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Studies in Conflict & Terrorism

ISSN: 1057-610X (Print) 1521-0731 (Online) Journal homepage: http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/uter20

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To cite this article: Ramón Spaaij & Mark S. Hamm (2015) Endgame? Sports Events as Symbolic Targets in Lone Wolf Terrorism, Studies in Conflict & Terrorism, 38:12, 1022-1037, DOI: 10.1080/1057610X.2015.1076695

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2015.1076695

Accepted author version posted online: 29 Jul 2015.
Published online: 11 Sep 2015.

Studies in Conflict & Terrorism, 38:1022–1037, 2015

ISSN: 1057-610X print / 1521-0731 online
DOI: 10.1080/1057610X.2015.1076695

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Endgame? Sports Events as Symbolic Targets in Lone Wolf Terrorism

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This article explores how terrorists acting alone or in small groups have used sports events as symbolic targets in their performance of terrorism. Drawing on a comparative analysis of the attacks on the 1996 Atlanta Olympic Games and the 2013 Boston Marathon, it is argued that terrorist target selection of major sports events should be understood in relation to the grievances and desires of the perpetrators. The article finds that rather than being the primary target of their attacks, sports events are among a broader range of densely crowded spaces that terrorist actors may seek to target as part of their violent struggle against their adversaries. The findings are contextualized in relation to broader patterns and trends in lone wolf terrorism, including the significance of a copycat phenomenon and inspiration effect.

Sports-related terrorism permeates American popular culture. In the 1995 action film *Sudden Death*, directed by Peter Hyams, terrorism invades the sports arena in a dramatic fashion "loaded with jaw-dropping stunts and special effects."[1] In the film, a terrorist group led by a disgruntled former U.S. government employee has the now-demolished Civic Arena in Pittsburgh wired with explosives during a Stanley Cup Finals game between the Pittsburgh Penguins and the Chicago Blackhawks. The group enters the owner's box and holds the U.S. vice president and other VIPs hostage, while threatening to

Received 11 June 2015; accepted 21 June 2015.
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assassinate the vice president and blow up the entire arena, filled with 17,000 ice hockey fans. Seventeen years on, Pittsburgh's Heinz Field, home to the Pittsburgh Steelers and University of Pittsburgh Panthers American football teams, served as the setting for an explosion scene in the film *The Dark Knight Rises*, portraying a bomb attack masterminded by Bane (played by Tom Hardy), "a terrorist in mentality as well as brutal action."[2]

The interplay between sport and terrorism is not purely fictional. Terrorist attacks on sports events are relatively rare compared to attacks on other types of targets.[3] Yet, the infamous events at the 1972 Munich Olympic Games, the bomb attack at Atlanta's Centennial Olympic Park in 1996, Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (ETA)'s car bomb near the Santiago Bernabeu stadium hours before Real Madrid's Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) Champions League semi-final against FC Barcelona in 2002, the suicide bombing at the start of the Sri Lankan Marathon of 2008, the attack on the Sri Lankan cricket team bus in Pakistan in 2009, and, in 2013, the bomb explosions at the Boston Marathon; all of these are very public examples of the interplay between sport and terrorism.[4] Most of these incidents feature in *TIME* magazine's "Top 10 Worst Sport Terrorism Attacks."[5] In addition, there have been a number of disrupted or aborted terrorist plots targeting sports venues worldwide, such as the suspected plot by members of The Ummah to bomb the 2006 Super Bowl in Detroit.[6] High-profile terrorist attacks that were not sports-related, such as 9/11 and the 2008 Mumbai attacks (involving a series of twelve coordinated shooting and bombing attacks lasting four days), have also left their mark on the sports environment as they further sensitize sports governing bodies to the need for robust security and risk management planning. The Mumbai attacks, for example, triggered extraordinary security measures at the cricket match between India and England in Chennai in December 2008.[7]

Sports events appear on Al Qaeda's list of targets. In 2012, Abu Mus'ab al-Suri, a leading Al Qaeda propagandist, wrote an article on "the most important enemy targets" that appeared in *Inspire*, an online English-language magazine produced by Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP).[8] Al-Suri contends that civilians should be targeted "when responding to a brutal practice carried out by America and her allied forces." "This is done by targeting human crowds in order to inflict maximum human losses," he writes. "This is very easy since there are numerous such targets such as *crowded sports arenas*, annual social events, large international exhibitions, crowded market-places, skyscrapers, crowded buildings" (emphasis added).[9] A 2014 issue of *Inspire* outlines several specific targets in the United States, United Kingdom, and France that are deemed suitable for a car bomb attack. The article asserts that "Choosing the place and time is a crucial factor to success in any operation" and urges perpetrators to "look for a dense crowd."[10] In the United States, recommended targets for car bomb attacks include "tennis stadiums; they are visited by thousands of people, and high profile people, especially the US Open." In the United Kingdom "there are many times and places to be targeted," the article contends: "You have the soccer (football) stadiums especially during Premier League and FA Cup matches. They have worldwide life [*sic*] media coverage. The best time is after the final whistle, when huge crowds leave the stadium and celebrate around the entrances." Horseracing events and tennis tournaments are also explicitly mentioned in the article: "In the beginning of summer, we have Cheltenham, and the end of summer we have Epsom, whereby horse races are attended by thousands from around the kingdom including the Queen. There are also Tennis tournaments."[11]

