

ASSESSING THE ROOTS OF THE BOSTON MARATHON BOMBINGS

HERMAN BUTIME*

Abstract. *This article examines the Boston Marathon bombings within the context of the political and social evolution of Chechnya and its impact on the wider Chechen national character. It is argued that the long conflict history of Chechnya has progressively fostered the evolution of a hardened collective Chechen national character that has not only fortified the Chechen people's capacity to cope with life in exile but also to participate in violent activities geared towards reinforcing their national ethos. Whereas this factor by itself may not have been sufficient to push the Tsarnaev brothers to conduct the bombings, as Americans of Chechen descent, it provided them with a potential framework of susceptibility to commit the attacks.*

Keywords: *Terrorism, Boston Marathon Bombings, America, Chechnya.*

Introduction

The Boston Marathon bombings were a watershed in United States (U.S) terrorism history. They were not only the first terror attacks on American soil since 9/11 but also the suspected perpetrators were U.S citizens. On 15th April, 2013, two home-made bombs were detonated at the finish line of the Boston Marathon in the U.S state of Massachusetts, killing 3 and injuring 264 people. The suspects in this double terror attack were Tamerlan Tsarnaev and Dzhokhar Tsarnaev, two brothers of ethnic Chechen descent whose family had immigrated to America from the Caucasus region of Russia¹. On interrogation, Dzhokhar, the younger of the two brothers, stated that the U.S' military involvement in Afghanistan and Iraq and the global 'conspiracy' against Muslims were the motivation behind the bombings².

* PhD, Independent Conflict and Security Researcher; hrb955@uowmail.edu.au.

¹ CNN, 'Boston Marathon Terror Attack Fast Facts,' *CNN Library*, 17th January 2015. Available at: <http://edition.cnn.com/2013/06/03/us/boston-marathon-terror-attack-fast-facts/>. Accessed on 17/02/2015.

² Parker Diantha and Bidgood Jess 2015, 'Boston Marathon Bombing: What We Know,' *The New York Times*, 1st January 2015. Available at: http://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/02/us/boston-marathon-bombings-trial-what-you-need-to-know.html?_r=0. Accessed on 17/02/2015.

Pol. Sc. Int. Rel., **XIII**, 2, pp. 18–32, Bucharest, 2016.

The Boston Marathon bombings triggered a couple of complex issues: If the allegations linking the Tsarnaev brothers to Chechen militant groups were correct, then it is challenging to explain why they chose to attack the U.S (a country that had provided them a home in exile) and not Russia (that had been at war in Chechnya); the fact that the Tsarnaevs never grew up in restive Chechnya makes it even more challenging to explain where and how they picked up the radical Chechen nationalism that partly fed into their wider web of discontentment; equally perplexing are the contradictions of their social integration into American society. On one hand, Tamerlan and Dzhokhar appeared to have settled in well in their host country. On the other, they seemed to reject the American way of life.

Against this backdrop, the article examines the Boston Marathon bombings within the context of the political and social evolution of Chechnya and its impact on the wider Chechen national character. It is argued that the long conflict history of Chechnya has progressively fostered the evolution of a hardened collective Chechen national character which has not only fortified the Chechen people's capacity to cope with life in exile but also to participate in violent activities geared towards reinforcing the Chechen national ethos. Whereas this factor by itself may not have been sufficient to push the Tsarnaev brothers to conduct the bombings, as Americans of Chechen descent, it potentially provided them with a framework of susceptibility to commit the attacks.

National Predisposition to Political Violence

Although the Tsarnaevs were neither raised in Chechnya nor cited the Chechen people's struggle for self-determination as motivation for the Boston Marathon bombings, the fact that they were linked to Chechen militant groups necessitates a closer examination of the history of Chechnya and how it could have impacted on their behavioural development. In this respect, it is argued that the long suffering of the Chechen people as a result of conflict has not only fortified their capacity to cope with life in exile but also earned them marketability in domestic and international armed conflict industry.

At the national level, this collective character presented as a framework of resilience and a predisposition for Chechens to pursue martial careers. Whereas this attribute may not be inherent in the behaviour of all Chechens, its hovering existence within the wider Chechen national character potentially provides disillusioned Chechens with a framework for the violent resolution of contradictions in their lives. In looking at the predisposition of Chechens to engage in violent activity, this section examines the national, geographical, social and political distinctness of these people that is relevant to this debate.

The national and geographical distinctness of the Chechen nation makes it susceptible to separatism. Chechens have historically occupied the northern slopes of the Caucasus mountain ranges³. They inhabit this area alongside Dagestanis and

³ Goltz Thomas, 'Is there a Chechen Connection to the Boston Bombings,' *The Nation*, 13th May 2013. Available at: <http://www.thenation.com/article/174026/there-chechen-connection-boston-bombings#>. Accessed on 25/02/2015.

Circassians. To the south and west, they are neighboured by Azeris and Georgians respectively⁴. Although the rest of the world calls them Chechens, they are a distinct national group accurately known as the Nakhs or Vainakhs. They do, however, prefer calling themselves Noxchi which translates as ‘the people’⁵. With this ethno-nationalist consciousness manifest in a distinct geographical area, attempts at eroding it through occupation potentially trigger resistance supported by a favourable rugged terrain.

Chechens also have a measure of social distinctness that supports their collective propensity for violent separatism. According to Julia Loffe, “Tolstoy, who was once stationed in the region, wrote about their eternal struggle against the Russians in *Hadji Murat* as did Pushkin, who went there in exile, in *Prisoner of the Caucasus*. They describe a society that fetishizes masculine honour and violence, skill with one’s horse and one’s sword”⁶.

