Chapter 1
New Blood:
The Recruitment of Terrorists
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Any viable organization, regardless of its goals, requires recruits as a fundamental prerequisite of survival. To remain competitive, commercial entities like General Electric, Siemens, Apple or Toyota need to attract new personnel to make good routine losses from retirement, career change, etc. Locating, attracting and bringing on board the appropriate recruits provide, in a real sense, life blood for these organizations. The same fact of organizational life holds true for al Qaeda (following the demise of Osama bin Laden), Jamiyah Islamiyah, Hamas, the Taliban and other terrorist groups. Indeed, in the case of terrorist organizations, which by their nature are engaged in a high-risk and deadly earnest pursuit, recruitment is especially essential because the membership suffers real losses in votaries who are killed, wounded or captured by government security services. The violent deaths of bin Laden, Imam al-Awlaki and other high-profile jihadists underline this point. Without continual recruitment to replenish the ranks, a terrorist organization degrades, atrophies, and eventually dies.

No organization with either set or vague goals, no matter what its mission, can long survive without replenishing losses of personnel and experience and identifying and attracting new members to matriculate over time into positions of increasing responsibility. No organization that seeks to expand its appeal and power—be it a political party or a business enterprise—can hope to do so without increasing and refreshing its ranks. Today and historically, most organizations have employed both some form of advertisement and some type of active recruitment to ensure a sufficient pool of people appropriate to the goals of the organization – whether that be increasing the amount of sales, extending the electoral base of a political association in a democratic state or expanding the appeal of a religious system. To the extent that terrorist groups resemble other, more benign organizations with discernable goals, they will also have to advertise aims and values while recruiting the right people to staff the ranks and replace inevitable losses. In short, a terrorist group planning to engage in acts of physical terror and destruction needs *people*. A terrorist group with global aspirations or universalist conceits will want to attract and retain a cadre of devotees internationally. This calculus applies, undoubtedly, to Al-

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Qaeda and many similar-minded Islamist-Jihadist groups with an ideological agenda bases on expansion.

There has been considerable debate in informed counter-terrorist circles regarding the current, 21st century architecture of Islamist terror. Are we faced in a post-9/11 world with loose networks, hierarchical structure, dispersed autonomous cells, informal small groups of actors, or some variation of the above?

> The killing of Osama bin Laden marks the culmination of a counterterrorism campaign that made decapitating the al-Qaeda network its paramount goal. But al-Qaeda has metastasized in the decade since the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks, expanding its reach and adapting its tactics in ways that make the organization likely to remain the most significant security threat to the United States despite its leader's demise.[2]

Similarly, the New York City Police Department found, in its report *Radicalization in the West: The Homegrown Threat*, which, in the cases it analyzed, command and control from a centralized, hierarchical Al Qaeda was "the exception rather than the rule." Indeed, some jihadist terrorists such as radicalized U.S. Army Major Malik Husan, the Fort Hood mass killer, would appear to be lone actors, deriving inspiration, but not actual instruction, from al Qaeda. Whether centralized, decentralized, quasi-autonomous or almost absent links, the fortunes of a terrorist structure will in all cases depend on its ability to make good its losses and to attract and maintain sufficient competent personnel to engage in action.

How, then, are new members attracted to and incorporated into a terrorist cause or organization (recognizing that there is a difference between the two)? This is hardly a trivial question, in view of the critical role of recruits or adherents to the viability of a terrorist organization. There is a considerable body of literature and research (if of uneven quality) on the topic of Moslem radicalization; the process whereby someone who professes the faith of Islam (including many Moslem converts) moves from a mainstream profession of faith to a more virulent, conflictual, activist brand of belief. This issue is as important as it is complex. At the same time, radicalization alone does not represent the end of the extremist journey. Can we identify the factors that impel an Islamic radical to cross the threshold separating extremist belief from active terrorist? Some individuals, apparently, make that journey without significant external contact. Arid Uka, a twenty-one year old ethnic Albanian from Kosovo who killed two U.S. servicemen in Frankfurt Airport and severely wounded two others in 2011, would seem to fall into this category.[3] Yet other terrorist candi-

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[2] Greg Miller and and Joby Warrick, "Al-Qaeda threat more diffuse but persistent," *The Washington Post*, 2 May 2011; http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2011-05-02/world/35263797_1_al-qaeda-counterterrorism-officials-and-experts-terrorist-network.

[3] Souad Mekhennet, "A 'Normal' Life that Vanished in a Terrorist Attack," *New York Times*, 8 March 2011.

dates are identified, propagandized and recruited in a recognizable sense by terrorist organizations. It should be noted here that the cycle of human manipulation and methods of recruitment are well understood in the world of intelligence operations and it may be helpful to apply a template of intelligence recruitment methods and conventional wisdoms to the terrorist universe, a consideration to which we now turn our attention.

