

Immigration Policy Reform: Monitoring Asylum Refugees and Immigrants with Psychological Profiling

After the Boston Marathon bombing, Senator Lindsey Graham (R-South Carolina) raised questions concerning why the FBI was unable to quickly fit the profile of the bomber(s) to Tamerlan Tsarnaev. Graham asked, in fact, "How could his name not pop up, the older brother?" (Hosenball, 2013). Senator Graham's emphatic question highlights the need for immigration reform measures that can reduce the potential of terrorist acts by asylum refugees and immigrants like Tamerlan Tsarnaev and his brother Dzhokhar. Along these lines, the introduction of a mandatory psychological profiling policy could provide the basis of a monitoring system to reduce the potential of terrorism.

In addressing the critical question of how a psychological profiling policy would be implemented, the first rule is to design policies according to the best available scientific theories and research findings. As one of the nation's leading experts, Jerrold Post, professor of psychiatry and director of political psychology and International Affairs at George Washington University, argues that individuals who commit acts of terrorism do so on the basis of a "special psycho-logic constructed to rationalize acts they are psychologically compelled to commit" (Whittaker, 2012, p. 21). Post's widely accepted theory holds, in other words, that the 21st century

radicalized terrorist is almost invariably the psychological product of religious and political hyper sensitivities. As such, temperamental idiosyncrasies induce a syncretic worldview in the mind of the terrorist, or what might most aptly be described as an "us versus them pathology" (Whittaker, 2012, p. 21).

Behaviorally, the radicalized terrorist often exhibits the traits of a mentally and emotionally injured individual whose personality has been shaped by some kind of psychologically damaging experience(s). Specifically, the personality of the radicalized terrorist is characterized by absolutism, aggression, flawed self-concept, a tendency to blame and scapegoat others, and a proneness to feelings of failure (Whittaker, 2012, p. 21). Jerrold Post's work, in so many words, provides a comprehensive theoretical foundation for policy formulation and, thereby, a possible starting point for the development of a psychological profiling system to reduce the potential of terrorism.

Although much remains to be discovered and learned about the background and psychological profiles of the two Boston Marathon bombers, even what is known today reveals that Tamerlan Tsarnaev fits Jerrold Post's theoretical profile quite closely. Tamerlan Tsarnaev's "us versus them" mentality, his flawed self-concept, his tendency to blame and scapegoat others, and his proneness to aggression and feelings of failure are all evident

in his personal comments and behavior. Some years ago, for example, Tamerlan was the subject of a boxing photo essay in which he expressed: "I don't have a single American friend, I don't understand them" (Battersby, 2013). Further, the plot line of his life is a story of disappointment, instability, and perceived failure. More than ten years ago, the Tsarnaev family needed asylum from Chechnya, Kyrgyzstan, and Dagestan. Ultimately, Tamerlan was left in America by his parents to tend to his younger sisters and brother. His hopes of being an Olympic boxer were dashed by a policy to end all participation by noncitizens in the Tournament of Champions of which Tamerlan was New England heavyweight champion for two years in a row (Sontag, Herszenhorn & Kovaleski, 2013). In sum, like Jerrold Post's theory predicts, the life of Tamerlan Tsarnaev was a tale of disappointment and failure.

Dr. Harold Bursztajn, a psychiatrist and co-founder of the psychiatry and law program at Harvard Medical School, has commented on the psychological states of both Boston Marathon bombers and what he sees as fundamentally necessary to implement an effective profiling intervention system. According to Bursztajn, Tamerlan Tsarnaev's purported religious extremism, loneliness, and hatred for the United States may have been accompanied by paranoid delusions that made it seem morally justifiable to kill innocent bystanders (Kotz, 2013). As for the

younger brother, Dzhokhar Tsarnaev, Bursztajn suggests that Dzhokhar is very likely the subject of a shared paranoid disorder. In this case, one person in a close relationship (Tamerlan Tsarnaev) has delusions and eventually pulls the other one (Dzhokhar Tsarnaev) into this delusional system (Kotz, 2013). As the basis of the proposed policy, Dr. Harold Bursztajn argues, in effect, that psychological states and conditions can only be ascertained by means of a multi-layered and cross-networked system of evaluation. Such a system, in other words, must include questioning teachers, family, and close friends, as well as involve neuropsychological testing to evaluate memory, motor function, personality, and other cognitive skills (Kotz, 2013). In short, the profiling system, as Bursztajn describes it, would be theoretically and clinically reliable enough to ensure that findings are valid and useful in helping to identify individuals who pose a terrorist threat.

As for some pragmatic details about the implementation of the proposed profiling system and how it will help make America safer, the system is fundamentally an extension of the values and principles that have made America the land of freedom and assured its national security for more than two centuries - namely, respect for human dignity, human rights, and equal opportunity. As such, the profiling system as herein described should be required of all asylum refugees and immigrants prior

to being allowed into the United States. Thereafter, all refugees and immigrants who have been granted entry into the United States should be assigned to a dual case worker program whereby, at a minimum, annual psychological evaluation and profiling is required. The dual case worker strategy provides greater assurance that evaluations and assessments are accurate and unbiased. In addition, the annual evaluation and profiling requirement makes it possible for case workers to determine whether or not a client is exhibiting the types of psychological and/or behavioral characteristics identified by experts like Dr. Jerrold Post and Dr. Harold Bursztajn - absolutism, aggression, flawed self-concept, a tendency to blame and scapegoat others, a proneness to feelings of failure, pathology, and delusional paranoia (Whittaker, 2012, p. 21). Based on findings of the annual psychological evaluations, appropriate decisions can be made by the case workers. Recommendations for interventions would be based on a graduated system with options including positive reports requiring no action on the part of the case worker and the US government, support interventions, or, in cases of detected psychological and behavioral risks for terrorism, extreme measures such as probationary status, detention, and/or deportation.

Most importantly, the proposed profiling system will help America become a safer place because it supports the purpose of

creating a stronger psychological support base for immigrants. As Dr. Post explains, a system based on proactive intervention and support for immigrants will serve to inhibit potential terrorists from joining the group, also it could produce dissension within the group to break it up, and further facilitate exit from the group by creating pathways out of terrorism (Post, 2007, p. 246). In so many words, the proposed psychological profiling system would help reduce the potential of terrorism because it is proactive by design and takes aim at aiding the vast majority of immigrants who are interested in establishing a law abiding and fulfilling life in America. At the same time, it can help weed out the bad apples in the bunch like Tamerlan Tsarnaev and his brother Dzhokhar Tsarnaev who harbor pathological hatred for America.

Conclusion

In the final comment, the introduction of a mandatory psychological profiling policy could provide the basis of a monitoring system to reduce the potential of terrorism. As noted, the system would need to be scientifically based in the theories and research of experts like Dr. Jerrold Post and Dr. Harold Bursztajn. It would also need to be constitutionally compliant in advancing respect for human dignity, human rights, and equal opportunity. As such, the proposed policy change is all about improving human relations, creating strong citizens

out of those who respect, support, and promote the very principles and values for which America stands - freedom and liberty. For those who may pose incorrigible threats to America like Tamerlan Tsarnaev and his brother Dzhokhar, the profiling system will enable case workers to effectively identify them and, accordingly, refer them to the proper authorities for judicious treatment such as deportation. Thereby, the potential of terrorism will be reduced and America will be a safer place for everyone.

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