

Homegrown Jihadists

Can Muslim terrorists in the U.S. mount serious attacks?

Recent jihadist attacks and plots by American citizens or longtime residents of the United States have dramatized the danger from domestic terrorism in the name of Islam. The United States once was considered by many as virtually immune from the type of violence associated with alienated immigrant communities in European nations. But the immunity — if it ever existed — has worn off, judging by recent events, including the killing of 13 people at Fort Hood, Texas, allegedly by an Arab-American; guilty pleas by a Pakistani-American who tried to detonate a car bomb in Times Square and an Afghan immigrant who planned to bomb the New York subway system. Still in dispute, though, is whether the motivation lies in personal problems, social discrimination or an imported ideology that has grafted itself onto Islam, a religion practiced today by 1.6 billion people, including 2.5 million in the United States.



Maj. Nidal Malik Hasan, a U.S. Army psychiatrist, is charged with a shooting rampage at Fort Hood, Texas, last Nov. 5 that killed 13 people and wounded 30. Investigators say he left a trail of clues indicating his jihadist sympathies.

INSIDE THIS REPORT

THE ISSUES	703
BACKGROUND	709
CHRONOLOGY	711
CURRENT SITUATION	716
AT ISSUE	717
OUTLOOK	718
BIBLIOGRAPHY	722
THE NEXT STEP	723

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THE ISSUES

- 703 • Does ideology — rather than discrimination, alienation or foreign policy — drive domestic jihadism?
 • Are domestic jihadis competent enough to mount serious threats?
 • Are U.S. Muslim communities doing enough to counter jihadist influence?

BACKGROUND

- 709 **Homegrown Terror**
 Anti-capitalist anarchists killed President McKinley in 1901.
- 710 **Modern, Violent Jihad**
 In the Muslim world, present-day jihadism began taking shape in the 1950s.
- 712 **Targeting America**
 Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri formed Al Qaeda in 1998.
- 714 **Hunt for U.S. Jihadists**
 Hundreds of terrorism-related cases were prosecuted after the 9/11 attacks.

CURRENT SITUATION

- 716 **Mosques in America**
 Several projects, including one near “Ground Zero,” are sparking protests.
- 718 **The African Connection**
 Several Americans from Minneapolis have joined the al-Shabab militia in Somalia.

OUTLOOK

- 718 **Pakistan Seen as Key**
 U.S. jihadism is seen as dependent on guidance from jihadists in Pakistan.

SIDEBARS AND GRAPHICS

- 704 **One-Third of Prosecutions in U.S. Involve Americans**
 Americans are the largest group prosecuted in connection with terrorism.
- 705 **Al Qaeda and FARC Involved in Many Prosecutions**
 More than 400 defendants had no known affiliation.
- 711 **Chronology**
 Key events since 1954.
- 712 **Eloquent U.S-Born Cleric Linked to 9/11 Attacks**
 Anwar al-Awlaki “inspires people to pursue jihad.”
- 714 **Use of Informants Draws Fire in California**
 Muslim defendant says he refused to become mosque informant for FBI.
- 717 **At Issue**
 Are U.S. Muslim organizations doing enough to counter jihadist doctrine?

FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

- 721 **For More Information**
 Organizations to contact.
- 722 **Bibliography**
 Selected sources used.
- 723 **The Next Step**
 Additional articles.
- 724 **Citing CQ Researcher**
 Sample bibliography formats.

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Homegrown Jihadists

BY PETER KATEL

THE ISSUES

For one young resident of Washington's Oakton, Va., suburbs, the door into jihadism was football. Shortly before the FBI arrested him in July, 20-year-old Zachary Adam Chesser wrote that he converted to Islam in 2008 while playing on a football team formed by a member of a Muslim missionary organization.

"By Allah Jihad is a part of this religion and by Allah it is obligatory," Chesser wrote on an extremist Website shortly before his arrest for allegedly providing "material support" to a terrorist organization. He also acknowledged that in talks with FBI agents he had "praised the Baghdad Sniper who killed 37 U.S. soldiers," and explained that FBI agents "were mad because the Baghdad Sniper killed Americans. I informed them that I was not rooting for the Americans and that the Baghdad Sniper was on the side I wanted to win."¹

The agents also asked Chesser, who said he grew up in a household with two lawyers, about sports, apparently reflecting the view of terrorism experts that sports can be a jihad precursor. "A reliable predictor of whether or not someone joins the Jihad is being a member of an action-oriented group of friends," Scott Atran, research director of ARTIS, a Phoenix-based social science research firm specializing in political violence, told the Senate's Emerging Threats Subcommittee in March. "It's surprising how many soccer buddies join together."²

Sports enthusiasm is far from a reliable predictor of extremism, of course.



Zachary Adam Chesser, a convert to Islam who went to high school in Oakton, Va., leads an anti-Obama rally at the White House on March 20. He is charged with providing "material support" to a terrorist organization. He came to the attention of authorities for a Web posting declaring that the creators of the "South Park" TV show were likely to be killed for planning to include a caricature of the Prophet Muhammed in an episode.

<http://pibillwarner.wordpress.com>

Indeed, no one can predict who will be drawn to jihadism powerfully enough to seek training or launch an attack. But one thing is clear, national security officials agree: Most of the estimated 2.5 million Muslims in the United States as well as the vast majority of the 1.6 billion-plus Muslims worldwide, reject jihadism.³

Worldwide, Atran testified, the number of Muslims who move from jihadist sympathy to violence amounts to no more than a "few thousand." In the United States, veteran terrorism analyst Brian Jenkins of the RAND Corporation think tank has counted 46 cases — involving 125 people — of recruitment to jihadist violence from Sept. 11, 2001, to the end of 2009.⁴

A recent string of attacks and attempts — including the killing of 13 military personnel at Fort Hood last year and an attempted car bombing in Times Square three months ago — has experts intensifying the search for jihadists' distinguishing characteristics. But the clues are many and varied.