Recruitment Models: Similarities between Espionage and Terrorist Recruitment

In the prevailing vocabulary of the arcane world of intelligence operations, foreign agents—"spies" in the vernacular—are "recruited" to do the bidding of their espionage handlers, the designated representatives of an intelligence agency such as the KGB, CIA or MI6. That is, pliable or vulnerable individuals are identified and assessed by trained professional intelligence operations officers and persuaded (or sometimes, though much more infrequently, coerced) into servicing the requirements of an intelligence agency. In general terms, this sort of recruitment is traditionally accomplished through offering a subject an inducement for his activity. This inducement might be money, valuable gifts, or something less tangible such as a sense of importance, the thrill of a dangerous lifestyle or other appealing lures, physical or psychological. In other instances, would-be spies sometimes volunteer their services to an intelligence organization, often for obscure personal reasons of their own (to include revenge against a hated superior, to use a not uncommon example). In espionage parlance these volunteers are generally called "walk-ins." Is there a body of evidence to suggest that these characteristics common to espionage recruitment also apply to the "recruitment" of Islamist terrorists, for example Al Qaeda votaries? Are Al Qaeda (and other violent jihadist group) ranks replenished through structured recruitment efforts? Or do new jihadists that join the cause follow more closely the "volunteer" model, offering their services due to ideological conviction without having been approached or induced by someone else? How does Al Qaeda attract new blood to the cause? Does it target specific individuals or simply rely on internet and other forms of propaganda to attract prospective initiates? Is the word recruitment misleading in the context of contemporary Islamist terrorism? Should we more accurately refer to something like "radicalization to the point of action"?

Available open source information on terrorist recruitment methods is partial at best, and some of it, including "first hand" statements and confessions by apprehended terrorists, may well be less than reliable; portions of this record may represent self-serving propaganda and some statements may even be intended as disinformation to mislead counterterrorist authorities. Still and all, there is a sufficient body of information currently in the public sector to strongly suggest that the ranks of the terror jihadists are being filled in a variety of ways, which we will now examine.

First, there is some evidence to suggest that there are two primary types of jihadist recruitment, each with significantly distinctive characteristics. The first is the recruitment of individuals specifically to participate in attacks in theaters of combat such as Somalia, Iraq and Afghanistan. This type of recruitment is often intended to acquire candidates for suicide attacks. North America, Europe and the Middle East, at a minimum, have experienced this type of recruitment activity, essentially an exercise in acquiring cannon fodder. Several young Somali males appear to have been radicalized and recruited in the United States, for example, and sent to the battlefield in Somalia, where at least one of them perished as a suicide bomber. The case of a Somalian suicide bomber, Abdisilan Hussein Ali, born in Minneapolis, is instructive.[4] The second category of jihadist recruitment is more complex: the acquisition of individuals to form small, clandestine cells to carry out attacks in their countries of residence or against specific targets. We will explore both types of terrorist recruitment.

Iraq has for years indisputably exerted a magnetic attraction for intending jihadists and numerous individuals from several countries have traveled to Iraq expressly to combat coalition forces and the ruling, post-Saddam Iraqi government. Figures on "foreign fighters" may be somewhat unreliable but surely tell a generally accurate story. According to Nina Shea, writing in *National Review Online*,[5] somewhere around eight hundred foreign fighters from Saudi Arabia have traveled to Iraq as violent jihadists, many of them intending to conduct suicide bombings against coalition and government of Iraq forces. Europe has contributed its share of fighters as well; the case of the Belgian woman Muriel Degauge, a convert to Islam, has received significant publicity, but there are others who have made the journey from European countries to Iraq in order to fight coalition and Iraqi government forces. Other nationalities represented in the ranks of Iraq jihadists to date include Syrians, Jordanians, Egyptians and North Africans. In many if not most of these cases, some form of traditional recruitment seems to have taken place as the individuals involved (even if initially self-radicalized) ultimately placed themselves in the hands of a formal terrorist support structure that arranged for their covert transport from place of residence to the front in Iraq and for some level of technical training commensurate with their assigned terrorist task. These committed recruits for violent jihad submitted themselves to some degree of control by a terrorist organization or hierarchy – often to the point of letting others in the chain determine when and where they were to die for the Islamist cause.

The record on how recruitment is accomplished is rather less clear regarding individuals who have committed or intended or attempted to commit ter-

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4   Josh Kron, "American Identifed as Bomber in Attack on African Union in Somalia," *The New York Times*, 30 October 2011; http://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/31/world/africa/shabab-identify-american-as-bomber-in-somalia-attack.html.

5   Nina Shea, "Teaching Terror: Violence is Inherent in Saudi Education," *National Review Online*, 17 September 2007; http://crf.hudson.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=publication_details&id=5119&pubType=CRF_Opeds.

rorist acts in Europe, North America or elsewhere. A survey of a number of would-be terrorists, discovered and apprehended before they could successfully strike, suggests that many of them have self-radicalized, sometimes after exposure to violent jihadist internet sites replete with emotionally powerful propaganda images and active chat rooms of like-minded, violent-prone individuals.[6] Others, at some point in their ideological journey, came into direct personal contact with an influential extremist figure—often an Imam from a fundamentalist mosque—who reinforced their radical beliefs, encouraged commitment to the violent jihad and put these devotees on the path to terrorist training (often in rural Pakistan) and action. In the case of the London 7/7 suicide bomber Sadique Khan, the apprehended "Operation Crevice" conspirator Omar Khyam and a number of others, it now seems clear that they were not entirely "home grown" as initially asserted but were in contact with and responsive to Al-Qaeda representatives, sometimes referred to as Al-Qaeda Central (an imprecise but nonetheless useful phrase). In sum, terrorists engaged in activities outside of Iraq have taken a variety of paths toward full terrorist engagement.

