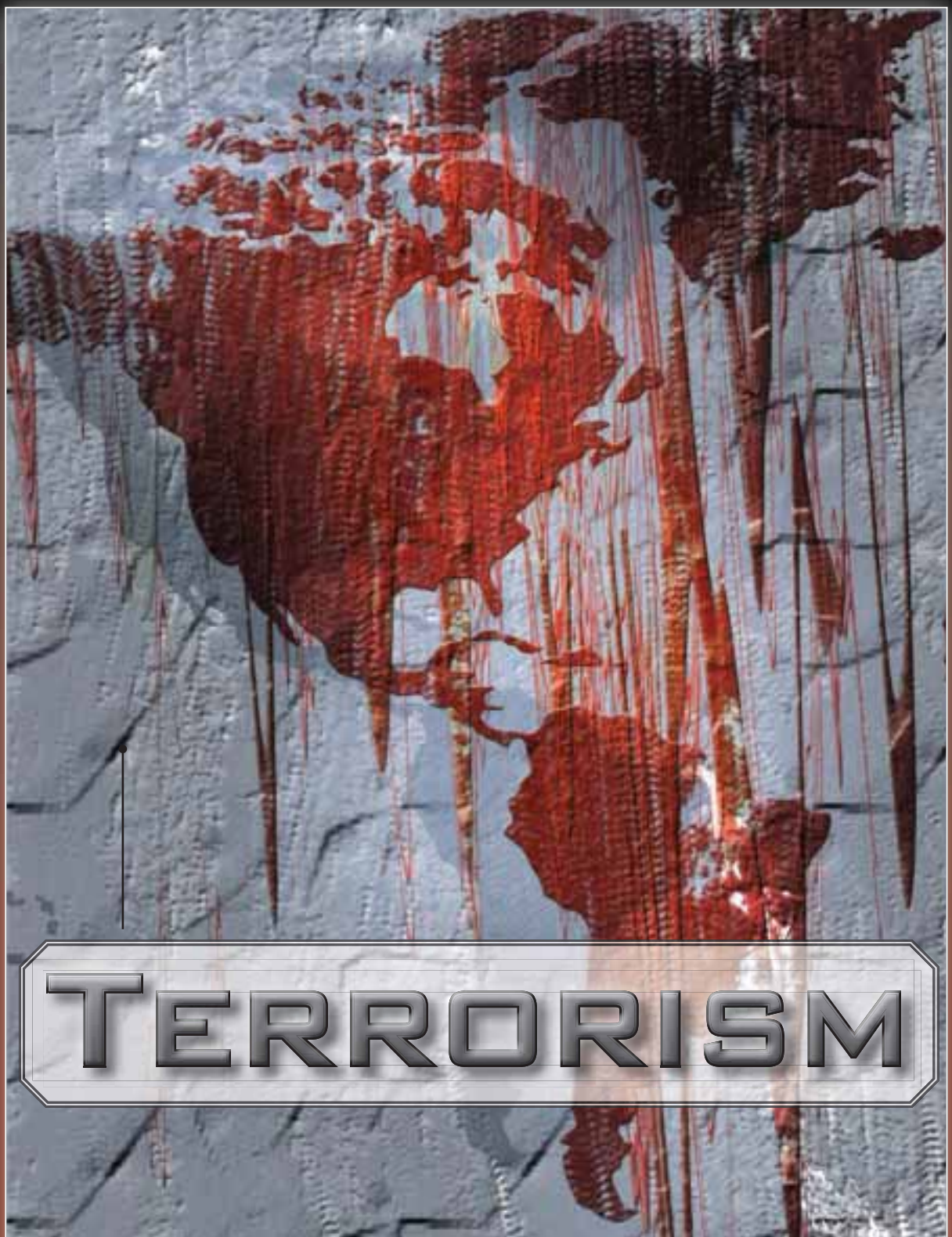
U.S. Department of Justice
Federal Bureau of Investigation

September 2011

FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin



September 2011
Volume 80
Number 9

United States
Department of Justice
Federal Bureau of Investigation
Washington, DC 20535-0001

Robert S. Mueller III
Director

Contributors' opinions and statements should not be considered an endorsement by the FBI for any policy, program, or service.

The attorney general has determined that the publication of this periodical is necessary in the transaction of the public business required by law. Use of funds for printing this periodical has been approved by the director of the Office of Management and Budget.

The *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin* (ISSN-0014-5688) is published monthly by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, 935 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20535-0001. Periodicals postage paid at Washington, D.C., and additional mailing offices. Postmaster: Send address changes to Editor, *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin*, FBI Academy, Quantico, VA 22135.

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The Training Division's Outreach and Communications Unit produces this publication with assistance from the division's National Academy Unit. Issues are available online at *http://www.fbi.gov.*

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Send article submissions to Editor, *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin*, FBI Academy, Quantico, VA 22135.

FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin

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ISSN 0014-5688 USPS 383-310

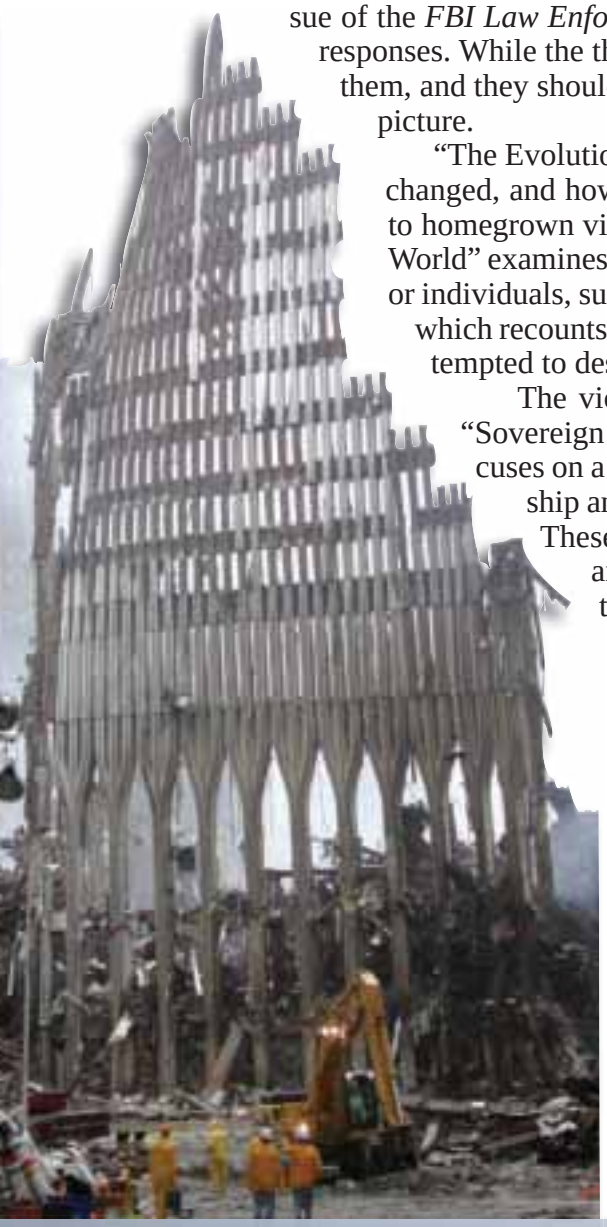
Focus on Terrorism

In the decade since September 11, 2001, the United States has had many successes against terrorism, from thwarting the plot to detonate liquid bombs aboard airlines to the death of Usama Bin Ladin earlier this year. Yet, the threat has not disappeared. If anything, it has become more prevalent and continues to change quickly. While the United States successfully has disrupted al Qaeda and dismantled some of its operations, the group remains a powerful force, influencing its followers and motivating new ones. Other groups, such as al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, not only have demonstrated their intent to attack the United States and its allies but shown their ability to inspire others to develop and carry out their own attacks. In the last several years, these efforts have fueled a steady stream of plots against U.S. citizens and targets by those living in America—homegrown violent extremists—who increasingly are fueled by easy-access Internet propaganda.

Because of these rapid transformations, the International Association of Chiefs of Police Committee on Terrorism requested that this issue of the FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin focus on the evolving terrorism threat to both U.S. interests overseas and in its homeland. The committee first undertook this effort in the March 1999 issue of the magazine and again in December 2007 to focus on the post-9/11 threat. In the 4 years since the 2007 edition, the threat has changed

significantly as America's adversaries use innovative approaches to avoid detection and carry out terrorist operations. To address this evolving threat, the United States must be more aware, identify emerging threats early, and not only look at the current state of terrorism but also ask, What's next?

Change is the only constant in addressing terrorism. With that in mind, the articles in this issue of the *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin* look at the varied forms of terrorism and America's responses. While the threats are diverse, each with its own challenges, common threads link them, and they should be treated not simply as a case or group but as part of a larger threat picture.



"The Evolution of Terrorism Since 9/11" looks at the overarching threat, how it has changed, and how Americans must adapt to the changes, from the threats of al Qaeda to homegrown violent extremists. "Radicalization of Islamist Terrorists in the Western World" examines the radicalization process and how it inspires violent actions of groups or individuals, such as the lone-offender example laid out in "The Hosam Smadi Case," which recounts a Joint Terrorism Task Force takedown of a Jordanian national who attempted to destroy a Texas skyscraper with a vehicle-borne improvised explosive.

The violent extremist threat is not limited to those with Islamist ideology. "Sovereign Citizens: A Growing Domestic Threat to Law Enforcement" focuses on a loosley knit group of individuals who have renounced their US citizenship and believe that federal, state, and local governments operate illegally. These individuals typically act alone, committing white collar crimes and creating false documents, but their behavior quickly can escalate to violence. During a traffic stop of two sovereign citizens in Arkansas last year, a passenger opened fire, killing two officers and injuring more law enforcement officials who attempted to stop the pair.

While these articles discuss the terrorism challenges faced by the United States, they also are meant to educate law enforcement on specific indicators that can alert them to potential violent behavior, why coordinated responses have prevented terrorist attacks, and how to protect U.S. citizens from these threats. America's state and local law enforcement partners are essential to a secure defense, with eyes and ears throughout communities across the country. These examples show how—together—Americans can be successul, and they also demonstrate why the United States must remain igilant and combine and adapt its intelligence and law enforcement capabilities to stop the ever-changing scope of terrorism.