"No single pathway towards terrorism exists," Kim Cragin, a senior policy analyst at RAND, told the House Subcommittee on Intelligence, Information Sharing and Terrorism Risk Assessment last December.⁵

Still, for Karen J. Greenberg, executive director of New York University's Center on Law and Security, one conclusion is inescapable: "It is no longer possible to think of jihad as a purely foreign phenomenon," she wrote in *The New Republic* in May. "American jihad ranges the full spectrum from lone nuts cloaking a general appetite for violence in jihadist rhetoric to more sophisticated would-be

terrorists who have actually trained abroad. In all these cases, it is a threat we ought not to ignore."⁶

A series of widely varied episodes that began last year seems to reflect a mix of "lone wolf" attackers and small-group conspirators, both from immigrant and longtime citizen backgrounds:

- On June 1, 2009, Abdulhakim Muhammad Muhammad (Carlos Bledsoe), a Muslim convert claiming to be retaliating for U.S. military aggression against Muslims, allegedly shot and killed a U.S. Army private and wounded another outside a military recruiting center in Little Rock, Ark. He is awaiting trial.⁷

- Najibullah Zazi, an Afghan residing in the United States, was arrested on Sept. 19, 2009, for preparing to

One-Third of Prosecutions Involve Americans

American citizens represented the largest single group of individuals who have been prosecuted in U.S. courts in connection with terrorism. Most of the 804 cases involved defendants who were extradited to the United States after alleged involvement in activities overseas, including drug smuggling by terrorist groups like the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC).

Citizenship of Defendants Prosecuted in U.S. in Connection with Terrorism

United States	273
Colombia	98
Pakistan	60
Palestinian Territories	22
Jordan	18
Iraq	14
Egypt	13
United Kingdom	12
Sri Lanka	11
Canada	11
Philippines	11
Yemen	10
Saudi Arabia	10
Other	84
Unknown	157

Source: "Terrorist Trial Report Card: September 11, 2001-September 11, 2009," Center on Law and Security, New York University School of Law, January 2010

bomb the New York subway system. In pleading guilty this year, he said he'd been trained in Afghanistan and ordered to make the suicide attack. At least one other man was directly involved and has pleaded guilty.⁸

• An American who converted to Islam in prison and a Jordanian immigrant were arrested by the FBI on Sept. 24, 2009, in two separate cases in which each one allegedly tried to detonate a building with fake explosives provided by undercover agents. Talib Islam (Michael Finton) is awaiting trial; Hosan Maher Husein Smadi pleaded guilty.⁹

• Army Maj. Nidal Malik Hasan allegedly killed 13 fellow service personnel at Fort Hood, Texas, on Nov. 5. Hasan, a psychiatrist from a Palestinian immigrant family, is awaiting trial in a military court.¹⁰

• David C. Headley, an American citizen with a Pakistani father, pleaded guilty on March 18 to a series of crimes outside the U.S. growing out of a long-term affiliation with Pakistani jihadist groups and Al Qaeda, including six months of training in combat and surveillance.¹¹

• Faisal Shahzad, 30, a naturalized U.S. citizen from Pakistan, tried to set

off a car bomb in Times Square on May 1. Upon pleading guilty, he admitted receiving bomb-making training in Pakistan. "I consider myself a Mujahid, a Muslim soldier. The U.S. and NATO forces have attacked the Muslim lands," he said. "It's a war . . . I am part of that."¹²

If the recent incidents have anything in common, it's that they all differ significantly from the intricately orchestrated Sept. 11 attacks on New York and the Pentagon, which were carried out entirely by Arabs, some of whom had studied in Europe. "Al Qaeda and affiliated movements," Cragin said, "have demonstrated a remarkable ability to adapt to different recruiting environments, adjusting both message and method of recruitment."¹³

Terrorism experts are also making adjustments. Since the Sept. 11 attacks, many had argued that young American Muslims are less drawn to jihadism than their counterparts in Western Europe, with its ghettoized populations of second- and third-generation Muslim immigrant families and its history of intolerance toward newcomers. But in light of the latest attacks and attempts, that view is less widely held.

To be sure, American Muslims do tend to be more affluent and more integrated in a country with a long history of religious and social pluralism. "Far more Muslims in three of the four Western European nations surveyed said they considered themselves first as Muslims, rather than citizens of their countries," a 2007 study by the Pew Research Center concluded. Nevertheless, about one-quarter of U.S. Muslims said they had experienced discrimination, and most said their lives had gotten more difficult since 9/11.¹⁴

Difficulties aside, some experts have long pointed to the existence of a jihadist current within a generally well-off, well-integrated population as evidence that socioeconomic advantages don't prevent jihadism. "I see very little

connection between status in life and proclivity to resort to violence,” says Daniel Pipes, a conservative commentator on Islam and the Middle East and director of the Middle East Forum, a think tank for promoting U.S. interests. “I believe it’s ideological, and unpredictable.”

Others venture some forecasting, based on an upsurge of anti-Muslim sentiment this summer sparked by a proposal to build an Islamic cultural center and mosque near the former World Trade Center site in New York. As the furor has intensified, some politicians and activists have gone from attacking the project near “ground zero” to denouncing the religion as a whole. (See p. 715.) In effect, some experts argue, the attacks are providing supporting evidence for a key tenet of jihadism: that America is at war with Islam.

“The jihadi and Glenn Beck need each other,” says counterterrorism consultant Marc Sageman, a sociologist, psychiatrist and former CIA operative in Pakistan.

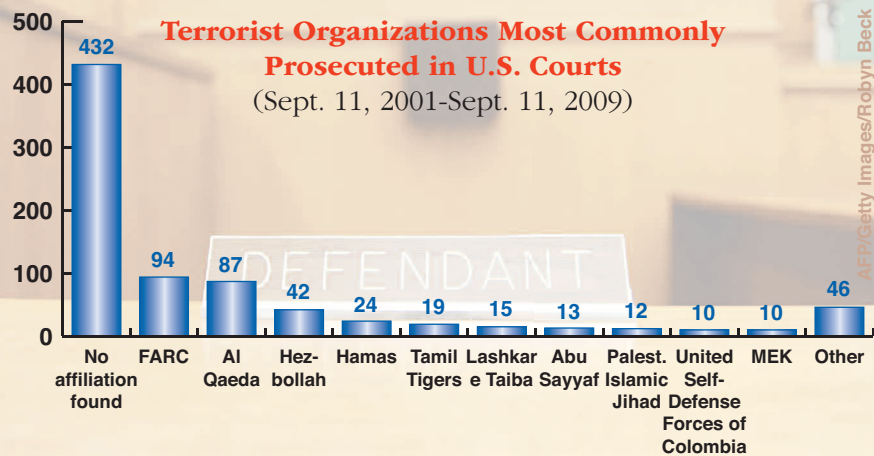
Beck, a radio talk-show host and Fox News TV commentator — and one of the more prominent opponents of the mosque projects — said in August: “You tell me you want to build an ‘Allah tells me to blow up America mosque’ — yeah, I got a problem with that.”¹⁵