It should also be noted that Islamist terrorism is generally (although not always) a group activity, conducted by clusters of people (mainly but not exclusively male). Instances of an individual acting utterly on his or her own in response to a vague proclivity to join a worldwide jihad are seldom encountered – the 2009 Fort Hood attack by Major Hassan, the 2010 attempt by Somali Mohamad Geele to kill a "Mohammed" cartoonist in Denmark,[7] and Roshonara Choudhry, a Bangladeshi with British citizenship who attempted to kill a member of parliament in the United Kingdom in 2010, being exceptions that underline the rule. Imam al-Awlaki, since killed by a US missile, seems to have played a role in at least two of these cases. As well, here Marc Sageman's continuing research and conclusions on terrorists as "a group of guys" and the importance of group dynamics seems compelling.[8]

Radicalizing individuals seek out others harboring extreme beliefs, either physically or virtually, as sounding boards, audiences and reinforcers. Indeed, in some cases, internet chat room conversations move aspiring terrorists on a trajectory toward an eventual physical meeting. This may be of necessity: it is difficult to imagine terrorists linked only by an electronic connection being able to effectively combine forces to bring about a terrorist attack in the physical world. Given this requirement for human contact, it would also seem logical that "self-recruited" cell members might also want to feel that they were a recognized part of the wider jihad by seeking out contact with the shadowy Al-

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[6] Eric Beidel, "Social Scientists and Mathematicians Join the Hunt for Terrorists," *National Defense Magazine* 95:682 (September 2010): 35-6.

[7] "Somali man sentenced to nine years for attack on Danish cartoonist," *The Telegraph* (UK), 4 February 2011.

[8] See Marc Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, April 2004).

Qaeda hierarchy. This desire may perhaps serve as the impetus for travel to Pakistan, not merely for training by experienced terror cadre, but to make formal contact with a "leadership" element that legitimizes—blesses as it were—the cell's existence and goals. In this sense, travel to Pakistan or another area to make direct contact with Al-Qaeda might be considered a sort of "terrorist Hajj," a theme we will address in more detail later.

Nonetheless, such travel to the "Holy Grail" of jihadi terrorism is not as easy to accomplish as it might seem at first glance, and is certainly more difficult today than it was in the year 2000 or earlier. To the extent that they are able to do so, a variety of intelligence and law enforcement agencies are clearly monitoring travel to the Pakistan-Afghanistan area and, if press accounts are to be credited, are also actively intercepting and studying communications in the region. At the same time, Al-Qaeda has always been a security-conscious organization and, given the obvious dangers of meeting with anyone who simply says he is a sympathizer, is doubtless discriminating with whom it in fact chooses to make direct contact. There are recorded instances where an intending terrorist had made the journey to Pakistan only to find that he was unable to locate an Al-Qaeda functionary to inaugurate him into the formal violent jihad. As well, traveling to Pakistan requires at a minimum sufficient funds for airline travel and expenses, the ability to acquire a passport and appropriate visa, the free time to conduct such a trip, etc., and to do all of this without alerting the authorities. The relative complexity or attendant sense of risk pertaining to such travel may in some cases preclude an initiate from undertaking the sojourn. This may have been the case with some post-2001 terrorist conspirators in the United States, for example. To perhaps misappropriate Clausewitz, in terrorism everything is simple, but the simplest things are very hard.

Arguably the important thing to note with intended travel to "the terrorist center of gravity," as with the desire to move from virtual links to actual cells, is that it suggests that intending terrorists *desire* contact with other terrorists and, at least in many cases, are likely willing to accept the authority of their terrorist betters, in whole or in part. This is important, I suggest, in view of the current focus on "homegrown terrorism" and because it can represent a terrorist vulnerability, of which more later.

From the Recruiter's Prism

If we return to our previous framework consideration of recruitment in its conventional espionage application, we can also note some clear distinctions between the world of intelligence organizations and terrorist structures. Espionage organizations are, in essence, set up to effect the recruitment of the *least* motivated members of the target organization or state. Although there are of course exceptions, espionage recruiters try to identify, assess and exploit the vulnerabilities of individuals who exhibit some flaw in character or behavior or common sense, or loyalty to their country of allegiance. Very often, the *sub rosa* offer of money for services plays a crucial role in successful recruitment. That is, the target individual is willing to betray his organization (for example, For-

eign Ministry) or country in exchange for cash, due either to unbridled avarice or to some pressing financial need (the payment of a substantial medical bill, for example). The seasoned recruiter, of course, takes pains to prevent the act of providing money for information from appearing crass or ignoble, and indeed will often strive to convince the target that he is, in fact, a paragon of virtue and a pillar of rectitude. To be sure, more noble human sentiments have also led people to commit espionage, but money has clearly been a standard, effective and reliable tool of the intelligence trade for centuries.

