

The Young and the Normless: Al Qaeda's Ideological Recruitment of Western Extremists

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The Boston Marathon bombings on 15 April 2013 brought terror to the finish line of one of the United States' oldest athletic events, and returned terrorism to the forefront of the United States' psyche. The world watched as Massachusetts law enforcement agencies shut down a large swath of the state in order to find a bomber on the run. As the dust settled, it was clear that a well-adjusted, popular, intelligent young man who was a naturalized U.S. citizen, from a Chechen refugee family, executed one of the most infamous terror attacks on American soil since 11 September 2001, under the wing of his older brother.

Dzhokhar Tsarnaev, a college student at the University of Massachusetts-Dartmouth, was found hiding in a boat four days after the bombing in Watertown, Massachusetts, and was subsequently arrested; he has since pled "not guilty" to all charges levied against him.¹ Dzhokhar's brother, Tamerlan Tsarnaev, was run over and killed by Dzhokhar as they attempted to flee law enforcement in the early morning hours of 19 April 2013.² Tamerlan was a potential American success story that went off the rails, not as well adjusted as his brother Dzhokhar, who was fondly known as "Jahar" to most of his friends and teachers. Tamerlan was an accomplished boxer, who lost his way shortly after his dreams to be an Olympian for the United States were curtailed because he was not a citizen.³ Their parents filed for divorce, their sisters moved away, and the family life of these two boys disintegrated.⁴ Soon after, Dzhokhar became a United States citi-

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¹ Richard Oppel and Jess Bidgood, "Marathon Bombing Suspect, in First Court Appearance, Pleads Not Guilty," *The New York Times* (10 July 2013); available at www.nytimes.com/2013/07/11/us/in-court-for-first-time-boston-bombing-suspect-will-face-victims.html?_r=0.

² Kevin Cullen, "New Details on Wild Shootout with Bomb Suspects in Watertown," *Boston Globe* (21 April 2013).

³ Lance Madden, "Boston Marathon Bombing Suspect No. 1 Tamerlan Tsarnaev Trained to Box for U.S.," *Forbes* (19 April 2013).

⁴ Josh Gerstein, "Boston Bombing Suspects' Parents Granted Divorce in 2011," *Politico.com* (22 April 2013); available at <http://www.politico.com/blogs/under-the-radar/2013/04/boston-bombing-suspects-parents-granted-divorce-in-162313.html>.

zen, continued onto college, and dabbled in drugs,⁵ while Tamerlan floundered in all aspects of his life.

How did the lives of two men, who showed such early promise, go so far astray? This question has laid heavily on the minds of those trying to make sense of this bombing and looking to prevent the next one. The answer is not as simple or straightforward as it has been portrayed. Last year, I completed my M.A. thesis on Al Qaeda's recruitment of Western extremists. I broke down Al Qaeda and its affiliates' recruitment patterns into three categories: structural, institutional, and ideological relationships. While structural and institutional connections between those seeking to join or act on behalf of Al Qaeda's worldview are often very concrete, ideological connections are porous and fluid. It was through this ideological avenue that the Tsarnaev brothers became radicalized.

It is of the utmost importance to understand the ideological influences and relationships that can push young individuals to become radicalized. The similarity through which hate groups, including white supremacists, far right extremists, and fundamentalist religious groups like Al Qaeda entice individuals to act violently on the group's behalf is most instructive for counter-radicalization and counterterrorism purposes.

The complete details of Tamerlan Tsarnaev's radicalization remain unclear. However, recent developments in this case show that while the primary impetus for the Boston bombing was radical Salafī jihadist literature of the kind promulgated by Al Qaeda, Tamerlan had also become immersed in other extremist right wing ideologies of the United States.⁶ In a similarly twisted manner, Anders Breivik, who carried out the massacre of children at a summer camp outside Oslo in July 2011, admitted he admired Al Qaeda's ideology, persistence, and success although he was a noted white supremacist and Islamophobe. Breivik called Al Qaeda the "most successful revolutionary movement in the world" and claimed he hoped to create a "European Al Qaeda."⁷ The cross-pollination and similarity of ideas between these extreme views could no longer be ignored. Counterterrorism efforts will be enhanced and bolstered if experts better understand the type of individual that is susceptible to the ideology espoused by groups like Al Qaeda.

The title of this journal, *Connections*, is very appropriate, as I believe the ideology Al Qaeda and the assortment of right-wing hate groups in the United States put forth is most appealing to those who lack sustaining connections in their life. This article will first illustrate how the extremist ideology of far-right groups and the ideology of Al Qaeda resonates with the same pool of disaffected, disconnected individuals looking for

⁵ Chris Kirk and Heather Brady, "From Wrestling Captain to Terrorism Suspect: A Timeline of Dzhokhar Tsarnaev's Life," *Slate.com* (23 April 2013); available at http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/map_of_the_week/2013/04/timeline_boston_bombing_suspect_dzhokhar_tsarnaev_s_life.html.

⁶ Alan Cullison, "Boston Bombing Suspect Was Steeped in Conspiracies," *The Wall Street Journal* (6 August 2013); available at <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424127887323420604578649830782219440.html>.

⁷ Richard Orange, "Al Qaeda Rejects Anders Behring Breivik Comparison," *The Telegraph* (3 May 2012).

meaning and a sense of community in their lives, using many of the same methods. The overwhelming evidence suggests this was the case for Tamerlan Tsarnaev. The importance of these connections to the radicalization process allows me to argue against the prevalence of “lone-wolf” discourse in counterterrorism today. Next, the article will further describe Al Qaeda’s ideological recruitment of individuals like the Tsarnaev brothers to their apocalyptic worldview through the case study of Zachary Chesser, a young American man who tried, unsuccessfully, to travel to Somalia to join Al Qaeda in 2010. The Tsarnaev brothers are featured prominently in the May 2013 issue of *Inspire*,⁸ Al Qaeda’s English language magazine, which only months earlier provided them with instructions and motivation for their attack. Understanding this process of radicalization, for any type of terrorist group, may prevent loss of life by interdicting future terrorists before they are able to carry out any violent acts.

Radical Recruiting: Different Ideologies Pulling on the Same Strings

There is little theoretical research that attempts to explain Al Qaeda’s recruitment tactics.⁹ Perhaps this dearth of information on recruitment is a result of the group’s shadowy, secretive nature. This may also be a result of the lack of experts studying how Al Qaeda recruits new adherents. Outside of the literature on Al Qaeda’s recruitment patterns, there has been a significant amount of research regarding the recruitment of members of U.S. domestic hate groups. Al Qaeda and hate groups use similar rhetoric and target similarly disaffected individuals.