Such talk, and projects such as a Florida preacher’s plan to hold an “International Burn a Koran Day” on Sept. 11, are generating rhetorical violence in Muslim online chatrooms. “By Allah, the wars are heated and you Americans are the ones who . . . enflamed it,” says one posting reported by *The Wall Street Journal*. “By Allah you will be the first to taste its flames.”¹⁶

Other Muslims have objected to the cultural center project precisely because it provided an arena for denouncing their faith. And from the jihadist side, amped-up rhetoric didn’t begin with the cultural center project.

Al Qaeda, FARC Involved in Many Prosecutions

Al Qaeda and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) are the terrorist organizations most commonly prosecuted in the United States. However, no affiliation could be found in the public record for more than 400 individual defendants, according to New York University’s Center on Law and Security.



Source: “Terrorist Trial Report Card: September 11, 2001-September 11, 2009,” Center on Law and Security, New York University School of Law, January 2010

Chesser, the former Virginia high-school football enthusiast now in custody, rose to the attention of law enforcement and eventually the public through virulent Web postings that he signed as an individual — most notoriously a declaration that the creators of the “South Park” TV show were likely to be killed for planning to include a caricature of the Prophet Muhammed in an episode. (The Comedy Central network censored the offending episode.)¹⁷

Chesser was arrested after allegedly trying to travel to Somalia to join al-Shabab (“the youth”), an Al Qaeda-allied militia that controls part of Somalia. At least three other Americans have also been arrested recently for allegedly making the same attempt.

The three had spoken of their jihadist plans to men who turned out to be informants or undercover law enforcement agents. Chesser himself knowingly spoke to FBI agents about his beliefs. No trained operative would let down his guard or

trust outsiders — actions that arguably rank the men strictly as amateurs.

Jarret Brachman, a counterterrorism consultant formerly with the Combating Terrorism Center at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, hypothesizes that Chesser was trying to emulate Humam Khalil Abu Mulal al-Balawi. The Jordanian jihadist killed seven CIA operatives, including a top agent, in a suicide operation in Afghanistan after luring them into a meeting.¹⁸

Balawi’s attack was a popular topic on Websites to which Chesser contributed, Brachman says, adding, “I think that was his model.”

As scholars and law enforcement officials study domestic jihadism, here are questions being debated:

Does ideology — rather than discrimination, alienation or foreign policy — drive domestic jihadism?

Experts disagree about whether conditions in the United States or ideas

HOMEGROWN JIHADISTS

from abroad push people toward political violence.

Within that debate lies another: whether ideas from abroad originating in the radical Islamic movement — Islamism — promote or counter violent jihadist doctrines. Political doctrines aside, some experts argue that deficient religious instruction plays a role in making some young people receptive to jihadist ideology.

Ebrahim Moosa, a professor of Islamic Studies at Duke University, says the religious education most young U.S. Muslims are getting isn't adapted to modern life. "You have an impoverished theology, made for a world that no longer exists," he says. "The way they are thinking about jihad comes from a time when the Muslim empire was being threatened. Now there are Muslims in 40 countries. Nobody has explained that to these young people."

Nevertheless, Moosa argues that young American Muslims' response to U.S. actions in Muslim countries definitely plays a role. "They are American in approach but feel a conflict in identity, and seeing human rights violations and injustices, that all combines," he says. "On top of that, one wants to be relevant in the world, where it is sexy to be a revolutionary. Islamism is one of the ideological forces that is giving capitalism some resistance."

Conservative commentator Pipes of the Middle East Forum concedes that the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as the conflict between Israel and Palestinians, provoke young Muslims.

But, he says, "They have a point of view that fits into an ideological framework of jihadism that shapes their response. A non-jihadi would not respond to events in Iraq and Afghanistan the same way, would not strap a car with munitions."

And Pipes, who spent three years studying in Egypt, counters the thesis that Islam as many practice it today has

includes leaders and members who reject violence. For that reason, write scholars Robert S. Leiken and Steven Brooke of the Nixon Center think tank, Al Qaeda's chief ideologist, Ayman al-Zawahiri, denounces the Brotherhood for enticing "thousands of young Muslim men into lines for elections . . . instead of into the lines of jihad."¹⁹

Alejandro J. Beutel, government liaison for the Los Angeles-based Muslim Public Affairs Council (MPAC), argues against tracing jihadism to any single origin but sees political manipulation of religion as a major factor. "Religion can be used as a justification for indiscriminate violence against other individuals, which is completely contrary to our faith," he adds. "The extremists use Islam as a political and social ideology; it's no longer about morals and values. That's the problem; it completely debases the whole point of the religion."

However, the council holds that the Brotherhood and similar organizations, as Beutel put it, "pose long-term strategic threats to violent extremists by siphoning Muslims away from violent radicalism into peaceful political activism."²⁰ Beutel acknowledges that the Brotherhood fuses politics and religion. "But though they do have a political ideology, at least they try to impart it from a sense of morality; groups like Al Qaeda are solely political and have no moral teachings." Beutel adds that MPAC opposes theocracy, which remains a tenet of Brotherhood doctrine.

But distortion of religion is only a partial explanation for jihadist influence, says former CIA operative Sageman.



Faisal Shabzad, a naturalized U.S. citizen from Pakistan, pleaded guilty to trying to set off a car bomb in Times Square on May 1.

He is shown during a Justice Department press conference on May 4 after the FBI took him off a flight about to depart for Dubai. "The U.S. and NATO forces have attacked the Muslim lands," he said. "It's a war. . . . I am part of that."