Collectively, these attacks, plots, and threats have fueled political and policy concerns about the potential vulnerability of major sports events, giving rise to increased counterterrorism, security, and risk management activity. Large and dense gatherings of members of the public are seen as being attractive to terrorists who seek to inflict maximum damage or to maximize publicity for their campaigns. Hallmark sports events, which draw athletes and spectators from all over the world, provide a setting where there are large numbers of people gathered in high density, often with abundant media crews and vivid media imagery that will amplify the focus on and salience of the event.[12] Hence, industry leaders perceive terrorism as "a foreseeable threat" to sports facilities and consider it "critical for those who operate sport arenas and stadiums to develop and implement risk management strategies aimed at reducing the risks associated with terrorism."[13]

Authorities have long feared that sports venues could be vulnerable as soft targets for terrorist attacks. In 2002, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) issued a vague alert warning that people with suspected ties to terrorist groups had used the Internet to access information on sports stadiums in the United States and Europe, including the RCA Dome in Indianapolis and the Edward Jones Dome in St. Louis.[14] In response to this and other perceived threats, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security developed a national planning scenarios document to cover possible terrorist attacks specifically aimed at sports arenas.[15] In late 2014, the FBI announced that it would be holding active shooter training drills at sports stadiums to prepare for what was a growing concern for law enforcement. A similar FBI program is intended to be rolled out for operators of large sports stadiums across the United States.[16] Meanwhile, sports event organizers, venue operators, and law enforcement have introduced more rigorous security measures. For example, after the 2013 Boston Marathon bombings additional and unprecedented security measures became a priority for marathon organizers in cities around the world, from New York City to Tokyo and Sydney.

Spurred on by these events, a body of scholarship has emerged that examines the multifaceted relationship between sport and terrorism. Within this literature, four main areas of research focus can be identified: spectators' and venue operators' perceptions of the risk of terrorism;[17] current and "best" practices in security and risk management at sports venues;[18] the discursive/media framing of sports events as targets of terrorism;[19] and finally, counterterrorism and the social construction of risk and fear.[20] While this body of research has progressed our understanding of key aspects of the relationship between sport and terrorism, it has tended to study these issues from afar, focusing predominantly on the media, sport facility management, and counterterrorism efforts.

This article takes a different approach: it seeks to better understand the sport–terrorism interaction through taking into account the *subjectivity* of the terrorist actors themselves, and not only their actual deeds or the responses to their deeds. In so doing, the article builds on Zulaika and Douglass's argument that we ought to take terrorist subjects themselves as "a primary and autonomous locus of investigation."[21] Moreover, the article is informed by an awareness of the social transformation in terrorist actors in the West. Acts of terrorism are increasingly being undertaken by individuals or small groups (duos, trios) rather than large networks or groups.[22] Yi refers to this as "atomized terror," attacks perpetrated by isolated individuals.[23] A key feature of this type of terrorism is its operational independence: the perpetrators are not directly linked to any extremist group, and the plot is conceived and directed by the individuals without any direct outside command or direction. While their attacks are politically orientated, they also reveal a highly personal, idiosyncratic motivation; that is, a combination of personal and political grievances.[24]

The issue of terrorists acting alone or in small groups particularly concerns authorities due to the perception that these actors have a critical advantage in avoiding detection before they strike. Thus, U.S. Secretary of Homeland Security Janet Napolitano proclaimed that the risk of "lone wolf" attackers was on the rise. "There's been a lot of evolution over the past three years," she explained in late 2011. "The thing that's most noticeable to me is the growth of the lone wolf," the single attacker who is not part of a larger global network.[25] Three years later, U.S. Attorney-General Eric Holder voiced a similar sentiment when he stated that the lone wolf terrorist was "something that frankly keeps me up at night," and "the kind of thing that our government is focused on doing all that we can . . . to try to make sure that it does not happen."[26]

