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## Terrorism and the Radicalization Process

**As borders tighten, al Qaeda increasingly relies on terrorist cells in target countries**

*Political violence and terrorism, workplace violence and violent crimes continue to be among the most significant concerns for most security directors. These topics have dominated the front pages of newspapers and security literature for over a decade and continue to hold a place of importance. Particularly for large global companies, terrorism has become a bigger concern. While surveys suggest that small to medium companies do not view terrorism as an immediate threat to their day-to-day operations, workplace violence is a continuing threat to all firms large and small.*

Radicalization is a relatively new term that has entered the lexicon of those concerned with security issues. Usually associated with political violence and terrorism, radicalization is a process that occurs when individuals become consumed with rage over some imagined or real injustice and are moved to exact revenge by a violent act to support a political cause or a personal grievance. The results range from colossal acts of terrorism to random acts of workplace violence. The most deadly terrorist attack in the United States prior to September 11, 2001, was the 1995 bombing of a federal building in Oklahoma City, carried out by the right-wing extremist Timothy McVeigh, a natural born American citizen who had recently been discharged from the United States Army. The suicide attacks on 9/11 and the recent tragedy at Virginia Tech manifest different types of violence, but those responsible passed through the various stages of radicalization before convincing themselves of the necessity to commit violence on a grand scale. The recent events that occurred in England and Scotland during June of this year emphasize the continuing threat extant because of the radicalization of "home grown terrorists." The events in London and Scotland deepened foreboding among security experts that Britain was confronting a new threat: the use of relatively unsophisticated, homemade explosive devices to spread mayhem. Two car bombs were successfully identified and defused in central London and a third car bomb was used to attack Glasgow airport in Scotland. All the vehicles were rigged to explode with gasoline, gas canisters and nails, and the attackers apparently tried to detonate the bombs using cell phones. The two cars in

central London were designed to explode one after the other, the first to bring people into the street and the second to cause great loss of life. These attacks were "less directed from Al Qaeda and more a matter of a home grown group," which raises alarms in England because it broadens the terrorist threat beyond the 2,000 suspected radicals known to the authorities. British Prime Minister Gordon Brown described the threat as "long term and sustained." This issue of the Lipman Report will focus on the concept of radicalization and the threat it poses for security experts.

### **Terrorism and radicalization**

Since the tragic events of 9/11, it has become clear that radicalization and the resulting political violence represent two of the greatest challenges to international peace and stability. In addition to the number of people killed and the value of property destroyed, consequences of these new threats that are occurring with increasing regularity include fear, disrupted peace processes, provoked division of cultures and communities, and expensive countermeasures incurred by the private sector and the government. Al Qaeda and other radical fundamentalist Islamic groups are more dangerous enemies today than they have ever been before, as terrorist groups around the world are organizing and training for jihad based on al Qaeda's model and successes.

### **The role of technology**

To promote radicalization, al Qaeda and its affiliates are focusing more attention and resources on propaganda and misinformation efforts. These activities exploit numerous local and independent actors, using them to mobilize supporters and sympathizers, intimidate opponents and influence international opinion.

The Internet is an important tool that terrorists have used in two key ways. First, it has become a forum for groups and individuals to spread messages of hate and violence and to communicate with one another, their supporters and their sympathizers,

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while launching psychological warfare. Today all active terrorist groups have established their presence on the Internet with over 5,000 terrorist Web sites, online forums, and chat rooms. Second, it has been used by these individuals and groups in attempted attacks on commuter networks in what has become known as cyber terrorism or cyber-warfare. The international community has yet to muster a coordinated effort to effectively counter extremist propaganda that plays a major role in radicalizing young disenfranchised Muslim youth throughout the world. The radicalization process continues to allow for the recruitment of volunteers empowering al Qaeda and its loose confederation of affiliated movements to remain the most immediate national security threat to the United States and a significant challenge to the international community.