AFP/Getty Images/Jewel Samad

never changed since its formative period. "There is a tendency to see Christianity as a religion in evolution, and Islam as static," he says. "It has changed in recent decades — has become more fervent, more extreme." He notes that the concept of jihad as an obligation for all Muslims, and as a doctrine of offensive warfare, are the products of 20th-century ideologues, some of them tied to the originators of Islamism, such as the Muslim Brotherhood, founded in Egypt in 1928.

But though the Brotherhood in the course of its history has included advocates of political violence, some argue that it is now committed to peaceful political change and

“The U.S. Muslim community is a little bit tired of the right-wing parade from Fox News blaming Muslims for everything,” he says. “Whereas after 9/11 they could understand the reaction, this is nine years later, and it’s been relentless.”

But Sageman acknowledges that jihadist propagandists are exploiting the response to Islamophobia with an increasingly sophisticated propaganda offensive. The most effective of them, Sageman and others say, is a U.S.-born and-educated cleric, Anwar al-Awlaki, now believed to be hiding in Yemen, his ancestral homeland.

“The rules have changed since 2004-2005 because of the increase in vernacular jihadi Websites,” Sageman says. “The English Websites tap into a large pool of people who were not able to really tune in five years ago, when you almost needed to be able to read Arabic to be able to understand what people were saying. This is where al-Awlaki becomes important; he is pretty compelling, and he speaks American-accented English.”

Yet for Stephen Schwartz, a Sufi Muslim and director of the Washington-based Center for Islamic Pluralism, al-Awlaki plays a relatively minor role. Citing Hasan, the accused Fort Hood shooter, who had contacted al-Awlaki before allegedly launching his attack, Schwartz says, “If you look at something like Fort Hood, and other people who got in touch with al-Awlaki, it’s not a question of al-Awlaki telling them you should go do jihad, it’s a question of them already having these views and then getting in touch with al-Awlaki.”

And those views, Schwartz argues, grow purely out of religiously themed indoctrination. “None of it is home-grown,” he says. “None of it is about discrimination, failure to get jobs. None of those phenomena, which are to some extent present in Europe — though radicals like to exaggerate them — are present in the United

States. It’s always about what’s happening in other countries.”

Are domestic jihadis competent enough to mount serious threats?

U.S.-based jihadis have a nearly unbroken record of operational failure. The long trail of errors goes back to one of the few times in which they accomplished — at least partially — their goal. In 1993, a member of the group that blew up a bomb in the garage at the World Trade Center tried to get his \$400 deposit back on the Ryder rental van that had carried the explosives. Claiming that the vehicle had been stolen, he went to Ryder to make his case — and was arrested.²¹

Hasan, the U.S. Army major accused in the Fort Hood rampage, had left a trail of significant signs — including e-mail contacts with Awlaki. Electronic surveillance, apparently of Awlaki, picked up messages between the two. But a military Joint Terrorism Task Force investigator saw nothing in the messages to warrant further action. The investigator apparently didn’t know that Hasan had also said in a 2007 presentation to colleagues that Muslims in the military should be allowed to resign if they refused to kill other Muslims — warning of “adverse events” if the Defense Department didn’t take that step.²²

Arguably, a trained jihadist wouldn’t have advertised his intentions even in that limited form. In other recent cases as well, FBI accounts and news reports document consistent failure of what spies call tradecraft, including a willingness to trust people who turn out to be government informants or undercover law-enforcement agents.

Examples include two men arrested separately in September 2009, each of whom had asked acquaintances to supply what they said were explosives. Instead, the materials that Michael Finton (a Muslim convert) thought would blow up a federal courthouse in Springfield, Ill., and that Hosam Maher Husein Smadi believed would

destroy an office tower in Dallas, were fake. The suppliers were FBI agents posing as Al Qaeda operatives.²³

Smadi, a Jordanian national, has pleaded guilty. Undercover agents approached him because he had participated in an online jihadist discussion site. Finton, who pleaded innocent and is awaiting trial, had written of his beliefs in papers that were discovered after he was arrested on a parole violation, the Justice Department said.²⁴

In other ways as well, jihadists have proved themselves unable to get around the tighter and more aggressive security measures imposed after Sept. 11. Shahzad, whose Time Square car bomb fizzled, had bought non-explosive fertilizer because purchases of ammonium nitrate fertilizer, which is explosive, are now traceable. “It’s become more difficult to acquire what once were readily available ingredients for devastating bombs,” Paul Browne, New York Police Department spokesman, told *The New York Times*.²⁵

Shahzad had attempted to evade detection by removing a vehicle identification number (VIN) tag from the Nissan Pathfinder he used for the bomb, and stealing a license plate for it. But he neglected a VIN stamped on engine parts. That tradecraft failure led to the vehicle’s seller, who had a phone number for Shahzad — one that matched a number he gave to airport immigration inspectors upon returning from a visit to Pakistan in February.²⁶

Nevertheless, Richard A. Clarke, former counterterrorism coordinator for the National Security Council in the Clinton administration, noted that none of the stepped-up security measures prevented Shahzad from making his attempt. Having only recently taken the extremist path, he hadn’t popped up on lists of jihadists. “These newly minted terrorists are the hardest to stop,” Clarke wrote in *The Washington Post*. “They may not be part of any known cell; there is no reason for their phones or e-mail accounts to come under surveillance. When they buy rifles, hand-

guns, tanks of propane gas or fertilizer, they are doing nothing out of the ordinary in American society.”²⁷

Hence, Clarke concluded, “The unfortunate fact is that such cases represent a kind of terrorism that is virtually impossible to disrupt. These attempts will continue, and from time to time one of them will succeed, with many dead and injured.”

Clarke’s assessment is widely shared. But Beutel of the Muslim Public Affairs Council says jihadists’ incompetence in recent years has weakened their image. “Ridicule can be one of the most powerful weapons against a group like Al Qaeda,” Beutel says. “The truth and ridicule are two of the most powerful weapons we have.”

All the more so, Beutel argues, because jihadists’ technical failures parallel their misuse of religion. “These are people who are not saviors of Muslims but instead are making things worse for everyone,” he says. “A lot of these people were idiots,” he says of the failed domestic jihadists.

However, Brachman, the former research director at the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, says that some jihadists contend in their online discussions — often in English — that even failed operations have an impact, arguing: “The number of people dead doesn’t really matter, it’s more that we’re living in constant fear and spending more on security.”