While these observations could be dismissed as subjective anthropology authored by Russians with an ‘imperialist complex,’ the enduring violent resistance to Russian rule; the disproportionate representation of Chechens in the Soviet military services coupled with their marked participation in the current global Jihadist campaign gives some credence to the stereotypical perspective of them as a martial nationality⁷.

The ‘inherent’ martial credentials of the Chechens are particularly evident in their enduring resistance to Russian imperialism. The Chechens were involved in the *Murid Wars* of the 19th century. These were the earliest *Sufi* Muslim wars of resistance against czarist Russia’s occupation of the Caucasus⁸. The significance of this epoch is that it consolidated Islam not only as an aspect of Chechen national identity (as different from the wider Orthodox-Christian Russian identity) but also as an ideology for violently defending it.

Russia’s ruthless suppression of the resistance in the Caucasus prevented the Chechen national character from solely being shaped by historical dynamics inside Chechnya. When the Russians captured Imam Shamil who had been leading Chechen guerrillas, a segment of the Chechen resistance transferred its fighting resources to the Ottoman Empire where, generically known as Circassians, this group was instrumental in pacifying the Balkans and the Arab lands of the Levant.

⁴ Kordunsky Anna, ‘Boston Bombing Suspects Put Chechnya in Spotlight,’ *National Geographic*, 19th April 2013. Available at: <http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2013/13/130419-chechnya-russia-caucuses-boston-marathon-bombing-suspects-world-militants/>. Accessed on 25/02/2015.

⁵ Goltz Thomas, *op. cit.*

⁶ Loffe Julia, ‘The Boston Bombing Suspects were Reared by Both Chechnya and America,’ *New Republic*, 19th April 2013. Available at: <http://www.newrepublic.com/article/112971/boston-marathon-bombers-brothers-chechnya-forged-america>. Accessed on 25/02/2015.

⁷ *Ibidem*; Dzhokhar Dudayev rose to the rank of Air Force Major General in the Soviet Armed Forces despite belonging to the minority Chechen ethnic group. See: Goltz Thomas, *op. cit.*; Omar al-Shishani, the overall military chief of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) is a Chechen. See: Associated Press and Daily Mail Reporter 2014, ‘The face of evil: Young, red-bearded Chechen who has become the most recognisable commander of ISIS terror group,’ *Mail online*, 2nd July 2014. Available at: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2677683/The-face-evil-Young-red-bearded-Chechen-recognisable-commander-Isis-terror-group.html>. Accessed on 09/04/2015.

⁸ Goltz Thomas, *op. cit.*

In Jordan, it went on to constitute the ceremonial guards of the king⁹. In a sense, Russia's occupation of the Caucasus triggered the first trans-national marketability of the Chechen martial streak helping to transform it into an enduringly integral element of the broader Chechen national character.

The crushing of the Caucasus resistance also paved way for the hardening of the Chechen national character. By the end of the 1817-1863 Russian campaign (aimed at securing a route to Transcaucasia), the Chechen population, which had been 1 million in the 1840s, had been significantly reduced to 140,000 in 1861¹⁰. Russian strategy at the time involved, among others, the forceful displacement of segments of the restive population. For example, north Caucasians of Ingush, Abkhaz and Adyghe extraction were exiled¹¹. This development presented the first wealth of collective Chechen embitterment.

The second unfolded during World War II. Although by the 1920s and 30s, the Stalinist regime had tried to 'reach out' to this nationality by declaring Chechnya an 'autonomous republic' complete with territory and an official culture, Chechen resistance to collectivisation and wider Soviet rule persisted¹². Whether this may have led to actual Chechen collaboration with Nazi Germany or it was simply a link manufactured by the Stalinist regime, in February 1944, the Chechen republic was dissolved and half of the 478,479 people who were forced out of Chechnya died enroute to Siberia and Central Asia¹³.

Assessing how the mass deportations of 1944 affected the Chechen national psyche, Thomas Goltz observes that: "The Vysl or deportation became the defining event in the Chechen collective memory, as resonant as the Trail of Tears for the Cherokees, the Retreat of the Nez Perce or the Holocaust of Europe's Jews. In the gulags and collective farms of Central Asian exile (mostly Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan), the Chechens honed their reputation for toughness... Those who did return to Chechnya did so with a collective bad attitude as well as a reputation for ruthlessness and organized crime"¹⁴.

During the Cold War, the Chechen national character was not greatly influenced by dynamics inside Chechnya because of what appeared like a final Soviet settlement of the Chechen question. Chechen military resistance inside Chechnya had been suppressed while on the political front, the repatriation of Chechens to their ancestral homeland eased tensions between them and the Soviet government. But with resistance against foreign occupation enduringly embedded in the Chechen national psyche, this collective character had to find a domain for development outside Chechnya. This development would not only transform the character of Chechen resistance to Soviet occupation but also, in future, widen the pool of 'enemies' of the Chechen nation.

⁹ *Ibidem*.

