Understanding Homegrown Terrorism

Armin Sick [1]

In the several years since Al Qaeda's attacks on the United States in 2001, there has been unprecedented growth in violent activity related to and inspired by radical Islamism perpetrated by individuals of Western descent.

Ordinary citizens, with unremarkable lives, unremarkable jobs and an overall appearance generally considered as "normal" are turning into radicals and actively involved in small extremist groups, planning and executing assaults inside their respective home countries.

While in the 9-11 attacks the perpetrators were of Arab national origin, using Western infrastructure for their activities, subsequent attacks have been committed by regular citizens or at least permanent residents, predominately in European countries.

The cases of the Madrid bombings in 2004, the series of assaults in London in 2005, the foiled planning in Germany in 2007 or the recent events in the United States prove that the threat has changed in a significant way. The new suspects, such as the London bomber Mohammed Khan are well integrated and highly educated European citizens with unremarkable CVs and no clearly visible signs of extremist thinking, either in ideology or religion. A significant number of these individuals were even converts, originally fully committed to the Western set of norms and rules which they then rejected.

This so called homegrown terrorism poses a serious threat to national intelligence and police agencies, and is even more difficult to control than the original imported form of Islamist terrorist plots. But with a growing number of incidents and case studies the need for adequate countermeasures is growing, and the nation states need to react.

The essential precondition for determining the way to react to a problem is to know its origins and characteristics. Unfortunately the case of homegrown terrorism lacks clear rules and obvious signs. The unremarkable record, background and appearance of the suspects makes it impossible for counterterrorist experts to predict imminent threat without putting whole groups of the population under general suspicion. Thus, law enforcement structures have to focus on the process of how these unsuspicious citizens turn into potential terrorist attackers or – to put it simply: How, where and when does this development take place? Who is involved? And, most important for the prevention of

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this development: Why do Western individuals get into this process of radicalization?

How to Become a Radical

Determining or anticipating who is a potential terrorist is difficult; especially when there are no clear characteristics or strategies to apply.

However, there seems to be a subgroup that is more susceptible to radical influences, that is, single males in the age of 15 to 35, with migration background and Muslim faith.

Apparently these features are found more often in the Islamic communities in the European countries, which produce a number of individuals belonging to the second or third generation, torn between the secular West and their religious heritage and living in an ethnically homogenous environment. Europe's failure to successfully integrate these parts of the population helps radicals seeking new aspirants.

But alienation and frustration are not the key factors in making an ordinary person a fundamentalist. Most promising and well integrated individuals can initiate the first step, the so-called pre-radicalization phase.[2]

This step characterizes the period previous to every process of radicalization in which the individual lives an ordinary life, not showing any ambitions to become part of these communities. The occurrence of an unexpected event, political, social, personal or economical which shakes one's certitude in previously held beliefs and leads to some kind of cognitive opening, marks the end of phase one and the entering in step two, self-identification.

This particular incident opens the individual to be more receptive to new worldviews, which leads—with the active help offered by spiritual mentors—to radical thinking, e.g. extremist Islamism or Jihad. The Jihad ideology provides simple answers to complex disputes, especially resonating with certain politically naïve Muslims in the West, and justifying the use of violence against all kinds of non-believers. Increased gathering of information about the new belief, often via the internet, leads the individual to new confidence in his/her ability to evaluate political developments.

At this point of the development, the indoctrination phase, the subjects are seeking facts and details in order to strengthen their ideas. Further they are looking for like-minded fellows to form small circles to meet, exchange beliefs and increase their commitments. Apparently this happens in public places like cafes, mosques, universities and increasingly in prisons, which play a crucial role in both triggering and reinforcing the radicalization process.

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[2] The four phases of radicalization in this chapter are derived from a research study by the New York Police Department in 2007. For further information see: Mitchell D. Silber and Arvin Bhatt, *Radicalization in the West: The Homegrown Threat* (New York, NY: The New York City Police Department, Intelligence Division, 2007), www.nypdshield.org/public/SiteFiles/documents/NYPD_Report-Radicalization_in_the_West.pdf.

Meeting in a small like-minded group is key for the process of radicalization since the individual is seeking acceptance for his/her new beliefs. Further, groupthink is one of the most powerful catalysts, creating a competitive environment amongst the group members for being the most radical. Converts have played a prominent role in the majority of terrorist case studies and tend to be the most zealous members of the groups. Their need to prove their religious convictions to their companions often makes them the most aggressive.

Many of the reported suspects, who went through this process, got in contact with a charismatic leader, who facilitated and guided them, providing ideological background and moral justification for the operations to follow.

The last step is the so-called Jihadization, in which the individual is indoctrinated to the extent that one is willing to commit attacks and even sacrifice one's life to prove the firmness of one's beliefs.