For his part, Brachman says that while the failed attacks seem reassuring, “The fact that they’re getting this many people willing to try is a very bad sign for us. To me, it gets at how widespread this ideology has become.” Brachman is now a lecturer on terrorism at North Dakota State University and directs Cronus Global, a security consulting firm.

Former CIA officer Sageman argues, however, that the low skill level displayed by Shahzad and others points to the effectiveness of the counterterrorism campaign on Al Qaeda infrastructure. With continuous rocket at-

tacks on jihadist facilities in Pakistan and Yemen, “Training is no longer months, with several courses,” Sageman says. “You’re talking about three to five days training in a rented house in pidgin English or pidgin Urdu.”

Graduates of these truncated training courses, Sageman says, “are not fully trained; they make mistakes.” But he adds that fighting with al-Shabab in Somalia could replace the old Afghanistan training-camp process.

Are U.S. Muslim communities doing enough to counter jihadist influence?

The most politically and emotionally sensitive issue created by the rise of jihadism grows out of the attackers’ claim to be acting as good Muslims. Many have been longtime members of Muslim congregations.

Indeed, especially before Sept. 11, some of those congregations effectively supported jihadism. Some of the 1993 World Trade Center bombing plotters, for instance, had attended a mosque led by an extremist imam. Following the convictions of four of the plotters, the mosque’s president called the verdict “a miscarriage of the justice system.”²⁸

Even after 9/11, some Muslim scholars said that only after a video surfaced in late 2001 in which Al Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden spoke of his planning role did they accept that the attacks were carried out by people who saw themselves as Muslim warriors. Until then, “I thought it plausible that it was American evangelicals,” Mahmoud Ayoub, a professor of Islamic studies and comparative religion at Temple University, said. “They could have been wanting to start the battle of Armageddon and hasten the return of Jesus.”²⁹

Sept. 11 also led to a wave of condemnations of jihadism by Muslim clerics worldwide. And numerous scholarly works acknowledged jihadism as a current within Islam — but not one that represented the entire religion — and one that had to be repudiated. In 2004,

for instance, more than 2,500 Muslim intellectuals from 23 countries signed a petition to U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan demanding an international treaty prohibiting incitement to violence in the name of religion. “Certain religious fatwas remain the pivotal cause of terrorist acts,” the petition said. “These fatwas clothe such terrorist acts in the apparent legitimacy of being one of the sacred tenets of Muslim faith.”³⁰

Along the same lines, activists from within and outside Islam for years have criticized textbooks published by, or approved by, the repressive, Wahhabi-influenced government of Saudi Arabia. A 2005 report by Freedom House, a human-rights group, cited Saudi jihadist material found in mosques and Islamic centers in several U.S. cities. One document collected at a Houston mosque paraphrased the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood in declaring that “Western secularism” had to be driven out of Muslim countries, and adds, “We will not stop at this point, but will pursue this evil force to its own lands, invade its Western heartland and struggle to overcome it until all the world shouts the name of the Prophet.”³¹

In response, the Saudi government declared that intolerant passages were being removed from textbooks. But the Institute for Gulf Affairs, a Washington human-rights group, reported this year — with documentation — that the Saudi government continues to publish books in which Jews, and to a lesser extent Christians, are declared enemies of God.³²

How widely such materials are still used is uncertain. Anwar, the Pakistani-American activist, says that no mosques with which he’s familiar disseminate them. “As an American Muslim,” he says, “if I see Saudi books being taught in our institutions, I would be very concerned and unhappy about it.”

Overall, the extent of jihadist or anti-jihadist teaching in American mosques is unclear, since U.S. Muslims, and Muslims worldwide, don’t answer to a central

authority. U.S. Muslims and those who've dealt with them make a point of speaking of "Muslim communities," which often group members by nationality or ethnicity. Counterterrorist consultant Brachman, for instance, says of his dealings with the Somali immigrant community in Minnesota, "When I ask about Awlaki they'll say, 'I never heard of the guy before reading that the U.S. is trying to hunt him down.' We in the non-Muslim media have hyped him as if every Muslim has heard of Awlaki."

Further, says Schwartz of the Center for Islamic Pluralism, it's untrue that the Palestinian struggle affects all Muslims, as many Muslim clerics claim. But that assertion, he says, often is used to rationalize jihadism. "They'll go to a nice interfaith gathering with Jewish people and Catholics and say, 'Peace in Palestine,' but they won't go back to their communities and say, 'Its time for peace in Palestine.' They've never done it; they don't do it on Iraq. They always express themselves in this overheated, loud, aggressive, excessive rhetoric."

Schwartz contrasts that rhetorical style with the messages that Catholic clerics preached about Northern Ireland, that the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. and other Protestants preached about civil rights, and the Dalai Lama preached about Tibet and its domination by China. "All of these groups had grievances, and in all three examples the involvement of religion was seen as introducing an element of calm, reconciliation, striving for peace, striving for justice through peace. That's what activist religion is supposed to be about."

But Beutel of the Muslim Public Affairs Council says that Muslim communities are in fact strengthening their anti-jihadist message, exemplified in a video posted on YouTube, featuring nine Muslim clerics denouncing violence as a political tool.³³ "It's not just about preventing but about presenting a counter-narrative, and taking the fight to the extremists," he says. "Right now, they're running scared; they're

afraid of the mainstream Muslim leadership denouncing them. That's why they're only able to get idiots."

Beutel argues that the anti-jihadism campaign should not erroneously portray jihadists as a major force among American Muslims. "We always have to make sure that as a community and as American citizens we continually remain on guard," he says. "But that means staying on a fine line between overblowing and underestimating the enemy."

Ideas that serve as a seedbed for jihadism are deeply rooted, even if held only by a minority of Muslims, says Saud Anwar, a Pakistan-born, Yale-trained physician in Vernon Rockville, Conn., who is deradicalization task force chair of the Pakistani-American Public Affairs Committee (PAKPAC). "There are still some community members who are in denial; denial is our enemy," he says. "For example: 'Shahzad was set up by the CIA. It is all a conspiracy to marginalize Muslims and attack another country.' Sometimes they don't even believe that violent extremism is a real thing."