To address this evolving threat, the United States must be more aware, identify emerging Threats early, and not only look at the current state of terrorism but also ask, What's next?"

Sean M. Joyce
Executive Assistant Director
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The Evolution of Terrorism Since 9/11

By LAUREN B. O'BRIEN, M.S.F.S.

Approximately 10 years after the 9/11 attacks, the United States faces a more diverse, yet no less formidable, terrorist threat than that of 2001. In this increasingly complex and dynamic threat environment, not only does Pakistan-based al Qaeda possess the ability to project itself across the globe to stage attacks against the West but so do groups based in Yemen, Somalia, and Iraq. In many ways, al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) poses as serious a threat to the nation as core al Qaeda, with two attempted attacks against the U.S. homeland in the past 2 years.

In this ever-changing threat environment, America constantly must evolve to keep pace with this adaptive enemy. The United States has had significant successes in combating the terrorism threat, most visibly with the May 2, 2011, death of al Qaeda leader Usama Bin Ladin. Further, the lives saved by U.S. counterterrorism efforts—the arrest of a homegrown violent extremist (HVE) who attempted to attack a Christmas tree-lighting ceremony in Portland or the disruption of three al Qaeda-trained operatives in the United States before they could attack the New York City transit system—stand as equally meaningful victories.

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Discussing the current threat environment requires an understanding of how terrorism trends have evolved. These trends remain relevant today in the decade since 9/11.

TERRORISM IN THE WAKE OF 9/11

Evolving Threat from Al Qaeda

In 2001, what emerged with clarity out of the ashes of the Twin Towers was that no greater threat to the homeland existed from a nonstate actor than that posed by core al Qaeda in Pakistan. Ten years later, the group still demonstrates the intent and capability to attack the United States. Although al Qaeda's last successful Western attack was in the United Kingdom in 2005, a steady stream of the group's operatives have been detected and disrupted over the past 10 years in the United States, Norway, Denmark, the United Kingdom, Germany, and Pakistan.

Counterterrorism efforts against al Qaeda in Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) that began with Operation Enduring Freedom in October 2001 have degraded al Qaeda's abilities, resulting in the loss of key leaders and trainers and making it more difficult for al Qaeda to train operatives, communicate, and transfer funds. In response to these setbacks, the group has refined its modus operandi and developed practices that have allowed it to persevere in a post-9/11 environment.

Seized by the success of 9/11, al Qaeda has maintained its intent to conduct "spectacular" high-casualty attacks against the United States and its Western allies. A review of disrupted al Qaeda plots since 9/11 reveals that the group has continued to focus on high-profile political, economic, symbolic, and infrastructure targets, with a particular fixation on aviation. Al Qaeda also has pursued its interest in staging simultaneous attacks—a theme it has followed from the 1995 Bojinka plot to attack planes over the Pacific, to 9/11, and to the 2006 plan to attack multiple flights from the United Kingdom to the United States. Such sophisticated plots require multiple operatives and longer planning cycles than a simply constructed, less-spectacular plan. In recent years, al Qaeda has evolved and expanded its interests to include small-scale attacks in addition to its pursuit of the spectacular, with the aim of staging a successful attack regardless of size.

> ***These various terrorism trends have resulted in a threat environment more complex and diverse than ever before.***

Al Qaeda's preference for acquiring its attack capabilities from locally available resources has held relatively constant. With the exception of "shoe bomber" Richard Reid in 2001, for its Western plots, al Qaeda has relied on well-trained operatives to construct an explosive device after being deployed, using locally available materials. For example, in the July 7, 2005 attacks in London, bombers spent weeks in their ground-floor flat in Leeds constructing explosive devices from readily available commercial ingredients.

Over the past decade, al Qaeda has developed the practice of using operatives with legal access to the United States and other Western nations to target their countries of origin; for example, al Qaeda deployed American legal permanent resident Najibullah Zazi to attack the New York City subway system in 2009 and U.K. citizen Mohammad Sidique Khan to carry out the July 2005 attacks in London. The three individuals convicted of the most serious charges in

the 2006 U.S.-U.K. aviation plot, as well as most of their co-conspirators, consisted of British citizens of Pakistani descent. Using operatives who not only possess legal travel documents but also language skills and Western cultural understanding can help them to evade security and operate undetected.

Despite setbacks to its training program due to the loss of key leaders and an increasingly difficult operating environment, al Qaeda has continued to recruit and train potential operatives. Identifying American al Qaeda recruits who may travel from the United States to Pakistan to receive training, much like Najibullah Zazi, is one of the FBI's highest counterterrorism priorities. Yet, U.S. authorities also must remain concerned about European trainees. Because of their visa-free access to the United States through the Visa Waiver Program, al Qaeda could deploy European operatives to the United States for homeland attacks or use Europe as a launching pad for attacks against America, as it did in the disrupted U.S.-U.K. aviation plot.

Birth of the Global Jihadist Movement

Following 9/11, the United States faced a threat from al Qaeda not only as an organization but also as an ideology. A new global jihadist movement composed of al Qaeda-affiliated and -inspired groups and individuals began to unfold. Although these groups threatened U.S. interests overseas, they did not rival al Qaeda in the threat they posed to the homeland. However, over time, the spread of this decentralized, diffuse movement has increased the threats to U.S. interests at home and abroad.

In the early 2000s, a number of al Qaeda affiliates and regional terrorist groups emerged, and, although they took on the name of al Qaeda and adopted its ideology, they largely adhered to a local agenda, focusing on regional issues and attacking local targets. At the time of the 2007 *National Intelligence Estimate* publication, al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) was the only al Qaeda affiliate known to have expressed a desire to strike the homeland. Within Iraq, AQI inflicted thousands of casualties on coalition forces and Iraqi civilians. Beyond the country's borders, AQI fanned the flames of the global jihadist movement and claimed credit for the June 2007 failed vehicle-borne improvised explosive device

New York City subway system

Russell Square, London

(VBIED) attack on Glasgow Airport in Scotland.

In addition to al Qaeda-affiliated groups, the United States also saw the emergence of a generation of unaffiliated individuals inspired by al Qaeda's ideology but lacking ties to any foreign terrorist organization. These HVEs have developed into one prong of a multifaceted homeland threat. Although many have lacked the capability to match their intent, others took steps to move from violent rhetoric into action.

Some of these al Qaeda-inspired Americans sought to travel to Pakistan, Afghanistan, or other fronts in the global jihad to gain fighting experience or participate in terrorist training. The Virginia Jihad Network—a group of individuals disrupted in 2001 after acquiring training from Pakistani militant group Lashkar-e-Tayyiba in preparation for jihad against American forces in Afghanistan—was one of the first cases to shed light on this trend.

Since 9/11, American HVEs have traveled to Pakistan, Somalia, and Yemen for terrorist training and ultimately joined terrorist groups in those countries. For example, Bryant Neal Vinas, a convert to Islam who was raised in Long Island, New York, traveled to Pakistan in September 2007 and managed to join al Qaeda. There, he participated in attacks against coalition forces and provided al Qaeda with insight for homeland attacks, including one potentially targeting the Long Island Rail Road. The primary concern with Vinas and other American trainees is that al Qaeda or its affiliated groups will leverage them for homeland attacks, as they sought to do with Najibullah Zazi before his plot to attack the New York City transit system was disrupted in 2009.

"Despite setbacks to its training program due to the loss of key leaders and an increasingly difficult operating environment, al Qaeda has continued to recruit and train potential operatives."

Other HVEs have attempted to stage attacks inside the United States. In the years since 9/11, the FBI and its law enforcement partners have disrupted over a dozen plots perpetrated by HVEs. Although many were unsophisticated, small-scale plots, like Derrick Sharreef's 2006 plot to attack a shopping mall food court with a hand grenade, others were more ambitious, like the one involving five individuals who conspired in 2007 to attack soldiers stationed at the Fort Dix Army Base in New Jersey. Based on the number of disruptions and indictments, the number of HVEs undertaking terrorist actions in the United States appears to have increased over the past 10 years.

Unfortunately, the appeal of the al Qaeda narrative has not diminished, and issues, like the war in Iraq, the United States and NATO presence in Afghanistan, and Guantanamo, serve to inflame and, perhaps, radicalize those sympathetic to al Qaeda's ideology. The decentralized global jihadist movement has become a many-headed hydra, with al Qaeda-affiliated and -inspired groups playing an increasingly prominent role in the overall threat.

CURRENT THREAT ENVIRONMENT

These various terrorism trends have resulted in a threat environment more complex and diverse than ever before. In the past 2 years, al Qaeda, its affiliates, and HVEs all have attempted attacks on the homeland. New tactics and tradecraft have emerged that further complicate the myriad threats facing the United States. The Internet has allowed terrorist groups to overcome their geographic limits and plays an increasing role in

Increase in Number and Diversity of Terrorist Plots Against the United States Since 9/11

	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Homegrown Violent Extremist (HVE)				4	5	6, 7, 8, 9	11		13, 14, 15, 16, 17	21, 22, 23, 24
al-Qa'ida	1, 2		3			10			18	
Unaffiliated							12		19	25
al-Qa'ida Affiliates									20	26, 27
Total Number of Plots	2	0	1	1	1	5	2	0	8	7

Civilian Other	11 Plots
Aviation	7 Plots
Military	7 Plots
Government	3 Plots
Mass Transit	3 Plots
Infrastructure	2 Plots
Financial	1 Plot

Number	Plotter or Plot Name	Targets
1	9/11	Civilian Other, Government, Aviation
2	Richard Reid	Aviation
3	Iyman Faris	Infrastructure
4	Herald Square Plot	Mass Transit
5	Jamiyyat Ul-Islam Is Saheeh (JIS)	Civilian Other
6	Derrick Shareef	Civilian Other
7	Liberty 7/Sears Tower Plot	Civilian Other
8	Mohamed Reza Taheri-Azar SUV Attack	Civilian Other
9	Ehsanul Sadequee	Civilian Other, Government, Financial
10	US-UK Aviation Plot	Aviation
11	Fort Dix Plot	Military
12	JFK Airport Plot	Aviation
13	Daniel Boyd Quantico Plot	Military
14	Newburgh 4	Civilian Other, Military, Aviation
15	Carlos Bledsoe Little Rock Shooting	Military
16	Ft. Hood Shooting	Military
17	Michael Finton	Government
18	Najibullah Zazi NYC Subway Plot	Mass Transit
19	Hosam Smadi	Civilian Other
20	NW Flight 253	Aviation
21	Mohamed Osman Mohamud	Civilian Other
22	Farooque Ahmed	Mass Transit
23	Antonio Martinez	Military
24	Paul Rockwood	Civilian Other
25	Khalid Aldawsari	Military, Infrastructure
26	Package Bomb Plot	Aviation
27	Faisal Shahzad Times Square Plot	Civilian Other

This information derived from the following sources: *"American Jihadist Terrorism: Combating a Complex Threat,"* Congressional Research Service, 7 December 2010; *"Al-Qaeda and Affiliates: Historical Perspective, Global Presence, and Implications for U.S. Policy,"* Congressional Research Service, 25 January 2011; and various criminal proceedings and Department of Justice press releases.

facilitating terrorist activities. In this diffuse and decentralized threat environment, the next attack could come at the hands of a well-trained AQAP operative equipped with a sophisticated improvised explosive device (IED) or a lone HVE using an automatic weapon to attack a shopping mall.