In this phase, the internet again provides crucial information for finding appropriate targets and completing preparations. Whether this final stage actually contains the planning and execution of terrorist actions depends on the individual's position inside the respective group. What is important is the readiness to perform.

Among the many cases which would fit into this scheme, the 2005 London bombers can serve as an epitome of a small self-radicalized circle of terrorist plotters.

Present British society contains nearly two million Muslims, primarily with South Asian origin from British former colonies India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. Starting in the 1960s and 70s, these immigrant groups formed communities in the UK, gaining British citizenship.

Three of the London attackers were second-generation British citizens of Pakistani descent. The fourth bomber, Germaine Lindsey, was of Jamaican origin and converted to Islam in 2000, thus only five years prior to the attacks. All four had Westernized and unremarkable backgrounds, and had grown up in well-to-do families.

By spending time at mosques and youth clubs known for their radical messages, the Pakistanis appeared to experience a religious transformation; praying regularly, changing in appearance and leaving behind the Western way of life.

After shifting mosques and Islamic centers, looking for acceptance for their increasingly radical views, they ultimately formed a circle, isolating themselves from British society and moderate Muslims. A trip to Pakistan to meet an influential Al-Qaeda leader, confirmed them on their course, which found its culmination in the suicide attacks in July 2005.

Also, in a recent report by the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, some statistical data concerning homegrown terrorism was collected. The study included the cases of 191 reported Islamist terrorists and tried to find out empirical information about the process of radicalization.

These data sustain some of the assumptions above. For instance around 26% of the suspects actually had a spiritual guide, 40% travelled abroad to re-

ceive special training and one third of these individuals had converted to Islam (among the US-citizens closer to 43%).

Nearly 50% of all suspects adopted a legalistic interpretation of Islam, i.e. deriving strict guidelines for every aspect of one's daily life, a total of between 39.3% and 50% in the UK considered Islam and the West as incompatible, and even 73.5% were convinced that the Western world has conspired against Islam to subjugate it, thus clearly demonstrating political radicalization. That this kind of politicization was connected to some cognitive awakening is affirmed by the fact that more than 40% of the accused stated that they had experienced this religious eye-opening prior to the process of political radicalization.

Given all these statistical data, as well as case studies from different countries and incidents, a number of conclusions and characteristics can be derived. It is stated that Muslim or migration background seems to be one of the things that most of the suspects have in common. However, if Muslim faith, minority status and economic disadvantage were sufficient explanations for al-Qaeda-inspired radicalization and recruitment, one would expect the structures and dynamics of Islamist militancy to be uniform across Western Europe. Apparently, they are not. On the other hand the feeling or perception of alienation is one of the main characteristics which could be observed in a significant number of cases. The so called cognitive opening—no matter in which way it might occur—and the search for validation of one's own beliefs are key factors which make the individual receptive to new, and in some cases extremist, ideas.

This frame of mind is deliberately exploited by radical activists looking for adherents and followers to fanatic groups.

The Recruiters

As the individual has made the first step in the process of radicalization the potential terrorist receives more often than not something like spiritual guidance. In some cases the individual is actively recruited by prominent members of existing terrorist groups; in other instances, the influenced person is seeking guidance alone via the internet or is actually attending discussions and religious sessions of spiritual leaders. Out of this variety of recruitment and indoctrination forms, a few characteristics can be identified in categories.

Three categories of recruiters can be detected; the first being the so called gateway organizations which are not directly involved in violence. They rather serve as means to facilitate the individual's movement towards violent extremist organizations. A good example for this kind of recruitment institution is the Hizb-ut Tahrir, which operates in a number of countries, ultimately trying to establish a worldwide Caliphate under the rule of Sharia law. The group is not involved directly in the plotting and execution of attacks, however it could serve as the first point of contact when looking for terrorist networks, providing guidance, information and probably connections.

The second category includes radical priests, imams, prophets and spiritual leaders, capable of speaking to a large audience and to convince them to take their path. They play a major role in the formation of a terrorist network by

acting as the main propagandist and spreading "the message" through which they are able to attract followers. They are also the religious authorities that provide justification for the group's activity, e.g. killing civilians as traitors and non-believers etc. However, they do not provide strategic or tactical training and information on how to execute a successful attack.

This is done by the so called activists, the third category of recruiters. These are the highly political leaders of the group who supervise the attack preparations, complete recruitment and training prior to the violent act. Recent terrorist plots like the shooting at the Fort Hood military base in November 2009 or the case of the so called underwear bomber are vivid examples for the role of radical imams capable of inspiring people to join violent Jihad and commit attacks in their respective environment. In the case of Major Nidal Malik Hasan, the manipulation was successful even though no face-to face interaction had taken place. The messages were able to propagate through other means of communication. It bears noting that the Internet and extremist forums play a major role at this point in the process, confirming the argument that recruitment and indoctrination can take place nearly everywhere.

