

BOISI CENTER INTERVIEWS



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PETER KRAUSE is an assistant professor in the Political Science Department at Boston College. His research and writing focuses on international security, Middle East politics, political violence, and national movements. He spoke with Boisi Center associate director **Erik Owens** after his presentation on terrorism and community resilience in light of the 2013 Boston Marathon attacks.

OWENS: Where were you on the day of the marathon bombings last year?

KRAUSE: I live on the marathon route in Coolidge Corner, and I have watched it for several years on Beacon Street. Last year, I watched the race for an hour, and then returned to my office in McGuinn to grade papers. Around 3:00pm, I received a call from my wife, who told me that bombs had gone off on the marathon route. I was surprised, did some searching online regarding the bombs, and saw that there had been multiple explosions.

OWENS: What inspired you to make the bold promise that you would run your first marathon after hearing the news about last year's bombings?

KRAUSE: I initially thought about writing a letter. As a professor, I try to present all sides of a story so that students can come up with their own opinions and make assessments based on quality of writing.

I did not want to put myself in the fray, and I have always hesitated to be an activist. However, this was an area where I felt I could use my knowledge to ease the students' fears, because I had been in their shoes before.

I was a college senior when the 9/11 attacks occurred. I remember feeling unable to comprehend what had happened,

fearful that this could happen again, and sadness at the loss of thousands of people. Thinking about my own experience, I felt I could offer a sense of understanding and comfort. That is why I decided to write a letter.



My thoughts and emotions at the time made me want to do more than try to summarize what happened—I thought I could contribute to the recovery process. I felt like running the marathon was something I could do to raise money, especially considering that it is something I normally would not do.

OWENS: Are you nervous about the security at this year's marathon?

KRAUSE: I'm not at all, honestly. The two men responsible for this attack are not part of any longstanding sustained organization. A possibility at this point is a copycat attack, but I think the likelihood of that happening is quite low. I think it's going to be the most protected marathon in the history of the world.

There has been great security at the Boston Marathon in years past, but they will be going the extra mile this year. There are going to be searches and an intense police presence. I am not worried about security, and I hope things go off without a hitch.

OWENS: You've studied several foreign environments where terrorism is prevalent. What can you draw from these case studies for an American context, especially in terms of prevention and response?

KRAUSE: By comparison, I often examine other environments and see if they have a democratic government, the freedom of speech, the freedom of religion, the freedom to assemble, or the freedom to feel like you can make a difference and have a stake in society. These factors play a huge role in whether a person will turn to violence to get across a political point.

In terms of the United States, we have many marginalized communities and individuals, but we do much better than many other societies in the world, and I think that's one of the reasons that terrorism is not a major issue here. America is a place where a lot of people have enough food to feed their families and feel that their interests are represented by their elected officials and by their government. This makes a large difference.

From Tocqueville onward, people who studied American society found it to have a strong civil society and decent social capital. These kinds of nongovernmental community bonds make a big difference.

People who commit terrorist attacks are oftentimes socially ostracized or isolated from the community. The United States is not perfect at integrating immigrants, but we are improving, and do it better than many other countries.

America also strikes a balance between being a security state and a police state. In America people don't feel that the state is incredibly overbearing, uses violence extensively, or locks people up without charge.

In places like Egypt there has been backlash, not only in the form of violence, but also through popular support and indifference to violence. Disaffected people feel that the government deserves the violence or has it coming. However, when you see strikes against the U.S. or an attack like the Boston Marathon bombings, there are outpourings of support amongst Americans of any background. This is because Americans feel they have a stake in a legitimate government and society.

OWENS: Would increased surveillance help?

KRAUSE: Yes. I see the biggest potential policy changes after the marathon as being increased surveillance. The type of surveillance that I'm thinking of is mainly cameras. The U.S., Boston in particular, is nothing like London, where there

are thousands and thousands of cameras on street level. These cameras are all integrated, and you can really watch people. There is no good research proving that this deters attacks, but it certainly helps with finding those responsible, which was an issue after the Boston Marathon attacks. We were able to find the bombers with the help of video cameras.

This is going to be a key talking point, and it has been for former police chief Ed Davis and other Massachusetts government officials who want to try to increase

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surveillance. I've seen in the past couple of months that MBTA buses have been outfitted with 360-degree cameras. I think we are going to see more cameras on the street, and polls have shown there is support for this form of surveillance. There is more resistance when it comes to the NSA and reading of emails. There is a line that the American people will not want to cross.

OWENS: You mentioned in a previous talk that when people are given information about terrorism, they tend to be less fearful about its likelihood.

KRAUSE: This was the question that drives the research project I'm currently working on. Some people say we are too fearful of terrorism, while others say we don't have enough awareness of its dangers. Fewer Americans die each year in terrorist attacks on American soil than from lightning. At the same time, there are many groups in the world that want to kill Americans.