Al Qaeda's Persistent Threat

One of the most significant recent changes to al Qaeda comes with the death of Bin Ladin. Although the full ramifications

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of his demise are not known yet, the U.S. government continues to assess and monitor how his death affects al Qaeda's organization and operations. Because of Bin Ladin's stature and his personal connections with leaders of al Qaeda affiliates and allies, his demise also may change the way these groups relate to one another.

The past 10 years have demonstrated that despite the counterterrorism efforts against al Qaeda, its intent to target the United States remains steady. For example, one al Qaeda homeland plot involved three operatives—Najibullah Zazi, Zarein Ahmedzay, and Adis Medunjanin—who were disrupted by the U.S. government in fall 2009. These individuals received training in Pakistan from al Qaeda and then returned to the United States, where they planned to use homemade IEDs to attack the New York City subway system.

The 2009 plot also demonstrated al Qaeda's continuation of targeting trends that evolved over the previous years, such as its interest in Western recruits for a homeland plot, its preference for IEDs constructed locally, and its desire to target transit infrastructure. Although these aspects of al Qaeda's modus operandi have remained consistent, al Qaeda has expanded and diversified its strategy in hopes of perpetrating more attacks. For example, while al Qaeda remains committed to large-scale attacks, it also may pursue smaller, less sophisticated ones that require less planning and fewer resources and operational steps. Instead of plots reminiscent of 9/11 that involve more than a dozen operatives, they now may employ only a few.

Rise of Affiliates

While Bin Ladin's death represents an important victory in U.S. counterterrorism efforts, it does not mean a reduced terrorism threat. The threat from al Qaeda affiliates, like AQAP and Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan (TTP), has drastically changed and represents the most significant difference in the terrorist threat environment since 9/11. AQAP, which has attempted two homeland attacks within the past 2 years, now poses as serious a threat to the homeland as core al Qaeda. AQAP has proven itself an innovative and sophisticated enemy capable of striking beyond the Arabian Peninsula. While the tactics core al Qaeda developed and refined continue to threaten the United States, the inventive tactics created by AQAP pose an additional dangerous threat.

With the Christmas Day 2009 attempt by Nigerian national Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab to detonate an IED onboard Northwest Flight 253, AQAP became the first al Qaeda affiliate to attempt an attack on the homeland. With this attack, AQAP broke from al Qaeda's typical modus operandi in several ways. Abdulmutallab was a single operative traveling alone. Rather than constructing his device in the target country, he carried an IED on his person all the way from the flight he

first boarded in Africa to the airspace over Detroit, and he evaded detection systems in various airports. Unlike Zazi, Abdulmutallab was not based in the United States, providing fewer chances for the FBI to look for clues of possible terrorist associations.

After this attempted attack, AQAP revealed its capacity to adapt and innovate by following with the October 2010 package-bomb plot. With this plot, AQAP obviated the need for a human operative by sending sophisticated IEDs concealed in printer cartridges inside packages aboard airfreight airlines. This tactic eliminated the potential for human error in the operation or detonation of the device. AQAP claims the total operation cost was only $4,200, a vastly smaller figure than the estimated $400,000 to $500,000 spent by al Qaeda to plan 9/11. In this "death by 1,000 cuts" approach, AQAP moved the West to spend many times that to reexamine and strengthen its security procedures. From AQAP's perspective, this failed attempt was a success—not in producing mass casualties, but in achieving a high economic cost.

In addition to conducting its own attacks, AQAP also has sought to radicalize and inspire others to conduct attacks. In July 2010, AQAP published the first edition of its English-language online magazine, *Inspire*, a glossy, sophisticated publication geared to a Western audience. In the five published editions of *Inspire*, AQAP has provided religious justification and technical guidance, including information on manufacturing explosives and training with an AK-47, to encourage HVEs to stage independent attacks.

> ***In addition to al Qaeda-affiliated groups, the United States also saw… unaffiliated individuals inspired by al Qaeda's ideology but lacking ties to any foreign terrorist organization.***

In all facets of its operations, AQAP benefits from the expertise and insights provided by its American members to target an English-speaking audience. Anwar al-Aulaqi—a former U.S.-based imam and now a leader of AQAP—is a charismatic figure with many English-language sermons available online. Over the past few years, Aulaqi has gone from a radicalizer to an individual who now plays an increasingly operational role in AQAP. He has recruited individuals to join the group, facilitated training at camps in Yemen, and prepared Abdulmutallab for his attempted bombing of Northwest Flight 253. Samir Khan, an American jihadist blogger who traveled to Yemen in October 2009, helps oversee AQAP's production of *Inspire* magazine. Together, Aulaqi and Khan have drawn on their understanding of the United States to craft a radicalizing message tailored to American Muslims.

AQAP is not the only al Qaeda affiliate to pose an increased threat to the homeland. Tehrik-e Taliban (TTP)—a Pakistani militant group that has voiced its desire since 2008 to strike the United States—demonstrated for the first time its ability to stage attacks against America with Faisal Shahzad's failed VBIED attack on Times Square in May 2010. Shahzad, a naturalized U.S. citizen of Pakistani origin, traveled to Pakistan to acquire terrorist training from TTP and then used those skills to construct a VBIED when he returned to the United States.

Other al Qaeda allies and affiliates also have expanded their focus. In July 2010, Somalia-based terrorist group al-Shabaab staged its first attack outside of Somalia with an attack in

Uganda that killed dozens. Al-Shabaab also has attracted Western recruits, including Americans; at least 2 dozen have traveled to Somalia to train or fight over the past few years. Some of these Americans even have assumed leadership positions, raising the possibility that they could help expand al-Shabaab's global reach.

As these examples show, the rise of al Qaeda affiliates presents an increasingly complex terrorism threat. U.S. authorities no longer can prioritize al Qaeda threats over those emanating from affiliate groups; they now must cover them all.

Increasing Threat from HVEs

In addition to these external threats, the United States faces a serious threat from HVEs inside its borders. The disruptions over the past several years reveal that HVEs come from a diverse set of backgrounds, ages, and life experiences. HVEs support terrorism in a variety of ways, from traveling overseas to fight to plotting attacks inside the United States.

In 2009, HVEs conducted their first successful attacks inside the United States. The most lethal occurred on November 5, 2009, when the Fort Hood military base was attacked by what appeared to be a lone gunman, killing 13 and wounding 43. The suspected shooter, Major Nidal Malik Hasan, is believed to have acted alone and used small arms to conduct his attack—factors that underscore the difficulty in intercepting HVEs.

Further complicating the HVE threat is their adept use of the Internet, which serves as a facilitator for terrorist activity and a platform for radicalization. Previously, the Internet was used primarily to spread propaganda; today, it facilitates recruitment, training, and fund-raising activities and allows HVEs to overcome their geographic isolation to connect with other like-minded extremists. The disruption of at least three HVEs plotting homeland attacks during 2010 serves as a reminder that their threat shows no signs of abating.

CONCLUSION

The threat environment has transformed significantly since 9/11 and will continue to evolve over the months and years ahead. While the FBI's number one priority holds constant—to prevent, deter, and disrupt terrorist activities—the ways in which it accomplishes this mission must not.

To better position itself to adapt to this changing threat environment, the FBI is undergoing a transformation in the way it collects and uses intelligence. The bureau is implementing a new proactive, intelligence-driven model that enables it to develop a comprehensive threat picture and enhances its ability to prioritize resources to address and mitigate terrorist threats.

The FBI also continues to enhance its relationships with intelligence and law enforcement partners at all levels of government and abroad. These national and international collaborative counterterrorism efforts have played a key role in enabling the bureau to thwart myriad terrorist threats over the past decade. To echo the words of FBI Director Robert Mueller III, "working side by side is not only our best option, it is our only option."

While 10 years have elapsed since 9/11 and much has changed during that time, the sense of urgency that the FBI brings to its counterterrorism mission has not waned. Today, the United States faces a threat environment more complex and dynamic than ever before. And, yet, as new terrorist threats evolve, the FBI will adapt to confront them.✦

Ms. O'Brien is an intelligence analyst in the FBI's Counterterrorism Analysis Section.

Tuesdays with Terry

"Leaders would find greater joy in their lives if they raised the servant aspect of their leadership and built more serving institutions."

—Robert Greenleaf

Many of you have read the famous Mitch Albom book, "Tuesdays with Morrie," about a student who comes to visit his aging college professor and gains tremendous lessons about life during his weekly visits. I, too, am fortunate to spend time with an amazing man who has been a Catholic priest, police officer, college professor, police chief, and FBI Academy instructor. This fascinating gentleman, who I am honored to call a friend, is Terrence J. Mangan. He is an avid reader and an expert on too many things to mention, but a few that come to mind are military history, the Civil War, Sherlock Holmes, current events, terrorism, and leadership in law enforcement.

