



HISTORICAL TIES TO JIHADISM IN MASSACHUSETTS

By Robin Simcox

On 15 April 2013, two bombs detonated at the Boston marathon, killing three people and injuring over 180. The authorities believe that the perpetrators were two brothers, Tamerlan and Dzhokhar Tsarnaev.

The Tsarnaev's were born in Kyrgyzstan and were ethnically half Chechen and half Dagestani.¹ By 2003, they had moved to the United States as asylum seekers, with Dzhokhar eventually gaining American citizenship.² They were living in Massachusetts. Boston has not previously been subject to a terrorist attack. However, the city and state of Massachusetts has a long history of ties to AQ and AQ-inspired militancy.

Potential radicalisation

While there is still more to learn of the motives behind the attack, there is evidence of potential radicalisation.

Tamerlan Tsarnaev is thought to have become increasingly radicalised in recent years which, in 2011, led to the FBI interviewing him – seemingly at the request of the Russian government, who were concerned about perceived increased radicalism.³

A YouTube account created in his name in August 2012 included in its playlist a video dedicated to the Black Banners of Khurasan, traditionally the black flag of Muslim armies now appropriated by jihadist groups. The black banners appear in multiple hadiths; and some al-Qaeda (AQ) members are thought to have believed they were fulfilling the instructions of their Prophet Mohammed, who reportedly said that

If you see the black banners coming from Khurasan, join that army, even if you have to crawl over ice; no power will be able to stop them and they will finally reach Baitul Maqdis [Jerusalem], where they will erect their flags.⁴

¹ See 'Bomb suspect's mother: Tamerlan Tsarnaev's touching call', *Los Angeles Times*, April 21, 2013, available at <http://www.latimes.com/news/world/worldnow/la-fg-wn-tsarnaev-mother-20130421.0.6590529.story>; 'Boston bombing suspects' father "a good man," neighbors in Dagestan say, *NBC News*, April 21, 2013, available at <http://worldnews.nbcnews.com/news/2013/04/21/17847186-boston-bombing-suspects-father-a-good-man-neighbors-in-dagestan-say?lite>

² 'Brothers in Marathon bombings took two paths into infamy', *Boston Globe*, April 19, 2013, available at http://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/2013/04/19/relatives-marathon-bombing-suspects-worried-that-older-brother-was-corrupting-sweet-younger-sibling/UCYHkiP9nfsjAtMjJPWJLL/story.html?s_campaign=sm_tw

³ 'Tsarnaev aunt reveals further details about visit to Dagestan', *Guardian*, April 22, 2013, available at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2013/apr/22/tsarnaev-aunt-details-visit-dagestan>; Little is known concerning Dzhokhar Tsarnaev, although, by September 2012, he was posting conspiracy theories on his Facebook page, stating that '9/11 was an inside job.'

⁴ For a fuller explanation of the importance of black banners, see Soufan, Ali & Freedman, Daniel, *The Black Banners: Inside the Hunt for Al-Qaeda* (Allen Lane, 2011)

Also featured in Tamerlan's YouTube account was a talk given by the extremist Australian cleric Feiz Muhammad and, on a playlist titled 'Terrorists', a video that featured militant Abu Dujan (killed in a gunfight with Russian special forces in December 2012) and armed individuals in army gear and masks.⁵

PRE 9/11

CARE INTERNATIONAL – BOSTON CHARITY FUNDING & ENCOURAGING JIHAD

Prior to its official founding, Care International acted as the local branch in Boston for the al-Kifah Refugee Center, the U.S. branch of Maktab al-Khidamat [MAK]. MAK was the organisation created by Abdullah Azzam and Osama bin Laden in 1984 in order to receive and supervise the growing numbers of *mujahideen* and funds from the Middle East being directed towards Afghanistan. Flyers and fundraising appeal letters found at the New York City headquarters of the al-Kifah Refugee Center directly implicated Boston's Care International representatives in fundraising, recruiting, and providing other forms of logistical support for violent jihad.⁶

