimately decided to give up boxing and went to join the Dagestani rebel movement where he became a member of the Mujahideen of the Caucasus Emirate.[9] It's likely that through Plotnikov, Tamerlan also entertained a new life course as a militant. Via Plotnikov's example, he found the way to enact it—traveling first to Dagestan, making contacts with militants there and ultimately hoping to be accepted into one of their groups.[10]

Tamerlan also appears to have become radicalised through contacts in Boston, as his mother in the 2008-2009 time frame appears to have encouraged him to back off of partying—drinking and smoking marijuana—and return to a stricter Islamic lifestyle. She apparently encouraged a teacher who introduced him to a stricter Salafi form of Islam and she also went on this journey with him. She began covering herself more and wearing the Salafi headscarf, a nonindigenous Chechen style of Muslim dress.

Individual Vulnerabilities

In the area of individual vulnerabilities the Tsarnaev brothers, particularly Tamerlan fit into both categories, of those who come from conflict zones and also of those feeling alienated in a non-conflict zone. During their childhoods, the Tsarnaevs had lived outside of Chechnya—likely

due to Stalin's historical deportation in 1944/45 of the entire Chechen nation. The family had later moved back to Chechnya but fled again to Kyrgyzstan after the first Chechen war of independence broke out in the Caucasus. Tamerlan's kindergarten teacher recalled that when he arrived in Kyrgyzstan following the outbreak of the first war in Chechnya, he was over-reactive to fire crackers—an indication of some sort of war trauma already in his young psyche. This teacher also recalled his parents as educated professionals, highly supportive of their sons' educational activities. Tamerlan earned high marks throughout his schooling there.[11] Tamerlan apparently studied music at some point because he was an accomplished piano player as well. With the outbreak of the second Chechen war Tamerlan's father had lost his government job—possibly because he was a Chechen. The family moved again, this time to Dagestan and Tamerlan's parents and Dzhokhar went ahead to the United States claiming asylum there. Tamerlan stayed behind at the tender age of fourteen with his sisters to wait for another year for his chance to come to the U.S.[12]

Tamerlan arrived to Boston in 2003 on an asylum visa at age fifteen. Although his parents, and later he also, received social welfare benefits from the state's department of transitional assistance,[13] the family was struggling to make ends meet. His mother free-lanced as a cosmetologist and their father, once a professional man, was reduced to repairing cars outside on the street in the cold Boston winters. The brothers apparently took to Boston and began to find their way in the diversely ethnic neighborhood they lived in. Both became known for “normal” teenage behaviors—including partying, drinking and smoking marijuana.[14]

While Dzhokhar made it into the University of Massachusetts, Dartmouth, Tamerlan, when he graduated from high school was *not* admitted into the university of his choice. He also dropped out of a community college after three semesters (2006 to 2008), opting to concentrate on a career in boxing instead. His father, who was also a good boxer, encouraged Tamerlan, to pursue boxing and he excelled at it winning the New England Golden Gloves heavyweight championship in 2009-10.[15]

Around 2008-2009, as mentioned previously Tamerlan's mother encouraged him to refrain from drinking and partying. During this time he fell under the influence of a Muslim convert named Misha who apparently led him into a stricter Salafi interpretation of Islam.[16] Tamerlan's mother reports that he became involved in “religious politics” around the same time.[17] Both he and his mother changed their style of dress, Tamerlan quit drinking although by some reports he continued to smoke marijuana. He began espousing more conservative radical views: Tamerlan at one time even angering his uncle by calling him an “infidel”.[18]

Tamerlan also asked Katherine Russell, the American girl he was dating, to convert to Islam and to wear the hijab. They married in 2010 and had a baby the same year. The Tsarnaev brothers attended a Boston mosque associated with radical elements that allegedly espoused views that embrace a narrative of Muslims around the world being under attack alongside a duty

to aide them.[19] This background, along with his Islamic tutor, appears to have exposed Tamerlan to extremist ideology.

Having fled Chechnya as a young boy and having spent impressionable teenage years in Dagestan, aware of the troubles there, Tamerlan was already sensitized to the plights of Muslims living under oppression—making the Al-Qaeda narrative of Muslims under attack by the West easy for him to relate to. As an ethnic Chechen, and having lived in and fled from Chechnya at the outset of the first war of independence, as well as having later lived in Dagestan during a time of turmoil, Tamerlan had to be well aware of the many human rights abuses that occurred to Chechens during Putin’s crushing of their independence movement. He was also likely aware of Basayev’s embracing of the “martyrdom” ideology and the onset of a campaign of Chechen suicide terrorism from the year 2000 onward—a time when he was still living as an impressionable youth separated from his parents in Dagestan. As a boxer in 2010 he made clear to journalists that as long as Russian troops continued to be present in Chechnya he preferred to box for the U.S. versus the Russians and wished with his new citizenship to earn a place on the U.S. boxing team.