We visit at least once a week and always find ourselves in discussions about world events, leadership, and the challenges facing law enforcement today. A visit with Terry consistently reveals another amazing story, such as when he met Martin Luther King, Jr., or his involvement in the Hillside Strangler serial killer case. As Terry and I sip our drinks, he shares profound insights and never ceases to amaze me with his wisdom. I often wonder if I ever can learn all he has to teach and share with me.

I have met numerous people who know Terry, and they always express deference or reverence after asking about his welfare. Terry humbly offers no explanation for this deference and respect, but I can. He always has done the right thing, even in the face of adversity. He truly has led by example and put his people first. His favorite expression is, "Hold an umbrella over people's heads." In other words, protect, defend, serve, value, and care about your people. Are they not the ones we ask to hold the highest ethical standards, put their life on the line, and carry out our vision?

These words may seem cliché to many people, but hearing them and actually living them are two different things. Terry Mangan has led in ways the rest of us only can hope to emulate, and he readily shares the wisdom he has gleaned from his vast life experiences. How fortunate for me to have Tuesdays with Terry.✦

Special Agent Michael McAuliffe, an instructor in the Leadership Development Institute at the FBI Academy, prepared this Leadership Spotlight.

Case Study

The Hosam Smadi Case
An Example of Success

By Thomas D. Petrowski, J.D., Michael W. Howell, M.A., David W. Marshall, and Sheeren Zaidi, M.S.

On September 24, 2009, 19-year-old Jordanian national Hosam Maher Hussein Smadi parked what he believed to be a large vehicle-borne improvised explosive device (VBIED) in the underground garage of Fountain Place—a beautiful, conspicuous skyscraper in the heart of the Dallas, Texas, business district. He armed and powered up the elaborate timing device, exited the building during the busy weekday lunch rush, and was picked up by an associate who he believed was a low-level soldier in the al Qaeda cell he had located after a long search.

With the associate, Smadi drove to the top of a nearby parking garage where he used his mobile phone to dial the number that he believed would detonate the VBIED—he had insisted on personally command-detonating the bomb—and destroy the building, killing thousands of innocent civilians in and around Fountain Place. The call, however, did not activate an VBIED; instead, it signaled the North Texas Joint Terrorism Task Force to arrest Smadi while he attempted to commit mass murder in the name of al Qaeda.

Smadi had spent months planning the attack, modifying his plans as to which target he would focus on and what type of explosive device he would use. He believed he was fortunate to have found in the United States an al Qaeda sleeper cell planning the next large-scale attack and that he could convince the cell to let him commit an enormous act of terrorism as an al Qaeda soldier.

In fact, Smadi had not found an al Qaeda sleeper cell but an FBI undercover operation (UCO) conducted by the Joint Terrorism Task Force (JTTF) operating out of the FBI's Dallas, Texas, division, one of 106 JTTFs across the country. The Smadi investigation represents an excellent example of the results of one of the

Smadi's Selected Target: Fountain Place Plaza Dallas, Texas

- *60-story high-rise building*
- *15th tallest building in Texas*
- *Over 1,200 employees*

current national counterterrorism strategies of the JTTF—in this case, critical member agencies included the Dallas, Texas, Police Department and the Texas Department of Public Safety—to identify and neutralize lone terrorists in the United States. The investigation also highlights the growing threat of lone offenders who operate without any ties to terrorist groups or states, can become radicalized by propaganda easily found on the Internet, and increasingly exist in America's rural areas.

Facing Challenges

The U.S. government's counterterrorism mission has many challenges, the most difficult being to preemptively identify lone-offender terrorists, individuals with no direct connection to a terrorist organization but who have been self-directed in their pursuit of radicalizing influences. These lone-offender terrorists typically become known only after an attack. Recent examples include Nidal Malik Hasan, charged with killing 13 and wounding 32 at Fort Hood, Texas; Abdulhakim Mujahid Muhammad, accused of killing a man at a recruitment center in Little Rock, Arkansas; Andrew Joseph Stack, who flew his plane into a Texas IRS building; James von Brunn, who allegedly killed a security guard at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C.; and Scott Roeder, sentenced to life in prison for murdering a doctor who performed abortions.[1] More well-know lone offenders include Timothy McVeigh, Ted Kaczynski, and Eric Robert Rudolph.

The FBI, the U.S. Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, and numerous outside experts assess that the homegrown, lone-offender terrorist, such as Smadi, proves the most difficult to identify and likely will become more common in the West as extremist ideologies spread globally.[2] English-speaking Islamic extremists are increasing their use of the Internet to recruit and radicalize Western Muslims and converts.

Carrying out the U.S. government's counterterrorism mission requires a preemptive strategy so threats can be interdicted before they manifest into a terrorist attack. In response to this challenge, the FBI has created several initiatives designed to identify the lone offender, including some programs that are cyber based, not unlike the Innocent Images National Task Force in the Crimes Against

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Children Program.[3] They seek out those who may be lone-offender terrorists or on the path of radicalization.[4] Smadi was identified through one of these initiatives, illustrating a significant success in these identification programs that provides an outstanding model for similar counterterrorism cases.

Identifying Smadi

In January 2009, the FBI's Chicago field office discovered Smadi within an online group of extremists where the FBI maintained an undercover presence. Unlike many others in the group who espoused and endorsed violence, Smadi stood out based on his vehement intention to conduct terror attacks in the United States and because of his zealous devotion to Usama Bin Ladin and al Qaeda. The FBI initiated a terrorism investigation to assess whether he posed a tangible threat to national security.[5] After Smadi repeated these comments, the undercover program made online contact with him. During those communications, Smadi made clear his intent to serve as a soldier for Usama Bin Ladin and al Qaeda and to conduct violent jihad (acts of terrorism in the name of Islam) in the United States.

Smadi—still photo from his 7-minute video to Usama Bin Laden

FBI Dallas quickly determined that Smadi was a citizen of Jordan, illegally residing in the United States in rural Italy, Texas, where he worked as a clerk at a gas station and convenience store. He entered the United States on March 14, 2007, on a nonimmigrant B1/B2 visa (temporary visitor for business or pleasure) that expired on October 30, 2007. Smadi was in violation of the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) when he overstayed his visa and, therefore, was deportable at any time.

Establishing the Undercover Operation

The FBI JTTF in Dallas stood up a complex sting operation in which Smadi believed he had found in the United States an al Qaeda sleeper cell planning the next large-scale attack.[6] Smadi believed he was in online contact with a senior member of the cell and continued to communicate his intent to commit an act of terrorism in the United States despite consistent attempts by undercover agents to dissuade him.[7]

After approximately 3 months and 25 online covert conversations with Smadi, the JTTF determined the UCO would transition to an in-person context to allow a more accurate assessment. Another FBI undercover agent in the role of a lower level operational soldier in the sleeper cell was introduced to Smadi, who remained in online contact with who he believed to be the senior leader of the cell.

Administratively, the UCO was both difficult and burdensome. As a national security UCO, the entire investigation was classified. Virtually all communications with Smadi were in Arabic, his native language (all three undercover agents also were native Arabic speakers). Every communication with Smadi was electronically recorded, and the in-person meetings between Smadi and the undercover employees were recorded through

Smadi—booking photo

Smadi—surveillance photo

multiple recorders and video. Meticulously recording and documenting all communications with Smadi proved critical because of the inevitable entrapment defense raised during prosecution.

Assessing Smadi as a Threat

From the day the FBI identified Smadi, the agency analyzed intelligence to assess his potential as a unilateral threat and lone offender with no direct connections to a terrorist organization. Behavioral Analysis Unit experts from FBI Headquarters were brought into the investigation to help assess what, if any, threat he posed. Within a few months, the FBI assessed that Smadi was a self-directed Sunni extremist, lone offender determined to commit an act of terrorism on the scale of the 9/11 attacks. He also was assessed to be obsessed with Usama Bin Ladin and the idea of being a soldier of al Qaeda.[8] Because of this and the prospect of his belief that he actually contacted al Qaeda, it was likely he would not do anything impetuous. The challenge was keeping the investigation secret. If he ever realized his sleeper cell actually was a sting operation, he likely would have done something very violent, very quickly.

Investigation revealed that Smadi was not a practicing Muslim and was not affiliated with a mosque or the mainstream Islamic community in north Texas. He stated to the undercover agents numerous times that "they" (his family and the local Islamic community) "don't get it," that they did not share his extremist, violent view of jihad. Postarrest interviews of the extended family indicated they were outstanding members of the Dallas Islamic community, gainfully employed and regular members of a large local mosque. Smadi's estrangement from his extended family and the mainstream Muslim community was a significant factor in his assessment as a threat.

Addressing Smadi

By summer 2009, Smadi's inevitable and significant threat to the United States had become clear. In evaluating options to interdict the threat, numerous issues were presented. Because Smadi was a Jordanian citizen and illegally in the United States, the easiest choice for quickly addressing the threat Smadi posed was to arrest him on an immigration charge and deport him. While attractive

as a short-term remedy, it was clear he was going to commit an act of terrorism against U.S. interests at some point. Deporting him would only move that threat overseas, not terminate it. Overseas, Smadi likely would have found members from al Qaeda or another terrorist organization (as he said he would do if he lost contact with his perceived sleeper cell). The FBI assessed that if he came in contact with these terrorists overseas, they would have provided him with false identification so he could return to the United States to conduct attacks.

The possible courses of action to address the threat Smadi posed were limited. Conspiracy charges, often used to take down a group or an individual associated with a group planning an attack, were not available as he was acting as a lone offender. After lengthy consultations with prosecutors in Dallas and the U.S. Department of Justice, the only viable strategy was to give Smadi what he sought: the opportunity to perpetrate the terrorist attack he was planning in a controlled manner and then prosecute him for that attempt.

> **"The investigation… highlights the growing threat of lone offenders who operate without any ties to terrorist groups or states…."**

Conducting the UCO

The UCO lasted approximately 9 months. Despite consistent efforts to dissuade Smadi throughout the operation, his planning and actions showed unrelenting determination to commit a large-scale terrorist attack on American soil as a soldier of al Qaeda.

