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## “Rely on Allah, Not on Your Equipment”. Modus Operandi and All Errors of Tsarnaev Brothers

STUDIA I ANALIZY

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**Abstract:** *The article analyses modus operandi of perpetrators who carried out the bomb attack during the Boston Marathon on 15 April 2013. The author indicates the consequences of using this type of IED and explains how the location of the bombs affected the number of casualties. The article includes an analysis of the bombers' tactics and the course of action beginning with the detonation of the bombs and ending with the apprehension of the last perpetrator. Moreover, the analysed attack shows something which does not receive enough attention – that terrorists make errors and act in a chaotic manner. A detailed analysis of the bombers' preparation, behavior and modus operandi showed how poorly trained, insecure and chaotic the terrorists were. The slogan “Rely on Allah, not on your equipment”, popular in the jihadist media, has proved to be deceptive.*

### Introduction

The bomb attack which took place during the Boston Marathon on 15 April 2013 showed that a pair of poorly trained but determined attackers can paralyse entire metropolis and trigger mobilisation of thousands of police officers. This attack is used as an example when

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describing principle of operation, lethality and effect of an Improvised Explosive Device (IED) constructed from a pressure cooker or in articles explaining the notion of an inspired attack, i.e. an attack with little or no involvement of a terrorist organisation which is carried out by people who only used instructional materials related to terrorism or pledged allegiance (Arabic: bay'ah) to a terrorist organisation.

The Boston Marathon bombing showed also that the terrorists made mistakes, acted illogically and that success of the attack should be attributed more to luck or favourable circumstances than careful analysis and thorough preparation. For years terrorist organisations have been preparing and publishing instructional materials describing how to organise a terrorist attack in the EU and the USA<sup>1</sup>. The actions of the Tsarnaev brothers, especially their chaotic getaway following the release of their photographs to the public, reflect desperation combined with stupidity. Although the brothers are depicted in jihadist press as heroes (especially Tamerlan<sup>2</sup>), it should be emphasised that their media image differs significantly from their real skills.

The above arguments indicate that it is worth to take a broader look at the Boston Marathon bombing, *modus operandi* of the perpetrators and the circumstances surrounding the attack.

## Tactics, goal and victims

The bomb attack was carried out a short distance from the finish line of the Boston Marathon which is a cyclical event with a long tradition dating back to the end of XIX century. It is the oldest annually organised race of that kind in the world with the first run taking place in 1897. Currently, the Boston Marathon is the largest sports event in the region attracting 500,000 spectators and nearly 30,000 participants<sup>3</sup>. The race is broadcast by numerous media outlets and attracts a worldwide audience.

The location of the attack was not coincidental (prior to the attack, Tamerlan Tsarnaev investigated the route of the marathon and chose this area as the most suitable) and had serious consequences for a number

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<sup>1</sup> K. Wojtasik, V. Horák, *Do-It-Yourself Terrorism. How Do Terrorist Organizations Inspire, Support and Teach Their European Supporters via Internet?*, «System Safety: Human – Technical Facility – Environment» 2019, No. 1, pp. 947–955.

<sup>2</sup> The Inspire magazine published by AQAP featured an extensive biographical entry and a hymn of praise decorated with a picture of Tamerlan in heaven smiling at his mother.

<sup>3</sup> 27,000 participated in the race in 2013.

of reasons. Firstly, the finish line was a soft target<sup>4</sup> – an open area where large number of participants gathered and which was difficult to secure due to increased human traffic. Secondly, the IEDs were placed near the finish line. Although people are gathered along the entire route of the marathon, near hydration and first aid stations, the biggest crowd of spectators, event operator staff, race staff, press, medical personnel, VIPs and participants finishing the run can be found near the finish line. Very high crowd density in that area at the time of explosion contributed to an increased number of casualties. Thirdly, the people present at the event – both race participants and spectators were focused on rivalry, emotions, fight with extreme fatigue and, as a result, paid less attention to the surroundings, were more prone to panic and delayed reaction. This hindered obtaining useful information about the attack from witnesses. Fourthly, the marathon is always held on Patriots' Day which commemorates the heroes of the American Revolutionary War and therefore this date has a symbolic significance<sup>5</sup>. Fifthly, the bombers chose an event which is widely covered in media and takes place in an American metropolis which guaranteed extensive publicity of the attack and achievement of soft goals of terrorism – spreading panic, fear, undermining public confidence in the authorities, promoting radicalisation and decreasing generalised trust within society.