One can come closer to understanding the framework through which Al Qaeda attempts to recruit its members by analyzing the theory that aims to explain the recruitment methods used by right-wing hate groups in the United States. It is important to note that Al Qaeda propaganda, like *Inspire* magazine, seeks to recruit individuals passively through indoctrination, as do some domestic hate groups. Similarly, by reviewing theories regarding the nature of terrorism in the post-9/11 world, one can understand the ideological recruitment themes upon which Al Qaeda bases its narrative.

According to the Southern Poverty Law Center, there are over one thousand active hate groups in the United States.¹⁰ Many of these groups themselves produce domestic terrorists. Prior to 9/11, the most successful terrorist attack on the United States was that of the bombing of the Alfred P. Murray Federal Building in Oklahoma City in 1995. Timothy McVeigh, although not a part of any particular hate group, was virulently anti-government and had been accused of anti-Semitic rhetoric.¹¹ The United States is much

⁸ *Inspire Magazine*, Issue 11 (May 2013).

⁹ “Al Qaeda,” throughout this essay, refers to any group or individual that adheres to Al Qaeda’s worldview and goals, whether or not there is a formal affiliation to the organization founded by Osama bin Laden.

¹⁰ Southern Poverty Law Center, “Hate Map,” available at www.splcenter.org/get-informed/hate-map.

¹¹ “Timothy McVeigh,” *CNN* (29 March 2001); available at <http://asia.cnn.com/2001/US/03/29/profile.mcveigh/index.html>.

more familiar with the concept of domestic terrorism because of these hate groups. These groups primarily recruit individuals in three ways. First, they target individuals who are experiencing “anomie” or “strain” in their lives; these individuals who are “frustrated” with their position in society are at risk of succumbing to hate groups.¹² Second, hate groups will preach that the “status quo” is under attack, and that people must join these groups in order to protect their ethnic or religious groups’ position of power in society.¹³ Third, many of these groups will use “apocalyptic” rhetoric in order to recruit individuals. Many individuals believe their specific community is under attack and will be recruited into hate groups when they believe their struggle is one of destiny or is God’s will.¹⁴

Randy Blazak documents the recruitment of neo-Nazi skinheads in his essay “White Boys to Terrorist Men.” White supremacist groups in the United States recruit young individuals to their cause through several means that are similar to the way other terrorist groups recruit individuals. Blazak documents how these skinhead groups “target specific youth populations” using ideology that appeals to disaffected young people.¹⁵ Blazak argues that individuals who experience anomie, or “normlessness,” are especially vulnerable to skinhead recruitment.¹⁶

Recruiters for skinhead movements, as well as other race-based hate movements in the United States, tap into feelings of “frustration, anger, and a need to resolve some perceived inequity.”¹⁷ Young individuals who suffer from “a sense of rootlessness or normlessness” are more likely to join these groups in order to create an identity for themselves.¹⁸ Skinhead groups will create a narrative of attack on the “cultural supremacy of heterosexual white men” in order to recruit young men in areas where this status quo is perceived to be under threat.¹⁹ According to Blazak, there is a theme of “cultural crisis” in the skinhead community and our nation at large.²⁰ Many of these themes resonate particularly with skinheads – and, in an entirely different context, with those sympathetic to Al Qaeda. These themes are: the uncertainty of “modern life,” rampant consumerism, and the “cult of individualism” in American society.²¹ Fear of the “cult of individualism” is not only seen in Western society, but in many countries around the world, where people worry that globalization is bringing these vices to their societies as well. These themes, coupled with the strain of “normlessness” that at-risk youth experience, allow individuals to be recruited into terrorist groups.

¹² Randy Blazak, “White Boys to Terrorist Men: Target Recruitment of Nazi Skinheads,” *American Behavioral Scientist* 44:6 (2001): 982–1000.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid., 982.

¹⁶ Ibid., 986.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid., 987.

¹⁹ Ibid., 988.

²⁰ Ibid., 997.

²¹ Ibid.

Perhaps most importantly, a divine and apocalyptic narrative is often used to recruit individuals. Hate groups in the U.S. claim that they are “doing God’s work to save the White race from extinction.”²² Individuals recruited by these skinhead groups are swayed by the desire to “restore” white hegemony. A sense of community is formed through believing they are the “chosen few” who will win a race war, establishing a homeland for the Aryan peoples in the Northwest United States.²³ It is in this desire to reclaim a mythical era of white dominance that one sees the most striking parallels with jihadist groups.²⁴ Blazak notes that skinheads and white supremacist movements believe that a “race war” will bring about a homeland only for whites in the United States.²⁵ This narrative is deployed to recruit individuals that experience “normlessness” in their lives, and who have few other compelling attachments. Skinhead recruits see threats to their identity as white males in society today as the perceived status quo changes.

White supremacists seem to target and appeal to individuals experiencing normlessness in their lives and promise them the restoration of their centrality in society, while delivering benefits of belonging to a community. These groups recruit alienated individuals and provide them with a sense of community based upon ethnic or religious ties. Individuals are called to defend this community, and are often convinced that it is a religious duty to do so, or that their community is taking part in a mythical or apocalyptic struggle. As we will see below, Al Qaeda uses a very similar ideology to that employed by neo-Nazi groups, and exploits the same ties to community and religion.

Interestingly, the BBC and the *Wall Street Journal* have recently uncovered reports that Tamerlan Tsarnaev, although surely motivated by Salafi jihadism in the months before the Boston attack, had closely studied far-right ideology.²⁶ Tamerlan often took care of an elderly neighborhood man, Donald Larking, for whom his mother served as a home health aide.²⁷ Larking supplied Tamerlan with a copy of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, a favorite anti-Semitic screed of Al Qaeda and Nazi sympathizers.²⁸ Tamerlan allegedly subscribed to several white supremacist newsletters, including *The American Free Press* (noted by the Southern Poverty Law Center for its anti-Semitic content) and *The First Freedom*, which advocates “equal right for whites,” a topic often discussed in right-wing extremist circles who fear changes in U.S. society.²⁹ Tamerlan also

²² Ibid., 983.

²³ Ibid., 994.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid., 986.

²⁶ Hilary Andersson, “Tamerlan Tsarnaev Had Right-Wing Extremist Literature,” *BBC News* (5 August 2013); available at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-23541341>.