Anwar adds that news of anti-Muslim demonstrations or attacks nourishes conspiracy theorizing. "I'm on all these e-mail lists; if I get an e-mail of one mosque having a hate sign drawn on it in Florida or Ohio — even if there are hundreds of mosques in the country — suddenly my perception becomes, 'They are attacking us.'"

And, in fact, the intensity of anti-Muslim sentiment is real, says Peter Skerry, a Boston College political scientist specializing in ethnic politics and immigration. As a result, he says, Muslim organizations "get caught up in being advocates and defending their community from the kinds of insults and abrasions which I don't deny are there."

The result is to strengthen Muslims' sense that the main danger facing them comes from the outside, not from within, says Skerry, who is finishing a book on U.S. Muslim communities. "Especially if you're a pretty fragmented group, as Muslims are, you have to get some-

thing to rally the troops," he says. "Getting beat up by the Feds or another government entity tends to do that. They get caught up in that." ■

BACKGROUND

Homegrown Terror

Americans experienced radical political violence long before modern jihadist doctrines even existed.

At the turn of the century, anarchists in the United States and elsewhere saw government and big business as the main obstacles to freedom. Some of them concluded that assassinating heads of state and industry would hasten the anti-capitalist revolution. In 1901 Leon Czolgosz, a Hungarian immigrant who wasn't affiliated with anarchist organizations but adopted the movement's ideas, took the assassination idea to heart and shot President William McKinley in Buffalo, N.Y., killing him.³⁴

By then, violent clashes had been under way for decades as labor unions fought to establish themselves against business-class resistance.

In 1910, 21 people were killed when two union activist brothers detonated a bomb at the *Los Angeles Times* in a blow at the paper's influential anti-union publisher. James B. and John J. McNamara pleaded guilty and received long prison terms.³⁵

Throughout the post-Civil War period, the Ku Klux Klan imposed a reign of terror on black citizens to keep them from exercising their rights, especially though not exclusively in the South. However, the Klan wasn't seeking to overthrow the political order, in this case the Jim Crow system, but to maintain it.³⁶

Independence for Puerto Rico sparked one of the most notorious cases of radical political violence. In 1950, two Puerto Rican nationalists, Oscar

Collazo and Griselio Torresola, attacked Blair House, across the street from the White House, in an apparent attempt to shoot President Harry Truman, who was temporarily staying there. Torresola was killed; Collazo served 29 years in prison. Four years later, four other *independentistas* fired pistols from the House of Representatives visitors' gallery, but killed no one.³⁷

The 1960s saw the beginning of a period of political violence that lasted into the mid-'70s. As the federal government began enforcing new civil rights laws, the Klan retaliated. Among the group's most notorious acts: the Sunday morning bombing of a Birmingham, Ala., church in 1963, killing four young black girls; and the murders of three voter-registration workers in Neshoba County, Miss.³⁸

On the far left, the Weatherman* faction of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), the major anti-Vietnam War organization, dissolved the main organization in 1969 and went underground to carry out a campaign of what it saw as revolutionary violence.³⁹

Over the next six years, the "Weather Underground" claimed responsibility for 22 bombings of targets including the U.S. Capitol (1971). By design, the attacks killed no one. In 1970, three members of the organization had died when bombs they were assembling at a townhouse in New York — and which were designed to kill — detonated. "After the townhouse, the WU Organization was careful to hurt no one, phoning in warnings, choosing times when buildings would be empty," ex-leader Mark Rudd wrote in the early 2000s.⁴⁰

The far left has no monopoly on violence. In the 1980s, far-right extremists began organizing to attack employees of the federal and state governments, which they viewed as illegitimate. Ini-

tially, a wave of foreclosures in the Farm Belt fueled the trend, fed by conspiracy theories blaming the foreclosures on Jewish plots.

By the 1990s, these notions had seized some followers and pushed them to action, including a 27-year-old Army veteran named Timothy McVeigh. He detonated a truck bomb outside the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City in 1995. The blast killed 168 people, including 19 children. Inspired by a neo-Nazi writer, McVeigh (executed in 2001) had hoped to spark a race war.⁴¹

Modern, Violent Jihad

In the Muslim world, the ideas that would form the basis of present-day jihadism took shape in the 1950s, when Egyptian writer Sayyid Qutb built on the work of earlier Muslim thinkers, including Ibn Taymiyyah, a 13th-century Arab scholar.

Taymiyyah drew a line between truly Muslim leaders and those who — like the Mongol leader Genghis Khan — presented themselves as such but, in his view, didn't deserve the designation. "Such rulers were clearly infidels and not Muslims at all, and as unbelievers had to be fought and killed," writes Mary Habeck, a professor of strategic studies at Johns Hopkins University's School of Advanced International Studies.⁴²

In addition, Taymiyyah called jihad an absolute obligation for all Muslims. Their enemies were all opponents of God — that is, non-Muslims — as well as Muslims who didn't answer the call to jihad.

Ibn Abdul Wahhab, an 18th-century scholar in today's Saudi Arabia, added another critical element to what became jihadism. He concluded that any human intercession between God and the worshipper was heretical. Accordingly, followers of Shi'a Islam — in which the prophet Muhammad's son-in-law Ali and other figures are venerated as holy — are false Muslims. So

are Sufis, whose mystical school of Islam was described by Wahhab as a deviation from the religion.⁴³

When Qutb began applying the work of Taymiyyah and Wahhab to modern times, he was a member of The Muslim Brotherhood, a pan-Arab organization that was trying to expand Islam into a political movement. Founded in Egypt in 1928 as a religion-based, anti-colonial movement that then opposed authoritarian regimes in the Arab world, the Brotherhood remains extremely influential. In Egypt in particular, the Brotherhood is illegal but enjoys widespread influence. Offshoots include Hamas, the militant political movement that rules the Palestinian territory of Gaza and embraces violence in the struggle against Israel.⁴⁴

Both in its early years and today, the Brotherhood mainly opposed what it sees as illegitimate rulers in the Middle East. Qutb and other advocates of "political Islam" argued that Muslims also had to confront the West. The United States as well as the European former colonial powers had violated God's supremacy by granting decision-making power to people, Qutb and the others wrote.