The perpetrators placed two IEDs in backpacks near the finish line of the marathon. The explosives were approximately 190 meters away from each other. As a result of ground level location of the bombs, victims primarily suffered leg injuries. The Tsarnaev brothers blended in with the crowd near the race barriers, placed the backpacks on the ground and walked away casually. The footage captured by surveillance cameras showed that the attackers did not display any signs of emotion or nervousness. According to sources quoted by the *New York Times*<sup>6</sup>, the unusual behaviour of the perpetrators (they remained calm, relaxed even,

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. J. Hesterman, *Soft targets*, [in:] M. J. Fagel, J. Hesterman (eds.), *Soft Targets and Crisis Management: What Emergency Planners and Security Professionals Need to Know*, 2017, pp. 1–9; R. H. Martin, *Soft Targets are Easy Terror Targets: Increased Frequency of Attacks, Practical Preparation, and Prevention*, «Forensic Research Criminology Intentional Journal», No. 3(2), <http://medcraveonline.com/FRCIJ/FRCIJ-03-00087.php> (2.12.2020).

<sup>5</sup> Initially, the Tsarnaev brothers planned to carry out the attack on 4 July (Independence Day) – an equally symbolic day on which people gather to watch annual parades, etc.

<sup>6</sup> K. Q. Seelye, M. Cooper, M. S. Schmidt, *F.B.I. Posts Images of Pair Suspected in Boston Attack*, <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/19/us/fbi-releases-video-of-boston-bombing-suspects.html> (30.04.2020).

and did not run in panic after the detonations) was one of the things which caught attention of the investigative authorities going through thousands of video clips from 15 April 2013. Dzhokhar placed his backpack directly behind a child standing at a barrier and had to be aware that a person that close to the blast will sustain the most serious injuries. Twenty minutes later surveillance cameras captured Dzhokhar visiting nearby supermarket to casually buy milk. The brothers were dressed inconspicuously – Tamerlan wore a baseball cap and sunglasses to prevent future identification. Dzhokhar wore his baseball cap backwards so it did not obscure his face at all. There is no information if the brothers' different approach to protecting their identity was a conscious choice or a coincidence. However, the subsequent events proved that the Tsarnaev brothers did not expect to be identified and were confident that no one learns about their involvement in the bombing.

The attack can be characterised as focused (carried out in a particular, previously selected area) and non-targeted (any person near the finish line could be a victim). The bombs killed 3<sup>7</sup>, wounded more than 260, many of them grievously. At least a dozen of the injured lost their limbs at the scene or at a later stage of hospitalisation (due to necessary surgical amputation). Windows on adjacent buildings were blown out, but the blast was not strong enough to cause any structural damage. As a result of panic caused by the explosion, people fled the area leaving behind their belongings (bags, backpacks, etc.). This made safety sweep of the area more difficult as each item constituted a potential additional IED. The emergency services received many false reports which also had to be verified. Moreover, a fire (unrelated to the terrorist attack) at the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum was initially recognised as a result of another explosion.

The IEDs were constructed in such a way that the explosion would harm as many people as possible. The Tsarnaev brothers build the IEDs in their family home in the period of February–March 2013. The bombs were constructed from 6-litre pressure cookers filled with black powder extracted from fireworks. Although firework sales are illegal in Massachusetts, such products can easily be purchased in the neighbouring states. Moreover, the homemade bombs were packed with metal objects and nails which, upon detonation, were sent in all direction causing severe injuries. The IEDs were concealed inside backpacks.

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<sup>7</sup> Some publications indicate that the number of casualties is 4 (adding to the bombing death toll the policeman shot dead by Tamerlan Tsarnaev at the MIT campus).

The Tsarnaev brothers chose an IED which is relatively easy to assemble from components which can be acquired with only minimal effort (in this case just a visit to a neighbouring state). Moreover, pressure cooker bombs are much safer to transport than those based on triacetone triperoxide (TATP)<sup>8</sup>. Additionally, this kind of IED can be used with a remote detonator and does not require bomber's life to be sacrificed in the explosion. Because of these advantages, pressure cooker IEDs have been used by various terrorist organisations for years. In 2004, Department of Homeland Security (DHS)<sup>9</sup> warned that pressure cooker IEDs were used by various militant groups in Afghanistan, India, Nepal, in the failed terrorist attack in France and such devices might pose a threat also in the USA. Seven such bombs exploded on 11 July 2006 in Mumbai, killing 209 people and injuring 714 more. In 2010, pressure cooker IEDs were used in Pakistan in a terrorist attack on a Christian aid group offices, killing 6 workers. This type of IED was also supposed to play a major role in the failed attacks in New York (2010) and Stockholm (2010). In 2011, a soldier was arrested near the Fort Hood military base after an IED and an issue of *Inspire* magazine was found in his hotel room. The use of such explosives is also recommended by far-right nationalist groups in the USA (white supremacists). Pressure cooker IED was also chosen by a bomber who tried to blow up a public bus in Wrocław on 19 May 2016.