¹⁰ Kordunsky Anna, *op. cit.*

¹¹ Goltz Thomas, *op. cit.*

¹² *Ibid*; Loffe Julia, *op. cit.*

¹³ Goltz Thomas, *op. cit*; Parker Diantha and Bidgood Jess, *op. cit.*

¹⁴ Goltz Thomas, *op. cit.*

Cross-cutting similarities in the conflict dynamics of Cold War Eurasia coupled with the international marketability of the Chechen martial streak allowed the Chechen national character to be shaped by dynamics outside Chechnya. With the U.S and her ally, Pakistan, backing the Mujahideen guerrillas in an Afghan Islamist campaign against what was seen as Soviet occupation, the Chechen resistance found a favourable foreign resistance it could relate to. Both resistances were not only against Soviet occupation but they were also spurred by an Islamist ideology. This rationale accounts for the onset of the radical Islamist streak inside Chechen resistance.

The beginnings of Chechen resistance anchored in radical Islamist ideology are closely tied with the career of Shamil Basayev, a Chechen rebel commander. With the assistance of Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), Pakistan's intelligence agency, Basayev and his lieutenants underwent military training at the Amir Muawia camp in the Khost province of Afghanistan. This training facility had been set up by Gulbudin Hekmatyar, a prominent Mujahideen commander. Later, they were transferred to the Markaz-i-Dawar camp in Pakistan where they received advanced training in guerrilla tactics¹⁵.

The significance of the Basayev chapter in Chechen history is in the way it transformed the character of the Chechen resistance. The subsequent participation of Chechen Jihadists in insurgent campaigns in the predominantly Muslim Georgian region of Abkhazia and the Nagorno-Karabakh (a territory disputed between Armenia and Azerbaijan) consolidated the international marketability of Chechens as a martial nationality¹⁶. It was, however, the subsequent injection of a radical Islamist ideology into domestic resistance that significantly altered the character of the Chechen resistance.

Like in other former republics of the Soviet Union, the end of the Cold War triggered secessionist movements in Russia. Chechnya was to be gripped by two wars which in many ways showcased the transformation of the Chechen character of resistance¹⁷. Whereas the First Chechen War (1994-1996) was mounted by secular-nationalists, by the start of the Second Chechen War (1999-2000), the Chechen resistance was dominated by radical Islamists and criminal clans¹⁸.

The secular-nationalist strand had very much been in tandem with the Sufi campaigns of the 19th century. Although the two strands of resistance are separable in ideological terms, both were identical in the pursuit of limited strategic goals – attaining Chechen independence. It is also worth noting that aspects of the Chechen national character evolving from these strands were shaped by dynamics

¹⁵ Chossudovsky Michel, BOSTON TRUTH: The 'Chechen Connection,' Al Qaeda and the Boston Marathon Bombings, *Global Research*, 22nd April 2013. Available at: <http://www.globalresearch.ca/boston-truth-the-chechen-connection-al-qaeda-and-the-boston-marathon-bombings/5332337>. Accessed on 23/02/2015.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*.

¹⁷ Vancauwenberghe Nadja, 'First Take: Don't blame Chechnya for Boston Bombings,' *USA Today*, 21st April 2013. Available at: <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2013/04/20/chechnya-boston-bombings-first-take/2099255/>. Accessed on 25/02/2015; BBC, 'Boston Bombings: Suspects' Chechen Connections,' *BBC News US & Canada*, 22nd April 2013. Available at: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-22229442>. Accessed on 17/02/2015.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*.

internal to Chechnya. On the other hand, the radical Islamist and criminal strands were an intrusion into the Chechen psyche of resistance emanating from without. Whereas Salafism had been imported from the Mujahideen camps in Afghanistan and Pakistan, the propensity for criminality evolved from the gulags and collective farms of Siberia and Central Asia¹⁹.

Significantly, though, the dawn of the Salafist era expanded the strategic goals of the Chechen resistance. Emphasizing this point, Doku Umarov, a Chechen rebel leader, observes: “Our enemy is not Russia only, but everyone who wages war against Islam and Muslims”²⁰. Thus, unlike the Sufist and secular-nationalist campaigns that had only aimed to achieve Chechen independence, the Salafists were out to attain the maximal strategic goal of establishing a caliphate of which an independent Chechen nation would be a part²¹. In order to understand how the shape of the Chechen resistance had reached this point, it is imperative to examine the activities of Basayev in the post-Cold War era.

When he returned to his homeland, Basayev invited Ibn-ul-Khattab, the Saudi-born Mujahideen, to set up a military training camp in Chechnya. This development was significant in that it went beyond the mere setting up of infrastructure to resist Russian rule. It also carried with it an underlying plan to undermine the secularist and Sufist foundation of the Chechen state. Militant religious organizations in Saudi Arabia (which is predominantly Sunni) pumped funds into the Khattab project. This financial assistance which also came from other Gulf States was contingent on the installation of Sharia courts in Chechnya. The installation of Sheikh Abu Umar as Principal Judge of Sharia courts in Chechnya and the organization of these judicial institutions under the leadership of Khattab marked a significant move towards the radical Islamization of Chechen society²².

It is important to note that the Salafist and criminal elements in the Chechen resistance were not only imported into the Chechen theatre but also exported abroad. With regard to Salafism, Russia launched the Second Chechen War because Chechen insurgents had started exporting their activities into Dagestan. The collective reputation for criminality was also manifest both domestically and internationally. For example, one of the excuses that President Boris Yeltsin cited for sending Russian forces into Chechnya was Grozny’s (the Chechen capital) evolution into a centre for organized crime²³. Internationally, Chechen criminal syndicates had a foothold in Albania, Moscow (the Russian capital) and links with the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA), a Balkan rebel group²⁴.

The Salafist phase not only transformed the socio-political fabric of Chechen resistance but also the military tactics underpinning it. Unlike in the past where Chechen rebels had employed orthodox guerrilla warfare against Russian forces,

¹⁹ Chossudovsky Michel, *op. cit*; Goltz Thomas, *op. cit*.