Known at his local boxing club as a proud boxer and flamboyant dresser, Tamerlan was dealt a devastating blow in 2010 when the rules were changed for the qualifying matches.[20] As a non-passport holder, he was barred from competing,[21] dashing his dreams of self-actualizing as a boxer for the U.S. Olympic teams. According to his boxing coach, Tamerlan—reflecting the mores of the country he had immigrated from (where conspiracies and fixing championships are commonplace)—he felt that he was the victim of a conspiracy to prevent him from entering the U.S. Olympic team, believing that he was barred to favour some native American boxer.

As his life aspirations were ruined, Tamerlan’s parents were also going through difficult times. In a short space of time, nearly all of Tamerlan’s stability, hopes and dreams for a bright future in American suddenly slipped away. Tamerlan’s father quarreled with his wife over her increasingly strict Islamic ways. The neighbors complained about him as he was working on cars on the street outside their apartment, and he became ill with cancer.[22] Tamerlan’s parents divorced and his father returned to Dagestan. In 2010, Tamerlan’s first child was born and Tamerlan—either too depressed to work, unable to get employment, or still smoking marijuana—didn’t care. He stayed home to take care of their young daughter while his wife worked seventy plus hours per week to support the family. Seeing little hope for his future, and perhaps wanting to escape all that was painful around him, Tamerlan slipped even deeper into extremist thoughts picked up from Internet websites.

Tamerlan’s mother derailed during this time period as well, clinging to religion while repeating to her cosmetology clients conspiracy theories about 9-11 that her son had told her. In 2011 she texted to Russia stating that her son was willing to die for Islam.[23] Later, however, she said that she never intended for him to become a terrorist. It is unclear whether or not she

was in fact encouraging Tamerlan into “martyrdom” or simply hoping to keep him away from alcohol and drugs as her own married life unraveled. In 2012, she was arrested for shoplifting over a thousand dollars worth of merchandise after which she returned to Dagestan, evading her court hearing.[24]

Perhaps Tamerlan’s strongest link to the militant jihad was his connection over the Internet with William Plotnikov, a Canadian immigrant from Russian and also a boxer who was disillusioned like him. A recent convert to Islam, Plotnikov was also casting about for a meaningful life and decided to go to Dagestan to fight with the rebels there. In a video taken in his militant hideout in Dagestan, Plotnikov clearly glorifies the militant jihad, terrorist killings of unbelievers and “martyrdom”, portraying that as a victorious life outcome.[25]

As a boxer, Tamerlan had also befriended Brendan Mess a young man who liked to smoke marijuana and was allegedly involved in marijuana sales. It’s unclear whether or not he was Tamerlan’s supplier, or if Tamerlan or Dzhokhar also dealt in drugs. They were known to be good friends as evidenced by statements made both by those who trained together at the Wai Kru Mixed Marital Arts gym and by Brendan’s girlfriend who recalls always serving halal food for when “Tam” came to visit.[26]

On 9-11, 2011, a bizarre crime occurred. Brendan Mess, the young man who Tamerlan had introduced at his gym as his “best friend” along with his two Jewish roommates Erik Weissman and Raphael Teken were murdered. They had their throats slit from ear to ear with each young man nearly decapitated. The police were not sure what to make of the crime as there was no forced entry—it appeared the young men had opened their door to a known person. Five thousand dollars was left behind and money and marijuana was sprinkled over the bodies of the dead men.[27] Their bodies were only discovered on September 12th and the local police did not think at the time that these were likely symbolic murders—having occurred on the anniversary of the 9-11 attacks, involving near beheadings, with no clear motive such as theft, and with drugs sprinkled over their bodies in what looked like a peculiar form of communication.

No one connected Tsarnaev with the murders at the time. He notably had argued with his friend about his lifestyle; he also did not go to his best friend’s funeral. He also stopped going to the gym.[28] Recently, following the Boston Marathon bombings, the case has been reopened with Tamerlan Tsarnaev featuring as a prime suspect. When viewed through the lens of a militant jihadi crime, it seems the murders—the way they were committed and the date they occurred—were possibly meant to convey a message about the corrupting power of the West and its tolerance for drugs, providing a militant jihadi answer—of annihilation and destruction.