Apart from the two IEDs used in the bombing, Tsarnev brothers assembled at least one more device of that type and a number of pipe bombs. They were also in possession of a Ruger P95 with its serial number removed. The gun was borrowed by Tamerlan from his friend Stephen Silva in March 2013. The owner did not know that the brothers were planning a terrorist attack and believed that the firearm will be used to rob college students in Rhode Island. There is no precise information on the shooting skills of the Tsarnaev brothers – it is only known that they visited a local shooting range in March 2013. The gun was used only by Tamerlan – it was him who killed the policeman at MIT campus, carjacked the SUV driver and fired at the police during the manhunt.

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<sup>8</sup> The referred article also contain instructions on how to make TATP: «*Inspire*», No. 6, pp. 39–45 <https://azelin.files.wordpress.com/2011/09/inspire-magazine-6.pdf> (30.03.2020).

<sup>9</sup> Department responsible for internal security of the USA formed in response to the September 11 attacks.

## **Course of the bombing and the manhunt**

On Monday, 15 April 2013, unknown perpetrators planted 2 IEDs nearby the finish line of the Boston Marathon which exploded 14 seconds apart at 2:49 pm. Medical services and law enforcement moved swiftly to respond to the attack. On 18 April 2013, during a press conference, the FBI released photographs of two men suspected to be involved in the bombings. The service had not yet learned their names by that time. The photographs showed the Tsarnaev brothers. Dzhokhar exchanged a couple of text messages with his close friend who, jokingly, observed that he resembles one of the suspects. The bomber laughed at the remark but then told his friend to take whatever he wants from his room at the dormitory. Three friends of Tsarnaev arrived at the dormitory and removed Dzhokhar's laptop as well as backpack containing empty fireworks from his room. The men did not notify the police about this situation and disposed of the backpack. They were later convicted of lying to federal agents and hampering investigation.

The bombers realised that the police will quickly identify them so they spontaneously decided to travel to New York and carry out a bomb attack in Times Square. They had a couple of home made bombs, one pistol and an old car registered to their father. They needed firearms, cash and a better car. At about 10:30 pm, the brothers attacked Sean Collier, a 27-year-old police officer who was in his patrol car parked at the MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology) campus. Tamerlan shot him dead in cold blood and tried to steal his gun but a lock in the holster prevented the theft and they fled the scene. At about 11:00 pm, Tamerlan carjacked a black SUV<sup>10</sup> at gunpoint and took the driver hostage. The hostage was then instructed to drive Tamerlan around with Dzhokhar following the SUV in the old car. The brothers forced the hostage to give his PIN number and Dzhokhar withdrew \$800 from the man's account. The bombers then transferred their luggage (including explosives) to the hostage's SUV and abandoned the Honda Civic. The kidnappers informed the hostage who they were and asked if there was enough gas in the tank to reach New York. The hostage later testified that the brothers threatened to kill him along the way. There was not much gas left in the SUV so the bombers drove to a nearby area with two gas stations next to each other to refuel the vehicle and replenish provisions. The hostage managed to escape to the nearby station, explained

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<sup>10</sup> Upper-segment SUV of a popular vehicle brand.

the situation to the attendant and asked him to call 911<sup>11</sup>. The brothers returned to the abandoned Honda Civic and loaded their luggage back. Dzhokhar drove Honda Civic and Tamerlan drove the SUV which the attackers decided to abandon. After midnight on 19 April 2013, in the residential area of the nearby Watertown, a police officer noticed a suspicious car. The police headquarters in Watertown had been informed about a stolen SUV but they had not been informed that the thieves might be responsible for the Boston Marathon bombings and could be armed with IEDs. Six officers were on duty that night with four of them on patrol in police cruisers.