During one of the later in-person meets, the undercover agent indicated that the cell had the capability to forward a video of Smadi to Bin Ladin. Smadi was emotionally overwhelmed. He spent hours researching on his computer and drafting a statement. With surreptitious cameras recording in the hotel room where they met, the undercover agent set up a tripod and video camera and made the recording. Smadi covered his face and made a compelling 7-minute video for Bin Ladin, which he believed would be delivered to the al Qaeda leader after Smadi's attack. The video resulted in one of the most compelling pieces of evidence against him.

The Smadi UCO shared many common issues with typical undercover operations: maintaining the integrity of the operation, ensuring the safety of the undercover agents, resolving translation issues, and addressing entrapment. Eventually, a total of six in-person meetings and about 65 online and telephonic communications occurred. An additional issue with running long-term UCOs targeting active terrorists is the constant concern that the subject is moving about freely in America, which creates perpetual physical and technical surveillance challenges.

Planning by Smadi

Through spring 2009, Smadi, on his own, was aggressively conducting research, physical reconnaissance, and analysis of targets he wished to attack. His first plans involved targeting large credit card companies (he indicated hope this might further harm the ailing economy). He also said he was considering military targets and the baggage claim area of a Dallas airport. His initial plans also focused on him planting smaller explosives at multiple locations, which he believed would have a more dramatic effect.

After months of researching targets, Smadi decided to confine his plan to using a sizable explosive to attack one large target. By late June, Smadi had made several selections and then changed

those targets either because they were too secure or not big enough. He put a significant amount of individual effort into developing and refining his planned attack. He settled on a 60-story building in downtown Dallas known as Fountain Place and asked his perceived sleeper cell to make him a car bomb big enough to bring down the entire building.

FBI headquarters and Dallas bomb technicians constructed the VBIED Smadi asked for. It included a clock timer, a safe-arm switch, 550 pounds of explosive-grade fertilizer, and inert blasting caps placed within inert C-4 explosive blocks. All of the components of the VBIED were contained within a 2001 sport utility vehicle. The VBIED had been designed to be readily adaptable, yet inert for public safety purposes.

Surveillance indicated that Smadi took several operational steps in the days before his attack that he did not completely share with his perceived al Qaeda associates. On September 22, in preparation for driving the VBIED into the garage and then walking out of Fountain Place, Smadi purchased an elaborate disguise, planning on wearing a cross around his neck and dressing as a parking valet for the day of the attack. The day before the incident, he moved his residence to a rural, isolated trailer in the event he was identified and needed to hide.

Vehicle that housed the vehicle-borne improvised explosive device with the target location in the background

Vehicle-borne improvised explosive device

Sentencing Smadi

In May 2010, Smadi pleaded guilty to one count of attempting to use a weapon of mass destruction and was sentenced to 24 years in prison in October 2010. As is typical in UCOs that result in overwhelming evidence against a defendant, Smadi's defense attorneys argued entrapment and mental health issues early in the prosecution. After discovery was completed, the defense team conceded there was no plausible way for an entrapment defense. The complete rejection of entrapment was a result of the issue being identified early on in the investigation and addressed throughout the case. In virtually every undercover conversation with Smadi, the operation attempted to discourage his planned course, and all communications—written, online, or in person—were recorded.

Conclusion

The Smadi investigation is significant not only because it prevented a terrorist attack but because it serves as a model for future lone-offender terrorism cases. Exposing self-radicalized lone offenders, such as Smadi, is an enormous challenge in preventing terrorism and will only become more common and necessary.

The most significant aspect of the Smadi investigation is that it demonstrates an overall capability of the JTTF to bring to bear the efforts of countless employees in the FBI and partner agencies working together in support of the domestic counterterrorism mission. The capacity to coordinate these entities and partner agencies into a unified effort from the street level to the highest levels in the U.S. intelligence community illustrates the evolving innovation and capability of the FBI, state and local law enforcement, and other agencies involved in the domestic counterterrorism mission.✦

Endnotes

[1] Major Nidal Hasan allegedly committed his attack on Fort Hood on November 5, 2009. Muhammad, aka Carlos Bledsoe, an American convert, attacked a military recruiting office in Little Rock, AK, on June 1, 2009. Stack flew a small personal plane into the IRS building in Austin, TX, on February 18, 2010. Brunn attacked the Holocaust Museum in Washington, DC, ostensibly motivated by anti-Jewish hatred. Roeder murdered Dr. George Tiller on May 31, 2009, in church because he was a well-known abortion advocate and provider.

[2] U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, *A Ticking Time Bomb: Counterterrorism Lessons from the U.S. Government's Failure to Prevent the Fort Hood Attack*, a Special Report (Washington, DC, 2011); *http://hsgac.senate.gov/public/index.cfm?FuseAction=Hearings.Hearing&Hearing_ID=9516c9b9-cbd4-48ad-85bb-777784445444* (accessed June 20, 2011). The report noted "[w]e recognize that detection and interdiction of lone-offender terrorists is one of the most difficult challenges facing our law enforcement and intelligence agencies. Every day, these agencies are presented with myriad leads that require the exercise of sound judgment to determine which to pursue and which to close."

FBI and U.S. intelligence community (USIC) products addressing this point are generally classified. An example of a leading terrorism expert addressing this point consistent with USIC assessments is Bruce Hoffman, a terrorism expert at Georgetown University and previously at the Rand Corporation and the CIA. Hoffman and other leading experts have published works that identify the homegrown, lone-offender terrorist as the hardest to detect and likely to become more common.

Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1999); in this book, Hoffman noted, "the new strategy of al Qaeda is to empower and motivate individuals to commit acts of violence completely outside any terrorist chain of command."

[3] In the national security context, these programs are worked with USIC partners, and virtually all aspects related to them are classified. In keeping this article unclassified, it is impossible to give complete details of the work and accomplishments of these programs. Notwithstanding the sensitivity of these programs, the large majority of the details of the Smadi investigation were declassified for use during the prosecution.

[4] In support of the preventive mission of identifying lone-offender terrorists, the FBI has developed a Radicalization Continuum that identifies attributes of these subjects from preradicalization (developing sympathies for a perceived cause) through the final stages of taking action and committing a terrorist act.

[5] Like all international terrorism investigations conducted in the United States, the Smadi investigation was completely classified and worked closely with other USIC partners with whom the FBI now freely can exchange information due to the USA PATRIOT Act. For a detailed source on the legal aspects of conducting domestic national security investigations, see David Kris and J. Douglas Wilson, *National Security Investigations & Prosecutions* (Eagan, MN: Thomson/West, 2007).

[6] The FBI Dallas Joint Terrorism Task Force, which conducted this UCO, was comprised of members of the FBI; the U.S. Transportation Security Administration; U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement; U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services; the Dallas, Texas, Police Department; the Garland, Texas, Police Department; and the Texas Department of Public Safety. Run out of the Dallas Division, the UCO was closely managed by the FBI's Counterterrorism Division collocated with the National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC) in northern Virginia.

[7] Because of the brevity of this article, specific examples of the online communication between Smadi and the undercover employees are not provided. The affidavit submitted in support of the arrest is available at *http://www.txnd.uscourts.gov/judges/smadi/smadi.html* (accessed July 14, 2011).

[8] The FBI assessed with high confidence that the factors that shaped Smadi's identity as a violent jihadist were the combination of childhood trauma, the Internet, social networking Web sites, Middle Eastern geopolitical issues, and consuming personal identification with Usama Bin Ladin and Abu Mu'sab al-Zarqawi. Smadi is a product of al Qaeda's global strategy to inspire potential youth recruits and lone offenders in the making through its militant Salafist ideology.

Bulletin Honors

Hazardous Device School Bomb Technician Memorial

At the Redstone Arsenal in Huntsville, Alabama, the Hazardous Device School (HDS) Bomb Technician Memorial, dedicated in April 2007, honors all public safety bomb technicians who died in the line of duty while performing a hazardous device operation or response. Funded through voluntary donations, the memorial's bronze statue depicts a bomb technician wearing a full protective suit and carrying an X-ray machine and disruptor, as well as three essential pieces of hazardous device safety equipment. The statue faces out toward HDS in the same manner a graduate would look back to the school for knowledge and guidance. Behind the figure, a marble wall displays the names of the fallen bomb technicians on brass plaques, along with an inscribed bomb technician badge and the biblical verse Isaiah 6:8 in the center. HDS, a joint effort between the FBI and U.S. Army, constructed the memorial to honor the bravery and courage of those who heroically paid the ultimate sacrifice for their work.

Submitted by Special Agent Dave Jernigan, Hazardous Devices Operations Center, FBI's Critical Incident Response Group

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Sovereign Citizens

A Growing Domestic Threat to Law Enforcement

By the FBI's COUNTERTERRORISM ANALYSIS SECTION

They could be dismissed as a nuisance, a loose network of individuals living in the United States who call themselves "sovereign citizens" and believe that federal, state, and local governments operate illegally. Some of their actions, although quirky, are not crimes. The offenses they do commit seem minor, including regularly false license plates, driver's licenses, and even currency.

However, a closer look at sovereign citizens' more severe crimes, from financial scams to impersonating or threatening law enforcement officials, gives reason for concern. If someone challenges (e.g., a standard traffic stop for false license plates) their ideology, the behavior of these sovereign-citizen extremists quickly can escalate to violence. Since 2000, lone-offender sovereign-citizen extremists have killed six law enforcement officers. In 2010, two Arkansas police officers stopped sovereign-citizen extremists Jerry Kane and his 16-year-old son Joseph during a routine traffic stop on Interstate 40. Joseph Kane jumped out of the vehicle and opened fire with an AK-47 assault rifle, killing both officers.

The sovereign-citizen threat likely will grow as the nationwide movement is fueled by the Internet, the economic downturn, and seminars held across the country that spread their ideology and show people how they can tap into funds and eliminate debt through fraudulent methods. As sovereign citizens' numbers grow, so do the chances of contact with law enforcement and, thus, the risks that incidents will end in violence. Law enforcement and judicial officials must understand the sovereign-citizen movement, be able to identify indicators, and know how to protect themselves from the group's threatening tactics.