²⁷ Conor Simpson, “Meet the Man Who Supplied Tamerlan Tsarnaev with Right Wing Literature,” *The Atlantic Wire* (6 August 2013); available at <http://www.theatlanticwire.com/national/2013/08/meet-man-who-gave-tamerlan-tsarnaev-his-right-wing-literature/68020/>.

²⁸ Cullison, “Boston Bombing Suspect Was Steeped in Conspiracies.”

²⁹ Ibid.

possessed a piece of literature about the “rape of our gun rights,” a common fear in right-wing extremist discourse.³⁰

While this right-wing extremist literature seems to have played a role in shaping Tamerlan’s thoughts, he was most likely indoctrinated to Salafi jihadism during his trip to Dagestan and in his prior interactions with his mother, who had become hyperreligious along with her son.³¹ Through Tamerlan Tsarnaev, one can see how both white supremacists, the conspiracy theories spread by the far right in the U.S., and Salafi jihadist views could affect someone experiencing significant “strain” or “anomie” in their lives.

Salafi jihadism, known colloquially as “Islamic extremism,” took a central place in the Western national security discourse after the events of 11 September 2001. As such, much of the literature devoted to the study of terrorism today speaks of the divergence between “old” terrorism and “new” terrorism. This debate is important to consider when analyzing Al Qaeda and Salafi jihadism. Many scholars believe that Al Qaeda and those who act on their behalf are the harbinger of a “new” form of terrorism, and hold that the “old” terrorism was political, state-sponsored, and less violent than the “new” terrorism espoused by Al Qaeda. However, this is a highly problematic distinction. Al Qaeda and affiliated terrorist groups today may have changed their tactics, but terrorism remains the same. Understanding that Al Qaeda does not represent a “new” form of terrorism and is politically motivated—as were all terrorist groups that preceded it—will affect the way the United States conducts its counterterrorism efforts. The United States will fail to counteract, and may even bolster, Al Qaeda’s political rhetoric if scholars continue to insist that Al Qaeda represents an entirely new form of terrorism and therefore is not politically motivated. The debate between scholars regarding “old” and “new” terrorism is integral to the discussion regarding Al Qaeda’s ideological recruitment strategies.

Scholars Richard Devetak, Steven Simon, and Daniel Benjamin believe that Al Qaeda before, on, and after 9/11 represented a “new” era of terrorism.³² Simon and Benjamin argue that the first characteristic of the older form of terrorism was its political goals, which hinged on the weakening of other powers in the international system.³³ The second characteristic of the “old” terrorism, according to these scholars, is its “predominantly state-sponsored” nature.³⁴ In the early 1990s, terrorism was a product of nation-states—namely “Iran, Iraq, Cuba, Libya, North Korea, and China”—that sponsored terrorist groups and used them as instruments to pursue national goals.³⁵ The last characteristic that defines the older form terrorism was its focus on garnering attention rather

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Alan Cullison, Paul Sonne, David George-Cosh, and Anton Troianovski, “Turn to Religion Split Suspects’ Home,” *The Wall Street Journal* (22 April 2013); available at <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424127887324235304578437131250259170.html>.

³² Richard Devetak, “Violence, Order, and Terror,” in *International Society and Its Critics*, ed. Alex J. Bellamy (Oxford: Oxford Scholarship Online, 2005), 232.

³³ Steven Simon and Daniel Benjamin, “America and New Terrorism,” *Survival* 42:1 (2000): 65.

³⁴ Ibid., 59.

³⁵ Ibid., 61.

than taking lives.³⁶ Benjamin states that the violence of the “old” terrorism was “carefully targeted and proportionate in scope” in order to avoid alienating people. Similarly, Devetak agrees that violence was never the “sole tactic” of earlier terrorist groups, and argues that it was used sparingly. These scholars agree that these three characteristics have been altered to create the putatively new form of terrorism executed by Al Qaeda and its affiliates.

These scholars maintain that the “new” terrorism has left its political, state-sponsored, and less violent nature behind in favor of new characteristics. According to Simon and Benjamin, the “new” terrorism is less political in nature and has instead taken on a religious motivation. These terrorists are required to carry out God’s will to create a perfect world on the “cosmic stage.”³⁷ Next, the “new” terrorists show a disregard for innocent life and aim for greater lethality in their attacks. The theological justification for their actions allows the “new” terrorists, especially Al Qaeda, to pursue “warfare without end.”³⁸ According to Devetak, because these newer terrorist groups have no “negotiable political demands,” they seek primarily to eliminate all opposition to their goals.³⁹

Finally, terrorism is no longer seen as state-sponsored, but rather as operating organically through a “hub and spoke structure.”⁴⁰ Simon and Benjamin observe that Al Qaeda and other “new” terrorist groups do not rely on states for financing under this analysis, but receive funding from wealthy donors, personal holdings, and donations.⁴¹ These perceived changes in funding, motivation, and tactics represent a significant change from “old” to “new” terrorism to these scholars. However, it becomes apparent that, while there might have been a change in actors, the tactics used by terrorist groups have remained largely the same. The better explanation for the apparent change is that, like any other actor with political goals, Al Qaeda’s strategies have changed as situations and contexts have changed.

More importantly, there are three fundamental errors these scholars make when drawing a distinction between “new” versus “old” terrorism. The first is an assumption that the religious goals put forth by terrorist groups cannot be political at the same time. Those who adhere to Al Qaeda’s religious teachings believe that Islam itself can serve as the basis for the new “social, political, and economic order” of the new society they seek to establish.⁴² Al Qaeda considers Islam a “revolutionary ideology” that unites global Islamic society.⁴³ The religious justification that Al Qaeda and similar groups claim for their actions is not recognized for what it truly is: a justification for the political “strug-

³⁶ Ibid., 65.

³⁷ Ibid., 66.

³⁸ Ibid., 68.

³⁹ Devetak, “Violence, Order, and Terror,” 240.

⁴⁰ Simon and Benjamin, “America and New Terrorism,” 68.

⁴¹ Ibid., 71.

⁴² John Turner, “From Cottage Industry to International Organisation: The Evolution of Salafi-Jihadism and the Emergence of the Al Qaeda Ideology,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 22 (2010): 542.

⁴³ Ibid., 549.

gle for dominance within the Islamic world.”⁴⁴ This is not a “clash of civilizations,” as many scholars would suggest. Rather, Al Qaeda is striving toward political goals that its opponents can combat and refute. Also, once we view Al Qaeda as a political movement, we can argue that the problem is not Islam, but rather a group of individuals who are distorting Islam for political gain.