Chillingly, when FBI agents questioned Ibragim Todashev, also a Chechen and sports associate of Tsarnaev about the murders he allegedly attacked the agents leading to an altercation in which he was shot and killed. While the FBI asserted that Todashev made statements

implicating both himself and Tsarnaev before attacking the agents, the case remains unsolved—but with significant tracks pointing to the elder of the Tsarnaev brothers.[29]

Following the murders, Tamerlan took off to Dagestan within three months. His boxing dream shattered, his parents having divorced and moved away and with no clear life path laid out before him he was perhaps considering following in the footsteps of Plotnikov. And if he had committed the murders of Brendan Mess and his roommates—over his own, his brother's, or his friend's use of marijuana—Tsarnaev had already crossed a serious red line. He may have been blaming the “decadent” west for corrupting he and his brother—no one knows. Yet after it had occurred, it appears he had begun his new quest—turning his back on the West—and perhaps going off to “cleanse” himself by joining the Dagestani “martyrs”.

In Dagestan, William Plotnikov is reported to have spent about six weeks in a village before he was accepted into the rebel groups.[30] If Tamerlan was hoping to join the rebels he would likely have a similar wait—having to be also vetted by them—a wait he spent visiting his father's home. Tamerlan spent a great deal of his time in Dagestan with his cousin, a leader in the ideological resistance movement and also with others who also had extremist mindsets. He also continued in his flamboyant ways leading many at the Dagestani mosque to question if he would get arrested—attesting to his continued narcissistic need for attention—which was likely off putting to the rebels there.

Whatever aspirations Tamerlan had to join the rebels, the group he had approached was apparently crushed when Plotnikov and his associates were suddenly killed in an ambush by the authorities. Tellingly, Tamerlan fled Dagestan within two days of the assault, flying back to the U.S. via Moscow. When questioned after the Boston bombings about the reasons for Tamerlan's trip to Dagestan his father stated that he had come to Russia to apply for his passport. However Tamerlan's haste to exit Dagestan was so imperative that he returned to the U.S. without the paperwork having been completed.[31]

Again his life trajectory had been thwarted—apparently Tsarnaev did not manage to join the Dagestani rebel group. Back in the U.S., he continued in his previous pattern of staying home to take care of their child while his wife worked long hours. He may have continued to smoke pot, at least that is what some reports say. According to his brother Dzhokhar, Tamerlan continued to seep himself in the video-recorded sermons of the late Anwar Awlaki—who lives on immortal on the Internet—and to study the writings of *Inspire* magazine.

The Lethal Cocktail—Bringing it all Together

Clearly Tamerlan Tsarnaev was a young man seeking glory in one form or another and had a strong psychological need for attention. Having come as an asylum seeker from a war-torn area, he was sensitive to the plight of Muslims in other parts of the world and likely easily drawn into the Al-Qaeda narrative that declared that Muslims were oppressed. Aware of Putin's crushing of

the Chechen rebel movement and Assad's attempts to crush the Syrian rebels (evidenced by a video he had uploaded on his You Tube account) he had fallen under the teachings of Awlaki who pointed the finger at the U.S., accusing America for civilian deaths of Muslims in Iraq and Afghanistan. As he got drawn via the Internet into militant jihadi ideologies, he was likely also upset to learn that both Samir Khan who wrote *Inspire* magazine and his virtual mentor Anwar Awlaki were killed by a U.S. drone attack just months before he had left for Dagestan.[32]

As many other first and second generation immigrants who fall prey to militant jihadi groups and their ideology, Tamerlan was living in a Western country, but unable to find the way to actualize a positive identity. He tried but did not make it in higher education. He tried and was blocked in his boxing aspirations—due to his immigration status. When at his mother's urging he tried to give up his drinking and marijuana smoking habits, he turned back to Islam and found a stricter interpretation of what is permitted and what is not. There was also a mentor to help him along, but apparently he stumbled into the militant jihadi ideology, either via the mentor or simply via the Internet. In Al-Qaeda's ideology he found an answer for his malaise—short-term psychological first aid. The militant jihadi ideology provided him with a new identity, a “heroic” sense of purpose and belonging. This most likely infused him with the euphoria many terrorists report when they commit themselves to “self cleansing” and going down the road to “martyrdom”.