In contrast to traditional espionage recruitment, it can be argued that terrorist recruiters are looking for the *most* motivated people that they encounter in the Islamist demimonde. Turning our attention to Al-Qaeda and associated movements, it seems likely that money is a much less effective component of recruitment, although, here too, there are interesting exceptions. The record derived from captured Al-Qaeda-related terrorists suggests that they did not join the violent *jihad* because they were offered money by a recruiter or by representatives of a radical venue, such as a mosque. Money does not seem to play that important a role and many terrorists would appear to have reasonable financial security – this was certainly true of the wealthy Osama bin Laden and, to a lesser degree, of a number of suspects in the United Kingdom, with careers as medical doctors and engineers.[9] If we stray farther afield from Al-Qaeda and consider suicide bomber recruits operating for Hamas or other Palestinian organizations, the situation is notably different. A number of Palestinian terror recruits have sacrificed their lives precisely or importantly to earn money for their families. In the perverse economic calculus of radical Islam, a livelihood might be less financially attractive than a "deathlihood." That is, Palestinian suicide bombers have often been paid to carry out a suicide attack; the record on this is unambiguous. The funds are of course of limited use to the successful attacker but are in the event intended to be passed along to his or her family. This same circumstance does not at present appear to apply to Al-Qaeda or its affiliates.

If we put aside the Palestinian case as an exception, and view it less as an example of global jihad and more as a terror campaign against an Israeli occupation force, the record indicates that financial considerations simply do not factor greatly into terrorist recruitment for Al-Qaeda and other violent Islamist groups. What factors, then, would seem to be key and perhaps even essential to recruitment for Al-Qaeda or other violent Jihadist-Salafist networks?

There is considerable agreement among counter terrorism specialists that the decision to align oneself with an active terrorist group is part of a longer radicalization process and cannot be properly understood as a simple stand-alone episode. Some have described the process leading to terrorist allegiance as a journey, influenced by elements such as religious belief, a feeling of identity with a community of believers, personal bonds of friendship, etc. The New

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9   John Steele, "45 Muslims doctors planned US terror raids," *The Telegraph* (UK), 5 July 2007.

York Police Department produced in 2007 a compelling assessment of the sojourn to terrorism,[10] describing the stages involved in moving toward becoming a terror activist; one willing to directly engage in violence, not merely a sympathizer with the homicidal deeds of other like-minded individuals.

   Examination of a number of accused and convicted terrorists reveals some interesting points of commonality. In a notable number of instances, an individual initially took an interest in a conservative, intolerant and triumphalist (but not necessarily violent) form of Islam, such as that promoted by the Hizb ut Tahrir. The first steps of the journey have sometimes involved radicalization via Islamist internet sites, many containing extremely graphic content of terrorist acts, including the savage beheading of "infidels." In many instances, a charismatic imam has played a pivotal role in encouraging a radicalizing individual to adopt ever more extreme views, often urging the subject to think of himself as a righteous jihadist, a foot soldier in the struggle against the unbelievers. As an imam is necessarily something of a public figure, the radicalizing subject will almost certainly be brought into contact with others harboring extremist tendencies, reinforcing the sense of being part of an elect group, and not merely a lone wolf. In important ways, these radical imams are more than transmission belts to terrorism; they serve a recognizable recruitment function, although somewhat distinct from traditional espionage recruitment, as we shall see. Finally, in a number of documented instances, the radicalized intending terrorist travels (or attempts to travel) to Pakistan, Afghanistan, Somalia or other isolated area to be trained (in the manufacture and employment of explosives, for example) and perhaps given general instructions by a seasoned, hard-core terrorist adherent. Training is generally followed by participation in a terrorist act, whether successful or failed. In general terms, and with minor variances, this would seem to represent the current Islamist terrorist recruitment cycle.

A Journey Toward Active Terrorism

The gradual progression from an interested voyeur of terrorist web sites to identification and voluntary action as an active terrorist appears to be valid both for those born and raised as Moslems and for those who convert to Islam (see Jahangir Arasli's chapter of this book on converts to violent Islam). In the cases of those raised as Moslems but not necessarily practitioners of the faith (Mohammed Atta provides an excellent example), something impels them to take another look at Islam and urges them in the direction of violence. In any event, based on examination of several documented terrorist cases, we can suggest that the following progression template may have some applicability in Islamist radicalization and recruitment.

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[10] Mitchell D. Silber and Arvin Bhatt, *Radicalization in the West: The Homegrown Threat* (New York, NY: New York City Police Department, Intelligence Division, 2007).

1. An individual (hereafter "subject") becomes interested in aggressive, uncompromising forms of Islam and seeks to acquire more information on the topic. The possible psychological reasons for being attracted to a violent form of Islam that is repellent to many are too numerous to list here and stand beyond the confines of this piece. In Pakistan, Indonesia and other heavily Islamic countries the role radical madras plays in drowning out alternate interpretations of the religion appears to be considerable.