²⁰ Vancauwenberghe Nadja, *op. cit*.

²¹ *Ibidem*.

²² Chossudovsky Michel, *op. cit*.

²³ Goltz Thomas, *op. cit*.

²⁴ Chossudovsky Michel, *op. cit*.

with the dawn of the new millennium, they increasingly started conducting terrorist attacks. Notable incidents included the 2002 attack on a Moscow theatre that resulted in the death of 130 people; the 2004 attack on a school in the Caucasian peninsula that cost more than 330 lives; the 2010 suicide bombing of the Moscow Metro that resulted in 40 casualties; and the 2011 attack on the Domodedovo airport that claimed 37 lives²⁵. The increasing use of terrorism was an indication of negative shifts in the Chechen insurgent campaign. With the Russian security apparatus mounting pressure on the separatists, brazen attacks on civilian infrastructure were a mechanism for demonstrating that the Chechen resistance was still alive.

Thus far, the history of Chechnya appears to point to Russia as the historically enduring 'enemy' of Chechen nationalists. Given that the Tsarnaevs went on to attack America, which had provided them a home in exile, it is imperative to explain how the U.S could have evolved into an 'enemy' of a segment of the Chechen resistance. Although during the Cold War, America allied with radical Islamist groups in resisting communism, it was always debatable that this cooperation would continue in the post-Cold War era²⁶. With the collapse of the communist bloc and the disappearance of a common enemy that had unified the west and radical Islamist groups, ideological contradictions and competition for global power and influence were bound to brew tensions between these erstwhile allies.

For starters, the west and radical Islamist groups were ideologically cut from different pieces of cloth. Whereas the west espoused the principles of democracy and a free market economy, the Salafists aimed to establish Islamist theocracies. These inherent ideological differences would not have generated friction between the two sides as long as they did not cross each other's path on the global stage. The snag, however, was that the Salafist non-state actors intended to implement their programmes in predominantly Islamic countries which were strategic allies of the west. The west's hands were tied in the sense that if the Salafist agenda succeeded, western influence would decline in those countries. On the other hand, if the west robustly defended its largely undemocratic allies, it would not only earn the wrath of its erstwhile Salafist allies but also contradict its stated commitment to democracy. These contradictions partly underpin the rise of Al Qaeda and its commitment to attack the west²⁷.

In the case of Chechnya, contradictory shifts in America's position on the Chechen conflict allowed her to gravitate between being perceived as an ally and

²⁵ Vancauwenberghe Nadja, *op. cit.*

²⁶ Global Research, 'Sleeping with the Devil: How US and Saudi Backing of Al Qaeda Led to 9/11', *Global Research*, Center for Research on Globalization. Available at: <http://www.globalresearch.ca/sleeping-with-the-devil-how-u-s-and-saudi-backing-of-al-qaeda-led-to-911/5303313>. Accessed on 03/04/2014; Mashal Mujib 2012, 'Hekmatyar's never-ending Afghan war,' *Aljazeera*, 28th January 2012. Available at: <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2012/01/201212614551208744.html>. Accessed on 03/04/2014.

²⁷ For an example of political repression by Arab Middle Eastern countries, see: Fitzgerald Andy, 'Why won't the west call out Saudi Arabia for persecution of democratic activists?', *The Guardian*, 29th December 2013. Available at: <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/dec/29/saudi-arabia-us-human-rights-persecution-activists>. Accessed on 03/04/2014; Muskus Jeff, 'Osama bin Laden Dead: The Rise, Fall and Legacy of America's Most Wanted Terrorist', *The World Post*, 2nd May 2011. Available at: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/05/02/osama-bin-laden-killed-legacy_n_856138.html. Accessed on 03/04/2014.

an enemy of the Chechen cause. During the Cold War, Chechen perceptions of the U.S were largely positive given America's opposition to the Soviet hegemony and Pakistan's (America's ally) logistical and military assistance for the Chechen resistance²⁸. Even in the aftermath of the Cold War, these perceptions endured, as evidenced by Moscow's suspicions that America looked favourably to the Chechen resistance as an instrument for destabilizing Russia. This argument found basis, for example, in the U.S offering Ilyas Akhmadov (Foreign Minister in the Chechen rebel government) political asylum despite Russia's protestations about his alleged terrorist links²⁹.

Three factors could have changed Chechen perception of America: first, Dzhokhar Dudayev (the Chechen nationalist leader) was killed by a laser-guided missile while he waited to speak with a U.S peace mediator. This incident led to Chechen suspicions of America's involvement in their leader's death³⁰. Second, the U.S has been keen on a rapprochement with Russia, in order to maintain her military supply lines to Afghanistan that run through southern Russia and central Asia. From the Chechen perspective, the Chechen cause could be sacrificed upon the altar of improved Russo-American relations. Third, despite its historical 'sympathy' for the Chechen cause, the U.S has been overly restrictive on admitting Chechen immigrants³¹.

From the foregoing discussion, it could be asserted that the Chechen national character has historically been shaped by dynamics inside and outside the cradle of Chechen civilization and it has consequently picked up the following critical elements: first, the perennial attempts at eroding Chechen nationhood potentially make Chechens susceptible to adopting a collective siege mentality. Second, Islam has emerged as an important doctrine for rallying resistance against threats to the Chechen national ethos. Third, the inherent Chechen martial character has not only emerged as useful in the resistance against Russian occupation, but has also become marketable abroad. Fourth, attempts at adapting to a condition of nationlessness have added 'ruggedness' to the collective Chechen character.