Once drawn into the militant jihadi ideology and its narrative regarding Muslims being under attack by Western powers, Tsarnaev deepened his identification with his oppressed “kin” in Dagestan and Chechnya and returned to join them. Even in this role, however, Tamerlan found himself blocked. When he tried to join the Dagestani rebels—where the issues were more clear-cut and the enemy more clearly defined—his contacts were killed leaving him without a way to self-actualize as a rebel/militant in Dagestan.

The extremists that Tamerlan spent considerable time with in Dagestan also influenced him. They held a much more global view of the militant jihad and viewed the West—including the U.S.—as an enemy. Most likely they encouraged the same view in the impressionable Tsarnaev. During his time in Dagestan, Tamerlan wanted to join their movement but also began to identify with the entire Muslim ummah, beginning to view them as fictive kin for whom he felt a responsibility. He probably began to view himself as a heroic militant jihadi figure with a responsibility to conduct an attack somewhere—even if it be America.

Dzhokhar, the younger brother reported that when his brother made up his mind, Tamerlan was upset with the U.S. and planned to attack Americans due to the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Indeed, if he wanted to self actualize as a militant jihadi and become a “martyr” and could not do so in Dagestan he needed to widen his view of the enemy and generalize his revenge for what he had seen happen under Putin in Chechnya, to include perceived crimes carried out by the U.S. against his Muslim “brothers” and “sisters” in Afghanistan and Iraq as well.

A young man in search of a positive identity, fully armed with a virulent ideology and having received social support among his Boston contacts and his extremist contacts in Dagestan for global jihad [33] as well as with Plotnikov and the charismatic virtual mentoring of the already dead Anwar Alwaki who continued to “live” on in the Internet—here a confluence of forces came together and probably made Tamerlan virtually signed on to the worldwide global militant jihadi movement that had emerged from Al-Qaeda.

Thwarted in Dagestan, Tamerlan decided, after his return to America, to attack in the U.S.—a place that had never fully been home to him and—where he had never fully acclimated. According to his younger brother, Tamerlan finished his quest for a positive identity and self-actualization by following the instructions for “lone wolf” terrorists that he had found in *Inspire* magazine. This must have led him to cook up his scheme to bomb the Boston marathon and from there proceed to Times Square in New York to explode more bombs there, thereby creating a path of destruction until such time as he could “blissfully” enter the realm of “martyrdom” by being killed.

By most Islamic accountings Tsarnaev only ended up dead and is not considered any type of hero or deserving entry into paradise for his acts. This however is not the view taken by *Inspire* magazine which had inspired him. There in the Spring 2013 edition, he is hailed as a hero and as a real Islamic “martyr”. Tamerlan dragged his promising younger brother down alongside him. Dzhokhar will now likely serve a lifetime sentence in prison.

Both young men fought a battle with trying to assimilate in a Western country after coming out of a more conservative Muslim surrounding and fleeing a war-torn country. Without his brother’s negative influence, Dzhokhar likely would have made it. Tamerlan however, was especially sensitized to war trauma and had a hard time finding his way in the U.S. Both brothers got into drugs and alcohol. Tamerlan, frustrated in many ways and perhaps hurt by the disintegration of his family as well as his own failure to achieve, finally decided to “cleanse” himself by rejecting the West and crawling into a virulent ideology and group that promised to make something out of him—that is, if he was willing to give up his life for it and to take the lives of others. Tragically his brother and many others will continue to suffer from his turning to the militant jihad and many look for answers about how this tragedy that killed three and wounded dozens of innocent people, could have been avoided.

About the Author: Anne Speckhard, Ph.D. is Adjunct Associate Professor of Psychiatry in the Georgetown University School of Medicine. She has interviewed terrorists worldwide and is the author of *Talking to Terrorists: Understanding the Psycho-Social Motivations of Militant Jihadi Terrorists, Mass Hostage Takers, Suicide Bombers & “Martyrs” to Combat Terrorism in Prison & Community Rehabilitation* (published by Advances Press, 2012).