2. Subject discovers pro-terrorist Islamist websites on line and spends considerable time sympathetically reviewing the material, eventually empathizing with the "global jihad" community and "virtual ummah" portrayed in the propaganda. Some of the material represented online can be categorized as at least a "soft recruitment pitch" to actively join the jihadist struggle.

3. Coterminous with or subsequent to the above, subject seeks out a radical mosque or cultural center to discuss the radical epistle "in the flesh" with another person. It is here that an extremist imam or similar figure performs the traditional roles of spotter, assessor and recruiter, broadly understood. Subject is persuaded to translate his violent belief structure into action.

4. Either with direct urging from the radical imam or other authority figure, or as a logical result of what the imam has suggested, subject determines to "join" what he views as the international jihad. The subject seeks to travel to Pakistan or Afghanistan to meet directly with representatives of Al Qaeda, both to offer his services and to take instruction. Those unable to travel (for any number of reasons) seek to network virtually or decide to engage in essentially autonomous, uncoordinated terrorist activity.

5. If successful in contacting an Al Qaeda figure, subject is either rejected by seasoned terrorists or selected for practical terrorist training. Trainers also serve in the capacity of recruitment reinforcers, ensuring that the volunteer, once acquired, remains in the fold.

6. The subject, now trained to some degree in the craft of terrorism, prepares for a specific terror mission, with varying degrees of autonomous decision-making ability as to target, timing, etc. The mission may be participation in an attack, but can also include serving in a support or logistics capacity, or as a spotter, recruiter or trainer of other potential terrorist adherents.

The above pattern of consecutive stages has been seen *in vivo* in numerous cases and in a variety of geographical locations. Clearly drawn here is not only the terrorist journey, but the important role of a persuasive individual pivotal in moving an "interested party" from a passive or sympathetic role to an active one. In essence, this pivotal figure—often an imam, as noted above—serves the

same basic function as does a recruitment case officer in an intelligence organization. This role in the terrorism milieu is, to be sure, less formalized and institutionally structured than in, say, the American CIA or French DST, but no less critical in providing willing agents to do the bidding of a controlling organization or cause.

In a real sense, it can be asserted that the first required building bloc for terrorist recruitment is *acceptance of an exclusionary form of radical Islam*; without this first baseline step the journey to violence proceeds no further. There is no compelling evidence to suggest that known terrorists associated with an Islamist organization have been cynical in their expressed beliefs or motivated primarily by factors not associated with their interpretation of Islam. It may well be, as Marc Sageman asserts, that group dynamics and bonds of friendship play a formative, key role in radicalization, but it should be noted that the core belief that is rallied around is Koranic in nature and that Islamist terrorists regularly profess their religious views as the central force in their lives and as the justification *sine qua non* of their violent excesses. It may also be the case, and it is a case that has been credibly made, that some terrorists, including former al Qaeda in Iraq leader al-Zarqawi, have been drawn to terrorism as a moth to the flame by their innate personal thirst for violence, dominating control and taste for cruelty in its most debased form. But again, it appears irrefutable that adoption of a radical version of Islam that justifies violence against civilians as a form of jihad is a key event in the cycle of terrorist recruitment. Radical Islam and its sweeping *Weltanschauung* stressing conflict provide the plinth for the later architecture of terrorism, with a radical imam frequently serving as construction foreman. In this sense it may be preferable, indeed more accurate, to think in terms of terrorist *conversion* rather than terrorist recruitment.

It remains for the person of the imam, or a like authority figure, to translate radical religious belief into actual terrorist action; arguably a not inconsiderable task. Examining a number of imams who have performed this role is instructive. Abu Hamza al-Masri in the United Kingdom and Sheik Abdellatif in Germany engaged in specific functions that an intelligence case officer would readily be familiar with. Just as with an intelligence operations officer, these and other imams associated with terrorist radicalization have busied themselves with meeting and assessing potential recruits, screening them for potential and crafting a persuasive message to move their subjects from inchoate extremism to commitment to violence and willingness to accept at least some sort of direction and even control. Once this indoctrination has been accomplished, the now committed terrorist volunteer can be steered toward training and contact with seasoned terror veterans. If this contact with experienced foreign-based terrorists is not possible for a variety of reasons, the imam can as an alternative urge the willing terrorist recruit to contact like-minded people locally and to work toward an action generally in line with violent Islamist goals. These latter individuals comprise the so-called home-grown terrorists. It is important to note that even if these individuals lack a connection to foreign ter-

rorists, they have nonetheless been radicalized and recruited (or, per above, converted) to participate in terrorism.