With my research, I address whether an increase in knowledge leads to different perceptions in terms of the threat of terrorism. Before they take my class, I survey students about their knowledge of terrorism. I ask how many groups they know, how many people they think get killed, how much the U.S. spends on terrorism, and what current U.S. counterterrorism policy is.

I also want to know students' opinions regarding the treatment of terrorism suspects. Do we overreact to terrorism? How fearful are you that the United States will be attacked again? I distribute the same questionnaire at the end of the class to see if their opinions have changed.

This year, I asked Dr. Liane Young, a professor in the psychology department, to assist me in this project. I run the survey in Professor Gallagher and Professor Crawford's classes here at BC. I've also run it in fifteen other universities around the country—some in classes about terrorism, some not. This creates a balance and a control group. At the end of this year, we will have three semester's worth of research, and will start fully analyzing the data.

One of our early findings is that the more people know about terrorism, the less they fear it. Knowledge is power—the power to have a clear eye when deciding counterterrorism policies, and the power to live a life unfettered by fear.

OWENS: You encouraged people in the lecture to rationally assess the likelihood of terror attacks in this country, while

simultaneously fostering community and helping one another. That is a terrific injunction, but is it possible to ask people to be both very rational and very emotive?

KRAUSE: Yes. In terms of the knowledge part, having knowledge and understanding about terrorism makes people less fearful, regardless of emotional levels. We are not capturing emotional levels in our survey. However, being less fearful will have an impact on the emotions. Of course, it can go the other way, because emotions can drive rational thinking as well.

I am saying more knowledge is better, but I'm not encouraging people to toss aside emotions. People should channel emotions in a positive fashion. Boston is not a city that is seeping with rage and hatred about the marathon bombings.

Those at Boston College and in the Boston community have channeled their emotion in productive ways—raising money, designing new bionic limbs, watching and volunteering at the race. It's a balance between knowledge and emotions.

OWENS: Should we feel different in the wake of the Boston Marathon bombing than we did in the wake of the Sandy Hook shooting? Americans frequently receive events such as these in the same way, as events that horrify our conscience, disrupt our community, and make us angry. What is different and what is the same in this instance?

KRAUSE: There are a number of comparisons here. First, in both cases there is wanton killing of civilians. This is the most important thing that we focus on. It does not matter if the attacker is acting out of personal or broader political motivation. In many ways, motivation is secondary to our first reaction, which is concern for the people that are killed or wounded.

If you look at the motivations of individuals who commit mass killings or terrorist attacks, there are also similarities. These



people may feel socially ostracized, or have a mental illness. This is not always the case for terrorist attacks, but it is relevant. Another cause is revenge or humiliation.

In terms of differences, what defines a terrorist attack is its political motivation. For a mass shooting like Sandy Hook, the individual who committed the shootings was not trying to establish a new state or trying to end discriminatory laws against a given ethnic population. By comparison, many terrorist attacks have such motivations. To some extent there can be differences in weaponry, although many terrorist attacks have used small arms just as mass shootings have.

People react differently to a terrorist attack than to a mass shooting because they feel it was uncontrollable, or it could have been them. Some mass shootings also have those components, which is why people can be very fearful of them as well. I could go to a movie theater, watch *Batman*, and suddenly find myself under fire. There is a similarity there.

The issue is how does the government respond? It depends upon whether it is politically sensitive or politically doable to pass certain legislation, and whether the attackers are foreign or domestic.

If there is a mass shooting by an American citizen using small arms, the attack can become entangled in the Second Amendment. All of a sudden, the amount that the government is willing to spend, or the pressure it is willing to exert to change laws decreases significantly. If there is an attack by someone who is not an American and who uses bombs, there is much more political support to ban that type of weaponry or treat those people harshly in war tribunals because they don't have the same rights or same political support.

OWENS: What is the ratio of deaths of Americans on American soil due to mass killing as opposed to terrorism?

KRAUSE: I know the terrorism numbers very well. On 9/11, 3,000 people were killed on American soil. About 4,000 have been killed since 1970 including other attacks.


How do you define a mass killing? Certainly homicide and gun violence outweigh terrorist attacks every year. I would imagine there are still probably more than 3,000 Americans killed per year in homicide and gun violence. Even in the year of the largest terrorist attack ever, I would say more were killed because of homicide and gun violence. Most years,

more Americans are killed in mass shootings than by terrorism.

Finally, the political aspect makes a difference in terms of what people think is being attacked. Mass shootings can be indiscriminate, unknown, and uncontrollable. Unless there is some broader cause, the shooter is not necessarily acting against America. However, under terrorism, you have environmental terrorism and groups who have political motives, involving the United States or not.

The Boston Marathon attacks and 9/11 were about American foreign policy to some extent. People took these attacks more personally, because they are Americans. I'm an American citizen. Even though I was not wounded or even present at these attacks, they were against my country. This type of sentiment riles people in a way that a mass shooting against random individuals does not.

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