

Questions mount about Boston bombers' links to US intelligence agencies

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Information coming to light about the background of the Boston Marathon bombings raises many questions about the relationship of US intelligence agencies to the alleged bombers, Tamerlan and Dzhokhar Tsarnaev.

It is now clear that the older brother, Tamerlan, who was killed in a police shootout in the early morning hours of April 19, was well known to both the FBI and the CIA.

The following account can be pieced together from what has emerged so far:

After first denying any knowledge of Tsarnaev, the FBI has now admitted that it received a request in March 2011 from Russia to investigate him, due to Russia's concerns that he might be connected with terrorist organizations active in Chechnya and the Caucasus region. He was added to the Treasury Enforcement and Communication System database to monitor past and future flight travel. The FBI claims that it found no relevant information on Tamerlan and reported this to Russia.

This was not the end of the matter, however. Six months later, in late September 2011, the Russian government contacted the CIA with a similar request, evidently unsatisfied with the FBI's response.

The CIA requested that Tamerlan's name be put on the Terrorist Identities Datamart Environment (TIDE) database, maintained by the National Counterterrorism Center. TIDE is the US government's central database on alleged "international terrorists," from which other US intelligence databases are compiled, including the FBI's "no-fly" list.

According to a US government official cited by ABC News, the CIA also "shared the information with the appropriate federal departments and agencies specifying that Tsarnaev may be of interest to them."

In January 2012, less than four months later, Tsarnaev was able to get on a plane to southern Russia. According to US Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano, this meant that the TIDE database was "pinged," alerting the US Joint Terrorism Task Force, which includes the FBI, the Secret Service and other agencies, of his movement.

Yet Tsarnaev was able to return to the United States in

July 2012 without incident.

Little has been said so far about what Tsarnaev did on his trip. However, according to a report on NBC News, "A police official source in Makhachkala, Dagestan... [said] that the Russian internal security service reached out to the FBI last November [2012] with some questions about Tamerlan, and handed over a copy of case file on him.

"During routine surveillance of an individual known to be involved in the militant Islamic underground movement, the police witnessed Tamerlan meet the latter at a Salafi mosque in Makhachkala, the police official said. It was one of six times in total that surveillance officials witnessed Tsarnaev meeting this militant at the same mosque, according to the police official.

"The militant contact later disappeared, the police official said, but so did Tsarnaev before investigators had a chance to speak with him. The FBI never responded, according to the Dagestani police official."

In other words, the FBI was warned about Tsarnaev both *before and after* his trip to Russia in the first half of 2012. The most recent warning was received only six months before the Boston bombings.

This account is supported by statements of Senator Richard Burr, a member of the Senate Intelligence Committee. After secret hearings held Tuesday, Burr told reporters that there were "multiple contacts" between the US and Russia over Tsarnaev, including "at least once since October 2011"—i.e., after the request submitted to the CIA in September 2011.

The government and media are scrambling to contain exposure of the significance of these revelations. The hearings conducted by Congress are being held behind closed doors, outside of the sight of the American people.

The new narrative that is being developed to explain the extraordinary facts that have emerged is simply not credible. According to government officials, "balls were dropped" and there was a failure to "connect the dots." If dots were not connected, who failed to connect them?

As in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks, there is an

effort to ensure that absolutely no one is held accountable. There is a reason for this. If any individuals were held responsible, they would seek to defend themselves, and that would lead to further questions that officials are eager to avoid.

The government seems particularly anxious to conclude that the two Tsarnaev brothers acted entirely on they own, a claim that is belied by the facts that have come out about Tamerlan so far. The convenience of this claim is that it directs attention away from examining the connections of these two individuals, including their relations with US intelligence agencies.

There are a number of possible explanations for the actions of the Tsarnaev brothers. One is that they were driven by hostility to US foreign policy. Indeed there are some reports that the younger brother, Dzhokhar, has told interrogators that he is opposed to the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Another, and not mutually exclusive, possibility is that the brothers, and particularly Tamerlan, were being developed as assets or potential assets of US imperialism's machinations in Chechnya and neighboring Dagestan. The region is critical to Russian geo-strategic interests because it is central to Russia's access to the energy-rich Caspian Sea.

US intelligence agencies have a long and sordid relationship with Islamic fundamentalist groups operating in Chechnya. The US also has close ties to neighboring Georgia and in 2008 supported Georgia in a war with Russia over the breakaway province of South Ossetia.

According to the Russian newspaper *Izvestia*, during his time in the Caucasus, Tsarnaev attended seminars organized by the Fund of the Caucasus, which is tied to the US-backed Jamestown Foundation.

The Jamestown Foundation, which supports Chechen separatism, was established with the assistance of former CIA Director William Casey and includes on its board of directors a bipartisan group of top figures in the intelligence, military and political establishment.

Directors include General Michael Hayden, former CIA director and former head of the National Security Agency; Bruce Riedel, senior fellow at the Brookings Institute; Michelle Van Cleave, former national counterintelligence executive under George W. Bush; and Matthew Bryza, former US ambassador to Azerbaijan under Obama and advisor on Eurasian energy matters, including the Caspian Sea, under Bush.

The Jamestown Foundation has close ties to the American Committee for Peace in the Caucasus, chaired by President Jimmy Carter's former national security adviser, Zbigniew Brzezinski. Brzezinski played a critical role in initiating the US alliance with Islamic fundamentalists in Afghanistan beginning in the late 1970s, as part of the US proxy war

against the Soviet-backed regime in Afghanistan. It was from this war that Al Qaeda emerged.

If Tsarnaev was seen as a potential asset in its geopolitical conflict with Russia, it would also explain the accounts given by the brothers' parents, who have said that the FBI had regular contact with Tamerlan, visiting the family multiple times. According to his mother, Zubeidat Tsarnaev, Tamerlan was "controlled by the FBI for three to five years."

The portrait that is beginning to emerge of Tsarnaev and his relationship with the US bears some resemblance to that of Zacarias Moussaoui, who was arrested prior to the September 11, 2001 attacks and was subsequently charged by the US government with conspiring in the plot.

In the late 1990s, Moussaoui fought in Chechnya with Islamic fundamentalist groups and helped recruit others to go to Chechnya. Before his arrest in August 2001, Moussaoui had attended flight training courses at the same school as Mohamed Atta and Marwan al-Shehhi, who flew the planes that hit the World Trade Center.

After his arrest and prior to the September 11 attacks, both British and French agencies passed on intelligence to the US about Moussaoui's connections to Chechen militants linked to Osama bin Laden. However, the FBI repeatedly rejected requests from local officials to search Moussaoui's computer and personal rooms.

Behind the so-called "war on terror," the US government continues to maintain ties to Islamic fundamentalist groups throughout the Middle East and Central Asia, insofar as these organizations are seen as useful tools to advance American geopolitical interests. The United States has recently utilized the services of such organizations in Libya, as part of the campaign to overthrow Muammar Gaddafi, and currently in the US-backed civil war in Syria.

Once again, the actions of American imperialism abroad appear to have had tragic consequences for the American people at home.



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