Reference to an Imam who allegedly served as a terrorist recruiter in Tetouan, Morocco is illustrative. According to a press account by Andrea Elliott, a certain Abelilah Fathallah, a youthful and charismatic cleric in a section of town called Jamaa Mezuak, drew congregants to his mosque by dint of his attractive personality. It is claimed that "at some point in 2006, the imam began talking to young men in the neighborhood about making jihad in Iraq. He acted as their recruiter and helped arrange their travel, a senior Moroccan intelligence official, Abdelhak Bassou, told me … When I asked Bassou how the imam operated, he outlined a general process that he said applied to the Jamaa Mezuak cell. Recruitment starts in the mosque, he said. The recruiter looks for people who are easy to approach and gives them books and CDs on Islam and then shows them jihadi Web sites. Eventually they become convinced."[11] The veteran intelligence officer will recognize Fathallah's *modus operandi*; at its core it is the same procedure of the progressive building of bonds and intimacy that case officers employ to recruit spies.

In the intelligence profession, an operations officer will generally employ his "legend" to meet a wide variety of people who may be of operational interest. This is, in a sense, a mathematical calculation: the more people an intelligence operator becomes acquainted with, the better the chances of finding some who genuinely have access to information of value to an intelligence service. Throughout the cold war, for example, social functions and similar gatherings provided the venue for the conduct of this activity. If this broader world served as the fish pond, the intelligence operations officer played the role of avid angler, attempting to make a catch with net or baited hook (with money, often the worm employed to entice the venal). In the sea of Islamist recruitment, however, the mosque or Islamic center substitutes as the venue to meet potential targets.

Available evidence suggests that money and venality play much less of a role in the recruitment of Islamist terrorists than with many other categories of people. Simply put, money or personal greed do not seem to be a strong motivating factor impelling individuals to embrace the Jihadi terrorist cause. Venue, however, does play an important role. The evidential plinth has clearly established that Islamist recruiters or spotters often inhabit mosques, cultural centers, information offices and sports clubs with an Islamic dimension. These and associated locations provide the recruiter or spotter with a broad audience of potential targets. As well, mosques, cultural centers and other locales that cater almost exclusively to Moslems are generally vexingly difficult for host country security services to effectively penetrate, thus providing the recruiter with a reasonably secure environment to ply his trade. It would appear completely natural to a casual observer to witness people in Islamic venues discussing es-

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[11] Andrea Elliott, "Where Boys Grow Up to Be Jihadis," *The NY Times Magazine*, 25 November 2007.

sentially theological matters – religious duty, the necessity of jihad, the nature of the infidels, the sword verses of the Koran and the traditions of the haddith. Accordingly, the recruiter might wish to be discreet in his enterprises, but need not seem overly conspiratorial, at least in his initial ministrations to targets of interest. Mosques and other Islamic gathering places are also useful to the Islamist recruiter precisely because they attract parties other than intending terrorists.

Even with identified radical venues such as the Finsbury Park mosque in the United Kingdom or the Neu-Ulm Islamic Information Center (IIZ) in Germany, it can be safely asserted that not all of the people who entered their portals were potential terrorists, although many of them doubtless harbored extreme, exclusionary beliefs. This mixed group consisting of the innocent (to some degree) and the dangerous (a minority) provides a further security mechanism and complicates law enforcement efforts to identify and monitor real or incipient terrorists. Just as importantly, whenever police or intelligence attention to a Moslem venue comes to light and receives media play, charges of religious harassment and prejudice invariably will not be far behind, further complicating the task of counter-terrorist authorities. In sum, the utilization of Moslem locales to meet, spot, assess and recruit terrorists makes tactical sense and poses a substantial challenge for law enforcement.

In the world of traditional espionage, a common question posed about a new recruit is whether the inductee "accepts tasking" from those whose interests he or she purportedly serves. Various procedures can be employed by agent handlers to ensure that a new spy does accept tasking and, along with it, some degree of control. A recruited spy who sets the ground rules himself is seldom loved by the organization that handles him; espionage practitioners value teamwork over independence. Of course, the utilitarian calculus is often that a spy who does not respond well to tasking is still preferable to having no spy at all. We might ask how does the subject of tasking and control apply to newly-recruited jihadists?

We do know that some recruited terrorists clearly do accept tasking, including detailed and specific tasking. This was certainly the case with Mohammed Atta and at least some of the other 9/11 hijackers who coalesced in the technical university of Hamburg-Harburg (it remains possible that not all of the hijackers understood the target of the fatal mission, but they demonstrated unfailing obedience to Atta's instructions, at a minimum). Similarly, shoe-bomber Richard Reid's pattern of activity and international flights before his ill-fated departure from Paris indicate that he, too, had been tasked by someone to blow up an airliner. The evidence is also incontrovertibly clear that suicide bomber recruits in Iraq have also followed directions from higher terrorist authority on target selection, and have accepted tasking unto death. In other instances, the accepting of tasking from a higher terrorist authority is less transparent. The Madrid train bombers, based on the 2007 Spanish court case and other information currently available, appear to have been mainly a self-contained cell. The failed duo that placed explosives aboard two German ICE

trains in 2006 also does not appear to have been acting in response to direction by a higher controlling authority. Still and all, it is apparent that Al-Qaeda and affiliated movements have attempted to exercise control over its votaries on numerous occasions, just as espionage organizations have traditionally done. The case of the German converts to Islam arrested in Germany in late 2007 is illustrative. The individuals eventually arrested by German and Turkish authorities (a total of four suspects incarcerated at this writing) had been clearly directed by their superiors in Pakistan to prepare to strike in September or October 2007 and not to delay their attack. The jihadist converts attempted as best they could to meet this timetable. We might accordingly conclude that reports that Al-Qaeda was not in a command-and-control position after 2002 are, at best, exaggerated. The tasking of terrorist recruits by a structured terrorist organization continues to this day.