The police officer patrolling the area noticed a suspicious car, notified the dispatch and received instructions to follow the suspects. Although he was driving with the lights off, he was spotted. The bombers left their vehicles and Tamerlan started shooting at the police. Initially, there were 2 police officers (the patrol officer who called in the stolen SUV and his superior who arrived shortly after the report) engaged in the shootout and they were shortly reinforced by others. At least 200 bullets were fired in the chaotic gunfight. The brothers threw IEDs at the policemen and their vehicles (pressure cooker bomb and 5 home made grenades of which 2 did not explode). When Tamerlan run out of ammunition he threw the empty pistol at one of the policemen. Two officers quickly tackled Tamerlan and tried to handcuff him. Dzhokhar got in the SUV and tried to ram the policemen. The officers managed to dodge the incoming vehicle but were not able to push the wounded Tamerlan out of harm's way. As a result, Dzhokhar run his brother over<sup>12</sup> and dragged him for 6 meters. Dzhokhar then sped away, abandoned the SUV about 1.5 km from the shootout and fled on foot<sup>13</sup>. Tamerlan was transported

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<sup>11</sup> J. Novogrod, T. Winter, M. Isikoff, *Green Honda could prove crucial if Tsarnaev charged in MIT officer's killing*, [http://investigations.nbcnews.com/\\_news/2013/05/01/17991679-green-honda-could-prove-crucial-if-tsarnaev-charged-in-mit-officers-killing?lite](http://investigations.nbcnews.com/_news/2013/05/01/17991679-green-honda-could-prove-crucial-if-tsarnaev-charged-in-mit-officers-killing?lite) (30.03.2020).

<sup>12</sup> There were reports in the press that the injuries sustained by Tamerlan did indicate that he was run over by a vehicle, for example: J. Graham, *ER doctor: Bombing suspect died at hospital*, <https://www.bostonherald.com/2013/04/19/er-doctor-bombing-suspect-died-at-hospital/> (2.04.2020). This lead to many conspiracy theories related to the brothers' involvement in the attack.

<sup>13</sup> K. Q. Seelye, W. K. Rashbaum, M. Cooper, *2nd Bombing Suspect Caught After Frenzied Hunt Paralyzes Boston*, <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/20/us/boston-marathon-bombings.html?hp> (2.04.2020).

to hospital where he died at 1:09 am<sup>14</sup>. The shooter's fingerprints allowed the police to establish his identity and determine that the other suspect is his brother. Fifteen police officers were wounded during the shootout and one officer died a year later due to sustained injuries. Shortly after the shootout some policemen fired at an unmarked police car which was mistakenly identified as the stolen SUV.

One of the bombers managed to escape and his state of health was unknown. Because no traces of blood were found in the abandoned SUV, there was a suspicion that he is not gravely wounded and might try to continue his terrorist plot or, in case of a confrontation with the police, he might use more explosives. It was not clear if the Tsarnaev brothers had more IEDs (authorities assumed that Dzhokhar still was in possession of more home made bombs) or if the remaining attacker was armed. It was certain that Dzhokhar is determined, has little to lose and poses a threat to both civilians and police officers. Apprehension of Dzhokhar Tsarnaev became a priority.

The residents of Watertown and the surrounding areas were ordered to remain at home while the streets were patrolled by armoured vehicles and SWAT officers. Boston, the biggest city of New England, went still, with public transportation service suspended and schools and universities closed as the police was conducting a thorough search of the area. At about 6:40 pm, a Watertown resident entered his backyard and noticed that there was a tear in the cover of his boat. He looked under the tarp and found a man lying in a pool of blood. He went back inside his house and immediately called 911. The police responded rapidly and within moments the boat was surrounded by around 100 officers. It was still not known whether the attacker was armed or injured. At some point a motion was observed on the boat (it could be caused by the wind) and one of the officers fired his weapon without appropriate authority. Other policemen thought the shot was fired by Dzhokhar and they returned fire. After the shooting stopped the attacker still did not emerge from his hiding place but at 7:05 pm another motion was observed on the boat. A police helicopter equipped with a thermal camera confirmed that there was indeed someone alive on board of the boat. The officers, using a megaphone, ordered the suspect to surrender but he was unresponsive. At about 7:43 pm, the police decided to throw flash bang grenades into

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<sup>14</sup> Some publications report that the hour of death was 1:35 am, for example: "The Road to Boston: Counterterrorism Challenges and Lessons from the Marathon Bombings; House Homeland Security Committee Report".

the boat. This also failed to force the surrender of the bomber who, as it later turned out, was seriously injured and greatly weakened by blood loss. The police feared that the attacker still had some explosives strapped to himself and decision was made to use a robot to remove the tarp. Finally, at 8:41 pm, the attacker left the boat by himself and surrendered to authorities. In July 2013, the police released photographs from the apprehension which showed frightened and bloodied teenager lifting his shirt (police officers ordered Dzhokhar to lift his clothing to make sure that he is not wearing a suicide belt). The attacker emerged from the boat with a sniper's laser trained on his forehead. At 8:42 pm, Dzhokhar was arrested and, in critical condition, transported to hospital.