It would, however, be difficult to adopt these propositions without qualification, given that only a fraction of the wider Chechen population goes on to participate in political violence. The challenge at this juncture then is to investigate how the above 'inherent' national attributes shape individual Chechen communities. Since, for the better part of their lives, the Tsarnaev brothers were a part of the Chechen American diaspora, it is imperative that the characteristics of this community are examined, in order to determine how these could have shaped the careers of Tamerlan and Dzhokhar.

²⁸ Chossudovsky Michel, *op. cit.*

²⁹ Schreck Carl, 'In Small Boston Diaspora, Echoes of Chechnya,' *RIA Novosti, Sputnik International*, 23rd April 2013. Available at: <http://sputniknews.com/analysis/20130423/180799181.html>. Accessed on 27/02/2015.

³⁰ Goltz Thomas, *op. cit.*

³¹ Upton Jodi and Overberg Paul, 'Few Chechen immigrants make it to US,' *USA Today*, 20th April 2013. Available at: <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2013/04/19/chechens-immigrants-us-population/2097065/>. Accessed on 27/02/2015.

Communal Predisposition to Political Violence

Although the evolution of the Chechen American community (and other Chechen diaspora) should have 'softened' the 'hardened' collective Chechen character (borne out of generations of nationlessness and suffering), there are contradictions in the social integration of this segment of American society that potentially allow gaps for individual alienation and gravitation towards political violence to exist.

The notion that the U.S has been a welcoming home for Chechen immigrants is contestable in some respects. Despite immigration waves that date as far back as the 1920s, Chechens in the American diaspora are comparatively few. The Chechen population in the U.S is estimated at between 200 and 1,000 dispersed in the states of Massachusetts, Michigan, Oregon and California. The cities that predominantly host this immigrant community are Boston, Chicago, Seattle, New York and the D.C Metropolitan area³². By comparison, there are 30,000 Chechen immigrants in Austria³³. Almut Rochowanski, Founder of the Chechnya Advocacy Network, attributes this situation to logistical challenges. It is easier for Chechens to relocate to Europe than to America³⁴. While this may be the case, however, U.S security concerns could also partly account for the small Chechen American population.

Due to stringent U.S anti-terrorism laws and Russian protestations, few Chechens, and fewer men for that matter, are admitted into America. 70% of Chechen immigrants to the U.S are women. It is worth noting that the U.S Treasury Department has three Chechen insurgent groups (implicated in the 2002 terror attack on a Moscow theatre) on its terrorism watch list: Islamic International Brigade; Special Purpose Islamic Regiment; and Riyadus-Salikhin Battalion³⁵. This could explain the restrictive admission of Chechens into America. Glenn Howard, President of the Jamestown Foundation, asserts that some American cities do not accept Chechen immigrants, a position that is, however, contested by Nicholas Daniloff, Professor at North Eastern University, who notes: "As far as I knew, they have also settled in Chicago, Seattle [and] New York"³⁶.

It is plausible to argue, therefore, that whereas Cold War alignments may have established a modicum for positive Chechen perceptions of America, the restrictive immigration policy targeting North Caucasians at the same time undermined this foundation. This reality fostered the evolution of mistrust in Chechen-American relations that could potentially be exploited by disillusioned Americans of Chechen descent seeking to attach ideological meaning to their individual predicaments.

³² Bishop Tricia, 'Chechens in U.S. feel shame, fear over Boston bombing,' *The Baltimore Sun*, 28th April 2013. Available at: http://articles.baltimoresun.com/2013-04-28/news/bs-md-local-chechens-20130428_1_chechens-boston-marathon-caucasus. Accessed on 27/02/2015; Gray Rosie, 'Chechen Community in the US: Tiny, Isolated And Disorganized,' *Buzz Feed News*, 21st April 2013. Available at: <http://www.buzzfeed.com/rosiegray/chechen-community-in-the-us-tiny-isolated-and-disorganized#.mdwN0Jo671>. Accessed on 27/02/2015; Schreck Carl, *op. cit.*

³³ Upton Jodi and Overberg Paul, *op. cit.*

³⁴ Bishop Tricia, *op. cit.*

³⁵ Upton Jodi and Overberg Paul, *op. cit.*

³⁶ Schreck Carl, *op. cit.*; Upton Jodi and Overberg Paul, *op. cit.*

Social Environment

Since Boston was not only home to Tamerlan and Dzhokhar but is also reputed to host the largest number of Chechens in the U.S, it is important to examine the kind of social infrastructure that makes it an attractive destination for this segment of American society and also establish whether there are certain social integration gaps in its social settings that might have fed into the Tsarnaevs' wider web of discontentment.

There are conflicting population figures for the Chechen American community in Boston. Whereas Danilooff estimates the population to be between 20 and 30, Howard puts the figure at 40³⁷. Other commentators on the Chechen-American diaspora estimate the population in terms of families: Both Fatima Tlisova, a Voice of America (VOA) journalist and Magomed Imakaev, a Chechen immigrant, put the figure at 5-6 families, with Imakaev asserting that "It is less than 50 people"³⁸. From the above statistics, it is possible to deduce that there are at least between 20 and 50 Chechen-Americans in the Boston area. Whether one adopts the 'floor' or 'ceiling' figure of these population estimates, Chechens are a comparatively very tiny community in Boston.