Care International was officially founded in April 1993 in Boston, Massachusetts. The group solicited funds and support for *mujahideen* fighters and jihadist causes, including Bosnia and Chechnya.⁷ It also contributed \$3,500 to the widow and orphans of Bassam Kanj, a Boston cab driver 'martyred' while fighting Lebanese forces in January 2000.⁸

- Care International convictions – funding jihad

Three individuals were convicted for their connections to Care International. Emadeddin Muntasser, Samir al-Monla and Muhammad Mubayyid were convicted in January 2008 of conspiracy to defraud the Internal Revenue Service by falsifying documents. They concealed the fact that Care International was the successor organisation to the al-Kifah Refugee Center, and was engaged in soliciting funds and support for *mujahideen* fighters and jihad.

Between 1993 and 2003, Muntasser, al-Monla, Mubayyid, and other Care International officers collected \$1.7m via their fraudulently-obtained tax-exempt status. Many of the donated checks received by the organisation specifically indicated that the funds were to be used for '*mujahideen*', 'fighters', 'martyrs', and 'Jihad'. Other cases included 'Bosnia *mujahideen*', 'Jihad Bosnia', and '*mujahideen* Bosnia 9th Battalion'.⁹

- Muntasser is a Libyan citizen who directed the Boston branch of the al-Kifah Refugee Center.¹⁰ He is also the founder of Care, and also served as its President between 1993

⁵ 'Brothers in Marathon bombings took two paths into infamy', *Boston Globe*, April 19, 2013

⁶ Evan Kohlmann, Expert Report – U.S v. Muhamed Mubayyid, Emadeddin Muntasser, and Samir Al-Monla Criminal Action, No. 05-40026- FDS (2007), available at <http://nefafoundation.org/file/nefacareintl0108.pdf>

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ United States of America v. Muhamed Mubayyid et al., – United States of America Memorandum and order on defendants' motions for judgment of acquittal under rule 29: Government's motion for reconsideration, United States District Court, District of Massachusetts, July 24, 2008; 'FBI probes "sleeper cell" possibility', *Boston Globe*, June 27, 2004, available at http://www.boston.com/news/local/articles/2004/06/27/fbi_probes_sleeper_cell_possibility/?page=full

⁹ United States of America v. Muhamed Mubayyid et al., United States Court of Appeals, For the First Circuit, available at <http://www.ca1.uscourts.gov/pdf.opinions/08-1846P-01A.pdf>

¹⁰ Ibid.

and 1996.¹¹ Between 1982 and 1986, Muntasser studied Electrical Engineer at the Worcester Polytechnic Institute, in Worcester, Massachusetts, earning a Bachelor's degree.¹²

- Al-Monla is an American citizen who was formerly both a President (1996 – 1998) and Treasurer (from 1998) of Care, and was a long-time resident of Massachusetts, having lived in Worcester, Boston and Brookline.¹³
- Mubayyid is a Lebanese citizen who had lived in Massachusetts since 1997 – residing in Shrewsbury and Westborough.¹⁴

- **Care International newsletter *Al-Hussam* encourages jihad abroad**

Care International published and distributed the newsletter *al-Hussam* (lit. the sword). *Al-Hussam* described itself as being an authentic source of information about 'Jihad action' and would include instructions such as, 'Fight them, and Allah will punish them by your hands, and disgrace them, and help you (to victory) over them' and, 'it is now that fighting has come and there will always be a group of [Muslims] who fight in the path of Allah [...] they fight until the day of Judgment'.