In the same way, scholars believe that the “new” terrorism is marked by a level of disregard for human life. This misconception is based upon a misreading of terrorist groups’ ideology. Al Qaeda and its affiliates believe that those working alongside dominant forces in the Middle East are “apostates,” and are thus guilty. Devetak and other scholars tread in dangerous water by saying terrorists refute “humanist values”;⁴⁵ placing Western “norms” on these groups leads to a flawed analysis of these groups’ motivations and goals. Al Qaeda and terrorist groups do not believe that they target “innocents,” but rather that they are fighting against aggressors. It is important to understand Al Qaeda’s rationale in order to analyze their ability to recruit individuals.

Finally, these scholars overlook the role states still play in terrorist activity. State sponsorship of terrorism might not be as direct as it once was, but there is still significant proof that Pakistan, Iran, and even Saudi Arabia continue to support terrorism.⁴⁶ These scholars also fail to realize that terrorist groups today need a physical space from which to operate, and therefore Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen, and Somalia play an integral role in their operations.⁴⁷ Terrorist groups may be less hierarchical than they were in the past, but this does not mean that states have no impact or relevance on terrorist activities.

The Tsarnaevs are not an example of state-sponsored terrorism. However, Tamerlan’s radicalization took place during his six months in Dagestan, a Russian province with an ongoing insurgency against the central government. The brothers’ motivations have still not been explicitly spelled out, but they were clearly scarred by their displacement as children and the continued strife in their homeland of Chechnya; their immigrant status contributed to their feelings of normlessness. These pressures caused them to experience strain and anomie in their own lives, and helped them fall prey to Al Qaeda’s political ideas regarding the protection of the *umma* (the global community of Islam). These ideas are not a wellspring for a “new” form of terrorism; in fact, Tamerlan’s consumption of both right-wing extremist literature and his devotion to Salafi jihadist propaganda on YouTube shows that these seemingly distinct political narratives can occupy common mental ground in young individuals who are feeling isolated and alone.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 542.

⁴⁵ Devetak, “Violence, Order, and Terror,” 240.

⁴⁶ Daniel L. Byman, “The Changing Nature of State Sponsorship of Terrorism,” Saban Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution, Analysis Paper No. 16 (May 2008), 8, 12, 21; available at www.brookings.edu/research/papers/2008/05/terrorism-byman.

⁴⁷ Stuart Elden, “Territorial Integrity and the War on Terror,” *Environment and Planning* 37:12 (2005): 2083–104.

It is important to dispel the false dichotomy of “old” versus “new” terrorism when analyzing the recruitment patterns of Al Qaeda in the United States and the West. Misunderstanding Al Qaeda and its affiliates’ political goals, ideology, and need for an unstable state from which to operate and continue recruitment hinders our understanding of the avenues through which Westerners come to join Al Qaeda.

The Tsarnaevs’ Thoughts: Ideological Recruitment by Al Qaeda and its Affiliates

One of the most prominent ways in which Al Qaeda and its affiliates radicalize an individual is through ideological means. Al Qaeda’s ideology can be deployed to create an impression of a “war of ideas” that can be extremely salient to individuals who are experiencing strain or anomie in their lives. Tamerlan Tsarnaev struggled with school, never fit into a social group, witnessed his parents divorce and return to Russia, and saw his Olympic dreams to box as an American crushed.⁴⁸ These experiences left him disaffected and alone. In a photo essay titled “Will Box for Passport” by Johannes Hirn, Tamerlan said, “I don’t have a single American friend, I don’t understand them.”⁴⁹ Al Qaeda’s ideology helped him gain a sense of belonging to something larger than himself: the *umma*.

His brother, Dzhokhar, struggled in college to maintain the same academic and social prowess that had distinguished him in high school, and he too began to embrace radical Salafī jihadist thought as a way to cement his connection with his brother.⁵⁰ Dzhokhar’s indictment asserts that he downloaded several Salafī jihadist sermons and statements from clerics Abdullah Azzam and Anwar al-Awlaki that spoke about the protection of “Muslim lands” from the hands of disbelievers. This is in line with another statement that Dzhokhar scrawled in the boat in which he was found – “The US government is killing our innocent civilians,” presumably referring to the *umma*.⁵¹ Al Qaeda not only employs religious rhetoric, but also has espoused political goals that connect with a specific constituency. It is important to note that these goals were of interest to the target populations for several decades before Al Qaeda formally came into existence.

To set the stage, one must understand that Al Qaeda embodies an ideology that has existed within the Islamic world for centuries. Osama bin Laden articulated Al Qaeda’s ideology before the attacks of September 2001 in several pronouncements. He claimed the United States, its allies in the West, and conspirator regimes in the Middle East were

⁴⁸ Janeit Reitman, “Jahar’s World.” *Rolling Stone* (17 July 2013), 9; available at www.rollingstone.com/culture/news/jahars-world-20130717.

⁴⁹ David Weigel, “Tamerlan Tsarnaev, Dead Bombing Suspect: ‘I Don’t Have a Single American Friend,’” *Slate* (19 April 2013); available at www.slate.com/blogs/weigel/2013/04/19/tamerlan_tsarnaev_dead_bombing_suspect_i_don_t_have_a_single_american_friend.html.

⁵⁰ Reitman, “Jahar’s World.”

⁵¹ Denise Lavoie and Tom Hays, “Dzhokhar Tsarnaev, Boston Bombing Suspect, Was Influenced By Internet: Indictment,” *The Huffington Post* (28 June 2013); available at www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/06/28/dzohkhar-tsarnaev-internet-indictment_n_3515432.html.

conducting a “crusade” against the *umma*.⁵² Bin Laden called on Muslims across the globe to wage “defensive jihad” against the United States and its allies, as the United States was an occupier in the holy land of Saudi Arabia.⁵³ This war between the West and the Islamic world would be fought to reestablish a “pious caliphate” that would be governed by Islamic law and politics.⁵⁴ This blend of religion and politics is not new in Islam. In fact, a father of Al Qaeda’s ideology is Ibn Tamiyya, a thirteenth-century scholar who refused to accept the “subordination of religion to politics” for those of Islamic faith.⁵⁵ A miniscule minority of individuals harbors this ideology; however, there are enough people who ascribe to Al Qaeda’s Islamist ideological stances that the approach has served as a strong recruitment tool for this group since their inception. Al Qaeda’s ideology, as we know, often bases itself in religious rhetoric and uses Islam as a justification for its violent actions. Scholars often dismiss Al Qaeda as a purely fringe religious movement, while others claim that Islam has current of violence, which Al Qaeda channels and magnifies to become a conduit for hate. However, what these scholars fail to acknowledge is that Al Qaeda is a fusion of a political and a religious movement. Although Al Qaeda’s rhetoric may be religious, they embrace a political ideology and pursue political goals. After all, at its heart, “terrorism is a form of political violence.”⁵⁶