A report<sup>15</sup> was prepared at the Harvard University assessing the services' response to the bombing and the actions that were undertaken to capture the perpetrators. The authors praised exemplary performance of law enforcement and emergency medical services after the attack and criticised mistakes and negligence which occurred during the manhunt: lack of tactical plan for capturing the Tsarnaev brothers in Watertown, lack of coordination between services and a chaotic firefight with the attackers which posed a threat both to police officers and civilians. It was also noted that the policemen involved in the search and the manhunt were on duty for 36 or more hours and were exhausted. Thus the authors recommended to implement new improved procedures for responding to crisis incidents in order to avoid such situation in the future. Similar conclusions are drawn in a report prepared by the services involved in the response activities which directly mentions Lack of Weapons Discipline<sup>16</sup> as a one of the factors posing a risk to the success of the operation.

## All errors of the Tsarnaev brothers

The bomb attack was not a spontaneous act and required many weeks of preparation and planning. The attackers did not make any significant mistakes when assembling the IEDs or planting them at the finish line.

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<sup>15</sup> H. B. "Dutch" Leonard, Ch. M. Cole, A. M. Howitt, P. B. Heymann, *Why was Boston strong? Lessons from the Boston marathon bombing*, [https://www.hks.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/centers/rappaport/files/BostonStrong\\_final.pdf](https://www.hks.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/centers/rappaport/files/BostonStrong_final.pdf) (30.03.2020).

<sup>16</sup> "After Action Report for the Response to the 2013 Boston Marathon Bombings", p. 115, [https://www.policefoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/after-action-report-for-the-response-to-the-2013-boston-marathon-bombings\\_0.pdf](https://www.policefoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/after-action-report-for-the-response-to-the-2013-boston-marathon-bombings_0.pdf) (30.10.2021).

They managed to escape from the site and for a couple of days they lived a normal life. Surveillance cameras captured Dzhokhar at a gym, laughing with friends and having fun. The release of the perpetrators' pictures and the chaotic attempt to leave for New York proved that the attackers did not have an emergency plan in case their involvement was uncovered by the authorities and that they were amateurs who acted impulsively and erratically.

Firstly, the attackers did not have an adequate amount of firearms and ammunition. They decided to assault a police officer to steal his gun. The brothers killed the policeman but were unable to remove his weapon from the holster. On one hand this demonstrates that they were unprepared for combat and had insufficient knowledge about firearms. On the other hand it shows that they were under stress and acted out of panic. Moreover, killing a police officer on duty during the initial state of the getaway was an ill-considered decision. The fact that the policeman was killed intentionally during an armed robbery had certain consequences. This kind of crime mobilises all police resources as an expression of solidarity within the law enforcement. Police officers combine efforts and work together to apprehend the killer of one of their own. As a result, at the very beginning of their escape, the Tsarnaev brothers guaranteed themselves increased patrols, roadblocks, car checks on every main exit from the city and full mobilisation of the police. The attackers also did not take into consideration that patrol cars are usually equipped with cameras recording the events outside and inside of the vehicle and that police officers sometimes wear a body camera.

Secondly, the bombers decided to steal some cash by kidnapping a man and forcing him to hand over his bank card and PIN number. Dzhokhar then withdrew \$800 from the man's account using an ATM. Locations of ATMs are closely monitored both by the city's surveillance system and the camera systems of the bank owning the machine. Dzhokhar did not try to make his identification more difficult – he did not cover his face and left fingerprints. Although at this point he theoretically knew that his photographs were widely distributed by the media.

Thirdly, Tamerlan informed the hostage that they are responsible for the bomb attack in Boston a couple days ago and that they just killed a policeman. He probably revealed that to intimidate the hostage and force him to cooperate. Moreover, by asking the hostage if there is enough gas in the tank do drive to New York the brothers revealed also their destination. The hostage knew that he was not kidnapped for ransom but became a part of a terrorist plot targeting New York.

Fourthly, the attackers did not guard the hostage well enough to prevent his escape. He was not immobilised or in restraints while being held in the car by the attackers. When one of the bombers went to pay for the gas and buy some snacks the hostage seized his chance and ran to another gas station nearby. Surveillance camera shows the terrified man rushing into the building and begging the attendant to call 911. The hostage feared that the kidnappers would pursue him so he hid at the back of the station. He immediately informed the dispatcher that he had been kidnapped by the perpetrators of the bomb attack from 15 April<sup>17</sup>. In the meantime, Dzhokhar was still doing the shopping. The surveillance cameras captured the moment of the hostage's escape. None of the kidnappers tried to stop the man – Tamerlan, who at that time was in the car, did not pay attention to what the hostage was doing (unfastening the seat belt and opening the door). By the time Tamerlan realised what had happened it was too late to go in pursuit.