Those responsible for securing major sports events perceive the threat in a similar manner. For example, Brazil's counterterrorism strategy for the 2014 Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) World Cup focused explicitly on the danger from lone wolves. Brazil's counterterrorism taskforce stated that the most likely terrorist attack scenario was that of an extremist acting without connection to a known terrorist group. "This is the most difficult kind of attack to track or predict," it confessed.[27] A massive security operation was staged to ensure security and protection in the host cities. Brazil reportedly spent nearly a billion dollars in security costs, five times what South Africa spent during the 2010 World Cup.[28]

This article explores how terrorists acting alone or in small groups have used sports events as symbolic targets in their performance of terrorism. Terrorism is a performative, communicative act. Terrorist targets are often selected because of their symbolic value and the impact they will have on affected audiences.[29] Terrorism is symbolic in that it is "intended to illustrate or refer to something beyond the immediate target," conveying a primarily political message.[30] Put differently, terrorism is "designed to have far-reaching psychological effects beyond the immediate victim(s) or object of the terrorist attack. It is meant to instil fear within, and thereby intimidate, a wider 'target audience.'"[31] Most targets symbolize, at some level, the moral righteousness of the terrorist's cause and the perceived evil of the enemy they are fighting. In what follows, we address this issue through a comparative analysis of attacks on two major sports events in the United States: the 1996 Atlanta Olympic Games and the 2013 Boston Marathon. Whereas the first attack was carried out by a single individual, Eric Rudolph, the second attack was perpetrated by an autonomous dyad—the brothers Tamerlan and Dzhokhar Tsarnaev. The analysis will focus on how the attacks were formulated and how the sports events were constructed as symbolic or representative targets. These questions will be examined in context, with particular reference to the grievances and desires of the perpetrators.

The 1996 Summer Olympic Games

The Atlanta Olympic Games attack on 27 July 1996 was one of the largest-scale terrorist operations ever to be carried out by a lone individual, killing two and injuring more than 110 other people. It was one of four separate bombing attacks perpetrated by Eric Rudolph between 1996 and 1998, a campaign that mortally wounded three people and injured another 117 in total. Rudolph was driven by a complex set of overlapping motives. While Rudolph was undoubtedly a racist and antigovernment fanatic, the essence of his grievance was anti-abortion absolutism.[32] Rudolph believed that violence was necessary to stop abortion and he justified killing law enforcement officers who defended abortion rights. In an eleven-page statement released after his guilty pleas,

Rudolph described the bombings as being part of a fight "in the defense of the unborn."[33] He also stated his specific purpose in bombing the Atlanta Olympic Games in 1996:

> Under the protection and auspices of the regime in Washington millions of people came out [to] celebrate the ideals of global socialism. Multinational corporations spent billions of dollars, and Washington organized an army of security to protect these best of all games. Even though the conception and purpose of the so-called Olympic movement is to promote the values of global socialism, as perfectly expressed in the song "Imagine" by John Lennon, which was the theme of the 1996 games—even though the purpose of the Olympics is to promote these despicable ideals, the purpose of the attack on July 27th was *to confound, anger and embarrass the Washington government in the eyes of the world for its abominable sanctioning of abortion on demand* (emphasis added).

While some analysts have called Rudolph's justification for his target selection a "leap of logic,"[34] his statement indicates that, in his own mind, the Olympics were not the ultimate target, but rather he perceived the event as being representative, or symbolic, of an evil government. For Rudolph, the Centennial Olympic Games were an appropriate target because they brought together "millions of people" and attracted global media attention, meaning a successful attack would surely "confound, anger and embarrass" the federal government. His sense of moral righteousness is highlighted in his characterization of the federal government as lacking the "legitimacy and moral authority to govern" due to its legalization of abortion. Rudolph continued: "There is no more legitimate reason to my knowledge, for renouncing allegiance to and if necessary using force to drag this monstrosity of a government down to the dust where it belongs."

Rudolph's plan was "to force the cancellation of the Games, or at least create a state of insecurity to empty the streets around the venues and thereby eat into the vast amounts of money invested." To achieve this goal, he thought about attacking the power grid around Atlanta. He writes that because he could not get access to the high explosives he required for this purpose, he settled on the idea of using five improvised explosive devices

> . . .placed one at a time on successive days throughout the Olympic schedule, each preceded by a forty to fifty minute warning given to 911. The location and the time of detonation was to be given, and the intent was to thereby clear each of the areas, leaving only uniformed arms-carrying government personnel exposed to potential injury.

While Rudolph preferred "innocent civilians" not to be hurt, he knew his bombs "could potentially lead to a disaster wherein many civilians could be killed or wounded." And so it unfolded.