Belief as a Motivating Force

We have previously noted that financial reward does not appear to play a central or even an important role in the recruitment process of intending jihadists. Rather, a persuasive process is pivotal in Islamist recruitment, with the evidence suggesting that religion and a sense of acting for religious reasons is the core motivational variable involved. The key role played by Islam in the recruitment of Islamist terrorists is insufficiently emphasized in much of the literature addressing the terror phenomenon. This is possibly due in part to an underlying Western discomfort at addressing the sensitive topic of religious or theological issues; sometimes referred to as political correctness. As well, since the West itself arguably does not place great value on religion in the 21st century, the assumption might follow that religion is equally unimportant in other cultural settings as well; the evidence strongly indicates that such an assumption is ill-advised. The manipulative techniques of Islamist recruiters are just that – techniques or tools that are employed to move another individual to do one's bidding. To this extent, the CIA or Mossad case officer trying to land a Second Secretary of Mission, and the radical imam on the hunt for suicide bombers have much in common. It might be fairly said that they share the same trade. The core factor to which they point as the source of motivation for the recruitment target differs enormously however.

Traditionally, material gain and the image of personal wealth often represent the touchstone of motivation for many individuals who agree to conduct espionage for an intelligence service. For others, the negative but powerful motivating force of revenge is a key factor. Still other recruits assume the burden of their espionage tasks and risks for reasons of ideological preference, sometimes termed patriotism. Only this last category of motivation has even the slightest hint of commonality with the chief motivating factor of the standard recruit to violent Islamism. Mohammed Atta, Sadique Khan, Jamal Ahmidan, the German convert Martin Schneider and hundreds of other violent Islamist terrorists were moved to their actions by an expressed devotion to their vision of Islam and by a desire to serve in its cause. It is Islam that has impelled these

and other men like them to take lives, those of others and their own. It is, in all likelihood, not a coincidence that so many recruiters of jihadist terrorists are Moslem clerics. Who else enjoy more credibility in discoursing on the spiritual dimension and who better to reinforce religious motivation with ready recourse to Koranic verse? At the risk of sounding a non sequitur, the key to Islamist terrorist recruitment lies within the tradition of Islam. A dedication to a form of this belief system is at the motivational heart of the terrorist, all else is arguably device, reinforcement and technique.

Terrorist recruitment, then, hinges on channeling a profoundly held religious impulse to serve Islam and directing this impulse toward a willingness to commit violent acts under the controlling hand of some authority, Al-Qaeda or another. The terrorist recruiter is the persuader, the salesman whose "pitch" is that the truly devout Muslim should prepare to participate in violent jihad against an enemy defined in entirely religious terms. Thus, for example, violent action to end the presence of U.S. troops in Saudi Arabia (one of the initial core positions of Osama bin Laden is conducted not primarily because the troops are American and representatives of a foreign superpower, but, rather, because they are "infidel" or "crusader" soldiers whose presence on the sacred soil of the Prophet is of itself an affront to the sanctity of Islam. The justification for violence is wholly made on religious and not political grounds. Indeed, the vocabulary of the Islamist terrorist starkly underscores this point. The enemy is generally defined as *kaffir*,[12] or polytheist or apostate or Jew; all of these terms emphasizing an underlying religious dimension to the struggle. The jihadist terrorist recruiter routinely employs this vivid, conflict-loaded imagery in his conversations with potential adherents.

Islamist Recruiters

To return briefly to our consideration of recruitment in the context of espionage activity, a point of distinction between this pursuit and Islamist recruitment efforts should be noted. In the world of international intelligence, the recruiter is a professional officer who is formally schooled by an intelligence agency in the methodology and craft of recruitment. That is to say that the clandestine service officer is subjected to a focused, and usually intensive, education in the factors that traditionally have been successful in persuading (and less often coercing) individuals to submit themselves to the direction of an intelligence organization. This formal recruitment training is a common building block of espionage operations shared by intelligence services from Albania to Zaire. A CIA or MI6 officer, for example, will be exposed to psychological training, conversational and elicitation techniques, personality assessment, manipulation skills, situational awareness, reading body language and other factors designed to assist him in acquiring the skills needed to effectively recruit espionage agents. The officer may, perhaps, participate in staged scenarios or practical exercises specifically designed to provide a "feel" for the practical

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[12] Patrick Sookhdeo, *Global Jihad* (McLean, Virginia: Isaac Publishing, 2007).

challenges facing a recruiter. Case studies of successful and failed espionage recruitment efforts will often be examined to suggest lessons from the historical record. Similarly, the instructors selected to conduct such training are often themselves veteran intelligence officers with an established record of recruiting spies.