Nevertheless, there is a range of specific locations which can be described as areas for active recruitment by radical organizations or places where radicalization is generally likely to happen.

Locations for Recruitment and Radicalization

Before we can focus on the topic of where recruitment is likely to take place,[3] a short definition of what we understand by recruitment is needed. Terrorist recruitment can be defined as an activity that intends to enlist individuals in an existing terrorist cell. Therefore recruitment serves as a bridge between personal belief and violent activism. The recruitment itself contains communication and information, while the information is intended to guide the individual towards the aims of the extremist organization. The communication between the recruiter and the potential follower can be found in diverse places, for example social institutions, colleges, mosques, churches, and last but not least in prisons and detention centers.

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[3] This is an interesting phenomenon. Case studies of Islamist terrorist incidents show that recruitment and radicalization differentiate according to the country the suspects live in prior to the attack. For instance, the Muslim communities in Southern Europe originate mainly from North African countries and are still fluent in Arabic, while the communities in the UK are connected to South East Asia, or as in Germany to Turkey. The descendants of these communities mainly do not have the skills to read the Quran or other Muslim texts by themselves what makes them dependent on imams who are trained to translate, interpret and explain the chapters they refer to in their preaching. This factor facilitates the spreading of radical messages since the audience is not able to reread and rethink their arguments in the original texts. For further information, see: Peter R. Neumann, *Joining Al-Qaeda. Jihadist Recruitment in Europe* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge for The International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2008).

This wide range of possible places for recruitment clearly complicates appropriate prevention strategies, but within this variety a number of categories can be applied.

The first category is the so called places of congregation, where people usually meet, exchange ideas and spend time regularly. For countering terrorism and radicalization, this kind of location is only significant inasmuch as a particular group of people is involved, e.g. Muslims in mosques or Koranic schools under the authority of imams or spiritual leaders, but also youth clubs and universities. This does not mean that Muslims in general are by definition susceptible. However, radical recruiters are found in these locations as well, looking for a susceptible audience. There are reports about active attempts by extremist organizations to infiltrate public mosques and to use them as a platform to spread their radical ideas, though this leads in most cases to conflict with the local Muslim community, which is generally more moderate in its belief systems. Of course, open disagreement and clashes with the local imams, which would attract the attention of police and law enforcement institutions is the one thing extremist cells want to avoid. In effect, Islamists have changed their behavior, meaning that public expression of their messages and long discussions with moderate imams have given way to quiet disagreement and continuation of discussions in smaller circles among an exclusive, more susceptible audience. This development is also one of the reasons why increased interaction between government authorities and Muslim communities is on the one hand an important factor in helping to integrate them into Western society, yet on the other hand, moderate Muslim communities might not be able to support and deliver valuable information to law enforcement authorities to counter the spread of radical ideas.

A more exclusive and hidden environment is offered by detainment institutions or prisons which are part of the second category, the so called places of vulnerability in which the individual is likely to experience stress and alienation, making him potentially vulnerable to extremist approaches. But it is not only the exclusiveness that makes prisons attractive for active recruitment. Prisons are by their own nature "highly unsettling environments in which people are confronted with existential questions." As Michael Waller states, prisons can be seen as the ideal breeding grounds for terrorist ideas and cells, since they recruit the alienated and angry to join their ranks, providing them with a cause to believe in, a special brotherhood to join, and a means to fight back at the society that locked them up. Adherents become members of a fraternity that offers a special relationship and the spirit of solidarity. Thus, joining certain groups or communities inside prison is a way to cope with the insecure environment in which the convicts find themselves after having been arrested and sentenced in court. What follows is the well known effect of peer pressure which can be observed in various surroundings, especially effective in groups of young men.

In addition, the psychological unsettlement is one of the key factors in the process of radicalization, as was discussed before. The experience of trial in

court and detainment is undoubtedly a huge shock for every individual that can lead to a mental state of uncertainty, alienation and the need for help. This explains why more people in prison reach out to religion and faith in order to find something to hang on to than in any other environment; religion provides certainty, security and answers to some of the fundamental questions which inmates are likely to ask themselves during their stay inside these surroundings. Among those who respond to religion, prisoners have two choices. One is to embrace faith and practice that will help them to become better human beings by struggling with their own weaknesses. In a way, this applies to all moderate versions of faith. The other choice is to follow a path that alienates them further from society, for example through radical belief systems, confirming the convicts in their role as a victim of society; a society in which the individual does not feel at home anymore, which treated him badly and therefore deserves to be contested.

For these individuals only a slight push is needed to guide them down to the path which leads to radical ideas. The extremist's black and white model of the world, the simplicity of who is right or wrong, good or bad, and who is responsible for misery and distress are just what the inmate is seeking in order to gain new confidence and to give his future life meaning; the consequence is breaking with the past and starting a new life.