Al-Hussam encouraged American Muslims to abandon their jobs and families in order to be 'martyred' in jihadist conflict zone. On occasion, it also had a specific focus on Boston:

- In March 1993, *al-Hussam* featured an article called 'Boston offers more martyrs', which described the actions of Morabit Yahya, an immigrant to the U.S. from Morocco who was described as the fourth recruit from the Boston area who went to fight jihad in Afghanistan. Yahya arrived in the U.S. in 1990, and fought jihad in Afghanistan from 1991 onward. According to *al-Hussam*, Yahya 'met some [people] who loved and worked to support Jihad. He joined the Mujahideen in Afghanistan in 1991, where he went to training camps and later fought different battles'.¹⁵
- *Al-Hussam* also featured an appeal in July 1993 to 'brothers that are doctors' living in Boston, asking that they volunteer for a month in Bosnian hospitals.¹⁶

After *al-Hussam* was discontinued in 1997, the material was posted to Care International's website – for example, a page entitled 'News from the Battlefields of Chechnya' that provided daily news bulletins throughout late December 1999.¹⁷

ABDEL GHANI MESKINI – MILLENNIUM BOMB PLOT

Abdel Ghani Meskini pleaded guilty in March 2001 to charges relating to Ahmed Ressam's 'Millennium Bomb Plot' to attack Los Angeles International Airport on New Year's Eve 1999.¹⁸

¹¹ United States of America v. Muhamed Mubayyid et al., – Superseding Indictment, United States District Court, District of Massachusetts, March 8, 2007, available at http://www.investigativeproject.org/documents/case_docs/596.pdf

¹² 'About', Emadeddin Muntasser Online, available at <http://emadeddinmuntasser.wordpress.com/about/>

¹³ 'Trial starts in probe of Muslim charity', *Telegram & Gazette*, November 14, 2007; 'Prosecutor critical of Judge's sentencing in a charity-fraud case of former Worcester man', *Telegram & Gazette*, June 1, 2012

¹⁴ 'Former Officers of Care International, Inc. Indicted, Reports U.S Attorney', United States District Attorney's Office, May 12, 2005, available at http://nefafoundation.org/file/FeaturedDocs/U.S._v_Mubayyid_DOJPRIndictment.pdf; 'Arrests cause shock, fear', *Telegram & Gazette*, May 14, 2005

¹⁵ Expert Report – U.S v. Muhamed Mubayyid, Emadeddin Muntasser, and Samir Al-Monla Criminal Action, No. 05-40026- FDS (2007)

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ United States of America v. Muhamed Mubayyid et al., United States Court of Appeals, For the First Circuit, September 1, 2011

In 1994, Meskini left Algeria for Boston, and subsequently moved between Boston and Brooklyn due to the fact that he could not stay in one place too long for fear of being arrested.¹⁹

9/11

The two flights hijacked by al-Qaeda operatives on September 11, 2001 that crashed into the World Trade Center departed from Boston Logan International Airport. The eleven hijackers of these flights stayed in Boston in the days prior to the attack.

Aboard American Airlines Flight 11 – departing from Boston and bound for Los Angeles – was Mohammed Atta, the operational leader of the attacks, Abdulaziz al-Omari, Wail al-Shehri, Waleed al-Shehri and Satam al-Suqami. This plane struck the North Tower.

Aboard American Airlines Flight 175 – departing Boston for New York City – was Hani Hanjour, Khalid al-Mihdhar, Majed Moqed, Fayez Banihammad, Salem al-Hazmi and Nawaf al-Hazmi. This plane struck the South Tower.

POST 9/11

AAFIA SIDDIQUI – FEMALE AL-QAEDA ASSOCIATE

Aafia Siddiqui was an al-Qaeda associate convicted in February 2010 for attempting to murder U.S. officers and employees in Afghanistan, and for assaulting the F.B.I. agent, U.S. Army officer, and interpreter who tried to stop her.²⁰ Siddiqui was connected to a variety of senior AQ members.