### **The rise of guerilla terrorism**

The U. S. Department of State describes the initial al Qaeda efforts as “expeditionary,” meaning that the organization selected and trained terrorists in one country, then clandestinely inserted a team into the target country to attack a pre-planned objective. The 1998 U.S. Embassy bombings in Africa, the 2000 attack on the USS Cole, and the 9/11 attacks were examples of this strategy. After 9/11, improved international border security, transportation security and document control in addition to the significant sums poured into the agencies responsible for counterintelligence and counterterrorism have made this strategy more difficult. Clandestine insertions across borders are harder, reconnaissance is more risky, and the international movement of funds and equipment is more likely to be detected. Consequently a new strategy has surfaced that the USDS identifies as “guerilla terrorism”. Here the terrorist organization seeks to grow a team close to the target, using nationals from the target country. Terrorists inspire local cells to carry out attacks that they then exploit for propaganda purposes. This is accomplished by utilizing intermediaries, web-based propaganda, and subversion

of immigrant expatriate populations. The “guerilla terrorism” strategy negates the need to insert a team across borders or clandestinely transfer funds and materials. The 2004 Madrid bombing, the London attacks of July 2005, the thwarted August 2006 attempt to attack passenger jets operating from British airports and the June 2007 car bombs in central England and the airport in Glasgow, Scotland are examples of this strategy. The individual plots are hard to unravel. Relationships are complicated. The individuals work together or alone with fellow countrymen or people from abroad, often connected by evidence on computers or cell phones that require painstaking investigation. Another cause of concern is true “home grown” terrorism involving local cells acting spontaneously rather than being consciously inspired and directed by transnational terrorists. Counter terrorism experts are seeing networks within networks, connections within connections, and links between individuals that cross local, national and international lines. Al Qaeda’s current approach focuses on propaganda warfare to include terrorist attacks, media forecasts and internet-based propaganda cynically exploiting the grievances and attempting to portray itself as the vanguard of a global movement. The phenomenon of radicalization plays a key role in this global strategy. The Internet contains vast libraries of materials that include information on how to make explosives, how to detonate bombs remotely and how to set up terrorist cells. The sites include a great deal of propaganda, videos of beheadings and exhortations to commit terrorist acts in the name of Islam.

### **Favorable conditions for radicalization**

The radicalization process is gradual, influential, persuasive and is often accelerated by injustice. During the 1960s and 1970s, the soil of the United States was untouched by groups engaging in Middle Eastern terrorism. During this period the FBI monitored the domestic branches of these groups, the membership of which sympathized with

their overseas colleagues. These groups and individuals demonstrated, wrote sympathetic editorials, held fundraisers and contributed significant sums for the unlawful terrorist activities of their colleagues abroad, but they were not sufficiently radicalized to commit violent acts of terrorism in the United States. However, the dynamics have significantly changed.

It is clear that radicalization does not occur by accident or because certain groups are innately prone to extremism. There is increasing evidence of terrorists and extremists manipulating the grievances of alienated youth or immigrant populations and then exploiting their problems to alienate these groups creating unrest and inciting violence. The extremists seek to convert these alienated and discontent populations. This radicalization and recruitment process is gradual, converting them to express extremist viewpoints and recruiting them in stages from sympathizers, to supporters and ultimately to membership in terrorist networks. The Internet is used extensively to convey this message. Additionally underlying conditions, imagined or real, provide the fuel in the form of grievances or conflicts that power the processes of radicalization. This strategy has been relatively successful because Al Qaeda and its associates are beginning to resemble a global insurgency. Supporters and sympathizers worldwide who are inspired by the group's ideology may be operating without direction from al Qaeda's central leadership. Al Qaeda serves as a focal group of inspiration for a worldwide network that is comprised of many Sunni extremist groups.

There is a widespread assumption that the ranks of terrorists and all those who commit premeditated violence are filled with psychologically disturbed individuals. It is difficult to imagine that anyone but a crazed fanatic would kill innocent victims in the name of a cause, or worst yet, become a human bomb. Yet research has concluded that terrorists are psychologically "normal" in the sense of not being clinically psychotic. They are neither depressed nor severely emotionally disturbed. Years of research

finds psychopathology and personality disorders are no more likely among terrorists than among non-terrorists from the same communities. Most come from middle class backgrounds and have higher levels of education than others from the same environment as evidenced by the recent "physicians' plot" in the United Kingdom. For some groups, collective identity is established extremely early so that hatred is bred at home. The "cause" is passed on early in childhood. There is a generational transmission of hatred. In places such as Beirut, Karachi, Kabul, Damascus or Jakarta, prejudice is relayed by the parents, and the children are exposed to it in the home, on the streets and in the schools. Children are the perfect recruits because they do not question adult motives and are easily impressed and persuaded. The oil revenue-supported madrasas of Afghanistan, Pakistan, Malaysia and Indonesia also fuel these seemingly irreversible hatreds because the children may be taught a fundamentalist ideology that is intolerant of others and see the West and its cultures as an enemy. They repeatedly hear how they have been victimized and humiliated. This new generation becomes radicalized to the point of carrying out acts of revenge, and in some cultures even martyrdom or self-sacrifice. Some conditions that can influence this movement toward violence are:

- Lack of democracy, civil liberties, and the rule of law
- Failed or weak states that provide havens for terrorists
- Too rapid modernization
- Extremist ideologies-both secular and religious
- A history of political violence, civil wars, revolutions, dictatorships, or occupation
- Illegitimate or corrupt governments
- Repression by foreign occupation or colonial powers
- The experience of discrimination on the basis of ethnic, racial or religious characteristics
- The presence of charismatic ideological leaders

The aforementioned conditions, combined with the following predisposing risk factors, are critical features in the development of a terrorist:

- Personal experiences of victimization that can be

- either real or imagined
- Becoming an “insider” with the lures of excitement, mission and sense of purpose
- Identification with a cause frequently associated with some victimized community
- Socialization through friends or family, or being raised in a particular environment
- Access to the group
- Exposure to extremist religious indoctrination

The involvement in terrorism is a complex process, comprising discrete phases that can be recognized as an individual terrorist engages in the gradual process of victimization, propaganda, accommodation and assimilation across incrementally irreversible stages. The “terrorist mind” is the product of the increased socialization into a terrorist group and the associated engagement in illegal activity. The notion of there being a moment of epiphany that inspires one to become a terrorist is naïve and misleading. While terrorism is a group activity the group will always be comprised of individuals all of whom have journeyed through the radicalization process.

There are so many different kinds of terrorism, conducted for different reasons, that it is impossible to identify a single cause for any individual form of terrorism whether it be religious, environmental, animal rights, abortion, right-wing racist or nationalism. Poverty is also a breeding ground for the recruitment of terrorists. One billion people—one-sixth of the world’s population— live in slums. In sub-Sahara Africa, seven out of ten urban dwellers live in slums, lacking services such as water, sanitation and the typical housing is accompanied with crime and violence. By creating an unworkable society, then offering an alternative society that they control with violence, intimidation, and manipulation, terrorists ensure a steady supply of recruits. In the Muslim world many potential recruits are being manipulated in religious schools where they may be taught a fundamentalist ideology that is intolerant of others and sees the West and its culture as an enemy to be conquered. By deliberately depriving young Muslims from receiving a good education, the fundamentalist ensure that the future of their potential recruits is bleak and the resulting frustrations make them easily susceptible to terrorist ideology.

another massive act of terrorism. Meanwhile, terrorist acts have occurred repeatedly in Europe, Asia and Africa. The recent events in the United Kingdom are particularly ominous because the conspirators are British citizens or immigrants who have become radicalized to the point of killing large numbers of their fellow countrymen. Two of the foreign born doctors suspected of plotting these bombings in London and Glasgow had inquired about applying for medical training positions in the United States. This phenomenon was unthinkable ten years ago. To date the United States Government has taken significant efforts to prevent another attack. The visa system has been tightened and significant sums have been dedicated to homeland security. New surveillance legislation has greatly assisted the intelligence and police communities. Improved cooperation with Western European police services has yielded information about the modus operandi of Al Qaeda and affiliated groups. In the United States, increased cooperation between federal and local police and the private sector, which manages 85% of the American infrastructure, has also been beneficial. However, the recent successes have led to an inevitable sense of complacency in government and the private sector. It is important, perhaps more than ever, for corporate, educational and governmental organizations to rigorously review their security programs and to update their business continuity plans. There are still vulnerabilities, and the al Qaeda network, which has shown itself to be patient and adaptable, is certainly studying and planning another surprise despite the countermeasures. These vulnerabilities must be identified and remedied because terrorists will strike targets perceived to be weak, and they only have to be successful once to cause great harm and disruption.



The Lipman Report Editors

## The Time for Urgency is Now®

Since 9/11 the United States has been unscathed by

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