In terms of settlement history, Boston should not have created a foundation for alienation for the Tsarnaevs. Historically, it has been a favourite settlement destination for Chechens. For example, when Akhmadov was granted political asylum in the U.S, he resided in the home of Khassan Baiev (a best-selling Chechen-American author and medical doctor) in Boston³⁹. Thus, aside from settling in an area with the highest number of co-ethnics, the Tsarnaevs were in social proximity to both prospective Chechen and Chechen-American role models, which, to a certain extent, should have dampened any emerging feelings of hopelessness and alienation.

The cosmopolitan urban settings of their precincts of residence should equally have eased their social integration. The Tsarnaev family lived along Norfolk Street which is proximate to Prospect Street, Cambridge Street and Brighton Avenue. This residential precinct is not only multi-cultural but it also has the social infrastructure that should have assisted Tamerlan and Dzhokhar to fit into American society. Cambridge Street, for example, is populated by Americans originally from Portugal and the Azores⁴⁰. The conglomeration and mixing of people from different cultural backgrounds in this precinct should have offered the Tsarnaevs an opportunity to break out of an in-ward looking Chechen diasporan cocoon, in the event they had been caught up in one.

It is common, in many cases of immigration, that successful social integration is not necessarily synonymous with total social assimilation. An immigrant group could embrace its new host society without abandoning all its cultural traditions and practices. In this connection, the Boston area where the Tsarnaevs resided

³⁷ Schreck Carl, *op. cit.*

³⁸ Gray Rosie, *op. cit.*; Schreck Carl, *op. cit.*

³⁹ Schreck Carl, *op. cit.*

⁴⁰ McKelvey Tara, 'Disbelief in home district of bomb suspect Dzhokhar Tsarnaev,' *BBC News US & Canada*, 20th April 2013. Available at: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-22229176>. Accessed on 24/02/2015.

had the needed social infrastructure to accommodate such a scenario. Amongst others, the Boston area has Islamic institutions like the Cambridge and Masjid al Qur'aan mosques where Tamerlan and Dzhokhar could have kept in touch with their faith; and the area also has the Ali Bara market which, as a sign on its front window indicates, "sells chicken hand-slaughtered by Muslims according to Islamic law"⁴¹. These social facilities, per se, should have nipped in the bud any start-up perceptions of American society as 'inherently' hostile to Muslims, a reason alluded to by Dzhokhar as motivation for the attacks.

Boston also provided the Tsarnaevs with the social infrastructure to accommodate their financial means (in the event they were living on the margins) and also engage in career pursuits that would keep them in touch with the Chechen martial ethos, if they so wished to adopt it. Apart from having Troy Anthony's Barber Shop, restaurants, shops and a fish market, Cambridge Street, for example has a store for second-hand items where those presumably living on the financial margins can make purchases. If the stereotypical perspective of Chechens as a martial nationality is true, then Boston also offered Tamerlan and Dzhokhar a facility where they could have peacefully exerted their 'in-born' attribute. Their residential precinct is home to the Wai Kru gymnasium where Tamerlan worked out⁴².

The dodgy dimension of this residential precinct, though, manifests in its propensity to attract Russian related criminal activity. Only prior to the attacks, it had been discovered that Russian spies, Donald Heathfield and Tracey Lee Ann Foley, had lived there⁴³. While these individuals could have conducted their espionage in other parts of the U.S, the fact that they selected this area points to the possibility that it had the requisite social infrastructure to conceal their illegal activities. As to whether this factor partly accounts for Tamerlan's alleged criminal stint is something worthy researching in future⁴⁴.

On balance, though, it could be asserted that the Boston social environment is largely suited for the integration of Chechens into American society. While this area has the 'ideal' pillars for this purpose, however, the smoothness of social integration itself depends on the actual behaviour of the Chechen community relative to this social infrastructure. This is the subject of the ensuing section.

Social Integration

The Chechen American community exhibits remarkable contradictions of social integration. Whereas Chechen Americans neither live in compact communities

⁴¹ *Ibidem*; McPhee Michele, 'Family Matters: Dzhokhar Tsarnaev and the Women in His Life,' *Newsweek*, 16th October 2014. Available at: <http://www.newsweek.com/2014/10/24/women-behind-boston-marathon-bombing-suspects-277760.html>. Accessed on 24/02/2015 .

⁴² McKelvey Tara, *op. cit.*

⁴³ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁴ Boston Herald.com, 'Marathon bombing defense likely to focus on dead brother,' *Boston Herald*. Available at: http://www.bostonherald.com/news_opinion/local_coverage/2015/02/marathon_bombing_defense_likely_to_focus_on_dead_brother_0. Accessed on 17/02/2015; Memmott Mark, 'Court Papers Link One Tsarnaev Brother To Previous Murders,' *The Two-Way, NPR*, 23rd October 2013. Available at: <http://www.npr.org/blogs/thetwo-way/2013/10/23/240239111/court-papers-link-one-tsarnaev-brother-to-previous-murders>. Accessed on 17/02/2015.

nor maintain ethnic solidarity in the U.S (which should have been a sign of successful social integration), they are at the same time very nostalgic about their ancestral roots. This discrepancy constrains U.S authorities in gauging the actual depth of social integration of this segment of American society. And where individuals from this community choose to go down the path of political violence or criminality, the authorities are unlikely to nip their activities in the bud.

Unlike some minorities, Chechens do not maintain ethnic solidarity in Boston. According to Tlisova: "The Boston Chechen community wasn't very much connected with each other. They know about each other, but I don't think they are close. They care for themselves mostly, and are isolated from the society, not only from the other Chechens"⁴⁵.