Fifthly, the perpetrators did not know that the stolen SUV had a GPS locator installed. The hostage informed the police that his car was equipped with such device which allowed the authorities to find the vehicle, monitor its route and prepare an ambush. The hostage left his phone in the car – the fact that the attackers were also unaware of and which also helped to establish the route of the SUV.

Sixthly, the attackers assembled a substantial amount of IEDs – at least 3 pressure cooker bombs and no less than 5 pipe bombs. Two IEDs were used in the bomb attack and the rest was stored in Tamerlan's apartment. In his room at the dormitory Dzhokhar left a backpack containing fireworks and black powder (gunpowder). There was no information that the brothers planned more terrorist attacks and decision to travel to New York was made spontaneously. The bombers did not take into consideration that keeping such evidence at their places of residence could cause suspicion in case of a search, accidental detonation or a fire. Constructing “spare” bombs without access to a safe place to store them could lead to the explosives being detected and would endanger the lives of other residents of the building. It should be noted that the apartment in which the home made bombs were assembled was a permanent home for Tamerlan, his wife and their 3-year-old child. Traces of explosive material were found on kitchen table and sink.

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<sup>17</sup> Watch Boston bombing carjack victim escape from the Tsarnaev brothers, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lv-FiS320YI> (1.04.2020).

Seventhly, the shootout with the police showed that the brothers were desperate and unprepared. When Tamerlan run out of ammunition he simply threw the empty pistol at one of the officers. Dzhokhar tried to ram the policemen who were handcuffing his brother but instead he ran Tamerlan over and dragged his body for around 6 meters, contributing to his death.

The behaviour of the attackers during the firefight shows that they were desperate amateurs whose image differs significantly from the terrorist profile created by the news agencies associated with terrorist groups and the Western media.

### “Rely on Allah, not on your equipment”

The bombers built the devices by themselves using instructions provided in a digital magazine, *Inspire*. The first issue of the magazine published by al-Malahem Media outlet (associated with AQAP<sup>18</sup>) includes instructions on how to make a pipe bomb or a pressure cooker IED<sup>19</sup> similar to the ones used in the bombing. The instructions can be found in the *Open Source Jihad* section which is described by the authors as follows: *a resource manual for those who loathe the tyrants; includes bomb making techniques, security measures, guerrilla tactics, weapons training and all other Jihad related activities*<sup>20</sup>. *Informal: A disaster for the repressive imperialistic nations: The open source jihad is America’s worst nightmare. It allows Muslims to train at home instead of risking a dangerous travel abroad: Look*

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<sup>18</sup> AQAP/al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (Arabic: Tanẓīm al-Qā‘idah fī Jazīrat al-‘Arab) – a terrorist organisation (branch of al-Qaeda) which operates predominantly in Saudi Arabia and Yemen. However, it also organised terrorist attacks in Europe and the USA. The organisation was formed in January 2009 from a merger of al-Qaeda’s Saudi and Yemeni branches. At the time of formation, the leader of AQAP was Nasir Al-Wuhayshi (now deceased) who served as secretary to Osama bin Laden over the period 1998–2001. The aim of the group is to seize control of Yemen and Saudi Arabia and overthrow the house of Saud.

<sup>19</sup> «Inspire», No. 1, pp. 33–40, <https://azelin.files.wordpress.com/2010/06/aqap-inspire-magazine-volume-1-uncorrupted.pdf> (30.10.2020).

<sup>20</sup> Jihad – a term referring to all efforts made towards spreading and strengthening Islam: mainly through internal struggle and spiritual development of the follower or converting infidels. Radical terrorist groups define jihad as an armed struggle against infidels. In the media this term is frequently but not accurately translated as “holy war”.

*no further, the open source jihad is now at hands reach*<sup>21</sup>. Such publications are part of the strategy employed by terrorist organisations (mainly al-Qaeda, al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula and the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) which consists in providing their radical sympathisers and supporters with propaganda and ideological materials via the Internet. The materials also include tactical information (instructions on how to construct an IED or organise a terrorist attack) and creative ideas for killing civilians in the West.