Ideology and Motivation

The FBI considers sovereign-citizen extremists as comprising a domestic terrorist movement, which, scattered across the United States, has existed for decades, with well-known members, such as Terry Nichols, who helped plan the Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, bombing. Sovereign citizens do not represent an anarchist group, nor are they a militia, although they sometimes use or buy illegal weapons. Rather, they operate as individuals without established leadership and only come together in loosely affiliated groups to train, help each other with paperwork, or socialize and talk about their ideology. They may refer to themselves as "constitutionalists" or "freemen," which is not necessarily a connection to a specific group, but, rather, an indication that they are free from government control. They follow their own set of laws. While the philosophies and conspiracy theories can vary from person to person, their core beliefs are the same: The government operates outside of its jurisdiction. Because of this belief, they do not recognize federal, state, or local laws, policies, or regulations.[1]

> ***The FBI considers sovereign-citizen extremists as comprising a domestic terrorist movement….***

One prevalent sovereign-citizen theory is the Redemption Theory, which claims the U.S. government went bankrupt when it abandoned the gold standard basis for currency in 1933 and began using citizens as collateral in trade agreements with foreign governments.[2] These beliefs can provide a gateway to illegal activity because such individuals believe the U.S. government does not act in the best interests of the American people. By announcing themselves as sovereign citizens, they are emancipated from the responsibilities of being a U.S. citizen, including paying taxes, possessing a state driver's license, or obeying the law.

Illegal Activity

The Redemption Theory belief leads to their most prevalent method to defraud banks, credit institutions, and the U.S. government: the Redemption Scheme. Sovereign citizens believe that when the U.S. government removed itself from the gold standard, it rendered U.S. currency as a valueless credit note, exchanging one credit document (such as a dollar bill) for another. They assert that the U.S. government now uses citizens as collateral, issuing social security numbers and birth certificates to register people in trade agreements with other countries. Each citizen has a monetary net worth, which they believe is kept in a U.S. Treasury Direct account, valued from $630,000 to more than $3 million. These accounts, they claim, are in a third-party's name, a "strawman," that they can access, which they commonly refer to as "freeing

Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building, Oklahoma City

money from the strawman." In essence, it is extorting money from the U.S. Treasury Department. Sovereign citizens file legitimate IRS and Uniform Commercial Code forms for illegitimate purposes, believing that doing so correctly will compel the U.S. Treasury to fulfill its debts, such as credit card debts, taxes, and mortgages.[3]

At a minimum, these activities create a voluminous influx of documents that clog the courts and other government agencies. But, the idea behind the Redemption Theory also leads sovereign citizens to find criminal sources of income as they travel the country, teach fraudulent tactics to others for a fee, and participate in white collar crimes. The latter offenses include mail, bank, mortgage, and wire fraud; money laundering; tax violations; and illegal firearms sales and purchases.

At seminars, sovereign citizens charge participants a fee in exchange for information on Redemption Theory schemes and other methods to avoid paying taxes, sometimes even selling materials, such as CDs or DVDs. They also sell fraudulent documents—including drivers' licenses, passports, diplomat identification, vehicle registrations, concealed firearms permits, law enforcement credentials, and insurance forms—to other sovereign citizens and illegal immigrants and charge fees for "consultant services" to prepare sovereign-citizen paperwork. Several recent incidents highlight their activities.

- In Sacramento, California, two sovereign-citizen extremists were convicted of running a fraudulent insurance scheme, operating a company completely outside of state insurance regulatory authorities. The men sold "lifetime memberships" to customers and promised to pay any accident claims against members. The company collected millions of dollars, but paid only small auto insurance claims and ignored large ones.[4]
- In Kansas City, Missouri, three sovereign-citizen extremists were convicted in a phony diplomatic credential scandal. They charged customers between $450 and $2,000 for a diplomatic identification card that bestowed "sovereign status," supposedly to enjoy diplomatic immunity from paying taxes and from stops and arrests by law enforcement.[5]
- In Las Vegas, Nevada, four men affiliated with the sovereign-citizen-extremist movement were arrested by the Nevada Joint Terrorism Task Force on federal money laundering, tax evasion, and weapons charges. The undercover investigation revealed that two of the suspects allegedly laundered more than a million dollars and collected fees for their services.[6]

One example of a white collar crime that escalated into a standoff includes a New

Hampshire husband and wife convicted of federal income tax evasion, failure to honor federal payroll taxes, and other conspiracy fraud charges. Elaine A. and Edward L. Brown, both sovereign-citizen extremists in their 60s, never appeared at their 2007 trial or at sentencing. In protest, the Browns barricaded themselves in their home during the summer and fall of 2007, receiving supporters, issuing militant and threatening statements, and stockpiling weapons and explosives. They were charged with weapons offenses after their arrest in October 2007 when law enforcement discovered pipe bombs, improvised explosive devices made of gun powder cans with nails and screws taped to the outside, and a large cache of handguns and rifles that included .50-caliber rifles.[7]

However, even when sovereign citizens go to prison for crimes, they continue criminal activity behind bars. Inmates provide a new population for them to sway to adopt the sovereign-citizen ideology; they then can train these inmates to help them defraud banks, credit institutions, and the U.S. government. They can create fraudulent businesses from inside prison walls and complete fraudulent financial documents to receive lines of credit from legitimate banks. The learning system goes both ways—inmates can teach sovereign citizens new criminal methods that they can use either from inside the prison or when they are released.

Indicators

Sovereign citizens often produce documents that contain peculiar or out-of-place language. In some cases, they speak their own language or will write only in certain colors, such as in red crayon. Several indicators can help identify these individuals.

> ***It is important to realize sovereign citizens' tactics to harass and intimidate law enforcement, court, and government officials, as well as financial institution employees.***

- References to the Bible, The Constitution of the United States, U.S. Supreme Court decisions, or treaties with foreign governments[8]
- Personal names spelled in all capital letters or interspersed with colons (e.g., JOHN SMITH or Smith: John)
- Signatures followed by the words "under duress," "Sovereign Living Soul" (SLS), or a copyright symbol (©)
- Personal seals, stamps, or thumb prints in red ink
- The words "accepted for value"[9]

They also carry fraudulent drivers' licenses to indicate their view that law enforcement does not have the authority to stop their vehicle or may write "No Liability Accepted" above their signature on a driver's license to signify that they do not accept it as a legitimate identification document.

Intimidation, Obstruction, and Protection

It is important to realize sovereign citizens' tactics to harass and intimidate law enforcement, court, and government officials, as well as financial institution employees. Methods can range from refusing to cooperate with requests, demanding an oath of office or proof of jurisdiction, filming interactions with law enforcement that they later post on the Internet, and filing frivolous lawsuits or liens against real property. They convene their own special courts that issue fake but realistic-looking indictments, warrants, and other

documents. They also can use real government documents, including suspicious activity reports, in an attempt to damage the credit or financial history of specific individuals.

While these efforts may seem obviously fraudulent, it is important to address these actions, which can have devastating outcomes for the individuals they target. The sovereign citizens' efforts also can be a gateway for them to harass, terrorize, and target others in hopes of changing behaviors that they perceive as threatening.

The Court Security Improvement Act of 2007 is one protection for officials who the sovereign citizens could target. The provisions under Title 18 created a new criminal offense for false liens against the real or personal property of officers or federal government employees, including judges and prosecutors. It also created as a new crime the disclosure of personal, identifying information to intimidate or incite violence against these individuals.[10]

Conclusion

Although the sovereign-citizen movement does not always rise to violence, its members' illegal activities and past violent—including fatal—incidents against law enforcement make it a group that should be approached with knowledge and caution. It is important that law enforcement be aware of sovereign citizens' tactics so agencies can warn the public of potential scams, spot illegal activity and understand its potential severity, and be prepared for and protect against violent behavior or backlash through intimidation and harassment.✦

"Although the sovereign-citizen movement does not always rise to violence, its members'… activities…make it a group that should be approached with knowledge and caution."

Endnotes

[1] U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Domestic Terrorism Operations Unit and Domestic Terrorism Analysis Unit, *Sovereign Citizen Danger to Law Enforcement* (Washington, DC, 2010).

[2] U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Domestic Terrorism Operations Unit II, *Sovereign Citizens: An Introduction for Law Enforcement* (Washington, DC, 2010).

[3] U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Domestic Terrorism Analysis Unit, *Sovereign Citizen Extremist Movement* (Washington, DC, 2011).

[4] U.S. Attorney's Office, Eastern District of California, "Two 'Sovereign Citizens' Sentenced in Illegal Insurance Scam," press release, 2/24/2010; *http://sacramento.fbi.gov/dojpressrel/pressrel10/sc022410.htm* (accessed June 14, 2011).

[5] U.S. Attorney's Office, Western District of Missouri, "Three Men Sentenced for Conspiracy to Use Fake Diplomatic Identification," press release, 2/8/2010; *http://kansascity.fbi.gov/dojpressrel/pressrel10/kc020810.htm* (accessed June 14, 2011).

[6] U.S. Department of Justice, U.S. Attorney, District of Nevada, "Members of Anti-Government Movement Arrested on Federal Money Laundering, Tax Evasion and Weapons Charges," press release, 3/6/2009; *http://www.justice.gov/usao/nv/press/march2009/davis030609.htm* (accessed June 14, 2011).

[7] U.S. Department of Justice and U.S. Attorney's Office-District of New Hampshire, press releases, 1/18/2007 and 7/9/2009, "Jury Convicts Lebanon Dentist and Husband in Tax Case," and "Edward and Elaine Brown Convicted"; *http://www.justice.gov/tax/usaopress/2007/txdv07WEM_Browns.pdf* and *http://www.atf.gov/press/releases/2009/07/070909-bos-edward-and-elaine-brown-convicted.html* (accessed June 14, 2011).

[8] The authors wish to stress that the majority of individuals who carry or refer to these resources are law-abiding citizens. However, in some instances, possession of these items may serve as one indicator of a sovereign-citizen extremist.

[9] *Sovereign Citizens: An Introduction for Law Enforcement*.

[10] Court Security Improvement Act of 2007; *http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/PLAW-110publ177/pdf/PLAW-110publ177.pdf* (accessed June 14, 2011).