Of course, the usefulness of prisons as universities for terrorists has not escaped Islamist radicals who are free to recruit and train inmates they believe to be suited for work within a terrorist organization. Local and immigrant, Muslim and non-Muslim, the bright, the dim, the violent: all are courted, all have a place in the network – provided they prove susceptible to indoctrination and radicalization.

But not only radical groups try to affect and use the state of mind in which the inmates find themselves. Prison officials even encourage missionary activities among the convicts since it helps lift the prisoners' morale and assists the correction process of converting them into helpful citizens. The role of psychologists and the so called prison chaplains—no matter which faith they represent—is also emphasized and backed by government authorities.

What is alarming is that particularly in the US the influence of radical imams and chaplains in prisons is growing in a significant manner. Since the mid 1990s, mainstream Muslim prison chaplains and distributors of classical Islamic literature have warned of this disturbing trend. Sheik Kabbani calls it a "hijacking of their prisons programs by extreme Islamist organizations." According to this information, traditional Islamic books, pamphlets, tapes, videos and other media in prison libraries and religious centers were replaced with militant and fundamentalist literature; in many cases sponsored by Salafi and Wahhabi organizations from the Middle East. The Graduate School of Islamic and Social Sciences (GSISS) and the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA) are the two institutions dominating the training and selection process for Muslim prison chaplains in the US. According to one source, the ISNA is described as "an influential front for the promotion of Wahhabi political, ideological, and

theological infrastructure in the United States," therefore increased surveillance in the selection of these chaplains is needed.

What stays beyond the control of the governmental authorities concerning recruitment in prisons is the interaction which takes place in the everyday life inside the installations. Ironically, the success of counter terrorism measures which were introduced in the years after the 9-11 attacks boosted this alarming development in the detainment centers in the Western States in general. With the growing number of arrests of Islamic fundamentalists and suspected terrorists, the extremist prison population has increased in a significant manner. Apparently, the radicals behind bars are by themselves not the problem, since they will stay there for a long time. But with a huge number of regular inmates in the Western countries, only serving short time sentences in jail during which they can get in contact with these radical ideas, the overall problem will persist or even increase in the near future.

Ultimately the last category of possible recruitment grounds is the so called recruitment magnets. Under this category fall locations with both congregation and vulnerability characteristics, especially interesting for people who have self-radicalized before and are now looking for opportunities to join a movement. Radical mosques and bookshops known for their extremist messages are examples of this category. This can also be seen as a continuation from the second category, for example when radicalized individuals are released and try to get in contact with like-minded people to receive more information, training, etc.

To demonstrate the alarming development that is going on inside prison walls, thus more or less unknown to the public attention, some figures and case studies can be examined.

Large Muslim communities cannot be identified in the United States, at least not to the extent some European countries have. Representing only one percent of the total population, Islamic belief is relatively inconspicuous.

However the United States has the highest prison population rate in the world, some 686 per 100,000 of the national population. Although the effective percentage of individuals radicalized in prison must be considered rather small, the total figure of nearly two million prisoners gives pause. Further, the current approximate number of 350,000 Muslims in federal, state and local prisons is increased by 30,000 to 40,000 each year, while most of the inmates came into prison as non-Muslims.

The prison population in the European states is overall much smaller; though the relatively large Muslim communities are also represented behind prison bars. Estimates figure the number for Germany and the UK to 80,000 each. There are a number of cases which help in illustrating the strong connection between prisons, radicalization and the execution of the terrorist act itself.

Three months after the 11 September 2001 attacks in the US, Richard Reid, a young British national boarded American Airlines flight 63 from Charles de Gaulle airport in Paris, bound for Miami. His mission was to detonate a concealed explosive device in one of his shoes, downing the aircraft and killing all

on board, along with himself. Richard Reid, aka Abdul Raheem, aka Abu Ibrahim, was from a broken home in southeast London, having been born to a Catholic English mother and a Jamaican Protestant father. As he grew up, Reid's father spent most of his time in prison, where he converted to Islam. Petty crime became a defining characteristic of Richard's youth and he left school at 16. He would himself serve several sentences in youth institutions and prisons, where he too would convert to Islam. On being released from prison in late 1995, Richard Reid changed his name to Abdul Rahim and began to frequent several mosques and praying circles in London, radicalizing himself to the extent that he was willing to spend time in a terrorist camp in Pakistan, training for the attacks.

On March 11th, 2004, a group of young Islamic extremists of Moroccan origin conducted a series of coordinated bombings against the train system of Madrid, resulting in the deaths of 191 people and wounding 2,050. Although more than 100 people have been investigated in connection to the bombings, 29 have been charged with participating in the terrorist attack and of the 29, six have been charged with 191 counts of murder and 1,755 counts of attempted murder.

