

# Boston Marathon Bombings: Link to the Iraq War?

✘ Two bombs exploded at the Boston Marathon on April 15. Three people have died and more than 170 have been injured. Now, investigators have learned that the bombs used were built around pressure cookers. Faisal Shahzad tried to blow up Times Square using just such a device on May 1, 2010. The number of casualties is low, but the episode is highly significant as it is the first fatal attack in the United States itself since the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001. The list of suspects is wide; for the time being all possible ideological currents are being considered, Islamist and right-wing groups or a single offender. The Pakistani Taliban denied any involvement. According to police, no one was arrested.

The motive for the attack is still unclear; however, the FBI has been treating it as a terrorist act. Since the 9/11 attack, major sporting events in the United States have been subjected to stringent security. The Boston Marathon is one of the most popular races on the East Coast – indeed, in the world. More than 26,000 runners were taking part and more than 500,000 people had lined the streets in Boston to watch.

The search for anniversaries is important to an investigation of this nature, but there are many April 15 anniversaries. On 15 April, 1865, President Lincoln was shot and on that same date he rallied volunteers for the Union against the Confederate States and there are many Americans in the South, who still remember this date with hatred. All hypotheses are still open. Even the approaching 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Waco siege and fire on April 19, 1993 has been suggested (McVeigh set off the bombs in Oklahoma City to coincide with the second anniversary of the Waco fire). Yet, there is one interesting anniversary that the media has totally ignored in the context

of the marathon bombings and the April 15<sup>th</sup> connection: on that date in 2003 the first phase of Operation Iraqi Freedom was officially concluded. On April 9<sup>th</sup> of that year a coalition forces captured Baghdad, prompting Saddam and the remnants of the Baath party leadership to flee to Tikrit, Saddam Hussein's home town. The Boston bombings, then, took place on the tenth anniversary of the end of the actual invasion of Iraq. Then there is the Aryan Brotherhood (the Governor of Massachusetts, Deval Patrick, is an African-American) and there are the Mexican drug cartels.

On April 15, Tikrit fell to the invading forces, concluding the invasion phase. It should not surprise anyone if those who will eventually be apprehended for the Boston bombings will be found to have some link to the Iraq war. Improvised explosive devices, many of which based on pressure cookers (the type identified in Boston), were used by Sunni insurgents in Iraq (and not just against American and British forces; Shiites were and remain frequent targets). Moreover, hours before the bombs went off in Boston, Iraq witnessed one of the most violent days of the year with coordinated bombing attacks throughout the country (Baghdad, Kirkuk, Fallujah), bearing the hallmarks of al-Qaeda from the type of devices used to the coordinated nature of the explosions. Surely, al-Qaeda, is associated with suicide attacks, but that is more the 'old school' variety; more recent bombing attempts have been carried out by lone figures with some training and not involving self immolation at all; the perpetrators have usually been arrested as they attempt to flee.

In other major U.S. cities, and in such European countries as France (which is engaged in a war directly against Islamist groups in Mali), security measures have been raised. Moreover, the Boston bombings have prompted organizers of large events such as the London and Berlin, the IAAF World Championships in Moscow, the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi, Russia (located very close to the highly contentious Chechen region) and the

2016 Olympic Games in Rio announced a review of its safety systems.

Both the London and Hamburg marathons, next Sunday, are scheduled to be held as planned.

The FBI considers the situation "fluid" and it is still too early to find the causes and motivations, while some in the government have claimed that "the attack was carefully planned." The bombings has the hallmark of al- Qaeda; then again the last mile of the marathon was dedicated to the victims of last December's shooting in Newtown, Connecticut – Congress has just passed a law that restricts the use of weapons in the U.S. and some far-right extremists such as Tim McVeigh who was behind the Oklahoma City bombings of April 19, 1995 could have launched a death signal. Monday was also "tax day" it is never too hard to find a madman who wants to take 'revenge' on the State.

The initiative has moved from within the group to single 'go-getters'. There is still too little information available, and the investigation cannot rule out any detail forensic or historical in trying to identify the perpetrator/s. Should the Boston terrorist attack be attributed to any kind of Muslim extremist group or individual, it will could alter US foreign policy, setting it back a few years or changing its outlook on the 'Arab Spring' and support for the Syrian opposition; it could even prompt an extension of the deadline for leaving Afghanistan (2014). If, however, the attacks are linked to a more domestic perpetrator, right wing fanatic or deranged gun ownership fanatic, it would be a step toward rehabilitating the perception of Islam in the United States and maintain US policy in the Islamic world along the present conciliatory course.