Richard Devetak argues that many terrorist attacks, including those which Al Qaeda has perpetrated, have a “hyperreligious motivation.”⁵⁷ These acts may be framed by religious rhetoric, but they remain political at their core. Al Qaeda seeks to change the political landscape throughout the world, by replacing the Hobbesian social contract between the ruler and the ruled with a contract between God and his people, based on *Sharia* law.⁵⁸ Al Qaeda has constructed a narrative that is steeped in religion, and uses this religious motivation to bring about political action through an emphasis on selected parts of Islamic history and the Quran. Al Qaeda tells its followers, and those it hopes to recruit, that there will need to be a “violent struggle to remake the world.”⁵⁹ The same rhetoric was described earlier in our discussion of neo-Nazi skinhead recruitment. White supremacists in the United States look to establish an “Aryan homeland” in the North-western United States, while Al Qaeda hopes to restore the Islamic Caliphate.⁶⁰ Al Qaeda’s struggle is a religious duty, but there is no question that it has a political end.

⁵² Christopher M. Blanchard, *Al Qaeda: Statements and Evolving Ideology*, CRS Report for Congress RL32759 (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, 9 July 2007), 3; available at www.fas.org/sgp/crs/terror/RL32759.pdf.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ Turner, “From Cottage Industry to International Organization,” 549.

⁵⁶ Devetak, “Violence, Order, and Terror,” 232.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 239.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 240.

⁶⁰ Blazak, “White Boys to Terrorist Men,” 994.

Mark Juergensmeyer, who speaks of a “Cosmic War”⁶¹ between Islam and the West, describes Al Qaeda’s ideology as “religionised politics.”⁶² Al Qaeda’s rhetoric may seem apocalyptic, but it is steeped in the desire to bring about a change in the status quo. As was discussed earlier, this desire to bring about social change when one’s community is being unfairly targeted, attacked, or suppressed is designed to appeal to individuals who are experiencing anomie in their lives.⁶³ It is clear that Al Qaeda’s religiously tinged political goals resonate with Muslim individuals in the West who feel as if Islam and their culture have been under attack for centuries. Al Qaeda uses this rhetoric to appeal to those who hope to restore their own version of the “status quo” – a return to power of the Islamic caliphate after years of Western dominance in the Middle East.⁶⁴

The Tsarnaev brothers’ Chechen identity is steeped in this region’s struggle against Russia as an occupying power. It is easy to see how these young men extrapolated connections between Russian dominance over the predominantly Muslim provinces of Chechnya and Dagestan and the United States’ “imperialist” agenda against Muslims around the globe. Tamerlan was steeped in this message during his time in Dagestan as he visited local Salafist mosques with his cousin, Magomed Kartashov, who is a prominent Islamist in the Dagestani capital of Makhachkala.⁶⁵ Kartashov’s group, the “Union of the Just,” renounces violence publicly, but speaks virulently about U.S. interventionism, specifically in the Middle East, and the exportation of liberal thought.⁶⁶ Although Tamerlan was also well versed in extremist right-wing discourse, this physical, ideological indoctrination into Salafī jihadist thought gave him a sense of belonging to the *umma*, a connection he desperately sought to quell his loneliness.

Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri have been successful in conveying that the global community of Muslims is mandated to fight a “defensive jihad” against the United States and its allies who are “occupying” the Middle East.⁶⁷ These leaders extend the analogy of the Crusades to this modern-day fight in an attempt to increase their historical and ideological credibility. In fact, Al Qaeda’s political ideology and the terrorist tactics used to advance it are related to a “centuries old struggle for dominance within the Islamic world.”⁶⁸ In espousing an Islamist view, which holds that Islam should provide the model for the political, economic, and social order, Al Qaeda’s leaders are

⁶¹ Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence*, 3rd ed. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003).

⁶² Devetak, “Violence, Order, and Terror,” 242.

⁶³ Blazak, “White Boys to Terrorist Men.”

⁶⁴ “Bin Laden’s Fatwa,” *PBS News Hour* (23 August 1996); available at www.pbs.org/newshour/updates/military/july-dec96/fatwa_1996.html.

⁶⁵ Simon Shuster, “Exclusive: Dagestani Relative of Tamerlan Tsarnaev Is a Prominent Islamist,” *Time Magazine* (8 May 2013); available at world.time.com/2013/05/08/exclusive-cousin-who-became-close-to-tamerlan-tsarnaev-in-dagestan-is-a-prominent-islamist/.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ Michael Scheuer, *Through Our Enemies’ Eyes: Osama Bin Laden, Radical Islam, and the Future of America* (Washington, D.C.: Potomac, 2006), 54.

⁶⁸ Turner, “From Cottage Industry to International Organization,” 542.

making a fundamentally political argument about the nature of the future state that they hope to create through jihad.

The Internet and Al Qaeda Indoctrination

In August of 1996, Osama bin Laden issued a *fatwa* titled “Declaration of War Against the Americans Occupying the Land of the Two Holy Places.”⁶⁹ A *fatwa* is a binding, religious edict issued by a figure of religious authority in Islam. However, because there is no hierarchical structure in Islam, many individuals believe they are in the position to issue *fatwas*. In bin Laden’s statement, he made the case that the “people of Islam have suffered from aggression” brought about by the U.S. and the “Zionist-Crusader alliance.”⁷⁰ It is clear that bin Laden was looking to correct the series of humiliations that had befallen the Islamic world since the end of the Ottoman Empire.⁷¹ Earlier, I noted that white supremacists often recruit individuals to their ranks by insisting that their position in society is under attack and has to be secured. In the same way, Al Qaeda and its affiliates create a narrative that the *umma* is being violently oppressed, and that the occupation of the lands of the Islamic Caliphate must be freed for this wrong to be corrected.⁷² Increasingly, it turns to online forums to spread this message.

The Internet is an extremely important tool for the ideological indoctrination of Al Qaeda recruits in the West. Many recruits are subjected to ideological recruitment through person-to-person interaction. However, Al Qaeda has managed to create an Internet conglomerate that is easily accessed by thousands of individuals in the West.⁷³ Al Qaeda has established several well-known Internet chat forums, including “Al Shumukh” and “al-Fida,”⁷⁴ which operate on a “gaming” system.⁷⁵ This system gives individuals incentive to remain in the chat rooms by awarding points and rewards for their posts; this system also encourages further radicalization. According to Jarrett Brachman and Alix Levine of *Foreign Policy*, “The majority of Westerners following a radical interpretation of Islam who have been arrested on terrorism charges have either been active in the hard-line forums or in possession of extremist materials downloaded from the

⁶⁹ “Bin Laden’s Fatwa.”

