

# Muskingum professor shares insight into Boston bombers

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Reports about the circumstances surrounding possible planning of the Boston Marathon bombings continued to evolve — and surprise — two weeks after a pair of explosions killed three and injured more than 200.

Over the weekend came news that one of the Boston Marathon bombing suspects had discussed jihad (holy war) in a telephone conversation with his mother.

On the heels of that revelation was the news that authorities were seeking “persons of interest” in the United State who may have had knowledge of the bombing plan.

Those reports came after *The Jeffersonian* had spoken with Dr. Richard Arnold late last week. At that point, the assumption was that the brothers suspected of the bombings had become “self-radicalized” domestically.

Dr. Arnold, an assistant professor of political science at Muskingum University, has rare expertise with respect to the national

background of the brothers.

The suspects, native Chechens, Dzhohkar and the late Tamerlan Tsarnaev, emigrated from the Caucasus region of Russia — an area quite familiar to Dr. Arnold, who specialized in western and eastern Europe, including Russia. (Arnold’s doctoral dissertation explored manifestations of ethnic violence as well as neo-Nazi violence in the Russian Federation.)

Although weekend reports suggested others besides the brothers may have had a direct or indirect hand in the bombings, no hard evidence had surfaced to indicate that that is the case.

Working with the information available on Thursday afternoon, Dr. Arnold leaned toward an explanation centered squarely on the suspects.

“In what appears to be the case at the moment, the reasons for radicalization appear to be much more personal than they are overtly political,” he said. “And cer-

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tainly [they are] not connected to [succession] in the north Caucasus.”

Arnold explained that, in recent years, citizens in regions in the Caucasus area had fought to separate themselves from Russia.

Initially, that separatist movement had been a secular, nationalistic movement. However, more recently it had become more of an Islamic movement.

The bombings “possibly are connected to radical Islam in the north Caucasus,” Arnold said. “But, most likely it is connected to radicalization here in America.”

Authorities believe the older brother, Tamerlan,

who died in a shootout with police, took the lead, swaying Dzhohkar to the plot.

Tamerlan had expressed his discontent with American life in years past, claiming that he didn’t have a “single American friend.”

Rather than a political agenda, could his purported radicalization have been merely an excuse for his general discontent?

“That would seem to be an appropriate insight but for the fact that this guy was a family man,” Arnold said. “He actually had a wife, an American born girl from the suburbs who converted to Islam. And he had a daughter. He had a life. He was fairly young at 27.

“Those aren’t the people we normally associ-

ate with becoming radicalized in the fashion we saw on the 15th.”

With respect to the country defending itself against similar attacks in the future, much will depend upon what is learned during the course of the investigation, Arnold said.

“If it really is the case that people are self-radicalizing on the Internet and learning how to make bombs on the Internet, there really isn’t that much that can be done apart from the notion of winning the war of ideas — that hackneyed phrase that we constantly return to.”

Arnold sees parallels in the Boston bombings to the 2005 bombers in Great Britain.

Tamerlan reportedly was motivated by his

displeasure with the American interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Similarly, the British Muslims in the 2005 bombings were radicalized by the presence of British armies in Islamic lands, Arnold said.

“They attacked their home country — not a host country because they were actually born in Britain.”

It is going to be very difficult to mount a defense such attacks, Arnold said.

“There are not even provisions to stop psychologically disturbed Americans from getting weapons,” he said. “So there is almost certainly going to be no provisions to stop Islamic terrorists.”

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