Global Salafi Terrorist Networks

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Evidence-Based Terrorism Research

- Specific Threat to the U.S.
- Application of Scientific Method to Terrorism Research
- Started with 9/11 Perpetrators As Index Sample
- Use of Violence Against Non-Muslim Government or Population (“Far Enemy”) in Furtherance of Salafi Goals
- 400 Biographies of Terrorists: Open-Source Information
  - Trial transcripts
    - U.S., France, Germany, Egypt, Indonesia, Morocco, Canada
  - Press accounts (FBIS)
    - English, French, German, Arabic, Spanish, Turkish, Dutch
  - Academic publications
  - Internet (corroborated)
## Individual Characteristics

- Mostly Middle Class
- From a Secular or Mildly Religious Background
- 87% Had Secular Education
- Average Age at Joining – 26
- 62% Had College Education, Mostly in Engineering
- Mostly Professional or Semiprofessional
- 72% Married and Vast Majority With Children
- Very Few Criminals
- Very Few with Any Type of Psychological Problems
- 84% Joined Terrorist Organization in Diaspora
Joining the Jihad

- **Friendship (Pre-Existing): 68%**
  - “Bunch of guys” collectively deciding to join
  - Joining childhood friends

- **Kinship: 20%**
  - Fathers, brothers, first cousins
  - Importance of in-laws and marriage to cement friendship bonds

- **Discipleship: 10%**
  - Students of Sungkar and Baasyir from *Jamaah Islamiyah*
Trajectory of Muslim Expatriates

- Upwardly and Geographically Mobile (“Best and Brightest”)
- Mostly from Religious, Caring, Middle-Class Families
- Global Citizens, Conversant in 3 or 4 Languages, Skilled in Computer Technology
- Separated from Traditional Bonds and Culture
- Homesick, Lonely, Marginalized, and Excluded from Society
- Seek Friends
- Drifted to Mosques for Companionship, Not Religion
- Moved in Together (Halal Food), Formed Cliques
Trajectory of 2nd-Generation Immigrants

- **Two Main Paths**
  - Second generation in the West
  - Young economic immigrants to the West
- **Upwardly Mobile and Completely Secular Background**
- **Excluded from Society**
  - Dropped out of school
    - Petty crime (false documents and drug dealing)
    - Drug addiction
- **Discriminated Against by Society**
  - Resentful; activation of collective identity
  - Personal experience resonates with Salafi ideology
- **Groups of Friends, Who Grew up Together and Collectively Drifted to Religion to Escape Their Situation**
- **Radicalized Collectively**
Mobilization

• Spontaneously Self-organized “Bunches of Guys” of Trusted Friends, from the Bottom Up
• No Top-Down Al Qaeda Recruitment Program
  – No campaign, shura, or budget dedicated to recruitment
  – Selection: 15-20% of volunteers accepted
• Gaps in the Distribution (U.S., Palestine, Iran)
• No Evidence of “Brainwashing”: They Simply Acquired the Beliefs of Their Friends
• No Evidence of “Recruiter”: Total Proselytizing Environment; All Mutually Recruited Each Other
• Social Bonds Came Before Ideological Commitment
• Group Processes: No Robinson Crusoe Narrative
Motivation

- Insidious Process
- Low-Risk Participation with an Increasingly Closer Set of Friends
- Medium-Risk Proselytism for an Ideal Way of Life
- Importance of Specific Script for the Global Salafi Jihad: 12 Islamist Institutions Generated 50% of Sample
- Salafi Ideology: New Values (Islam and Ummah)
  - Faith and commitment grounded in intense small-group dynamics
  - Gradual development of a collective identity
  - Greater jihad: “born again,” imitate Salaf through personal example
- Complete Transformation of Values
In-Group Love

- Dynamics of Dense Social Networks Promotes In-Group Love
- Self-Sacrifice for Comrades and the Cause
  - Secular → religious
  - Material → spiritual
  - Short-term opportunity → long-term vision
  - Individual concern → communitarian sacrifice
  - Apathy → active engagement
  - Traditional morality → takfir group morality
  - Worldly gains → otherworldly rewards
Out-Group Hate