Drug trafficking played a significant role in the operations of this terrorist cell. Dealing with hashish, cocaine and ecstasy, the well established smuggling routes between Morocco and Spain served as their primary funding resource. But criminal activities were relevant not only in terms of financing the attacks but also with regard to recruitment. The prisons of Spain and Morocco provided venues for indoctrination, recruitment and networking. According to press reports, some of the suspects, such as Jamal Ahmidan were radicalized while serving their time in prison for drug trafficking. In 2003, Jamal Ahmidan emerged from prison as a hardcore Salafi; the same thing applies to a significant number of his terrorist fellows involved in the Madrid attacks one year later.

A further example of successful recruitment in prisons is the case of Aqil, a convert who, after being released from detainment, went to Afghanistan to kidnap and murder reporter Daniel Pearl. The same applies to Jose Padilla, recruited by Al-Qaeda who was arrested in 2002, as well as the episode of Kevin James who was sentenced in February 2009 for conspiring to wage war against the United States. This last incident was particularly disturbing. Not only was the plot described by the FBI as the most operationally advanced since 9-11; even more troubling is the fact that James designed and supervised the attempted plot while serving time in a state prison in California. When he began serving his 10 year sentence for robbery in 1997, James was already part of the Muslim community. But during his stay he was moving from moderate to more and more radical thinking and ideology. It is reported that by 2004, James had developed a following of several dozen inmates consisting predominantly of youngsters serving short term sentences, who were particularly easy to manipulate. Under James' steering, the released followers started a series of robberies to fund their operations which ultimately would have ended in an attack

on a U.S. Army recruiting office. Eventually a lost cell phone during one of the robberies drew the attention of the authorities, who were able to arrest the terrorist cell members and explore the connections to the mentioned detainment center in California.

The examination of the process of radicalization, of who is involved and which places to look at has shown that a few common characteristics can be derived from the seemingly unpredictable phenomenon of homegrown terrorism and radicalization.

To summarize the conclusions: individuals who have experienced a real or perceived frustration or alienation are especially susceptible to radical ideas which replace uncertainty and weakness by simple ideas; ideas which deal in extremes, which can be applied to all problems of life and which are shared by small groups of like-minded people who feel "a unique sense of strength and superiority, whilst publicly breaking with the past and embracing a purer raison d'être."

But what still remains unclear is the rationale to join a radical organization at all. We have to admit that extremist groups such as Al-Qaeda have developed sophisticated methods and strategies to attract followers and future fighters. However, the individual must have a primary motivation which serves his own needs. After exploring the different steps in the process, as well as who is involved and where, an examination of this motivation is key to an effective counter terrorism strategy and the prevention of further home grown terrorist cases.

Why Some Join Radical Groups

Clearly, the incentive to join a radical group is difficult to analyze. Nevertheless, assuming that all of these individuals are weak-minded, easily-led sociopaths will not provide a valid explanation of the problem; nor will it help to develop counter strategies.

Given the fact that most of the reported individuals shared a perception of alienation and frustration, it seems reasonable to describe joining as the more or less egoistic attempt to accomplish the individual's needs. In the case of prisoners who are entering this unsettling environment, the reason to join a group which provides affiliation and security is quite obvious. To explain the drive for Western youngsters to be part of violent Jihad is far more difficult to comprehend.

In a recent study by Col. Venhaus of the United States Institute of Peace,[4] interviews and personal histories of more than 2,000 Islamist fighters were used to answer this particular question: Why would someone want to join an organization like Al-Qaeda, or any other radical group?

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[4] Col. John Venhaus, *Why Youth Join al-Qaeda*, Special Report (The United States Institute of Peace, 2010), available at http://www.usip.org/files/resources/SR236 Venhaus.pdf.

The "underwear bomber" Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab stated before his terrorist attempt in a chat room: "i am in a situation where i do not have a friend, i have no one to speak too, no one to consult, no one to support me and i feel depressed and lonely. i do not know what to do."

This statement exemplifies that most of the potential radicals are impressionable youths, looking for attention and acknowledgement of their existence and needs. Therefore the study identifies a set of categories of seekers which can be described as the following.

The first of the four seekers is the so called revenge seeker. He feels constant frustration about his current position inside the community and generally perceives himself as a victim in society. In his view there are external influences which prevent him from succeeding. However, he is not able to identify these forces. That is why he is looking for an enemy, and a means to fight against that enemy which is the cause and aim of his universal anger.

Number two is the so called status seeker who is also discontented because of his position and influence in his society. His expectations are far from being met and he is not able to succeed no matter how hard he tries to show his abilities. This feature is especially common to immigrants to Western countries, who leave their home countries to prove themselves and to live a better life. After entering the society of the new country, they do not feel accepted even though they try to be as cooperative as they can. This frustration is quickly replaced by the will to show the world their value, eventually leading to a radical group which allegedly offers a status of respect and personal glory for dedicated individuals.