This observation throws a spanner in the wheel of existing perspectives on the collective character of Chechens: If historically, they come across as people who are fiercely conscious about their ethno-nationalist roots, then they should be networking socially. Existing evidence shows that this is not something they do.

Aside from being dispersed across the U.S, Chechen Americans are not linked by any representative body which should have addressed the above organizational need. The only known attempt at social networking was initiated by Albert Digaev, a Chechen American and founder of Amina.com, a social media website which allowed Chechens in different parts of the world to interact online. This initiative itself hit a dead end in 2004/2005 after the posting of photos of some girls in compromising situations led to them committing suicide and the Chechen government instituting a tight social media monitoring regimen⁴⁶.

Logically, the individualistic approach to social interaction would have been an indication of 'successful' integration of Chechens into American society. The assumption here would have been that the relocation of Chechens from their ancestral homeland (where Chechen ethno-nationalist sentiments were rife) to a foreign land (where those sentiments were not sustained) had broken Chechen ethno-nationalism to a point where Chechens neither cared about their immediate co-ethnics nor about developments in Chechnya.

While the above assumption may hold true with regard to Chechen-to-Chechen interaction in the U.S, it is unsustainable when it comes to the connection between Chechen Americans and their ancestral homeland. This segment of American society is very nostalgic about its ancestral roots. In this respect, Alsan Doukaev, a Radio Free Europe journalist, observes that while Chechen Americans do not stick together, "...they don't lose touch with their homeland"⁴⁷.

This observation is supported by the interior and exterior design of Imakaev's home in Boston. According to Carl Schrek: "Traditional ram's wool hats hang on the walls; a computer monitor glows with the green of the Chechen flag; and the sapling of a medlar, an ancient fruit-bearing tree rare in America but common in the north Caucasus, awaits summer in a backyard garden"⁴⁸.

⁴⁵ Gray Rosie, *op. cit.*

⁴⁶ *Ibidem.*

⁴⁷ *Ibidem.*

⁴⁸ Schreck Carl, *op. cit.*

The above description points to a deliberate attempt at maintaining a strong cultural connection with Chechnya. Imakaev, who immigrated to Boston as a war refugee in 2004, confirms this deduction: “It (the fruit tree) makes me feel at home, because that’s the tree originally that I grew up around, the tree that I used to see everywhere in Chechnya when I went around the woods as a kid”⁴⁹.

From the above exposition, it could be deduced that the relocation of Chechens to the U.S precipitated a double-edged social integration scenario where on one hand, the absence of strong communal ties would facilitate the ‘successful’ integration of some Chechens into American society; while on the other hand, ‘inherent’ nostalgia about their ancestral roots would potentially predispose others to strongly identify with Chechnya. The ‘inherent’ resilience of Chechens (embedded in their national character) would play a critical role in whichever of the two directions Chechen Americans headed. For those who would choose to participate in the ‘liberation’ of their homeland, their ‘inherent’ attributes as good fighters would not be in question given the historical marketability of Chechens as a martial nationality.

Chechens who would choose to embrace the U.S would also have the benefit of tapping into the rich reservoir of resilience inherent in their collective character in order to fit into American society. Citing Imakaev, Schrek underscores this point: “Many of the Chechens who have settled in Boston and other U.S cities seek out manual jobs that allow them to capitalize on the resourcefulness and tenacity acquired while growing up amid destruction and harsh climes in Chechnya”⁵⁰.

However, in terms of social class, given that the majority of this community would be located in the lower stratum of the American social structure, the propensity for some Chechen Americans being alienated and gravitating towards Chechen ethno-nationalism (as a way of attaching meaning to their individual predicaments) would not be ruled out.

Conclusion

It is important to note, therefore, that given the lack of ethnic solidarity among Chechen Americans, it is challenging to accurately gauge the extent to which some of the broader aspects of the Chechen national character have shaped them as a collective unit. In order to effectively assess susceptibility to adopting a siege mentality; the emergence of Islam as a doctrine binding the Chechen American diaspora; and the significance of the Chechen martial streak as a tool for pursuing collective objectives, it is imperative that the Chechen community in the U.S be a relatively tight-knit unit – which is not the case.

In the foregoing analysis, however, it has been possible to determine the impact of the Chechen national character upon the work rate of Chechens in the U.S because, unlike the rest, assessment of this variable is not overly contingent on