• Grounded in Everyday Experience of Discrimination and Exclusion from Highest Levels of Society
  – Endemic in Middle East and Western Europe

• Grounded in Group Dynamics
  – “Bunch of guys” escalation of mutual complaints about unfairness and injustice in society
  – Endorse conspiracy theories

• Endorse Takfir Doctrine → Sanctions Commission of Crimes Versus Society
Group Dynamics

• Explanation in Normal Group Dynamics, Rather Than Individual Mental Pathology

• Once in the Movement, Difficult to Abandon It Without Betraying Close Friends and Family

• This Natural and Intense Loyalty to the Group, Inspired by a Violent Salafi Script, Transforms Alienated Young Muslims into Fanatic Terrorists

• High-Risk Terrorist Operations
  – In-group love + out-group hate (under specific violent script, often religious) → mass murder + suicide
The Network
Pre-Existing Social Bonds
Operational Links

- Bali, 2002
- Jakarta, 2003
- Singapore Plot, 2001
- Strasbourg, 1999
- France, 1995
- Casablanca, 2003
- Morocco, 1994
- Istanbul, 2003

Emb, 1998
Personal v Operational Links
Continued Evolution

• **Success of Post-9/11 Counterterrorism Campaign**
  – Elimination of sanctuary, funding, communication, and key leaders
  – Neutralization of Al Qaeda proper

• **Physical Breakup of Formal Global Salafi Jihad Networks**
  – Expansion of home-grown initiative due to lack of leadership and restraints
  – Local autonomy, self-financing, and self-training
  – Informal communications, difficult to monitor
  – Fuzzy boundaries: no formal initiation or fixed numbers
  – New local, more aggressive, and reckless leadership
Present Status

• Four Types of Networks Existing in Parallel:
  – The old Al Qaeda organization (longer term planning):
    • Effectively neutralized (sanctuary denial, monitored communication)
  – The organized affiliated groups, now more autonomous:
    • Zarqawi’s organization; JI; MILF; GSPC
  – Unaffiliated informal groups (more of an effective reaction to trigger):
    • Madrid group; “Salafia Jihadia”; Hofstad group; London groups
  – Singletons:
    • Kamel Bourgass; Yehya Kadouri

• Effectiveness of U.S. Counterterrorism Campaign:
  – Pressures GSJ to evolve into the last two types of networks
  – Forces migration of the Jihad to the Internet
Toward a Global “Leaderless” Jihad

- Decentralized, Loosely Connected Network
  - Mobilized and motivated autonomously
  - No more 9/11, but lots of 3/11 or 7/7, especially in Europe
  - Threat to the West comes from the West

- Military Role (No Hard Targets)
  - Sanctuary denial in potential failed or friendly states

- Importance of the Internet
  - Virtual “invisible hand” organizing terrorist operations: C2
  - Social transformation of the jihad
  - Enemy center of gravity:
    - Vision of Salafi utopia unites the leaderless jihad
    - Ideological battleground (War of Ideas)
Identifying the Networks: Triangulation

• **Background Attributes**
  – Diaspora
  – Young: 15-30 (mostly men, but women becoming more common)
  – Underemployed, spending lots of time on Internet
  – Travel abroad (or new passport)
    • Syria, Pakistan, Iran, Yemen, Turkey, Egypt

• **Behavioral Attributes**
  – Salafi
    • Dramatic change: embrace new community, isolated from old community
    • Appearance: short pants, beard, mark on forehead (veiled wife)
    • Proselytism: people around them, mosque
    • Takfir: dispute with imam and crime (white collar and drugs)
  – Action predisposition
    • Martial activity: paintball, shooting practice, camping (no training camp)

• **Online Attributes**
  – Jihadi chatrooms, jihadi websites, downloading weapons info