Perspective

Radicalization of Islamist Terrorists in the Western World

By Ryan Hunter, M.A., and Daniel Heinke

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Modern Islamist extremism emerged in the middle of the last century, but, in its beginnings, was limited to the Middle East. That dramatically changed in the aftermath of the assault on 9/11 when the threat Islamist terrorism posed to countries in the Western world became apparent. While it was not the first time Islamist militants targeted a Western country, the scale of the attack—killing almost 3,000 people and destroying the iconic Twin Towers—demonstrated that the threat from such organizations and individuals had shifted. Since 9/11, that menace continues to transform, and Western societies increasingly must deal with a rise in so-called homegrown Islamist terrorism.

In itself, homegrown terrorism is not a new phenomenon as nationals of the respective country conduct the vast majority of typical nationalistic or politically motivated terrorist activity. However, violent Islamist ideology inspiring homegrown terrorism in the West represents a new aspect.

The terms *homegrown terrorism* and *homegrown violent extremism* typically describe radicalized Western citizens or local residents. They adopt an extremist religious or political ideology hostile to Western societies and values and turn to terrorism. The word *radicalization* has many definitions in intelligence and law enforcement communities. The FBI defines it as "the process by which individuals come to believe their

engagement in or facilitation of nonstate violence to achieve social and political change is necessary and justified." German law enforcement and intelligence agencies describe it as the "turning of individuals or groups to an extremist mind-set and course of action and the growing readiness to facilitate or engage in nondemocratic methods up to the execution of violence to achieve their goals."

RADICALIZATION: WHO AND HOW

Counterterrorism is more art than science. Radicalization, especially of Islamist extremists, only recently has become a serious research topic of law enforcement organizations, intelligence agencies, and academia. Yet, data still are not extensive and have resulted mainly from shared analysis of executed or prevented terrorist attacks. Baseline data for comparison have proven difficult to collect because of legal restrictions and other issues. Collection also presents challenges because, generally, Islamist terrorism is not static, but highly flexible, including its recent manifestation into homegrown terrorism. This new manifestation does not replace known variations of Islamist terrorism, but represents additional threats possibly encountered independently or in combination with foreign-based efforts. To counter this threat, various government studies from western European countries and comparable research in the United States have considered two key points of homegrown violent extremism: *who* becomes radicalized and *how* the radicalization process works.

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Who: Common Denominators

Analysis in both Europe and the United States showed that violent Islamist extremists represent a broad range of the population. In Western countries, most of these individuals have been nationals or have had legal status in the country. They are ethnically diverse, although in some European countries, the majority of identified Islamist terrorists comprised part of the largest immigrant Muslim community (e.g., France: Algerian; Great Britain: South Asian; Spain: Moroccan). However, this does not hold true for other large countries, such as Germany, Italy, and the United States.

Additional stereotypes do not prove valid either. Most terrorists are male, but women also play an important role. The majority of extremists are between 20 and 30 years old, but a number of older men—sometimes women—require consideration too. While numerous individuals are single, many also have steady relationships and children. Their educational backgrounds span the entire spectrum, from no formal qualifications to postgraduate degrees (although the majority worked in relatively low-grade jobs). Some analysis indicated that many radicalized Islamists in western Europe tend to seek a group-oriented life, and group dynamics also have proven a common factor in promoting terrorist activities in the United States. A disproportionately high number of Islamist extremists in the West converted to Islam, but this neither insinuates a general tendency toward radicalization among converts nor does it deny the fact that the majority of Islamist extremists were born into the Muslim faith. Most of these terrorists' prior criminal involvement was minor or nonexistent. Homegrown Islamist extremists are so socially and demographically diverse that no universally accepted profile can be compiled using sociodemographic characteristics.

How: The Radicalization Process

On the surface, the pathways to terrorism seem as varied as the actors themselves. Extremists have many diverse starting points and follow many different paths that lead to ultimate involvement in terrorist activities. The existence of a common end point has led many individuals and organizations with an interest in radicalization to characterize these pathways as variations of *the* radicalization process, and much effort has focused on identifying common aspects to understand and—in the end—counter this progression. In the course of this research, several analyses of the radicalization of identified Islamist terrorists have been conducted, mainly based on data from law enforcement agencies and intelligence services, such as the FBI, New York City Police Department, German Federal Criminal Police Office, Dutch General Intelligence and Security Service, Swedish Security Service, Danish Security and Intelligence Service, and the British government.

> **"Radicalization, especially of Islamist extremists, only recently has become a serious research topic of law enforcement organizations, intelligence agencies, and academia."**

While these agencies' models and explanations are not entirely congruent, they suggest a prevailing radicalization model composed of three main components: grievance, ideology/narrative, and mobilization.[1] The breakdown of these distinct components may be useful for law enforcement and intelligence agencies, as well as other government or nongovernment partner institutions, to assess the circumstances and potential radicalization of certain individuals or groups.

However, these components do not reflect an automatism and do not follow a fixed timeline of radicalization. Obviously, not all individuals who begin this process complete it. Many stop or even abandon this development at various points and for different reasons; some reenter later and begin again. Others do not follow the implied sequential development, but move from one radicalization stage to the next. Yet other individuals do not seem to make well-considered decisions within this process, but follow it like a slippery slope. The radicalization process can take several years for some persons, but develop very quickly for others.

Grievance

Discontent seems to serve as the prerequisite of the radicalization process. Issues driving this attitude toward individuals in the West may include perceived persecution of Muslims throughout the world; a sense of uprootedness, alienation, or lack of acceptance; feelings of discrimination, especially among second- or third-generation immigrants; or a general search for identity.

This discontent may be based on individuals' actual experiences or those of other people within their community, or it may result from the normal process of identity formation among young people. These latter feelings of uncertainty of oneself during adolescence and early adulthood are common and well-known in developmental psychology, but after an individual feels rejected by society, these emotions can lead to a deep identity crisis and cause one to search for a new purpose of life. Some Muslim-born individuals may link experiences of disadvantage or nonbelonging to their faith and judge them to be an expression of cultural and religious discrimination.

Ideology/Narrative

Ideological framing adopts this diffuse feeling of discontent and leads it in a defined direction. The idea of "us"—the *ummah* (community) or *ummat al-mu'minin* (the community of the believers)—defending against "them"—the nonbelievers conducting an alleged war against Islam—secures a strong bond among the followers while alienating them from Western citizens.

This narrative typically finds its ideological footing in a form of Salafism, adherence to which is viewed as the ultimate distinguishing feature between right and wrong. Interpretations of Salafism range from a purely personal religious conviction with an emphasis on purifying the believer's way of life to a jihadi orientation that demands its followers to take on the fight against Western governments and "apostate" Muslim (especially Middle Eastern) regimes held responsible for the suffering of all Muslims. This jihadi Salafism emphasizes God's undisputed and sole sovereignty *(hakimiyyat Allah)* and views the Qur'an and the Sunnah of Muhammad as the only acceptable sources to define right and wrong. In consequence, this ideology bans the idea of democracy and man-made law in general as un-Islamic; Western societies are considered sinful and a danger to the right order of mankind.

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Some well-read scholars justify these claims with in-depth theological arguments in favor of violent *jihad*, "the use of violence against persons and governments deemed to be enemies of fundamentalist Islam, especially the West ."[2] However, Islamism and Salafism, when presented as an ideology or narrative to promote radicalization rather than as a religion, tend to be kept simple and without theological depth.

The core significance of this ideological framing component should not be sought on the basis of its content, but because it provides followers (true believers) with an idea of their "true purpose" and sense of belonging to a transnational community. By accepting this highly polarized worldview and its narrow set of rules, the uncertain individual searching for meaning receives simple answers, as well as a comprehensive framework of social and moral norms and values. Terrorist movements or ideologues then can build on this ideology by strengthening the perception of global Muslim suppression; the picture of Islam under threat, triggering the belief that the Muslim community and the radicalized individual exist in a state of permanent self-defense; and the view of violence as a legitimate response.

Mobilization

In the majority of cases, extremists become radicalized in large part through intensifying social interaction with other people with shared beliefs. Such a relationship then results in a mutual push toward violence. Sometimes, a spiritual leader will goad individuals to take such actions. The "lone wolf/lone offender" has served as the rare exception. However, in recent years, prominent attacks in the United States and Europe were carried out successfully by individuals with few ties to other extremists, highlighting the threat posed by radicalized persons who are relatively alone.

The sense of identity and belonging that likely accompany group interaction may provide a psychological and emotional reward that exceeds the original ideological motivation. Often, this group experience is fueled intentionally by isolating to a certain degree potential or new members, using means, such as overseas travel and training

camps (especially in Europe). Through ongoing mutual assertion of the righteousness of shared beliefs, new moral norms and standards replace existing ones. Group members increasingly see violence as an acceptable and legitimate, even desirable, way to achieve the common goals of the group. Visual propaganda is intensified, including hate videos with high emotional impact. Contrasting images of perceived or factual atrocities against Muslims with "glorious" attacks by jihadis and the celebrated killing of Westerners (the beheading of a U.S. soldier serves as one heinous example) are featured, and all Islamist terrorist attacks against infidels, non-Muslims, and "apostate" Muslims are endorsed. As extremists see it, jihad is increasingly supported. This ultimately may lead to an ideologue that calls for the direct participation in jihad or self-persuasion to join the violent fight against the perceived enemies of Islam.

Typically, mobilization is the only radicalization component involving specific actions possibly subject to criminal prosecution. Potential operatives are recruited by an extremist group or individual, small groups are prompted to form a terrorist cell of their own, and extremists begin preparing direct attacks or supporting others planning to attack. In the United States, mobilization also is the transition phase from ideology—protected under the First Amendment—to action, which becomes criminal activity. Logically, law enforcement and intelligence resources will focus on mobilization because activities conducted in this latter stage of radicalization present the opportunity to make arrests. Further, the majority of those harboring grievances and adopting the ideology do not progress to violence. However, this final phase can be short-lived, enforcing the need for intelligence agencies to fully understand and become aware of the earlier components.

Beyond these three components, the additional element of a specific traumatic experience (a personal or political "tipping point") may trigger involvement in terrorist activities.[3] Based on available data, such tipping points are not reliably verifiable yet, and such experiences likely will be so varied and personal that trying to identify them may add little value to the day-to-day work of law enforcement and intelligence agencies. Nevertheless, their identification could serve as a worthwhile approach for further research.