Another category is formed by the so called identity seekers. Unlike the two forms of seekers presented before, the identity seeker is not trying to improve his personal reputation in society. On the contrary, these individuals look for a place to belong to. Abdulmutallab clearly is one of these cases, when being part of a group and a large movement is the primary incentive. "The identity seeker needs the structure, rules, and perspective that come from belonging to a group, because belonging defines him, his role, his friends, and his interaction with society." [5] The individual identifies himself with the aims of the group; the community's rules and ideology guide him and give him confidence; at last, being part of an exclusive club, sharing collective knowledge creates the perception of being superior, as well as the phenomenon of peer pressure, which complicates breaking off from the group afterwards.

The last category is called "the thrill seekers" who are looking for adventure and a way to break out of their secure environment to prove their abilities and strength. Though this applies by far to the smallest percentage of the suspects, the promise of spectacular violence and face-to face combat against an enemy who deserves to be contested is one of the strong features which make groups like al-Qaeda attractive to a distant audience around the globe, especially to Westernized youths who are lured by the portrayal of violence in action movies

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[5] Venhaus, *Why Youth Join al-Qaeda*.

and the everyday media. The case of the German fighter Eric Breininger could serve as an example for this distinctive category. It is reported that he was easily impressed by others and—as one investigator stated—could have ended up with any other radical group. After converting to Islam and having met members of the Sauerland cell, Breininger left Germany to join the violent Jihad. In his memoirs which were published on an Islamist website after his reported death in April 2010, Breininger described his experiences in the fighting: "I was in Islam for only 4 months; though I knew my duty (…) I wanted to go to Jihad." In contrast to his vigor, he clearly lacked decisive knowledge of Islam, and how to achieve his aims. According to reports, he was not able to choose the right flight out of Germany, and had a hard time during his training in Waziristan when one of his closest friends left the group for unknown reasons. Nevertheless, he had fought against Coalition Forces in Afghanistan and Pakistan for more than 3 years, and was involved in the production of propaganda videos in order to mobilize and recruit new followers, especially from Germany, to fight on the Taliban's side in Afghanistan.

All of these categories of seekers do not imply the need for Islam or a religious belief system at all. Joining an organization like al-Qaeda is primarily a rational choice; either to belong to a group that provides security and confirmation, or as a means to distinguish oneself from the broader society which does not pay attention to the unremarkable individual, or just for the mere reason of escaping boredom and the monotony in life.

But why join a violent group of religious fanatics from the Far East which implicates living under deplorable conditions, fighting and dying for the sake of strangers? How is it possible that Westerners join the fight against the culture they were raised in, or at least benefited from for a long time?

To explore this particular question—which is key to the development of a successful counter strategy—it is necessary to examine the current media coverage. Al-Qaeda has become a message, a brand which stands for the fight against Western "arrogance" and behavior towards other cultures, the perceived injustice of the relationship between the United States and the nations of the Middle East, and the existence of a Jewish state within a Muslim region.

The same applies to most of the other Islamist organizations which popped up like mushrooms during the last decade, as for example the Hizb-ut Tahrir, the Islamic Jihad Union as well as country-specific associations like the German Taliban Mujahidin.

"The new generation of Islamist militants realized long ago that Al-Qaeda is no match for the United States and its allies. But the militants clearly have an edge in the propaganda battle, a crucial component of the 'war on terror'," said Jason Burke, a British expert in terrorist groups, adding: "The terrorists have

become producers and film directors, and video cameras have become their most potent weapon." [6]

Thus, organizations like al-Qaeda cannot be defeated on a local battlefield. Their messages float across borders and are present in all Western news media. Affected or interested individuals have a wide range of Internet forums, platforms and propaganda portals to choose from. Knowing this, it is sufficient for recruiters to wait for the followers to come and make this first step, and then guide them down that path to radicalization.

Developing Counter Strategies

A successful counter terrorism strategy must be based on various grounds, such as the use of force in areas where radicals operate, as well as combating recruitment and the spreading of extremist ideas inside the respective home country. As we have seen, the threat of homegrown terrorism is difficult to grasp, the actions of radicals are hard to predict and the list of potential attackers is long and diverse.

However, with the help of case studies and analysis this shadowy threat can be characterized and categorized so that counter strategies can be designed to cover the different areas of the problem more efficiently in the future.

As we have seen, sets of categories for recruiters and locations where recruitment is likely to take place can be identified. Although not all of the individuals that enter the process of radicalization will automatically become terrorists and there are a reported number of discontinuations which indicate the possibility to interfere, the main task must be to prevent individuals from getting in contact with these radical ideas and figures at all since peer pressure and the change of mind after indoctrination are hard to overcome through external influences. Moreover, identifying radical thinking among apparently unremarkable Western citizens is nearly impossible. Therefore, the focus should be on recruitment locations and the categories of seekers presented above.