Terrorist organizations publish a lot of instructional and tutorial materials for potential attackers. Moreover, they argue, that not skills, but deep faith and trust in God (Allah) guarantees success. They encourage young poorly trained supporters to conduct terrorist attacks not informing them about potential risks (e.g. how dangerous producing home-made bombs can be). ISIS teaches that the success of a terrorist attack consists of preparation, ingenuity and detailed planning of the various stages of the undertaking. However, they also emphasize meaningfully that no plan will succeed without God's blessing, in other words, it will be as God wills. Confidence and self-righteousness can end in failure because God does not like people who are too confident. Success comes because God wants it so, not because the attack has been well prepared and it should always be remembered. Doubt, sin, or pride are far more dangerous than hordes of enemies and the most modern weapons<sup>22</sup>. In very well-known jihadi magazine, entitled "Rumiyah" we can find slogan: "Rely on Allah, not on your equipment" that defines this point of view. With the help of an appropriate selection of fragments of the Koran and hadith, radical supporters of salafi terrorist organizations, as well as people who are just becoming radicalized, are told that without training, necessary skills and reliable equipment, and only with Allah's blessing, they are able to carry out an effective terrorist attack, build a bomb, or achieve other organization's goals connected with spreading fear in western societies. In this way, the organization not only motivates to prepare the attack, but also strengthens the attacker's self-confidence, the level of optimism and faith in success. The consequences of such a strategy can be complex and varied. First of all: organizing attacks that are insufficiently prepared; accidents with the production of homemade

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<sup>21</sup> «Inspire», No. 1, p. 32, <https://azelin.files.wordpress.com/2010/06/aqap-inspire-magazine-volume-1-uncorrupted.pdf> (30.10.2020).

<sup>22</sup> «Rumiyah», No. 7, pp. 11–12, <https://azelin.files.wordpress.com/2017/02/rome-magazine-6.pdf> (20.07.2021).

bombs; an increase in the number of attacks, as well as an increase in the number of thwarted/unsuccessful attacks, including failed devices. However, the motivated and self-confident attacker is even more capable of spectacular, brutal, and risky actions that makes him more dangerous. Regardless of the result of these actions, even a failed attempt (no victims) or a frustrated terrorist attack has its consequences within modern society: a sense of danger, an atmosphere of anxiety, ill-considered political decisions, an increase in radicalism. Each attack, even if unsuccessful, inspires other attackers to do what their predecessors did not. The increase in attacks increases tension, fear, anxiety, uncertainty and chaos in society. Terrorist organizations achieve their goals anyway.

## The bombers

Countless amount of articles and a couple of books about Dzhokhar and Tamerlan Tsarnaev were published<sup>23</sup>. Many authors tried to answer the question why emigrants who were given refuge and support<sup>24</sup> organised a bloody terrorist attack in a city which has been their home since their arrival in the USA. Many authors believe that the reason behind the brothers' radicalisation is the fact that the American Dream has failed to realise for Tsarnaev family<sup>25</sup>. Despite promising beginnings, after 8 years in the USA, the family did not achieve financial success. The father worked as a mechanic (he claimed that back in Dagestan he worked as a prosecutor's office employee) and the mother worked in a beauty salon. The family lived in a cramped apartment and the daughters were stuck in failed marriages. After initial successes, the sons, who were supposed to be the family's pride, started their adult lives without much chance of making a career and achieving stability. Although the family had never been religious, around 2010, the mother and Tamerlan started

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<sup>23</sup> For example: M. R. McPhee, *Maximum Harm: The Tsarnaev Brothers, the FBI, and the Road to the Marathon Bombing*, ForeEdge 2017; M. Gessen, *The Brothers: The Road to an American Tragedy*, Riverhead Books 2015; A. Lee, *Jahar The Lone Boston Bomber #2: The Story about Dzhokhar Tsarnaev from his capture to his trial*, CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform 2016.

<sup>24</sup> At various stages of life the Tsarnaevs received welfare benefits and food stamps.

<sup>25</sup> Ex. S. Jacobs, D. Filipov, P. Wen, *The Fall of the House of Tsarnaev*, [https://www3.bostonglobe.com//Page/Boston/2011-2020/WebGraphics/Metro/BostonGlobe.com/2013/12/15tsarnaev/tsarnaev.html?arc404=true&p1=Article\\_Inline\\_Text\\_Link\(31.03.2020\)](https://www3.bostonglobe.com//Page/Boston/2011-2020/WebGraphics/Metro/BostonGlobe.com/2013/12/15tsarnaev/tsarnaev.html?arc404=true&p1=Article_Inline_Text_Link(31.03.2020)).

to practice Islam, changed their lifestyle and became devoted Muslims. Soon the parents got divorced and left for Dagestan leaving their sons by themselves in the face of financial and life problems.