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Brian M. Jenkins, “Is Al Qaeda’s Internet Strategy Working?” RAND Corporation, Testimony presented before the U.S. House of Representatives Homeland Security Committee, Subcommittee on Counterterrorism and Intelligence (6 December 2011); available at www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/testimonies/2011/RAND_CT371.pdf.

⁷⁴ Ellen Nakashima and Joby Warrick, “Al Qaeda’s Online Forums Go Dark for Extended Period,” *Washington Post* (2 April 2012); available at http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/al-qaedas-online-forums-go-dark-for-extended-period/2012/04/02/gIQAfd4xqS_story.html.

⁷⁵ Jarrett Brachman and Alex Levine, “The World of Holy Warcraft,” *Foreign Policy* (13 April 2011); available at www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/04/13/the_world_of_holy_warcraft.

web.”⁷⁶ The strongest case study for ideological Internet radicalization, indoctrination, and an individual using the Internet to radicalize others is that of Zachary Chesser.

The Case of Zachary Chesser

Raised in suburban Virginia, Zachary Chesser converted to Islam in 2008, the summer before he entered college, as the result of an experience with a soccer team. Members of *Hizb ut-Tahrir*, a radical Uzbek Islamist political organization, sponsored the soccer team.⁷⁷ This first experience with Islam underlines the importance of recruitment through institutions, which will be discussed in a later section of this paper. Chesser’s ideological recruitment and radicalization is extremely interesting because of the speed with which it took place. In less than six months his views had become so stringent that he sought out further ideological support of his radical perspective. Chesser admits he turned to the Internet because “it is simply the most dynamic and convenient form of media there is.”⁷⁸ Chesser’s case is one of the most telling because he has remained honest in his testimony. His own statements speak to the ideological pull he felt as he formed relationships with radical Islamists through the Internet. He said, “A Muslim who sincerely investigates their religion will find that it is an obligatory [sic] to implement Islamic law, that voting is a doubtful matter, that jihad becomes obligatory in the event that non-Muslims invade Muslim lands. This is what I found, and this is what essentially everyone finds... One who sets out to learn inevitably sees jihad as viable and preferable at some point.”⁷⁹ Chesser’s statement shows how, once the main points of Al Qaeda’s ideology take root, individuals will attempt to participate in jihad either at home or abroad to fulfill their radicalization process.

Perhaps the most important takeaway from Chesser’s radicalization is his adherence to the teachings of Anwar al-Awlaki and his correspondence with this ideological leader before Chesser’s arrest in Uganda in 2010. In terms of structural recruitment, al-Awlaki was an important member of Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) until his death in 2012. AQAP has become the most active and dangerous branch of Al Qaeda as of late.⁸⁰ However, al-Awlaki’s ideological sermons and writings have acted as an important recruitment factor for individuals in the West. Also, as a native English speaker and a citizen of the United States, Awlaki was soft-spoken but preached with an authority that attracted thousands of online followers who valued his pronouncements regarding

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ “Zachary Chesser: A Case Study in Online Islamist Radicalization and Its Meaning for the Threat of Homegrown Terrorism,” Report to the U.S. Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee (February 2012), 5; available at www.hsgac.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/CHESSER%20FINAL%20REPORT%281%29.pdf.

⁷⁸ Zachary Chesser, Letter to U.S. Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee, 6 September 2011; available in *ibid*.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ “CIA Chief Says AQAP Most Dangerous in ‘Global Jihad,’” *Xinhua News* (14 September 2011); available at http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/world/2011-09/14/c_131136754.htm.

the religious justification for terrorism.⁸¹ Al-Awlaki struck a chord with so many individuals because of his background as an American, his seeming piety and religious expertise, and his expert use of the Internet as a tool for recruitment. Dzhokhar Tsarnaev has admitted that he and his brother followed al-Awlaki's sermons online.⁸²

Chesser became a follower of al-Awlaki about three months after his conversion to Islam. There is no doubt that Anwar al-Awlaki provided Chesser with the ideological justification for his decision to provide material support to the Al-Shabab Islamist militants and to travel abroad to Somalia in an attempt to join this affiliate of Al Qaeda. Describing his desire to put his ideological beliefs to practical use, Chesser said, "I concluded that Al-Shabab fit the mould [sic]. Al-Awlaki simply put Al-Shabab on the radar for me."⁸³ Chesser traded e-mails with al-Awlaki regarding his decision to travel abroad, and al-Awlaki encouraged him to travel if he thought it would be "beneficial."⁸⁴ Chesser would engage in his own ideological recruitment of others before his attempt to travel to Somalia. After he was recruited, Chesser in turn looked to recruit others through the Internet and ideological pronouncements. This strategy of using converts as "ideological foot soldiers" is an important element of Al Qaeda's overall political strategy.

Beyond the Internet

Chesser realized the importance of ideological indoctrination in order to ensure that there would be significant recruits for Al Qaeda in the future. Chesser founded *Revolution Muslim*,⁸⁵ a site for radical Western Muslims (especially those in the United States), and he was also the author of *MujahidBlog*, which was directed toward Western Muslim recruitment.⁸⁶ Chesser realized the importance of engaging and winning the "war of ideas" against the West if Al Qaeda was to succeed.⁸⁷ For this reason, he sought to become a prolific online jihadist in line with Samir Khan (of *Inspire*) and al-Awlaki, and created a series called *Counter-Counter-Terrorism*.⁸⁸ Chesser's last essay before his arrest was titled "Raising Al Qaeda: A Look into the Long-Term Obligations of the Jihadist Movement."⁸⁹ Chesser discussed the various ideological messaging efforts Al

⁸¹ "Zachary Chesser: A Case Study in Online Islamist Radicalization and Its Meaning for the Threat of Homegrown Terrorism," 10.

⁸² Daniel Klaidman, "Exclusive: The Awlaki/Tsarnaev Connection," *The Daily Beast* (26 April 2013); available at www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2013/04/26/the-awlaki-connection.html.

⁸³ Zachary Chesser, Letter to U.S. Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee, 4 October 2011.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ Christopher Anzalone, "Zachary Chesser: An American, Grassroots Jihadist Strategist on Raising the Next Generation of Al Qaeda Supporters," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 4:5 (2010): 22.