In more specific terms, this means that an individual who is seeking revenge because of his position in society needs to be calmed down and his frustration channeled to more constructive terms. The revenge seeker cannot describe what causes his dissatisfaction; therefore his energy needs to be guided to alternative outlets, for example through sports competitions, providing him with role models he can identify with or by offering other means to express his emotions and feelings, e.g. music and poetry. This seems like a weak approach to the problem of violent radicals trying to execute terrorist attacks. But it should be made clear that the potential terrorist of tomorrow is presently a "normal" juvenile within Western society.

The same applies to the case of the so called status seeker. This individual needs to be promoted in a way that he can show his qualities and achieve sat-

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[6] "Stripped of havens, Al-Qaeda turns to 'media jihad'," *The Daily Star*, 10 September 2005, http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/Sep/10/Stripped-of-havens-Al-Qaeda-turns-to-media-jihad.ashx#axzz2QFq5YeAf.

isfaction in his normal surroundings. These people consider themselves as clever and capable. Giving them the opportunity to prove their qualities is one way to prevent them from seeking other forms of acknowledgement. In this respect, Western society also needs to promote the ideal of political discussions where diverse views and needs can be expressed. The years after the beginning of the War on Terror were filled with debates on Western behavior towards other cultures and the use of force in general. Animating individuals who feel concerned about their nation's policy and its possible effects on a certain religious group or population to participate in political discussions is absolutely essential for a democratic and multicultural society not only for the sake of countering radical ideas, but also to evaluate and refine people's own perceptions. Therefore advertising the equality of opportunities, also and especially for immigrants with a different cultural and religious background is indispensable to show that change is possible and more likely to succeed without radical force and terror.

As for the category of identity seekers who feel alienated inside an uncomprehending society, they must be guided to groups like sports clubs, student societies or—in the case of religious needs—to moderate associations. Offering a constructive alternative helps them return to and be part of society again.

The category of thrill seekers is fascinated by the message of organizations like al-Qaeda, but they are likely to quit the movement if reality fails to meet their high expectations. Hence disturbing the propaganda flow and presenting the events in the proper light is the best way to avert this disturbing development. Or, as Col. Venhaus states:

> Discrediting the al-Qaeda brand in the eyes of potential thrill seekers also requires that al-Qaeda operations be publicly portrayed as inglorious and shameful. The military and law enforcement activities that are used to thwart attacks must be determined and aggressive, but the public recounting should question al-Qaeda's effectiveness and delegitimize its struggle by making it appear bumbling, inept, and illegal. Al-Qaeda's adventurous appeal also wanes dramatically for the thrill seeker when the reality of living in squalid conditions, fighting for a lost cause, and dying an ignominious death is prominently displayed.[7]

Reports and public interviews with former radicals who have changed their mind after being arrested could also help to prevent seekers from admiring terrorist groups and ideals. This approach is designed to keep or turn away impressionable individuals from radical ideas and messages. However, with the paramount availability of the Internet and daily media as a platform for Islamist propaganda, communication from recruiters to potential followers is likely to continue in the near future. And some individuals, such as prisoners who have just entered their new unsettling environment will still end up in radical associations for various reasons.

Countering active recruitment necessitates law enforcement authorities to be present at locations where recruitment is likely to occur. Places of congrega-

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[7]   Venhaus, *Why Youth Join al-Qaeda*.

tion like mosques cannot be shut down, nor can they be observed without putting a whole group of the population under general suspicion. That is why cooperation and involvement of moderate elements—which represent by far the majority—are so important in the process. As it was discussed before, moderate imams may not have explicit knowledge of radical circles or single individuals among the local communities. But narrowing the area of operation that is available for recruiters is the first step in pushing radical elements out of these locations. True, moderate Muslims will not be happy to report to the authorities about suspicious incidents, but it is a small group of violent fundamentalists that discredit the whole community, resulting in public pressure on uninvolved members.

The same applies to the third category, the magnets of recruitment like radical bookshops and mosques known for their extremist ideas. If these places are familiar to public authorities, they must be observed and in case they are not willing to cooperate or are violently opposed to the law, have to be dissolved.

The case of prisons is more complex in nature. The administration and maintenance of penitentiary system is traditionally a public responsibility. Thus, a modification of design and composition of these institutions can be easily achieved. On the other hand, the existence of associations inside the prison is difficult to alter. Moreover, not every prisoner network is by itself radical and threatening. As we have seen, also the influence and work of spiritual guides is important and even supported by public authorities in many Western countries. Therefore more attention must be paid to the selection of prison chaplains etc. since their contribution to moral and emotional assistance to the prisoners and thereby to their thinking cannot be overestimated.