The Attack and Its Aftermath

The 1996 Summer Olympic Games took place a little more than one year after Timothy McVeigh killed 168 people with an ammonium-nitrate fertilizer bomb in Oklahoma City. Security at the Atlanta venue was therefore at a heightened state of readiness with some 30,000 local, state, and federal agents and private security guards assigned to protect the

games, which were expected to draw a crowd of 85,000 spectators each day. Tactical units, bomb technicians, rescue squads, and other specialists were on hand to provide around-the-clock security. There was one area where security was not as tight: the 21-acre Centennial Park adjacent to the Olympics Stadium. Designated the "town square" of the Olympics, the city park offered restaurants, beer gardens, and free nightly concerts for visitors to the Olympics. Centennial Park was not an official Olympic venue and authorities wanted it to be as open and welcoming as possible. A temporary fence was erected around the perimeter, with entrances monitored by security officers and closed-circuit television (CCTV). There were no metal detectors or compulsory backpack searches in Centennial Park, despite the objections of some law enforcement officials.[35]

Shortly after midnight on 27 July, 30-year-old Eric Rudolph managed to slip past hundreds of security officers and enter Centennial Park. An estimated 50,000 people were in Centennial Park, dancing, drinking, and visiting in the late summer night. Rudolph carried a heavy green military backpack containing a pipe bomb. He sat down on a park bench near an NBC-TV sound and video tower. Rudolph placed the backpack under the bench and walked away. Moments later, a drunken teenager spotted the backpack and began tugging at it and tipped it over. He considered stealing the backpack but found it too heavy to carry so he left it behind. Richard Jewell, a 33-year-old private security guard, was next to see the backpack. Suspicious, he called a nearby guard from the Georgia Bureau of Investigation who in turn radioed bomb technicians and asked them to come to area. Jewell then evacuated people from the area to make room for the bomb techs, an act that would ultimately save many people from injury or death.

At roughly 12:30 a.m., Rudolph went to a phone booth and called 911. After assuring that the operator could understand him, Rudolph began to deliver a warning that there was a bomb in Centennial Park. Yet the operator hung up on Rudolph before he could finish his statement. Rudolph could not contain himself. Assuming that the call had been traced, he went looking for another phone booth and located one a block away. His second 911 call was made at 12:58 a.m. "There is a bomb in Centennial Park," said Rudolph. "You have 30 minutes. We defy your. . .," but the operator cut him off again.[36] This was followed by a stunning display of police incompetence.

The 911 operator first attempted to call the Atlanta Police Department Command Center (ACC), but she got a busy signal. After several minutes, the operator was able to get a police dispatcher on the line and this exchange ensued.[37]

> "You know the address to Centennial Park?" asked the operator.
> "Girl, don't ask me to lie to you," joked the dispatcher.
> "I tried to call ACC, but ain't nobody answering the phone. And I just got this man telling me about there's a bomb set to go off in 30 minutes in Centennial Park," said the operator before explaining that she had tried to get the computerized communications system to recognize Centennial Park, but was unsuccessful when she typed it in.
> "Oh Lord, child. One minute, one minute . . . Centennial Park. You put it in and it won't go in?" asked the dispatcher.
> "No, unless I'm spelling Centennial wrong . . . How are we spelling Centennial?" asked the operator.
> "C-E-N-T-E-N-N-I . . . How do *you* spell Centennial?" asked the dispatcher.
> "I'm spelling it right. It ain't taking. . ." said the operator.
> "Wait a minute. That's the regular Olympics Stadium, right?" asked the dispatcher.

After several more minutes the operator located a street address for Centennial Park and entered it into the system, which alerted the Atlanta Police Department to Rudolph's bomb threat. Unfortunately, however, there was no direct line of communication set up between the Atlanta Police Department and the command center at Centennial Park. Due to this abject failure in local police communications, officers on the ground at Centennial Park never got the warning.

Rudolph's motive for the warning calls was anything but altruistic. By broadcasting his intent to bomb Centennial Park, Rudolph assumed that police would clear the area of citizens, leaving only police in direct proximity of the blast zone. Rudolph's aim was to kill as many police officers as possible.

In Centennial Park, the bomb's timing device was ticking toward ignition inside the backpack as two technicians knelt over it looking for booby traps. Finding none, an officer inspected the contents of the backpack with a flashlight. He saw wires, a plastic container, and the metal end of a pipe. The technicians quickly moved away and called the bomb disposal unit. But it was too late.

At 1:18 a.m., the timing device triggered the explosion, sending thousands of white hot chunks of pipe and nails through the air and into the crowd, killing a woman and injuring 110 others, some grievously. A cameraman racing to the scene collapsed and died of a heart attack.