⁸⁶ "Zachary Chesser: A Case Study in Online Islamist Radicalization and Its Meaning for the Threat of Homegrown Terrorism," 16.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ Anzalone, "Zachary Chesser," 22.

Qaeda must take to survive, including the “normalization” of the idea of jihad.⁹⁰ He also spoke about developing and supporting a greater role for women in “raising” children to become members of Al Qaeda.⁹¹

Chesser went as far as to insist that members of Al Qaeda emulate the “domestic propaganda machine” that exists within the United States, as he believed the United States created the strongest ideological connections between the individual and the nation.⁹² He suggested that Al Qaeda should mirror their message to inspire the “blind patriotism” citizens of the United States experience when rallying behind the “empty terms and loaded words” of their politicians.⁹³ Chesser believes that instilling this sense of “patriotism” in children will create more jihadists in the future. Despite his success online, Chesser was not content to simply become a propagandist recruiter online. He believed that travel to participate in jihad was a religious obligation and an important part of Al Qaeda’s ideology.⁹⁴

On 10 July 2010, Chesser attempted to board a flight to Uganda with his infant son with the hopes of traveling to Somalia to join Al-Shabab.⁹⁵ As Martha Crenshaw points out, many recruits are inspired by Al Qaeda’s ideology, but it is normally not until they travel abroad that they become operational.⁹⁶ Chesser was denied access to the flight and was arrested on 21 July for attempting to provide material support to Al Shabab.⁹⁷ Chesser believed that it was his religious obligation under Islam to travel abroad to fight, but to his dismay he was barred from travelling to Somalia twice before his arrest.⁹⁸ He pled guilty to all charges and was sentenced to twenty-five years in a U.S. federal prison.⁹⁹

No part of Zachary Chesser’s recruitment to Al Qaeda suggests that there was any degree of “lone-wolf” terrorism at play. Chesser first experienced Salafi jihadism through a social institution, a soccer team, and converted to Islam shortly thereafter. His marriage to a woman he had met on Al Qaeda’s Internet forums suggests that ideological relationships formed on the Internet can foster relationships in the real world.¹⁰⁰ Finally,

⁹⁰ Ibid., 23.

⁹¹ Ibid., 25.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 29.

⁹⁵ “Zachary Chesser: A Case Study in Online Islamist Radicalization and Its Meaning for the Threat of Homegrown Terrorism,” 19.

⁹⁶ Martha Crenshaw, Statement Before the Subcommittee on Intelligence, Information Sharing, and Terrorism Risk Assessment, Committee on Homeland Security, U.S. House of Representatives, “Hearing on Reassessing the Evolving al-Qa’ida Threat to the Homeland” (19 November 2009), 4; available at <http://iis-db.stanford.edu/pubs/22749/MCrenshaw.pdf>.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Anzalone, “Zachary Chesser,” 28.

⁹⁹ “Zachary Chesser: A Case Study in Online Islamist Radicalization and Its Meaning for the Threat of Homegrown Terrorism,” 25.

¹⁰⁰ “Wife of Virginia Man who Threatened South Park Pleads Guilty,” *Anti-Defamation League* (9 November 2010); available at www.adl.org/main_Terrorism/nzabanita_chesser.htm.

Chesser looked to travel to Somalia and participate in jihad, proving that the desire to be part of a community is a focal point of recruitment. Although Chesser operated alone, with the exception of his wife, he had greater connections both through the Internet and international community that undermine any scholarship that would suggest he was a “lone-wolf.”

The Tsarnaev brothers did not operate alone; Tamerlan’s radicalization was aided by his six months in Dagestan, and the brothers relied on their familial bond. While it is unknown exactly how the brothers became operational, it seems that Dzhokhar followed his brother’s radicalization. Again, the importance of connections when succumbing to radical ideology cannot be overstated. The radicalization process rarely occurs in a vacuum, hence casting doubt on the narrative of “lone-wolf” terrorism.

Tamerlan’s six-month trip to Dagestan undoubtedly furthered his radicalization as he met with notable Salafis and spoke freely about jihad.¹⁰¹ His radicalization started, however, when his mother begged him to become more religious in an effort to stem his use of alcohol and drugs. Tamerlan became so immersed in religion that he chided his family members and even encouraged his mother to wear a hijab. Together, they became more steeped in religion, driving their family apart, as the father could not understand his son’s change in behavior.¹⁰² Tamerlan could not even fit in at his local mosque in 2009, where he had an outburst regarding a sermon that praised Martin Luther King, Jr. Those who attended the service that day in 2009 were shocked by his stunning eruption. He was told if another outburst occurred, he could not return to the mosque.¹⁰³

Tamerlan’s interactions in Dagestan pushed him toward radicalization, but those he was in contact with during his stay convinced him not to join the strife in Chechnya. Rather, they suggested he return home.¹⁰⁴ Cast out again, armed with reinforced views against United States intervention in the Middle East from his time in Dagestan, Tamerlan and his brother began to plan the bombings. Dzhokhar, struggling in school and increasingly isolated, latched onto his only connection still close to him. His brother was the main source of radicalization.

Together, the Tsarnaevs devoured Salafi jihadist propaganda videos on the Internet, including prophecies about a global holy war to reestablish the Islamic caliphate.¹⁰⁵ They discovered *Inspire*, the propaganda magazine of Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). In these pages, the brothers found their recipe for pressure cooker bombs in an article titled “How to Make a Bomb in the Kitchen of Your Mom.”¹⁰⁶ Perhaps more importantly, *Inspire* often encourages Westerners who desire to fight in foreign

¹⁰¹ Shuster, “Exclusive: Dagestani Relative of Tamerlan Tsarnaev Is a Prominent Islamist.”

¹⁰² Cullison, Sonne, George-Cosh, and Troianovski, “Turn to Religion Split Suspects’ Home.”

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Shuster, “Exclusive: Dagestani Relative of Tamerlan Tsarnaev Is a Prominent Islamist.”

¹⁰⁵ Lavoie and Hays, “Dzhokhar Tsarnaev, Boston Bombing Suspect, Was Influenced By Internet.”

¹⁰⁶ Eli Lake, “Al Qaeda’s Recipe for Pressure-Cooker Bombs,” *The Daily Beast* (16 April 2013); available at <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2013/04/16/al-qaeda-s-recipe-for-pressure-cooker-bombs.html>.

wars to consider themselves the “jihadist next door” and attack in their own countries.¹⁰⁷ In one notable video, Adam Gahdan reminded sympathizers in the U.S. that the country is “awash with guns” that are “easily attainable.” The video ends ominously, asking the viewer, “So what are you waiting for?”¹⁰⁸ This type of propaganda aided the brothers in their path to violence.

