

The US media returns to the mysterious death of Ibragim Todashev

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More than nine months after the unexplained shooting death of Ibragim Todashev while he was being questioned by FBI agents in his Florida home about his relationship with Boston Marathon bombing suspect Tamerlan Tsarnaev, the US media has suddenly revived interest in the case.

According to the official story, Todashev apparently “flipped out,” attacking his questioners with a “samurai sword” hanging from his wall. Later reports alleged that his weapon had been a “metal pole” that “might have been a broomstick.” Later, it was suggested that Todashev may not have been armed at all.

Since then, both the FBI and the Ocala County state’s attorney’s office have conducted investigations of Todashev’s death, without putting anything on the public record. Last month both the federal and state agencies said they would release their reports on the case by the end of March.

Last week, the monthly *Boston* magazine published a lengthy cover story on the Todashev case, focusing on allegations that Todashev and Tsarnaev may have both taken part in a triple-murder in Waltham, Massachusetts in September 2011, and arguing that a more thorough police investigation of those killings might have led to Tsarnaev’s arrest and thus forestalled the Marathon bombing.

“This American Life,” a program airing on National Public Radio, broadcast an hour-long report Friday, March 7, in collaboration with the *Boston* magazine investigation.

The two reports provide new details about the ongoing efforts of federal and local authorities to cover up the killing of Todashev and its possible connection to the Waltham killings and the Boston Marathon bombing.

Susan Zalkind, the author of the *Boston* magazine piece, entitled “The Murders Before the Marathon,” states, “If Waltham police had figured out who hacked three men to death on September 11, 2011, there’s a good chance we would not be talking about the Boston Marathon bombings.” In this, her article follows the approach taken by the *New York Times* in the aftermath of Todashev’s killing, which sought to portray the Boston Marathon events as an alleged

“failure to connect the dots.”

The report delves into the circumstances surrounding the 2011 triple homicide in the Boston suburb of Waltham, for which Todashev had allegedly implicated Tsarnaev and himself before being shot to death by federal agents. The report states that local police ignored leads connecting Tamerlan Tsarnaev to the killings during the initial investigation, despite many friends of the deceased mentioning Tsarnaev by name as a close associate of Brendan Mess, one of the victims.

Bellie Hacker, the mother of Erik Weissman, another victim, states of the police that “they were basically waiting for someone to come forward and say who did it,” adding that officers reassured her that “someday down the line, someone is going to need a plea bargain.”

The case was left largely untouched until the Boston Marathon events in 2013. Federal agents then moved quickly to establish the connections between Tamerlan Tsarnaev and the 2011 slaying. “For the first time, Brendan Mess’s younger brother Dylan and his friends were questioned about Tamerlan Tsarnaev,” Zalkind writes, adding, “the FBI agents wanted to know if either Brendan or Tamerlan was involved in organized crime. If Tamerlan had guns. Who else he sparred with. If Tamerlan prayed, if he preached.”

The article then details the strange circumstances surrounding Ibragim Todashev’s death, after he had been contacted by federal officials in the wake of the April 15 bombing.

“As best as I can tell, the FBI arrived on Ibragim’s doorstep looking for a terrorist,” Zalkind writes. She relates that officials had been in contact with him for nearly a month before his death in May.

Nearly nine months since the killing, government officials have not produced an explanation as to how a potential key witness in the Boston Marathon bombing investigation, as well as an unsolved triple homicide, could be killed during an interrogation by a half dozen agents.

The article details the efforts of authorities to pressure, intimidate, and bully the close friends and relatives of

Todashev. Tatiana Gruzdeva, his live-in girlfriend, had initially been pressured by agents to provide information connecting Todashev to the Waltham incident. When she insisted she knew nothing, she was detained by immigration officers and threatened with deportation to her native Moldova, allegedly due to an expired work visa. Gruzdeva would later give an interview to Zalkind for *Boston* magazine, for which she would be again detained by officials and then finally deported.

FBI agents aggressively questioned Ashurmamad Miraliev, another friend of Todashev, about his connections to Tsarnaev, the Boston Marathon events and the Waltham murders. After having been denied a right to an attorney, Miraliev was then jailed before being deported to Tajikistan, having been forced to miss a hearing in court which would have allowed him to appeal for asylum in the US. Another friend, Khusen Taramov, was barred from re-entering the United States after having attended Todashev's funeral in Chechnya. (See "Family of Boston Marathon bombing witness killed by FBI denounces federal harassment") While the *Boston* article suggests that the attempts to intimidate the close friends and acquaintances of Todashev were part of an effort to learn more about his possible connections to terrorism, the thuggish behavior of authorities is indicative of the extent to which agents are willing to go in order to suppress anyone who may be in a position to contradict the official line about his death.

Federal and state-level authorities have moved to silence any information pertaining to Todashev's death. This includes refusal to release the autopsy report of the killing, as well as denying any cooperation with an investigation launched by the American Civil Liberties Union last summer. Tellingly, Zalkind states that though numerous state prosecutors, police and federal agencies were contacted for information, none had responded for comment.

On Monday, March 10, the *Washington Post* published an editorial headlined, "A death unexplained: The FBI must come clean on the death about Ibragim Todashev's death." The commentary suggests the reason the establishment media has been compelled to return to this subject after ignoring it for months, referring to "conflicting and downright strange leaked accounts" of how Todashev died, which "have been more than enough to fuel reasonable suspicions, let alone the multiple conspiracy theories reverberating globally via the Internet."

The *Post* expresses the hope that the forthcoming reports from the FBI and the Florida state's attorney will put such conspiracy theories to rest. The *Boston* magazine/NPR report serves that purpose through a diversionary effort: providing a valuable account of the failure of the police to seriously investigate the Waltham killings, and of the FBI's

persecution of the friends and family of Ibragim Todashev, while remaining silent on the evidence of ties between the suspected Boston bomber, Tamerlan Tsarnaev, and US government agencies.

Tamerlan Tsarnaev, who was killed in a shootout with police just days after the Marathon bombing, and his brother Dzhokhar, who survived the shootout and now faces capital murder and terrorism charges, had a close family tie to American intelligence. Their uncle, Ruslan Tsarni, was married to the daughter of a high-ranking CIA official and ran an organization, the Congress of Chechen International Organizations, that provided material aid to Chechen separatists fighting against the Russian government. The group was headquartered at the home of Tsarni's father-in-law, Graham Fuller, a top-level CIA official in the 1980s.

During the period in 2011 in which the Waltham murders took place, the FBI, tipped off by the Russian and Saudi Arabian authorities, had opened a file on Tamerlan Tsarnaev to investigate accusations of connections to radical Islam. Unaccountably, the security investigation was closed in 2012, and Tsarnaev was allowed to travel abroad to Dagestan in the Northern Caucasus where he attempted to establish ties with Islamic separatist movements in the region.

In the lead up to the Boston Marathon bombing, local authorities were kept in the dark about the presence of the Tsarnaevs. Boston Police Commissioner Ed Davis has testified that the FBI made no attempts in the run-up to the events to warn the city's law enforcement about the existence of a possible terror suspect, even as they were conducting an investigation into him.

The voluminous detail in the *Boston* magazine/NPR investigation only underscores the vast amount that remains deliberately concealed and still to be uncovered about the Marathon bombing and its connection to the US national security apparatus.



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