In another display of gross incompetence, once FBI agents entered the bombing investigation they designated Richard Jewell as a possible suspect based on a "lone bomber" criminal profile.[38] And Rudolph was free to kill. Six months later, around 9 a.m. on 16 January 1997, Rudolph set off a similar bomb outside an abortion clinic in the Atlanta suburb of Sandy Springs. An hour later, he detonated a second bomb next to a dumpster, where he knew police and first responders would gather. In all, six were injured including two federal agents. Just past 10:30 p.m. on 21 February 1997, Rudolph bombed a gay and lesbian nightclub in midtown Atlanta, yet no one was injured. While inspecting the area, an officer found a second bomb hidden near the front entrance, which was rendered safe by a robot. Almost a year later, on the morning of 28 January 1998, Rudolph used a model airplane controller to detonate a bomb outside an abortion clinic in Birmingham, Alabama, killing an off-duty policeman and critically injuring a nurse.

Following the Birmingham bombing, a witness saw a long-haired man leaving the abortion clinic in a Nissan pickup, seemingly uninterested in the mayhem behind him. The witness wrote down the vehicle's license plate number, which police traced to Eric Rudolph. Yet Rudolph had escaped into the vast Appalachian wilderness where he would spend the next five years surviving on wild game, acorns, salamanders, pilfered vegetables, and discarded food. In October 1998, he was named as a suspect in the four Atlanta bombings and the FBI offered a $1 million reward for information leading to his capture. Federal, state, and local law enforcement search teams scoured the wilderness while locals turned Rudolph into a cultural icon. A country song was written about him, "Run, Rudolph, Run." His image appeared on a popular t-shirt, women admitted to having erotic dreams about the fugitive, and he became the subject of widespread Internet traffic.

Rudolph was arrested without incident in Murphy, North Carolina, at 4 a.m. on 31 May 2003 by a rookie police officer behind a Save-A-Lot store. In 2005, Rudolph was sentenced to four consecutive life terms and taken to the Federal Supermax at Florence, Colorado.

The 2013 Boston Marathon

The Boston Marathon is the world's oldest marathon. The event is held on Patriots' Day, celebrated on the third Monday in April to commemorate the 1775 battles of Lexington and Concord that started the American Revolutionary War. At approximately 2:49 that afternoon, with more than a quarter of the 23,000 runners still in the race, two pressure-cooker bombs packed with shrapnel and other materials exploded within seconds of each other near the finish line along Boylston Street. Three spectators died and more than 260 other people were wounded. Among the fatalities were an eight-year-old boy and two women in their twenties.

Dzhokhar Tsarnaev, aged 19 at the time of the bombings, was convicted of all 30 charges including use of a weapon of mass destruction and conspiracy, bombing a place of public use, carjacking resulting in serious bodily injury, and a number of firearms charges. His older brother and accomplice, Tamerlan Tsarnaev, 26, was killed during the police manhunt for the bombers. While some questions still linger, the existing evidence suggests that they were motivated to strike against the United States in part because of its military actions in Iraq and Afghanistan, and what the Tsarnaev brothers saw as a conspiracy against Muslims, a mistreatment that the brothers cared deeply about having grown up as a member of a discriminated minority in a conflict zone.[39] They were immigrants of Chechen heritage, having arrived in the United States in 2002 and 2003, respectively, and settling in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

The extremist beliefs held by the Tsarnaev brothers, and especially Tamerlan, were fueled by *jihadist* rhetoric. Authorities found a collection of *jihadist* videos and other extremist materials, such as several issues of *Inspire* magazine and videos and writings of Anwar al-Awlaki (the Yemen-based radical cleric who was known for spreading Al Qaeda's ideology over the Internet), which began appearing on the Tsarnaevs's computers and other electronic devices for more than a year before the bombings.[40] Yet, at least for Tamerlan, personal grievance also appears to have played a significant role, especially his sense of alienation from American society.[41] According to his lawyers, Dzhokhar experienced a sense of loss following his parents' divorce and their remigration to Dagestan in 2011; however, the actual influence of this personal grief on his engagement with extremist views is contested.[42]

Why, then, did the Tsarnaev brothers target the Boston Marathon, the city's most iconic sports event? Like Eric Rudolph before them, they perceived the event as a symbolic target that was representative of, and would confound and embarrass, their enemy—the U.S. government. In a handwritten note recovered by police, Dzhokhar Tsarnaev referred to the Boston Marathon victims as "collateral damage" in a strike meant as revenge for U.S.-led wars in Muslim countries.[43] He likened the victims to Muslims who were killed in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. "When you attack one Muslim, you attack all Muslims," Dzhokhar allegedly wrote.[44] Whereas Rudolph at least contemplated the fate of "innocent civilians," the Tsarnaev brothers seemed comfortable with the idea of killing civilians. In this regard, their perceived enemy was not just the government, but American society as a whole.