In 1991, Siddiqui travelled to the U.S., where she studied Biochemical and Biophysical Studies²¹ at the Massachusetts Institute for Technology (MIT), in Cambridge, Massachusetts. During this time, she regularly raised money for MAK. On March 15, 1993, Siddiqui e-mailed Muslim newsgroups a pledge form for the organisation, requesting support for Bosnian widows and orphans. In another e-mail, she offered to show a video produced by Mercy International (a group eventually banned by the U.S. government for its ties to AQ).²²

Following her 1995 graduation from MIT, Siddiqui enrolled at Brandeis University, Waltham, Massachusetts, and acquired a PhD on learning through imitation.²³

In 1999, Siddiqui, along with her first husband, Amjad Khan, and her sister, Fowzia, established the Institute of Islamic Research and Teaching in Roxbury.²⁴ As late as the spring of 1999,

¹⁸ 'Terrorism 2000/2001', United States Department of Justice, 2004, available at <http://www.fbi.gov/stats-services/publications/terror/terrorism-2000-2001/>

¹⁹ 'Terror trial witness comes under defense attack', *Associated Press*, March 30, 2001

²⁰ 'Aafia Siddiqui sentenced in Manhattan Federal Court to 86 years for attempting to murder U.S. nationals in Afghanistan and six additional crimes', Department of Justice, available at http://www.investigativeproject.org/documents/case_docs/1380.pdf

²¹ 'The Most Dangerous Woman in the World', *Der Spiegel*, November 27, 2008, available at <http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/0,1518,593195,00.html>

²² 'E-mails Show MIT Grad Taught School While Raising Money for Terror-Linked Group', *Fox News*, August 22, 2008

²³ 'The Most Dangerous Woman in the World', *Der Spiegel*, November 27, 2008

²⁴ Saathoff, 'Forensic Psychiatric Evaluation, Re: United States v. Aafia Siddiqui, Criminal Case No. 1:08CR00826', July 2, 2009

Siddiqui taught students a biology course at Brandeis.²⁵ During this time, she lived in Roxbury, Massachusetts.²⁶

During her time as a student in Massachusetts, Siddiqui also received firearms training at Braintree Rifle and Pistol Club.²⁷

DANIEL MALDONADO – HOMEGROWN JIHADIST

Daniel Maldonado was convicted in April 2007 for receiving military training at a Somali camp where members of AQ were present. Maldonado said that he was willing to become a suicide bomber if he were wounded and could not fight.²⁸

Maldonado was born and raised in Massachusetts. He had formerly resided in Pelham and Methuen.²⁹

TAREK MEHANNA, KAREEM ABU-ZAHRA AND AHMAD ABOUSAMRA – ASPIRING COMBATANTS

On February 1, 2004, Tarek Mehanna, Kareem Abu-Zahra, and Ahmad Abousamra flew from Boston Logan International Airport to the United Arab Emirates with the intention to fight jihad, preferably in Iraq. They prepared for their expedition by watching jihadist videos, which included footage from Chechnya.³⁰

Once in the UAE, Abu-Zahra backed out of the plan (eventually going on to testify against Mehanna as did another of Mehanna's associates, Daniel Maldonado). Mehanna was ultimately unsuccessful in accessing training camps and returned to the U.S., where he translated and distributed jihadist texts including those advocating jihad and violence against U.S. troops and interests. He was also a moderator of a jihadist Internet forum.³¹

Mehanna was convicted in December 2011 of a range of false statement and terrorism charges for attempting to assist AQ and conspiring to commit murder in Iraq. He was raised in Sudbury, Massachusetts,³² taught religion and science at the Alhuda Academy in Worcester,³³ and studied a PhD in Pharmacy at the Massachusetts College of Pharmacy and Health Services in Boston.³⁴

Abousamra resided in Mansfield, Massachusetts, and remains a fugitive.³⁵

²⁵ 'E-mails Show MIT Grad Taught School While Raising Money for Terror-Linked Group', *Fox News*, August 22, 2008

²⁶ 'The Most Wanted Woman in the World', *Vanity Fair*, March 2005

²⁷ 'Aafia Siddiqui Found Guilty in Manhattan Federal Court of Attempting to Murder U.S. Nationals in Afghanistan and Six Additional Charges', United States Department of Justice, February 3, 2010; 'Neuroscientist Denies Trying to Kill Americans', *New York Times*, January 28, 2010, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/01/29/nyregion/29siddiqui.html>