The Islamist recruiter, on the other hand and in most cases at any rate, would appear to operate rather differently. To date, persuasive evidence is lacking to suggest that those individuals operating, in effect, as Islamist recruiters are the recipients of formal schooling in the techniques and diverse aspects of successful recruitment. The Al Qaeda recruiter in all likelihood has not been exposed to an examination of case studies of successful and failed recruitment attempts. Also more than likely, he has never discussed personality manipulation with a trained psychologist. It is improbable that the average Islamist recruiter (or, as we have suggested as an alternate term, the Islamist converter) has taken part in a role-play exercise aiming to enhance recruitment skills. For an individual like Abu Hamza al-Masri, recruitment skills appear to be acquired more informally, perhaps through "on the job training" and simple experience. Judging from a number of publicized Islamist recruitment cases, the successful recruiting officer has a commanding presence, a well-articulated and uncompromising message, a persuasive style of speaking and a sympathetic personality. The uncompromising message must of course be sufficiently grounded in religious knowledge (Koran, *haddith*, *sira*) to be convincing. The combination of a persuasive, hard-line messenger with the appearance (whether deceptive or not) of religious authority would appear to be effective in moving Islamist radicals over the threshold to terrorism practitioners. Although the Islamist recruiter and the espionage recruiter differ in their schooling and approach, they share the same goal in the end. Different methodologies—one formal, one informal, one evidentially-based and the other intuitive—are employed to move target individuals to action; whether for espionage or terrorism is a secondary concern. Both bring new blood to the receiving organization and utilize the recruit to advance organizational goals.

Countering Islamist Terrorist Recruitment

How, then, can law enforcement, intelligence officials and other authorities effectively counter the ability of Islamist terror organizations to recruit new adherents successfully? As a point of entry to this topic, it should be noted that no strategy or set of counter-terrorist tactics can realistically be expected to definitively prevent or eliminate the phenomenon of terrorist recruitment. A more realistic approach to Islamist terrorist recruitment might aim to limit—rather than stop—the flow of recruits and to disrupt the chain leading from radicalization to the capability of new recruits to participate in terrorist acts. Based upon our (admittedly imperfect) understanding of how Islamist recruitment transpires, we might venture some practical counter measures, as seen from the eyes of an intelligence official.

- *Monitoring propaganda material and web sites:* As a point of departure, counter-terrorism officials should be versed in the virtual world of the international online jihad. In both intelligence and law enforcement, information and knowledge represent forms of real strength. Understanding the nuances and developments in the terrorist message—the same messages being read by potential recruits—should be a fundamental building block of any counter-terrorist campaign. What are the terrorists saying to their public audience? What are the current thematic materials, and what arguments are employed to justify a resort to violence against civilians? Web sites such as Al-Fidaa can be readily accessed and provide security officials with a window into the jihadist terrorist mind – and likely with a window into the terrorist perspective.

- *Identifying venues of radicalization* such as specific community centers, mosques, sports clubs, etc., can lead to uncovering recruiters. Identifying venues of interest can be based on tips from human intelligence sources, or from something as simple as a review of literature issued by an association; many do not bother to conceal their radical content or sympathies. If a specific location is identified as radical, resources (such as electronic or physical surveillance) can be assigned to uncover and confirm suspicious activity.

- *Infiltrating suspected radical locations:* In countries with the legal structure to permit it, undercover security officers (of the appropriate ethnicity, if required) can be sent to attend services in radical mosques or events at dubious community centers and sports associations. This can serve to uncover activities and connections, including recruitment efforts.

- *Infiltrating radical web site chat rooms using a false flag:* Intelligence services often pretend to represent different countries, and use ethnic officers to pull this off. A terrorist recruitment candidate might be more willing to be recruited by a "Turkish" intermediary than an American one. Intelligence and law enforcement agencies should pick whatever flag is convenient.

These are some of the tools of the trade that can be brought to bear in a focused effort to infiltrate terrorist organizations and complicate (one should never say stop) terrorist recruiting. The record to date is sufficiently successful to suggest that these and other steps are being taken to reduce the effectiveness of terrorist recruitment. There is another. That is the considerable number of terrorists who end up dead. The U.S. drone campaign has been highly effective, the assassination of Abu Yahya al-Libi, reputedly the al Qaeda number two, is testimony to this. It serves as a cautionary tale to respective jihadist inductees that alternative forms of political opposition, that do not threaten the international order and do not celebrate the legitimization of violence, might wisely be considered. Indeed, the use of coercive force against terrorists has proven remarkably successful; terrorist attacks have reputedly declined as a

consequence of bin Laden's death, according to the U.S. Department of State.[13] This fact has doubtless had enormous psychological consequences as well. Complicating the best efforts of terrorists to recruit "new blood" admittedly calls for a significant commitment of resources. The alternative solution—taking no action—is not to be considered.

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[13] Dana Hughes, "Sharp Decline in Terror Attacks After Bin Laden Death," *ABC News*, 31 July 2012, http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/politics/2012/07/sharp-decline-in-terror-attacks-after-bin-laden-death.