Notes

- [1] Cooper, M., Schmidt, M. S., & Schmitt, E. (April 23, 2013). Boston suspects are seen as self-taught and fueled by the web. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/24/us/boston-marathon-bombing-developments.html?pagewanted=all&_r=1&; and Isikoff, M., Williams, P., & McClam, E. (April 23, 2013). Search of Tsarnaevs' phones, computers finds no indication of accomplice, source says. *U.S. News on NBCNEWS.com*. Retrieved from http://usnews.nbcnews.com/_news/2013/04/23/17877288-search-of-tsarnaevs-phones-computers-finds-no-indication-of-accomplice-source-says?lite.
- [2] Speckhard, A. (2012) *Talking to Terrorists: Understanding the Psycho-Social Motivations of Militant Jihadi Terrorists, Mass Hostage Takers, Suicide Bombers & "Martyrs" to Combat Terrorism in Prison & Community Rehabilitation*, McLean, VA: Advances Press.
- [3] Speckhard, A. (2012), op. cit.
- [4] Speckhard, A. (2012), op. cit.
- [5] Speckhard, A. (2012), op. cit.
- [6] Speckhard, A., & Akhmedova, K. (2006 a). The New Chechen Jihad: Militant Wahhabism as a Radical Movement and a Source of Suicide Terrorism in Post-War Chechen Society. *Democracy and Security*, 2(1), 103-155; Speckhard, A., & Ahkmedova, K. (2006 b). The Making of a Martyr: Chechen Suicide Terrorism. *Journal of Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 29 (5), 429-492.
- [7] Ibrahim, Y. (May 30, 2013). Inspired by 'Inspire'. *Inspire Magazine*, (11). Retrieved from <http://jihadology.net/category/inspire-magazine/>
- [8] Paz, R. (2011). Reading their Lips: The Credibility of Militant Jihadi Websites as "Soft Power" in the War of the Minds. In: A. C. Speckhard (Ed.), RTO Technical Report (Vol. Psychosocial, Organizational and Cultural Aspects of Terrorism; available from <http://ftp.rta.nato.int/public//PubFullText/RTO/TR/RTO-TR-HFM-140//TR-HFM-140-06.pdf>
- [9] Shane, S., & Herszenhorn, D. M. (April 28, 2013). Agents pore over suspect's trip to Russia. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/29/us/tamerlan-tsarnaevs-contacts-on-russian-trip-draw-scrutiny.html?pagewanted=all>
- [10] *Novaya Gazeta*. (April 4, 2013). «Бостонский взрыватель» был давно заряжен ("Boston fuse" has long been charged).
- [11] Radio Azattik (2013). Кыргызские земляки о Царнаевых (Kyrgyz neighbors on Tsarnaev). from <http://rus.azattyk.org/media/video/24963456.html>.
- [12] Murphy, K., Tanfani, J., & Loiko, S. L. The Tsarnaev brothers' troubled trail to Boston. *Los Angeles Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/nation/la-na-boston-suspects-20130428-dto.0.15030.htmlstory>.
- [13] Cassidy, C. (April 24, 2013). Tamerlan got Massachusetts welfare benefits. 4-5. Retrieved from http://bostonherald.com/news_opinion/local_coverage/2013/04/tamerlan_tsarnaev_got_mass_welfare_benefits.
- [14] Sontag, D., Herszenhorn, D. M., & Kovalesk, S. F. (April 27, 2013). A battered dream, then a violent path. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/28/us/shot-at-boxing-title-denied-tamerlan-tsarnaev-reeled.html?pagewanted=all>
- [15] Finn, P., Leonnig, C. D., & Englund, W. (April 19, 2013). Tamerlan Tsarnaev and Dzhokhar Tsarnaev were refugees from brutal Chechen conflict. *Washington Post*. Retrieved from http://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/details-emerge-on-suspected-boston-bombers/2013/04/19/ef2c2566-a8e4-11e2-a8e2-5b98cb59187f_story.html.
- [16] Murphy, K., Tanfani, J., & Loiko, S. L. The Tsarnaev brothers' troubled trail to Boston. *Los Angeles Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/nation/la-na-boston-suspects-20130428-dto.0.15030.html>.
-