Qutb's denunciations of the West went further. He depicted the United States and European countries, as well as Jews everywhere, as bent on destroying Islam. Indeed, far from viewing jihad as merely defensive fighting against aggressors, Qutb said a main objective of jihad is to "strike terror into the hearts of God's enemies who are also the enemies of the advocates of Islam throughout the world."⁴⁵

Though Qutb was executed for subversion by the regime of Gamal Abdel Nasser in 1966, the jihad ideologist had already laid out his teachings. His book, *Milestones*, had a deep influence on the founders of modern jihadism, including Ayman al-Zawahiri, the Egyptian physician who helped found Al Qaeda and is Osama bin Laden's closest known associate.⁴⁶

Continued on p. 712

* The name comes from a line in Bob Dylan's "Subterranean Homesick Blues": "You don't need a weatherman to know which way the wind blows."

Chronology

1950s-1970s

Jihadist doctrines formulated in Egypt; extremist violence roils United States.

1954

Egyptian intellectual Sayyid Qutb is imprisoned by the country's military strongman, begins formulating an ideology of warfare between devout Muslims on one side and "false" Muslims and the West on the other.

1963

In Birmingham, Ala., scene of a growing civil rights movement, Ku Klux Klansmen detonate a bomb at the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church, killing four young black girls.

1966

Two years after his release, Qutb is arrested for plotting the regime's overthrow, put on trial and hanged.

1970

Three members of the anti-war extremist group Weather Underground accidentally blow themselves up in a New York City townhouse while preparing anti-personnel bombs.

1975

By the end of its organizational life, the Weather Underground has claimed responsibility for 22 bombings of public places, with no one killed.

1980s-1990s

Jihadist leaders build an organization and begin to launch attacks, eventually aiming at the United States.

1981

Egyptian jihadists assassinate President Anwar Sadat of Egypt for signing peace treaty with Israel.

1988

Osama bin Laden and other militant Muslims who have come to Pakistan to oppose the Soviets in Afghanistan form Al Qaeda as war winds down.

1993

In New York, a Kuwait-born engineer leads a cell of jihadists, most of them Middle Eastern immigrants, in detonating a bomb in the World Trade Center basement; the explosion kills six people but leaves the building standing.

1996

World Trade Center plot leads to prosecution and conviction of 10 others — Muslim immigrants and U.S.-born converts — for a series of plots including plans to bomb U.N. headquarters.

1998

Bin Laden and Egyptian jihadist Ayman al-Zawahiri co-sign a "Declaration of Jihad Against Jews and Crusaders." . . . Six months later, Al Qaeda-directed bombers attack U.S. embassies in Tanzania and Kenya, killing at least 225 people.

2000s ***Jihadists stage a massive attack against the United States and make repeated attempts to mount others.***

2000

Al Qaeda suicide bombers on a small boat blow a hole in the *USS Cole* in harbor at Aden, Yemen, killing 16 Navy personnel.

2001

Attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon kill more than 2,700 people.

2003

Six young Yemeni-Americans from Lackawanna, N.Y., plead guilty to having attended an Al Qaeda training camp before the Sept. 11 attacks.

2004

Nine young men in Northern Virginia, immigrants from Muslim families and some converts to Islam, are convicted or plead guilty to charges arising from participating in a training program for jihad.

2008

Six Muslim immigrant men from New Jersey are convicted of plotting to kill soldiers at Fort Dix, N.J.

2009

Muslim convert Abdulhakim Mujahid Muhammed allegedly kills one soldier and wounds another in Little Rock, Ark. . . . Afghan immigrant Najibullah Zazi is arrested in plot to bomb New York subway system; later pleads guilty. . . . Two Muslim men, one a U.S.-born convert, are charged separately with attempting to blow up federal buildings; one pleads guilty. . . . Army psychiatrist Maj. Nidal Malik Hasan allegedly kills 13 military personnel at Fort Hood, Texas.

2010

Faisal Shahzad, a U.S. citizen from Pakistan, tries to detonate a car bomb in Times Square, later pleads guilty and calls himself a "soldier" in war between America and Muslims. . . . U.S. officials disclose that U.S.-born jihadist cleric Anwar al-Awlaki, believed to be in Yemen, has been placed on a list of terrorists to be captured or killed.

Eloquent U.S-Born Cleric Linked to 9/11 Attacks

Anwar al-Awlaki “inspires people to pursue jihad.”

A U.S.-born Muslim cleric noted for his eloquence, intelligence and fluency in English is a key link in a chain that connects several recent jihadist attacks and attempts in the United States — and perhaps the Sept. 11, 2001, assaults as well.

Now believed to be hiding in Yemen, 39-year-old Anwar al-Awlaki can be seen worldwide on Web videos. His talks are widely considered the most influential source of jihadist inspiration to English-speaking audiences.

Awlaki owes his American-accented, idiomatic English and familiarity with U.S. popular culture to long spells in the United States. Born in 1971 in Las Cruces, N.M., where his father was studying agricultural economics at New Mexico State University, Awlaki moved to Yemen with his family at the age of 7, then returned to the United States at 18 to study engineering at Colorado State University in Fort Collins. After dropping out, he became a full-time imam in several U.S. cities, departing the country for Britain in 2002.¹

Even before the age of Internet video, Awlaki’s skill in transmitting the militant Islamist message was evident to those who heard him. “He was the main man who translated the jihad into English,” said Abu Yahya, 27, a Bangladeshi-British student who attended Awlaki’s lectures in 2003 in London.²

The Obama administration has placed Awlaki on a list of terrorists to be captured or killed, national security officials have said. He “has proven that he is extraordinarily dangerous, committed to carrying out deadly attacks on Americans and others worldwide,” Stuart Levey, Treasury under-secretary for terrorism and financial intelligence, said in July. “He has involved himself in every aspect of the supply chain of terrorism — fundraising for terrorist groups, recruiting and training operatives and planning and ordering attacks on innocents.”³

Awlaki’s father, Nasser al-Awlaki, a former agriculture min-

ister and university chancellor in Yemen, has asked the American Civil Liberties Union and the Center for Constitutional Rights to try to block killing Awlaki without a trial.

“Targeting Americans for execution without any form of due process . . . is fundamentally un-American,” said ACLU Executive Director Anthony D. Romero. The groups had also objected to being forced to apply for a Treasury Department license to represent Awlaki, a step required by his designation as a “global terrorist.” They were granted the license.⁴

The assessment that Awlaki now plays an “operational” role apparently grew out of the investigation of the failed 2001 Christmas Day airliner bombing by Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, a young Nigerian who had been studying in Yemen.