²⁸ United States of America v. Daniel Joseph Maldonado – Superseding Criminal Complaint, United States District Court, Southern District of Texas, February 13, 2007, available at http://www.investigativeproject.org/documents/case_docs/390.pdf

²⁹ 'U.S. citizen pleads guilty to receiving training from al-Qaida', *Associated Press*, April 19, 2007; 'U.S. terror suspect's statements detail time in Somalia', *Associated Press*, February 23, 2007; United States of America v. Daniel Joseph Maldonado – Superseding Criminal Complaint, United States District Court, Southern District of Texas, February 13, 2007

³⁰ 'Affidavit of Heidi L. Williams', Federal Bureau of Investigation, October 20, 2009, available at http://www.investigativeproject.org/documents/case_docs/1094.pdf

³¹ United States of America v. Tarek Mehanna – Government's Motion for Detention, United States District Court, District of Massachusetts, November 5, 2009, available at http://www.investigativeproject.org/documents/case_docs/1122.pdf

³² 'Massachusetts man convicted of aiding al Qaeda to be sentenced', *Reuters*, April 12, 2012, available at <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/04/12/us-usa-security-mehanna-idUSBRE83B0RE20120412>

³³ 'Accused Terrorist Taught at Alhuda Academy', *Telegram and Gazette*, October 23, 2009, available at <http://www.telegram.com/article/20091023/NEWS/910230414/0/FRONTPAGE>

³⁴ 'Keyboard Jihadist?', *American Prospect*, May 14, 2012, available at <http://prospect.org/article/keyboard-jihadist>

³⁵ 'FBI Seeks Assistance in Locating Wanted Fugitive Ahmad Abousamra', Federal Bureau of Investigation, October 3, 2012, available at <http://www.fbi.gov/boston/press-releases/2012/fbi-seeks-assistance-in-locating-wanted-fugitive-ahmad-abousamra>

REZWAN FEDARUS – PENTAGON AND U.S. CAPITOL ATTACK

Rezwan Fedarus was convicted in November 2012 for plotting to crash remote controlled airplanes containing explosives into the Pentagon and U.S. Capitol, and rigging cell phones in order to detonate IEDs with the aim of killing American soldiers.

Ferdous was born in Massachusetts and resided in Ashland. He is a physics graduate of Northeastern University in Boston.³⁶

CONCLUSION

From as early as 1993, there has been jihadist activity in Massachusetts, including fundraising for jihad; those convicted for planning jihad; and even those who have been killed while fighting abroad.

Therefore, even prior to last week's Boston bombing, there had been twenty six individuals with links to Massachusetts connected to AQ and AQ-inspired terrorism. Fifteen had lived in Massachusetts, with eleven 9/11 hijackers using the Boston area as a temporary base from which to launch their attacks.

While the motivations of the Tsarnaev brothers are still partially unclear, the tragic events in Boston last week should still be viewed in the context of the ongoing threat that Massachusetts has faced from AQ and AQ-inspired militancy.

The U.S. has been largely successful in degrading al-Qaeda's capacity to commit mass casualty acts of terrorism similar to those on 9/11. However, radicalised individuals who aspire to smaller – but still deadly – terrorist acts are a continued threat to national security. As the Boston bombings would appear to show, the al-Qaeda inspired threat is ongoing, and should be treated with the utmost seriousness.

³⁶ 'Rezwan Ferdous of Ashland sentenced to 17 years in terror plot; plotted to blow up Pentagon, Capitol', *Boston.com*, November 1, 2012, available at <http://www.boston.com/metrodesk/2012/11/01/rezwan-ferdaus-ashland-sentenced-years-terror-plot/KKvy6D6n2PfXfbEFA4iMwJ/story.html>