The plot to attack the Boston Marathon was haphazard in some respects. The event was among a broader range of potential targets that the Tsarnaev brothers had identified, and it only emerged as their preferred target relatively late in their planning. They had initially conceived the plan to detonate explosives at Boston's Fourth of July (Independence Day) celebration on the Charles River and subsequently to launch an attack on law enforcement officers.[45] When it turned out that assembling the bombs took less time than

they had anticipated, they decided to move the attack up to the Boston Marathon on 15 April, Patriots' Day in Massachusetts. The Tsarnaev brothers picked the home stretch and finish line of the marathon after driving around the Boston area looking for sites.[46] The marathon reportedly was not their only intended target. Following their attack on the Boston Marathon, the brothers allegedly planned to drive to New York City and detonate their remaining explosives in Times Square, another highly symbolic target. Some of their actions, however, suggest that they may have been making things up as they went along (e.g., their scramble for cash while on the run from police).[47]

Ironically, Tamerlan and Dzhokhar Tsarnaev were themselves talented athletes. Tamerlan had been a promising amateur boxer who won the New England Golden Gloves championship twice and fought in the Golden Gloves National Tournament in 2009. His younger brother excelled in wrestling at his high school and was listed as a Greater Boston League Winter All-Star.

The Attack and Its Aftermath

On 15 April 2013, between 2:42 and 2:45 p.m., Tamerlan and Dzhokhar Tsarnaev placed their knapsacks containing the improvised explosive devices (IEDs) at two separate points near the metal barriers that separated the spectators from the runners approaching the finish line. Both IEDs consisted of pressure cookers concealed in backpacks with low-grade explosives, nails, shards of metal, and ball bearings. The first bomb exploded at 2:49 p.m. some 100 feet before the finish line, followed by a second explosion 200 yards away from the first explosion 13 seconds later. Each explosion killed at least one person, maimed and wounded scores of others, and damaged public and private property.

An investigation involving more than 1,000 federal, state, and local law enforcement officers was launched in the immediate aftermath of the bombings. A breakthrough in the case came less than two days later, when the FBI pinpointed two suspects from videos and photographs taken from security cameras in the area where the explosions occurred. That night, on 18 April, a Massachusetts Institute of Technology police officer was shot dead in his patrol car on campus. Authorities would later link the murder to the Tsarnaev brothers, who allegedly attempted to steal the officer's service weapon.[48] The two brothers also hijacked a Mercedes sport utility vehicle (SUV) at gunpoint, according to police. The police eventually caught up with them. Tamerlan Tsarnaev died in the shootout with the police and Dzhokhar was apprehended eighteen hours later and is currently on trial, charged with the Boston Marathon bombings. His defense lawyer argues that the young Tsarnaev was influenced and enlisted by his brother, who "planned and orchestrated" the attack.[49]

The response efforts after the blasts at the Boston Marathon were considered by the authorities as highly effective owing to years of deliberative planning and coordination.[50] However, some critical questions were raised, such as by analysts who argued that "some mistakes were made and some red flags were ignored."[51] For example, the significance of information received from the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) and of Tamerlan Tsarnaev's travel to Russia in 2012 as potential warning signs is still subject to debate.[52]

The Boston Marathon bombings had "a substantial [short-term] impact on interstate and foreign commerce," forcing a premature end to the Marathon and the evacuation and temporary closure of numerous businesses along Boylston Street for several days.[53] Moreover, the emotional impact of the attack continues to be felt in Boston, with many local citizens describing themselves as being "more fearful."[54] As noted earlier, the attack has also triggered increased security measures at marathons and other sports events in the

United States and in other countries. It has contributed to the social construction and discursive framing of sports events as symbolic targets for attacks by terrorists acting alone or in small groups. As one study put it: "the events of April 15 in Boston remind us that the threat has not disappeared."[55]

A revealing development in the aftermath of the Boston Marathon bombings has been the way in which Al Qaeda has retrospectively endorsed and praised the attack. In so doing, it has urged others to follow in the Tsarnaev brothers' footsteps. *Inspire* magazine used the attack as evidence that security measures in the United States are failing:

> The Blessed Boston Bombings (BBB) have been an absolute success on all levels and domains. These heroic bombings have exposed many hidden shortcomings of the American security and intelligence system. They have also proved that the legendary acclaimed power of the enemy's intelligence is nothing but a big lie indeed.[56]

The article further highlights the Tsarnaev brothers' achievements:

> The real worthy winners of the Boston Marathon were the Tsarnaev mujahideen Brothers. When we talk about the Boston operation, we need to shed light on one element; the factor of success. Because it is important to all Muslims generally and the mujahideen in particular to know how brilliant the Tsarnaev were in planning and accomplishing these jihadi attacks.[57]

For the present purpose, *Inspire*'s comments on the Tsarnaev brothers' choice of the Boston Marathon as a target for the bombings are particularly insightful. According to *Inspire*, Boston "is relatively out of the enemy's attention as a potential target to the mujahideen, unlike New York for example, which is under an intensive security surveillance since September 11."[58] The article continues: "The BBB hit Copley Square the substantial heart of Boston center, whereby many hotels are around. MIT is in the neighborhood, Fenway Park the home ballpark of the Boston Red Sox baseball club is not far, also Boston university and Boston college are located near the the blasts." The magazine also cites Rep. Bill Keating (Democrats, Massachusetts and Homeland Security Committee Member) who stated publicly that "They chose symbolic targets, certainly the iconic Boston marathon, the oldest marathon that brings people together from all around the world is that kind of symbolic event. It is also the April 15 Tax day, an event that might incite domestic or lone wolf type of terrorist." The *Inspire* article goes on to assert:

> In other words, this analysis states that "the Tsarnaev mujahideen were very clever by striking on the marathon day," in consideration that the event attracted 27,000 registered participants, in addition to approximately 500,000 spectators and about 1,000 media personnel from more than 100 outlets. Moreover, last April 15 coincided with Patriots' Day, a civic holiday in Massachusetts. All this means the Tsarnaevs [*sic*] brothers planned smartly to strike at a crowded time to guarantee maximum killing and injuring. This timing is significant in Lone Jihad operations.[59]

In the next section, we draw together and reflect on the two case studies presented here.

Discussion and Conclusion

This article has sought to situate the continued predictions of terrorism at major sports events within the wider context of the changing nature of terrorist actors. Specifically, it has explored how terrorists acting alone or in small groups construct and justify sports events as symbolic targets in their performance of terrorism. While such attacks or plots are relatively rare, their detailed analysis allows for a better understanding of the nature of the threat. To this end, the article has discussed two major attacks perpetrated by terrorists acting alone or in small groups: the 1996 Centennial Olympic Park attack and the 2013 Boston Marathon bombings.

Our findings confirm two important conclusions drawn by Andrew Silke with regard to terrorist target selection of the Olympics.[60] First, the rationales for those who target sports events are often similar, even if the ideological motive behind the attack is radically different. Secondly, terrorists target sports events not because they bear any particular ill-will to sport, but rather because they wish to target a government or community involved in or associated with the event. It is often the host government that is "the real and primary target" of the attack.[61] The two cases examined here indicate the similar way in which the sports events were constructed as a symbolic target, albeit from radically different ideological viewpoints. For anti-abortion activist Eric Rudolph, the Centennial Park blast was meant to "confound, anger and embarrass" an evil government, in an attempt to "drag this monstrosity of a government down to the dust where it belongs." For Tamerlan and Dzhokhar Tsarnaev, the Boston Marathon explosions were payback for the U.S. military actions in Iraq and Afghanistan.

We start to see, then, how terrorist selection of a sports event as a legitimate target should be understood in relation to the grievances and desires of the perpetrators. In their minds, the sports events symbolized at an abstract level the righteousness of their cause and the evil of their adversaries, reducing innocent civilians to mere collateral damage. The symbolism of the events was used to rationalize an act of mass violence by fitting the immediate target into a loosely defined category of "the enemy," with the ultimate aim to intimidate and instill fear in the wider target audience. In both cases, however, other targets would have been equally suited to this purpose. In fact, Rudolph committed three more bombings after the Centennial Park attack, none of which involved sports events. In a similar vein, the Tsarnaev brothers stumbled upon the Boston Marathon somewhat haphazardly, and had also considered alternative targets that again did not involve sport.

An inherent limitation of any analysis of sports-related terrorist attacks is that they are atypical events that occur so infrequently that they are arguably almost impossible to categorize, let alone predict. This is especially the case for attacks perpetrated by terrorists acting alone or in small groups, which themselves constitute only a small proportion of all terrorist attacks.[62] Our recent National Institute of Justice funded research, which studied 98 cases of lone wolf terrorism in the United States between 1940 and 2013, shows that Eric Rudolph was the only American lone wolf who targeted a sports event during this entire period (the Tsarnaev brothers were not included in this study because they operated as a dyad).[63] Yet, by contextualizing the two attacks examined here in relation to the broader patterns and trends identified in our study, it is possible to obtain a better sense of where these attacks "fit" within the broader landscape of terrorists acting alone or in small groups.