At the time of the bomb attack, Dzhokhar Tsarnaev was 19 and was studying marine biology. He arrived in the USA with his parents at the age of 8 and received U.S. citizenship in 2012. He was born in Kyrgyzstan, has Chechen descent (although he never lived in Chechnya) and between 2001 and his arrival to the USA in 2002 lived in Dagestan with his family. Dzhokhar Tsarnaev spoke English without an accent, did not flaunt his ethnicity and religion, did not show radical views and did not even want to join the Muslim Students Organization at his university. He looked just like any other student at his age, he partied and had a large group of friends. His friends from the campus could not believe that he is responsible for the bombing. Dzhokhar had good grades at school, was interested in sports and it seemed that he, out of the entire family, assimilated best in the new homeland. His life started to change after he enrolled at the university. On one hand, he complained that the standard of teaching was low and his old essays from high school were sufficient to pass courses. On the other hand, Dzhokhar had low academic achievement level, changed his major, was failing courses and faced a risk that he will not receive diploma. Moreover, he lived the academic life to the fullest – partied a lot and sold drugs at the campus. One year before the bomb attack, Dzhokhar started sharing posts calling into question the September 11 attacks and post related to his Chechen descent. The more he was struggling academically, the more time he started spending with his brother Tamerlan.

In 2013, Tamerlan Tsarnaev was an unemployed, unfulfilled sportsman supported by his wife and social care. At the time of the bomb attack, Tamerlan was 26 and was a practicing Muslim. He started to radicalise in 2010. He was born in Kalmyk Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (USSR) and arrived in the USA in 2004. In 2007, Tamerlan was granted legal permanent residence (green card) and married in 2010. He had a 3-year-old daughter whom he looked after when his wife was at work. From early childhood Tamerlan had a passion for sport and started achieving success as a heavyweight boxer. However, he had to abandon his career because his immigration status precluded participation in a major tournament. Tamerlan then turned to religion and with the fervour of a neophyte started lecturing his friends, engaging in arguments with local imam and, more and more frequently, visiting jihadist websites. In 2011, Federal Security Service (FSB) informed the FBI and CIA that

Tamerlan Tsarnaev had extremist views and he might try to join a jihadist group in the Caucasus. The FSB revealed also that Tamerlan wanted to help Palestinians in their fight but decided not to go because he did not speak Arabic. The FBI did not find evidence of terrorist activity and asked for more detailed information on Tamerlan’s radicalisation but did not receive a reply<sup>26</sup>. In 2011, the CIA placed Tamerlan on Terrorist Identities Datamart Environment (TIDE). In 2012, Tamerlan Tsarnaev spent 6 months in Russia and Dagestan where he could undergo military and ideological training.

Certainly Dzhokhar was under the influence of his brother who was also the brains behind the bomb attack. The line of defense adopted by the lawyers representing Dzhokhar Tsarnaev was that he was following his brother’s instructions, did not act on ideological grounds and was only manipulated by older and more radicalised Tamerlan. However, the evidence against Dzhokhar was irrefutable, especially the video footage showing Dzhokhar placing a bomb directly behind a child and the following words written on the boat’s wall: *I don’t like killing innocent people but in this it is allowed because the USA must be punished*. Dzhokhar Tsarnaev was found guilty on all 30 counts of the indictment and unanimously sentenced to death by a 12-person jury<sup>27</sup>. The defense filed another appeal<sup>28</sup>.

## Conclusions

The bomb attack in Boston perfectly illustrates what makes pressure cooker IED so dangerous and shows the consequences of filling the bomb with metal objects. The attack is an exceptionally interesting case study of the emergency services’ response to a crisis. It is also an incentive to the discussion and scientific reflection on the circumstances surrounding the attack: the phenomenon of crowd-sourced investigation (which in the times of dynamic technological development can be both

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<sup>26</sup> *The Road to Boston: Counterterrorism Challenges and Lessons from the Marathon Bombings*. House Homeland Security Committee Report, pp. 12–13, [https://fas.org/irp/congress/2014\\_rpt/boston.pdf](https://fas.org/irp/congress/2014_rpt/boston.pdf) (20.03.2020).

<sup>27</sup> According to the federal law, death penalty sentence requires a unanimous jury decision. If this requirement would not be met Dzhokhar Tsarnaev would automatically be sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole.

<sup>28</sup> A. Jarmanning, *Tsarnaev’s Attorneys Want Him Off Death Row. Here’s What They’ll Argue*, <https://www.wbur.org/news/2019/12/11/dzhokhar-tsarnaev-death-sentence-appeal-boston> (5.04.2020).

an opportunity and a real threat), the image of a terrorist (shaped by pop culture) as well as radicalisation and susceptibility to radical and destructive ideologies (not only those related to Salafi Islam). Over the past 20 years, jihadist tactics have evolved. From well-planned, group-engaging attacks to attacks that are carried out by one or a few, usually poorly trained, attackers. The Boston Marathon bombing is an example of this type of attack.

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