> **"Analysis in both Europe and the United States showed that violent Islamist extremists represent a broad range of the population."**

ROLE OF THE INTERNET

Online radicalization presents a primary concern. Extremists use a variety of tools that range from dedicated password-protected jihadist Web sites, forums, blogs, social networking resources, and video-hosting services to professionally produced online English-language propaganda magazines, such as *Inspire* magazine, established by al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). These online assets, serving as a sort of "virtual jihad university," can play a role in all three radicalization components.

- *Grievance:* The Internet allows rapid and widespread dissemination of information about events that may fuel grievances. Often, such propaganda is intensified by highly emotional images combined with an amplifying comment or soundtrack. Because anyone can post content online, individuals have a forum to present the material in a way that supports their point of view no matter how extreme.

- *Ideology/Narrative:* Similarly, the Internet allows the extremist narrative to spread globally. Anwar al-Aulaqi, a Yemen-based American citizen and member of AQAP, is perhaps the best example for English-speaking audiences. His lectures and contributions to *Inspire* magazine are widely available online. It no longer is necessary to have an ideologue at a local mosque or gathering place to inspire future extremists.
- *Mobilization:* How online interaction impacts mobilization poses pressing questions inside the United States and Europe. Because extremists interact online with other like-minded individuals despite geographical differences, can they develop the group dynamics that lead to violence? How effective are social networking sites as a venue for terrorists to spot and assess would-be extremists? In a recent case in Germany, a 21-year-old extremist accused of fatally shooting two U.S. soldiers and wounding two others at Frankfurt airport on March 2, 2011, claimed to be radicalized through the Internet and motivated to take action after seeing propaganda videos.

APPROACHES FOR COUNTERRADICALIZATION

Law enforcement activities directed solely against an individual's illegal activity after radicalization likely start too late and do not provide a sufficient answer to the complex phenomenon of homegrown Islamist terrorism. An effective counterradicalization program has to confront one, preferably all, of the components of the radicalization process and involve a variety of participants beyond the law enforcement and intelligence communities.

It seems that in each component, efforts of government and nongovernment actors can address issues at the level of the individual or the external environment. While potential counterradicalization activities and actors are wide and varied, a few highlights stand out.

> **"An effective counterradicalization program has to confront one, preferably all, of the components of the radicalization process and involve a variety of participants…."**

- *Prevent or Properly Handle Grievances:* On an individual level, efforts should focus on improving young Muslim immigrants' participation in society regarding their social, educational, and economic situation. Externally addressing discrimination and other issues that give rise to grievances also must be taken seriously.
- *Counterideology:* Individually, potential young extremists should be provided clear, descriptive, and unbiased information. Misleading or agitating propaganda should be countered aggressively. At the external level, to educate Muslims and address possible misunderstandings, authorities should provide open information on extremist Islamist trends and government programs to these communities, preferably in concert with respected Muslim citizen representatives. Proposed steps to prevent the spread of violent ideologies, such as Web site disruptions, also have to be evaluated while addressing questions of free speech and effectiveness.
- *Countermobilization:* Efforts include the classic antiterrorism approach of intelligence and law enforcement agencies collecting and analyzing information on extremist persons or groups, enacting early detection programs,

identifying potential threats, and disrupting plots and other extremist activities. At one level, these activities may target individual would-be operatives or recruiters and known communication or facilitation nodes.

CONCLUSION

Homegrown individuals engaging in Islamist extremism are both demographically and socioeconomically diverse, preventing the development of a reliable profile. Yet, all these persons develop a new mind-set as they undergo radicalization. While no typical pathway exists for this radicalization process, three main components include deeply ingrained grievances as the basis for an identity crisis, an elementary Islamist/Salafist ideology providing a sense for one's existence and sense of belonging to a chosen community, and the individual's mobilization to join the terrorist movement. The understanding of these distinct components of the radicalization process may help law enforcement and intelligence agencies assess potential cases of radicalization and lay the groundwork for other government or nongovernment institutions to develop defined counterradicalization efforts.✦

Endnotes

[1] Peter Neumann, "What Motives and Circumstances Lie Behind Persons Affiliating with Violent, Radical-Islamist Groups and Committing Acts of Violence Themselves?" (lecture at the autumn conference of the German Bundeskriminalamt, or Federal Criminal Police Office, Wiesbaden, Germany, Oct 19, 2010).

[2] For example, Jordan-based Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi.

[3] Peter Neumann.

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Wanted: Notable Speeches

The *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin* seeks transcripts of presentations made by criminal justice professionals for its Notable Speech department. Anyone who has delivered a speech recently and would like to share the information with a wider audience may submit a transcript of the presentation to the *Bulletin* for consideration.

As with article submissions, the *Bulletin* staff will edit the speech for length and clarity, but, realizing that the information was presented orally, maintain as much of the original flavor as possible. Presenters should submit their transcripts typed and double-spaced on 8 ½- by 11-inch white paper with all pages numbered, along with an electronic version of the transcript saved on computer disk, or e-mail them. Send the material to: Editor, *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin*, FBI Academy, Quantico, VA 22135, or to *leb@fbiacademy.edu*.

Bulletin Reports

Human Trafficking

Characteristics of Suspected Human Trafficking Incidents, 2008-2010, presented by the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS), describes the characteristics of human trafficking investigations, suspects, and victims in cases opened by federally funded task forces between January 2008 and June 2010. This report provides information about investigations, persons involved in suspected and confirmed incidents of human trafficking, and case outcomes. Data are from the Human Trafficking Reporting System (HTRS), created in response to a congressional mandate in the Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act of 2005 for biennial reporting on the scope and characteristics of human trafficking. HTRS currently is the only system that captures information on human trafficking investigations conducted by state and local law enforcement agencies in the United States. The report also describes HTRS data collection procedures and data quality issues. Highlights include the following: federally funded task forces opened 2,515 suspected incidents of human trafficking for investigation between January 2008 and June 2010, about 8 in 10 of the suspected incidents of human trafficking were classified as sex trafficking, about 1 in 10 incidents were classified as labor trafficking, and the confirmed human trafficking incidents open for at least a year led to 144 known arrests.

Characteristics of Suspected Human Trafficking Incidents, 2008-2010 (NCJ 233732), part of the *Characteristics of Suspected Human Trafficking Incidents Series,* can be obtained by accessing BJS' Web site, *http://www.bjs.gov.*

Criminal Victimization

The Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) presents *Criminal Victimization in the United States, 2008,* which presents tables with detailed data on major items measured by the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS). Topics include crimes of violence (rape/sexual assault, robbery, and aggravated and simple assault), property crimes (household burglary, theft, and motor vehicle theft), and personal theft (pocket picking and completed and attempted purse snatching); demographic characteristics of victims, including age, sex, race, Hispanic origin, marital status, household income, and educational level; characteristics of crime victimization, including time and place of occurrence, weapon use, self protection, injury and medical care, victim-offender relationship, offender characteristics, time lost from work, and economic losses; and crimes reported and not reported to police, victims' reasons for reporting or not reporting crimes, and police response time. These annual data, in 110 fully indexed tables, are released electronically and disseminated through the BJS Web site, *http://www.bjs.gov*.

Bulletin Notes

Law enforcement officers are challenged daily in the performance of their duties; they face each challenge freely and unselfishly while answering the call to duty. In certain instances, their actions warrant special attention from their respective departments. The *Bulletin* also wants to recognize those situations that transcend the normal rigors of the law enforcement profession.

Deputy Katers

While on routine patrol, Deputy Jason Katers of the Brown County, Wisconsin, Sheriff's Office noticed a large amount of heavy smoke in the air. He tracked the source of the smoke to an attached garage of a residence. He immediately reported the structure fire and approached the front door, where he discovered one of the residents—an elderly woman—confused and disoriented. After Deputy Katers assisted her from the house and brought her to a safe area, he learned that two more occupants remained inside. As the structure rapidly filled with heavy smoke and it became difficult for Deputy Katers to breathe, he reentered the house twice to locate each of the residents, who had become similarly disoriented due to smoke inhalation. Katers escorted both of them to safety, and his swift actions likely saved the occupants' lives and mitigated the severity of the property loss.

Officer Becker

Officer Pague

Officers Cody Becker and Edward Pague of the Northern York County, Pennsylvania, Regional Police Department responded to a structure fire at an apartment building. Upon arrival at the scene, the officers determined that a mother and her three children were trapped in their third-floor apartment as the building burned beneath them. The officers immediately took action. Officer Pague helped Officer Becker climb to the second-floor balcony, and the mother passed down her three children, ages 3 months to 6 years, to him. Officer Becker moved the children safely to Officer Pague on the ground below and then helped the mother descend from the balcony. Thanks to the timely and heroic efforts of these officers, the family survived without injury.

Nominations for the ***Bulletin Notes*** should be based on either the rescue of one or more citizens or arrest(s) made at unusual risk to an officer's safety. Submissions should include a short write-up (maximum of 250 words), a separate photograph of each nominee, and a letter from the department's ranking officer endorsing the nomination. Submissions can be mailed to the Editor, *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin*, FBI Academy, Quantico, VA 22135 or e-mailed to *leb@fbiacademy.edu*.

U.S. Department of Justice
Federal Bureau of Investigation
FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin
935 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20535-0001

Periodicals
Postage and Fees Paid
Federal Bureau of Investigation
ISSN 0014-5688

Official Business
Penalty for Private Use $300

Patch Call

The Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigation (OSBI) patch depicts an Osage Indian warrior's shield crossed by a peace pipe and an olive branch, derived from the Oklahoma state flag. An eagle, symbolizing vigilance, stands atop the shield, and the microscope and scales of justice on either side represent criminal investigation and criminal justice. The OSBI's founding year is located beneath the seal.

The patch of the Cary, North Carolina, Police Department was developed in 1996 by a local artist. The state is depicted in the center of the patch, superimposed by a clock that stands in the city's historic downtown. The triangle represents the area of the state where Cary is located—between Raleigh, Durham, and Chapel Hill, known as the Research Triangle Park.