To start with, the two attacks reflect the broader pattern regarding the ideological motivations that drive lone wolf terrorism: it is not restricted to any one particular ideology. While their ideological motivations differed considerably, Rudolph and the Tsarnaev

brothers both perceived the respective sports events as legitimate and convenient targets. Furthermore, both attacks were remarkably lethal when compared to the average lethality of lone wolf terrorist attacks.[64] From 1940 through 2013, lone wolf terrorists committed a combined total of 216 attacks, claiming 143 lives and injuring another 431. The average "body count" (deaths + injuries) was 2.66 per attack. By contrast, the 1996 Atlanta Olympic Games bombing alone claimed two lives and injured another 110, while the Boston Marathon bombings killed three people and wounded more than 260. In both cases, the perpetrators were able to exploit the fact that the events attracted large numbers of people gathered in high density, which increased their chances of inflicting maximum damage. Centennial Park and the Boston Marathon were also relatively accessible to the perpetrators, allowing them to place their bombs at the sites without being stopped and searched by police or security.

An important pattern identified in our National Institute of Justice study was a copycat phenomenon and inspiration effect, evidence for which was found in a third of the cases of lone wolf terrorism. Criminologists view the "copycat effect" in terms of a tendency—largely among young males with prior criminal records, severe mental health problems, or histories of violence—to be inspired by sensational publicity surrounding violent murders.[65] The media coverage of these events gives those with preexisting violent tendencies a chance to enjoy their moment of fame through the act of imitation. The effect of the media is indirect, in the sense that media coverage gives people who are already violent the idea of how to commit a crime, rather than directly influencing a large number of criminals. Criminals are often obsessed with the shock value of their actions, and those with a violent tendency will most likely go down that road.

To date, there has been no research into a copycat effect with regard to sports-related terrorism. However, the 1996 Atlanta Olympic Games bombing provides interesting insights into this issue. Among those influenced by Rudolph's attack, and by the media coverage thereof, was David Copeland, who carried out three bombing attacks in the United Kingdom in 1999. Copeland described how he "wanted to be famous . . . [cause] murder, mayhem, chaos, damage—to get on the news as the top story, really."[66] Copeland closely followed the media coverage of the explosion at Centennial Park. As he watched news reports from the scene, he wondered why nobody had bombed the Notting Hill Carnival. He stated to police that he gradually became fixated on the idea of carrying out his own bombing and "woke up one day and decided to do it."[67] He explained: "I had a thought once. It was that Centennial Park bombing. The Notting Hill Carnival was on at the same time, and I just thought why, why, why can't someone blow that place up? That'd be a good'un, you know, that would piss everyone off."[68] Interestingly, Copeland did not interpret the Centennial Park bombing as being specifically targeted at a sports event; instead, he related it to another large and dense gathering of members of the public that he considered an attractive target. This, again, highlights the finding that such events are symbolic, rather than the ultimate intended targets of terrorist attacks.

It is too early to tell whether the Boston Marathon bombings will similarly inspire terrorists acting alone or in small groups. It is revealing, however, that Tamerlan and Dzhokhar Tsarnaev downloaded and read *Inspire* magazine and used information from it to build their bombs. As noted earlier, *Inspire* has been encouraging lone actors to strike against targets in the West, including crowded sports events. In the aftermath of the Boston Marathon bombings, *Inspire* devoted ample attention to the Tsarnaev brothers and hailed their attack a success. The magazine published a full-page memorial to Tamerlan Tsarnaev. In the memorial photo, Tsarnaev is pictured among bright sunlight, clouds, and doves with the words of a text message he is believed to have sent his mother at one point,

which reads: "My dear mom, I will lay down my life for Islam. I'm gonna die for Islam Inshaa Allah [God willing]."[69] *Inspire* also argued that "The brothers have been inspired by Inspire. This is not only because Inspire offers bomb recipes, but also because of the contents of the magazine as a whole."[70]

By turning political causes into violent action, lone wolf terrorists can become role models for others who are sympathetic to those causes, inviting what Bakker and De Graaf call "bandwagon attacks."[71] As the above suggests, the Internet and social media influence this phenomenon. This development may further impact on the interplay between sport and terrorism by encouraging like-minded individuals to attack densely crowded spaces such as sports arenas. At the same time, the current target hardening activity surrounding major sports events is likely to inform the target selection choices made by terrorists acting alone or in small groups. As this article has shown, sports events are not the "endgame" of their attacks. Rather, they are among a broader range of symbolic targets that terrorist actors may seek to strike as part of their violent struggle against their adversaries.

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