⁴⁹ *Ibidem.*

⁵⁰ *Ibidem.*

group solidarity. Even while operating at an individual level, it is relatively possible to assess whether Chechen Americans at work reflect the wider Chechen national character. The fact that Tamerlan and Dzhokhar went on to pursue martial sporting careers (boxing and wrestling respectively) and puritanically embraced Islam as a means to redefining their identity cannot be underestimated. These individual career attributes resonate with the evolution of the wider Chechen national character that is synonymous with toughness, resilience and reliance on Islam for ideological direction.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Associated Press and Daily Mail Reporter 2014, 'The face of evil: Young, red-bearded Chechen who has become the most recognizable commander of ISIS terror group,' *Mail online*, 2nd July 2014. Available at: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2677683/The-face-evil-Young-red-bearded-Chechen-recognisable-commander-Isis-terror-group.html>. Accessed on 09/04/2015;
- BBC, 'Boston Bombings: Suspects' Chechen Connections,' *BBC News US & Canada*, 22nd April 2013. Available at: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-22229442>. Accessed on 17/02/2015;
- Bishop, Tricia, 'Chechens in U.S. feel shame, fear over Boston bombing,' *The Baltimore Sun*, 28th April 2013. Available at: http://articles.baltimoresun.com/2013-04-28/news/bs-md-local-chechens-20130428_1_chechens-boston-marathon-caucasus. Accessed on 27/02/2015;
- Boston Herald.com, 'Marathon bombing defense likely to focus on dead brother,' *Boston Herald*. Available at: http://www.bostonherald.com/news_opinion/local_coverage/2015/02/marathon_bombing_defense_likely_to_focus_on_dead_brother_0. Accessed on 17/02/2015;
- Chossudovsky, Michel, BOSTON TRUTH: The 'Chechen Connection,' Al Qaeda and the Boston Marathon Bombings, *Global Research*, 22nd April 2013. Available at: <http://www.globalresearch.ca/boston-truth-the-chechen-connection-al-qaeda-and-the-boston-marathon-bombings/5332337>. Accessed on 23/02/2015;
- CNN, 'Boston Marathon Terror Attack Fast Facts,' *CNN Library*, 17th January 2015. Available at: <http://edition.cnn.com/2013/06/03/us/boston-marathon-terror-attack-fast-facts/>. Accessed on 17/02/2015;
- Fitzgerald, Andy, 'Why won't the west call out Saudi Arabia for persecution of democratic activists?' *The Guardian*, 29th December 2013. Available at: <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/dec/29/saudi-arabia-us-human-rights-persecution-activists>. Accessed on 03/04/2014;
- Global Research, 'Sleeping with the Devil: How US and Saudi Backing of Al Qaeda Led to 9/11', *Global Research*, Center for Research on Globalization. Available at: <http://www.globalresearch.ca/sleeping-with-the-devil-how-u-s-and-saudi-backing-of-al-qaeda-led-to-911/5303313>. Accessed on 03/04/2014;
- Goltz, Thomas, 'Is there a Chechen Connection to the Boston Bombings,' *The Nation*, 13th May 2013. Available at: <http://www.thenation.com/article/174026/there-chechen-connection-boston-bombings#>. Accessed on 25/02/2015;
- Gray, Rosie, 'Chechen Community in the US: Tiny, Isolated and Disorganized,' *Buzz Feed News*, 21st April 2013. Available at: <http://www.buzzfeed.com/rosiegray/chechen-community-in-the-us-tiny-isolated-and-disorganized#.mdwN0Jo671>. Accessed on 27/02/2015;
- Kordunsky, Anna, 'Boston Bombing Suspects Put Chechnya in Spotlight,' *National Geographic*, 19th April 2013. Available at: <http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2013/13/130419-chechnya-russia-caucuses-boston-marathon-bombing-suspects-world-militants/>. Accessed on 25/02/2015;

- Loffe, Julia, 'The Boston Bombing Suspects were Reared by Both Chechnya and America,' *New Republic*, 19th April 2013. Available at: <http://www.newrepublic.com/article/112971/boston-marathon-bombers-brothers-chechnya-forged-america>. Accessed on 25/02/2015;
- Mashal, Mujib 2012, 'Hekmatyar's never-ending Afghan war,' *Aljazeera*, 28th January 2012. Available at: <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2012/01/201212614551208744.html>. Accessed on 03/04/2014;
- McKelvey, Tara, 'Disbelief in home district of bomb suspect Dzhokhar Tsarnaev,' *BBC News US & Canada*, 20th April 2013. Available at: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-22229176>. Accessed on 24/02/2015;
- McPhee, Michele, 'Family Matters: Dzhokhar Tsarnaev and the Women in His Life,' *Newsweek*, 16th October 2014. Available at: <http://www.newsweek.com/2014/10/24/women-behind-boston-marathon-bombing-suspects-277760.html>. Accessed on 24/02/2015;
- Memmott, Mark, 'Court Papers Link One Tsarnaev Brother To Previous Murders,' *The Two-Way, NPR*, 23rd October 2013. Available at: <http://www.npr.org/blogs/thetwo-way/2013/10/23/240239111/court-papers-link-one-tsarnaev-brother-to-previous-murders>. Accessed on 17/02/2015;
- Muskus, Jeff, 'Osama bin Laden Dead: The Rise, Fall and Legacy of America's Most Wanted Terrorist', *The World Post*, 2nd May 2011. Available at: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/05/02/osama-bin-laden-killed-legacy_n_856138.html. Accessed on 03/04/2014;
- Parker, Diantha and Bidgood Jess, 'Boston Marathon Bombing: What We Know,' *The New York Times*, 1st January 2015. Available at: http://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/02/us/boston-marathon-bombings-trial-what-you-need-to-know.html?_r=0. Accessed on 17/02/2015;
- Schreck, Carl, 'In Small Boston Diaspora, Echoes of Chechnya,' *RIA Novosti, Sputnik International*, 23rd April 2013. Available at: <http://sputniknews.com/analysis/20130423/180799181.html>. Accessed on 27/02/2015;
- Upton, Jodi and Overberg Paul, 'Few Chechen immigrants make it to US,' *USA Today*, 20th April 2013. Available at: <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2013/04/19/chechens-immigrants-us-population/2097065/>. Accessed on 27/02/2015;
- Vancauwenberghe, Nadja, 'First Take: Don't blame Chechnya for Boston Bombings,' *USA Today*, 21st April 2013. Available at: <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2013/04/20/chechnya-boston-bombings-first-take/2099255/>. Accessed on 25/02/2015.