Zachary Chesser’s rapid radicalization through ideological relationships and recruitment, starting on a soccer team but becoming cemented through Al Qaeda’s Internet forums, is an important case study for the United States. Chesser realized the importance of the ideological foundations of Al Qaeda’s recruitment machine, and attempted to improve the longevity and reach of these recruitment measures through his own writing. His only mistake was becoming so prolific in both his writing and his desire to recruit others to the jihadist cause that he tipped off authorities to his plans, leading to his arrest. However, through the efforts of propagandists like Chesser—and the now infamous Anwar al-Awlaki and his Yemeni cohorts, who continue to publish *Inspire Magazine*—many disaffected young men like the Tsarnaevs are at risk of falling prey to Al Qaeda’s radical world view.

The Tsarnaevs themselves, although they had no tangible connections to any arm of Al Qaeda, succumbed to this ideology and committed a horrific act of violence that left three young people dead and hundreds injured on a beautiful day in Boston. The success of Al Qaeda’s ideological recruitment and propaganda has garnered the Tsarnaevs a starring role in the latest edition of *Inspire*, released in May 2013.¹⁰⁹ On the first page of the magazine, Al Qaeda offers, “Americans, you should understand this simple equation: as you kill, you will be killed. Yesterday it was Baghdad, today it is Boston.” *Inspire* claims “the two great brothers,” Tamerlan and Dzhokhar, as Al Qaeda’s own, even though their connection to this movement was purely ideological. Tamerlan is pictured in a heavenly scene, dressed in his flashy clothes from his boxing days and a pair of aviator sunglasses. *Inspire* calls on all “true” Western Muslims to follow the lead of the Tsarnaev brothers. The glorification of the Tsarnaevs through online forums and chat rooms that make discussing future plots and religious zeal a game, with points and ranks, has begun.¹¹⁰ Alienated individuals will find satisfying ties to this community, and the cycle may begin again.

¹⁰⁷ *Inspire Magazine*, Issue 10 (March 2013).

¹⁰⁸ Sam Stein, “White House Taking ‘Seriously’ Al Qaeda’s Eying of America’s Gun Show Loophole,” *The Huffington Post* (7 June 2011); available at www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/06/07/white-house-taking-seriously-al-qaeda-gun-show_n_872413.html.

¹⁰⁹ *Inspire Magazine*, Issue 11 (June 2013).

¹¹⁰ Brachman and Levine, “The World of Holy Warcraft.”

Conclusion

Dzhokhar Tsarnaev's next hearing in federal court is on 23 September 2013. At the time of this writing, he plans to plead "not guilty" on all counts.¹¹¹ Regardless of the outcome in court, there are important conclusions to be drawn from the Tsarnaevs' radicalization, especially in Tamerlan's process. Tamerlan experienced great normlessness and anomie in his life, so much so that he confessed openly he did not have "one American friend." This sense of rootlessness, driven by his troubled childhood and inability to fit in to any social group, allowed him to be swayed by right-wing extremist, white supremacist, and Salafi jihadist ideology. The sense of purpose and community these ideologies lend to individuals experiencing disconnection from society is an area that should be explored more by academics and counterterrorism professionals. Perhaps, if the FBI had recognized these characteristics in Tamerlan when they interviewed him in the summer of 2011 at the behest of the Russian government, his radicalization could have been halted.¹¹²

Tamerlan's radicalization was aided by the relationships he formed in Dagestan, his bond with his mother, and his connection to his brother Dzhokhar. These relationships pushed the brothers to become increasingly radicalized. Their relationship to Al Qaeda's ideology, as well as their belief in protecting the *umma* (as evidenced by Dzhokhar's note inside the boat), highlight the importance of establishing societal connections during the radicalization process. Radicalization, whether it takes place via the Internet or in person, rarely occurs in a vacuum. The fear of "lone-wolf" terrorism is overblown for these reasons. Instead, counterterrorism and law enforcement should focus on interceding with those who are experiencing anomie in their lives.

Finally, the importance of Al Qaeda's propaganda machine for ideological indoctrination and recruitment cannot be overstated. Through the case study of Zachary Chesser, I have illustrated how individuals can be radicalized solely through the online community. Chesser understood the importance of recruiting online, and Al Qaeda is aware that at-risk, lonely youth are easily swayed by their radical propaganda, which can be easily found on the Internet in sermons and on the pages of *Inspire*. The Boston marathon bombings bring this narrative full circle. The Tsarnaev brothers, disaffected and alone, acted on their violent beliefs, fostered by *Inspire* magazine, and now play a starring role in the May 2013 edition.

As the United States looks to stop the next Western extremist before they become operational, the ideological path of the Tsarnaev brothers, especially Tamerlan, is instructive. Scholars may speak in meaningless clichés like "Al Qaeda 3.0," but in truth, this type of radicalization is all too common in the United States and has been for dec-

¹¹¹ Oppel and Bidgood, "Marathon Bombing Suspect, in First Court Appearance, Pleads Not Guilty."

¹¹² "2011 Request for Information on Tamerlan Tsarnaev from Foreign Government," Federal Bureau of Investigation National Press Release, 19 April 2013; available at www.fbi.gov/news/pressrel/press-releases/2011-request-for-information-on-tamerlan-tsarnaev-from-foreign-government.

ades.¹¹³ In the case of Tamerlan, one can see a lonely, disaffected young man who became immersed in all types of extreme ideology – he just happened to cultivate the personal relationships that pushed him toward Salafi jihadism. In order to stop the next terrorist, the United States should recognize that both the white supremacist terrorist attack on a Sikh Temple in Wisconsin in August 2012 and the Boston bombings are less about the narrative that takes hold and more about the social state of these attackers that led them to seek out a radical ideology.¹¹⁴ This would be a fundamental change in our approach to counterterrorism as a nation, but it is one idea whose time has come.

¹¹³ Bruce Riedel, “Al Qaeda 3.0: Terrorism’s Emergent New Power Bases,” *The Daily Beast* (3 December 2012); available at <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2012/12/03/al-qaeda-3-0-terrorism-s-emergent-new-power-bases.html>.

¹¹⁴ Brendan O’Brien, “Vigil at Wisconsin Sikh Temple Marks Anniversary of Shooting Attack,” *Reuters* (6 August 2013); available at www.reuters.com/article/2013/08/06/us-usa-shooting-sikh-idUSBRE97505320130806.

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