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Boston Bombing Seen as U.S.-Russian Intelligence Failure

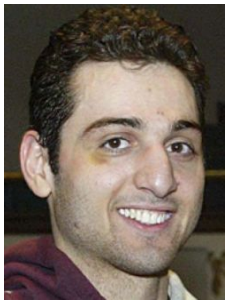
By Jonathan Earle

April 21, 2013



Revelations that Moscow alerted Washington in early 2011 to suspicious behavior by one of the Boston Marathon bombing suspects, but did not provide additional information when asked, has raised questions about the effectiveness of bilateral counterterrorism cooperation.

Though both sides have promised to focus on "all aspects of the challenge," and key intelligence-sharing agreements are in place, an analysis of available information about the attack suggests that efforts are hampered by mistrust, bureaucracy, and self-interest, an intelligence expert said Sunday.



Tamerlan Tsarnaev
The Sun of Lowell, MA

The expert, Agentura.ru's Andrei Soldatov, said by telephone that Russia's Federal Security Service was likely acting in self-interest when it asked the Federal Bureau of Investigation in early 2011 to investigate Tamerlan Tsarnaev, whom the Russians suspected of being a follower of radical Islam and preparing to return to the North Caucasus to join underground groups.

"The FSB rarely provides information. Tipping off the FBI was their last priority. Their first priority was, 'Can we use counterterrorism cooperation channels to get information from the Americans?' It's a different logic, and it's very typical of the FSB," Soldatov said.

He pointed to the fact that the FSB did not respond to a request from the FBI for more information in the summer of 2011 after the FBI investigation came up empty, according to a statement posted on the FBI's website.

"The FBI was looking for links to a terrorist organization, and they didn't find them. And because the Russians didn't answer the request for more information, the FBI had an excuse to close the case. This a normal bureaucratic decision," Soldatov said.

The next time the FBI has acknowledged encountering Tamerlan, he was a suspect — along with his younger brother Dzhokhar, 19 — in last week's gruesome double bombing near the finish line of the Boston Marathon that killed 3 and injured 170, many of whom are still hospitalized.



Dzhokhar Tsarnaev
FBI

Tamerlan was killed early Friday during a shootout with police in a Boston suburb. Dzhokhar, who unlike his brother was a U.S. citizen, was captured after a massive manhunt and is reportedly in serious but stable condition at a local hospital.

There were other apparent intelligence lapses in the Boston case. Tamerlan reportedly spent the first six months of 2012 in the North Caucasus region, where his father lives. But Russian secret services appear not to have taken an interest in his activities, which may have included meetings with Islamist radicals.

Soldatov said there is no evidence that FSB or local officers — if they were even informed — kept tabs on Tsarnaev, which might have included interviews with family members or more aggressive measures. "The FSB isn't good at secrecy. If they needed information, it would have been obvious."

Investigators are looking into the possibility that Tsarnaev linked up with Chechen separatist and Islamist leader Doku Umarov — who is wanted by both Russia and the United States for suspected terrorist activities — or other extremists, Fox News reported. No connection between the two has been found, however, Interfax reported Sunday, citing a Russian law enforcement source.

Umarov's insurgency group, Caucasus Emirate, distanced itself from the Boston bombing on Sunday, saying in comments carried by Reuters that it is at war with Russia, not the United States.

Around the time of his return to the United States in July, Tamerlan reportedly created a YouTube account and started posting videos sympathetic to radical Islam, including a video of a song by Chechen bard Timur Mutsurayev called, "I devoted my life to jihad."

But the FBI did not check up on him after he arrived, a senior law enforcement source told The New York Times, adding that the FBI did not have the legal authority to do so.

"He was very open about his beliefs. I'm at a loss as to why the FBI didn't pay attention to him then," Soldatov said.

The day after the bombing, Putin said Russia was ready to help with the U.S. investigation, and Putin's spokesman told Rossia 24 TV on Saturday that the United States and Russia might join forces in the investigation.

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