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Former CIA officer: ‘Absurd’ to link uncle of Boston suspects, Agency

Posted on **April 27, 2013** by **Laura Rozen**

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Retired CIA officer Graham Fuller confirmed to Al-Monitor Saturday that his daughter was previously married to an uncle of the suspects in the Boston Marathon attacks, but called rumors of any links between the uncle and the Agency “absurd.”

Graham Fuller's daughter, Samantha A. Fuller, was married to Ruslan Tsarnaev (now Tsarni) in the mid-1990s, and divorced in 1999, according to North Carolina public records. The elder Fuller had retired from the agency almost a decade before the brief marriage.

“Samantha was married to Ruslan Tsarnaev (Tsarni) for 3-4 years, and they lived in Bishkek for one year where Samantha was working for Price Waterhouse on privatization projects,” Graham Fuller told Al-Monitor by email Saturday. “They also lived in our house in [Maryland] for a year or so and they were divorced in 1999, I believe.”

“I, of course, retired from CIA in 1987 and had moved on to working as a senior political scientist for RAND,” Fuller continued.

Fuller said his former son in law was interesting but homesick, and moved back to Central Asia after the divorce.

"Like all Chechens, Ruslan was very concerned about his native land, but I saw no particular involvement in politics, [although] he did try to contact other Chechens around," Fuller continued. "He also felt homesick and eventually went back to Central Asia after the divorce. His English was shaky. (We always spoke Russian together)."

A story on the Internet implying "possible connections between Ruslan and the Agency through me are absurd," Fuller said.

"I doubt he even had much to say of intelligence value other than talking about his own family's sad tale of deportation from Chechnya by Stalin to Central Asia," Fuller said. "Every Chechen family has such stories."

The elder Fuller said he had made several visits to Central Asia to do research on post-Soviet political developments, and visited Samantha and Ruslan there. "Our visit is briefly mentioned in my recent memoir, *Three Truths and a Lie*, as well as their marriage celebration in [Maryland]," he wrote.

A former Russian history and literature major at Harvard, Fuller said he was always interested in Soviet minorities and found Ruslan interesting. Fuller also pointed to a March 2000 article ([.pdf](#)) he and a colleague wrote in *Foreign Affairs*, "Russia's Ruinous Chechen War."

Ruslan Tsarni has said in media interviews that there was a strong rift between his family and that of his brother Aznor, over what Ruslan described as the growing religious fanaticism of Aznor's wife, Zubeidat, and that the families had not spoken for several years. Aznor and Zubeidat's sons Tamerlan, 26, and Dzhokhar, 19, are suspected of carrying out the April 15th Boston Marathon bombings.



Fuller said he thinks he met Aznor Tsarnaev once, fleetingly, in Kazakhstan. His daughter, he said, knew the family better, but when Tamerlan was just a toddler, and Dzhokhar not yet born.

According to Fuller, the suspects' mother Zubeidat Tsarnaeva was not an ethnic Chechen herself, but Dagestani, and so the family spoke Russian, not Chechen, at home. "People who lose their native language (identity) sometimes are more fanatic in some respects," he observed.

US officials [reportedly said](#) this week that they added Tamerlan Tsarnaev and Zubeidat Tsarnaeva to a US counterterrorism database in the fall of 2011, based on a warning from Russia's intelligence service that they were suspected of being followers of radical Islam.

Tamerlan was killed in a police chase April 19th. Dzhokhar was charged on two federal counts of terrorism April 21, and transferred to a prison hospital outside of Boston on Friday, April 26.

"I for one was astonished at the events, and to find myself at two degrees of separation from them," Fuller said.

(Top photo: Graham Fuller; second photo: Ruslan Tsarni. CBS News)

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