-
- [17] Finn, P., Leonnig, C. D., & Englund, W. (April 19, 2013). Tamerlan Tsarnaev and Dzhokhar Tsarnaev were refugees from brutal Chechen conflict. *Washington Post*. Retrieved from http://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/details-emerge-on-suspected-boston-bombers/2013/04/19/ef2c2566-a8e4-11e2-a8e2-5b98cb59187f_story.html .
- [18] CNN. (April 22, 2013). Timeline: A look at Tamerlan Tsarnaev's past. Retrieved from <http://www.cnn.com/2013/04/21/us/tamerlan-tsarnaev-timeline> .
- [19] USA Today. (April 25, 2013). Mosque that Boston suspects attended has radical ties. Retrieved from <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2013/04/23/boston-mosque-radicals/2101411/> .
- [20] Sontag, D., Herszenhorn, D. M., & Kovalesk, S. F. (April 27, 2013). A battered dream, then a violent path. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/28/us/shot-at-boxing-title-denied-tamerlan-tsarnaev-reeled.html?pagewanted=all> .
- [21] Murphy, K., Tanfani, J., & Loiko, S. L. The Tsarnaev brothers' troubled trail to Boston. *Los Angeles Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/nation/la-na-boston-suspects-20130428-dto.0.15030.htmlstory> .
- [22] Sontag, D., Herszenhorn, D. M., & Kovalesk, S. F. (April 27, 2013). A battered dream, then a violent path. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/28/us/shot-at-boxing-title-denied-tamerlan-tsarnaev-reeled.html?pagewanted=all> .
- [23] Kelly, M. (April 25, 2013). Tamerlan Tsarnaev vowed to die for Islam; judge may have prematurely stopped brother's interrogation, sources say. *FoxNews.com*. Retrieved from <http://www.foxnews.com/politics/2013/04/25/tamerlan-tsarnaev-vowed-to-die-for-islam-judge-prematurely-stopped-brother/#ixzz2WPg8OPR5> .
- [24] Murphy, K., Tanfani, J., & Loiko, S. L. The Tsarnaev brothers' troubled trail to Boston. *Los Angeles Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/nation/la-na-boston-suspects-20130428-dto.0.15030.htmlstory> .
- [25] National Post. (May 1, 2013). Canadian William Plotnikov with rebel fighters in Dagestan translated. Retrieved from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=trOy1smv-l> .
- [26] Hohler, B. (May 25, 2013). Waltham victim's girlfriend says Tsarnaev visited. Retrieved from <http://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/2013/05/24/friend-triple-murder-victim-says-police-knew-ties-marathon-bombing-suspect/tUZsGAQb59kYYXo7emjbHM/story.html> .
- [27] Tomlinson, S., & Nye, J. (April 22, 2013). Did Boston bomber murder his 'only American friend' in horrific triple killing in 2011? *Daily Mail Online*. Retrieved from <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2312814/Tamerlan-Tsarnaev-Friends-suspect-Boston-bomber-murdering-American-friend-2011.html#ixzz2RbxjrJ5o> .
- [28] Tomlinson, S., & Nye, J. (April 22, 2013). Did Boston bomber murder his 'only American friend' in horrific triple killing in 2011? *Daily Mail Online*. Retrieved from <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2312814/Tamerlan-Tsarnaev-Friends-suspect-Boston-bomber-murdering-American-friend-2011.html#ixzz2RbxjrJ5o> .
- [29] Schmidt, M., Rashbaum, w. K., & Richard A. Oppel, J. (May 22, 2013). Deadly end to F.B.I. queries on Tsarnaev and a triple killing. *New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/23/us/officer-involved-in-shooting-of-man-tied-to-tsarnaev.html?hp> .
- [30] Shuster, S. (April 29, 2013). The Boston-Bomber trail: Fresh clues in rural Dagestan. *Time*. Retrieved from <http://world.time.com/2013/04/29/picking-up-the-boston-bomber-trail-in-utamysh-russia/#ixzz2WPzbeL00> .
- [31] Shuster, S. (April 29, 2013). The Boston-Bomber trail: Fresh clues in rural Dagestan. *Time*. Retrieved from <http://world.time.com/2013/04/29/picking-up-the-boston-bomber-trail-in-utamysh-russia/#ixzz2WPzbeL00> .
-

[32] Mazzetti, M., Savage, C., & Shane, S. (March 9, 2013). How a U.S. citizen came to be in America's cross hairs. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/10/world/middleeast/anwar-al-awlaki-a-us-citizen-in-americas-cross-hairs.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0.

[33] Shuster, S. (April 22, 2013). Older Boston suspect made two trips to Dagestan, visited radical mosque, officials say. *Time*. Retrieved from <http://world.time.com/2013/04/22/tsarnaev-in-dagestan/#ixzz2WQTZK19K> and Shuster, S. (May 8, 2013). Exclusive: Dagestani Relative of Tamerlan Tsarnaev Is a Prominent Islamist. *Time*. Retrieved from <http://world.time.com/2013/05/08/exclusive-cousin-who-became-close-to-tamerlan-tsarnaev-in-dagestan-is-a-prominent-islamist/>.