The disturbing development inside the US prison system is partially attributed to the lack of well educated prison chaplains, especially for those providing Muslim religious service. As Frank J. Cilluffo, director of the Homeland Security Policy Institute stated before the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs in September 2006: "Strikingly the Federal Bureau of Prisons (FBOP) currently employs only ten Muslim chaplains for the entire federal prison system. (…) This handful of chaplains cannot possibly tend to the religious needs of every Muslim prisoner or oversee every religious service. As a result, prisoners often take on the role of religious service providers and prayer leaders."[8] Financial pressure and a constant over-occupation is reason for this evolution which leaves the door wide open for radical ideas to flow in. Especially when regular prisoners voluntarily act as spiritual guides, individuals like Kevin James can influence inmates on a regular and legal basis. The establishment of an institution which supervises the selection and education of

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8 Frank J. Cilluffo, "Prison Radicalization: Are Terrorist Cells Forming in U.S. Cell Blocks?," Testimony before the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, 19 September 2006. Available at http://hsgac.senate.gov/public/index.cfm?FuseAction=Files.View&FileStore_id=c4cb9c30-7466-43d5-bf4f-2699710b4b69.

these chaplains is essential for preventing radical ideas to spread inside prison walls. Furthermore, incoming books, tapes and other material must be monitored to ensure that no controversial literature and propaganda finds its way to the inmates. In addition, more emphasis should be laid on the promotion of moral values and educational seminars, especially for those prisoners who will be sent into society after a short period of time. The idea of punishment needs to be changed to a more re-educational approach, especially when talking of young criminals, since the ultimate goal is to never see them behind bars again.

The members of the German Sauerland cell might serve as an example for the positive influence on the suspects in prisons.[9] After being arrested in 2007, the group was held in custody while investigations were still running to set up a trial, beginning in April 2009. The prosecution was expected to last for years, with long lists of testimonies and reports. However, in June 2009 the members surprisingly approached the law enforcement authorities to make an extensive confession. The decisive turn in this case may have hinged at least in part on simple boredom, as Adem Yilmaz, a Turkish man raised in Germany, declared openly in court: "I couldn't care less how long you give me, whether it's 20 or 30 years, (…) I just want to get what we're doing here over and done with. It's boring." [10] The confessions resulted in more than 1,500 pages of reports and inside knowledge about terrorist structures in Germany, their connections to radical groups in countries like Afghanistan, Pakistan and a disturbing insight to the process of radicalization and recruitment. The members of the Sauerland cell had radicalized themselves very quickly and tried to go to Jihad as fast as possible, no matter when or where. After first plans to fight in Iraq or Chechnya, the members ended up in Waziristan, training for combat with the Islamic Jihad Union which sent them back to their home country to prepare and execute attacks. We can assume that their confessions were motivated also by a possible reduction of the sentences, which ended in twelve, eleven and two times five years for the suspects; on the other hand, the assumed head of the group, Fritz Gelowicz declared in his final statement: "In retrospect, I would not do it again," thus, clearly a message which can be used to convince other seekers to go down this route to radicalism and an acknowledgement of the effectiveness of law enforcement agencies and the penitentiary system in general.

The establishment of new prisons to relieve pressure on the present system, the employment of more prison chaplains selected through a governmental institution and carrying out special training for the prison personnel to identify radical inmates will require a higher budget for the penitentiary system. But, if this leads to the reduction of the threat of homegrown terrorism, this seems money well spent.

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[9] Nicholas Kulish, "Suspects Plan Guilty Pleas in Terror Case in Germany," *The New York Times Online*, 9 June 2009, www.nytimes.com/2009/06/ 10/world/europe/ 10germany.html?scp=2&sq=sauerland cell&st=cse.

[10] Yassin Musharbash, "Die Memoiren des deutschen Dschihadisten," *Der Spiegel*, 5 May 2010, www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/0,1518,693081,00.html.

Conclusion

The information given clearly shows that the threat of terrorism is far from being thwarted. In truth, the danger has changed into a form which is even more difficult to control, since the potential attackers are living inside Western society without attracting attention. Their unremarkable record, background and appearance make it impossible for counter terrorist experts to predict imminent threat without putting whole groups of the population under general suspicion.

Nevertheless there are characteristics in the process itself, the types of recruiters, the possible recruitment grounds and the reasons for joining these kinds of groups that can be identified and used to develop adequate counter terrorism strategies for the respective nation states.

Terrorist groups like al-Qaeda, the Taliban, the Islamic Jihad Union and many others will continue to exist and find their way into our daily life through media and Internet. However, nations and their societies can have an impact on the minds most susceptible to these radical messages. By improving living conditions, offering alternatives for the frustrated and seeking continuous cooperation with local communities and associations, the seeds of radical ideologies will fall on infertile ground. In conjunction with extensive surveillance and improvement of counter terrorism strategies, the challenge of terrorism can be met in an effective way.

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