In February, *The New York Times* reported that Awlaki told a Yemeni journalist of having met with Abdulmutallab. “Umar Farouk is one of my students; I had communications with him,” Awlaki said on a recording to which *Times* correspondent Robert F. Worth listened. “And I support what he did, as America supports Israel’s killing of Palestinians, and its killing of civilians in Afghanistan and Iraq.”⁵

He also said, “I did not tell him to do this operation, but I support it.”⁶

Previously, Awlaki had had e-mail exchanges with Maj. Nidal Malik Hasan, the U.S. Army psychiatrist accused of killing 13 military personnel in a November 2009 shooting rampage at Fort Hood, Texas.⁷ And the FBI reports that Zachary A. Chesser, the suburban Washington 20-year-old arrested in July after allegedly trying to join Somali jihadists, acknowledged e-mail correspondence with Awlaki as well.

Chesser told an agent “that Awlaki inspires people to pursue jihad,” Special Agent Mary Brandt Kinder said in a July 21 affidavit filed when Chesser was taken into custody. “He told her that he

Continued from p. 710

Targeting America

Zawahiri and bin Laden met in Pakistan in the 1980s during the Afghan war against the Soviet occupation. By 1989, they and Muslims from many countries had forced Soviet forces to withdraw. Over the years that followed, the pair laid the groundwork for long-term jihad. In 1998, bin Laden, Zawahiri and three others signed a declaration of “Jihad Against Jews and Crusaders” — the latter a term for Christians.⁴⁷

The declaration called on Muslims

“to kill the Americans and their allies — civilians and military.” The aim was to “liberate the al-Aqsa [Jerusalem] Mosque and the holy mosque [Mecca] from their grip,” and to force all foreign forces from Muslim countries.⁴⁸

Apart from serving as a warning to the West, the declaration signaled a victory by bin Laden and his comrades over other jihadists who argued for targeting the “near enemy” — Muslim rulers of Muslim countries who, jihadists claimed, had betrayed their religion. The betrayal was in not imposing the ultra-restrictive laws that the jihadists demanded, and by staying on generally

friendly terms with the United States and other Western countries.

The manifesto was followed by a series of bomb attacks on U.S. targets abroad — the U.S. embassies in Nairobi, Kenya, and Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, in 1998, and the *USS Cole* during a stop in Aden, Yemen, in 2000. The embassy bombings killed at least 225 people; the *Cole* attack killed 16 U.S. Navy personnel.⁴⁹

In retrospect, the attacks heralded Al Qaeda’s campaign to systematically hit U.S. targets wherever possible. But few at the time saw links to the 1993 truck bomb at the World Trade Center, which only killed six people.⁵⁰

sent Awlaki several e-mail messages and that Awlaki replied to two of them.” The contents of the messages were not disclosed.⁸

Faisal Shahzad, the Pakistani-American who tried to set off a car bomb in New York’s Times Square last May, also claimed that he’d been guided by Awlaki’s Web-broadcast sermons, government sources have told reporters. “He [Shahzad] listened to him, and he did it,” a U.S. official told *The New York Times*.⁹

Though Awlaki only became prominent in news accounts this year, he has been on security officials’ radar screen for years. According to the *9/11 Commission Report*, investigators going over the hijackers’ trail in the United States noticed that two of them attended the Rabat mosque in San Diego where Awlaki was an imam. The two “reportedly respected Aulaqi [as the report spelled his name] as a religious figure and developed a close relationship with him.”¹⁰

Those two future hijackers, Hani Hamjour and Nawaf al Hazmi, then moved to the Virginia suburbs of Washington. And so did Awlaki, who became imam of Dar al Hijrah mosque in Falls Church, Va. — the very mosque where the two of them prayed. It is also the mosque from which Awlaki reportedly spoke as a “moderate” Muslim leader.

The commission report reflected suspicion over his role, but the FBI had concluded that Awlaki’s contacts with the two were coincidental. *The New York Times* has reported, based on commission



Getty Images/The Washington Post/T. Woodward

Former imam Anwar al-Awlaki meets with Patricia Morris, a neighbor of his Falls Church, Va., mosque who organized a vigil of support after the 9/11 attacks.

records at the National Archives, that some investigators believed otherwise. “If anyone had knowledge of the plot, it would have been” Awlaki, an FBI agent told the commission. “Someone had to be in the U.S. and keep the hijackers spiritually focused.”¹¹

— Peter Katel

¹ Aamer Madhanim, “What makes cleric al-Awlaki so dangerous,” *USA Today*, Aug. 25, 2010, p. A1; Scott Shane and

Souad Mekhennet, “From Condemning Terror to Preaching Jihad,” *The New York Times*, May 9, 2010, p. A1.

² Shane and Mekhennet, *ibid.*

³ Quoted in Charlie Savage, “Lawyers Seeking to Take Up Terror Suspect’s Legal Case Sue U.S. for Access,” *The New York Times*, Aug. 4, 2010, p. A4.

⁴ Quoted in “Lawyers Win Right to Aid U.S. Target,” *The New York Times*, Aug. 5, 2010, p. A13; *ibid.*

⁵ Quoted in Robert F. Worth, “Cleric in Yemen Admits Meeting Airliner Plot Suspect, Journalist Says,” *The New York Times*, Feb. 1, 2010, p. A7.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *United States of America v. Zachary Adam Chesser*, affidavit, Mary Brandt Kinder, FBI, July 21, 2010, www.investigativeproject.org/documents/case_docs/1343.pdf.

⁹ Quoted in Scott Shane and Mark Mazzetti, “A Newly Religious Immigrant Is Linked to a Militant Yemeni-American Cleric,” *The New York Times*, May 7, 2010, p. A13.

¹⁰ *9/11 Commission Report*, National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States (2004), p. 221, www.9-11commission.gov/report/911Report.pdf. The commission’s interest in “Aulaqi” was reported in Shane and Mekhennet, *op. cit.*

¹¹ Quoted in *ibid.*

The man behind that attack was Kuwait-born Ramzi Yousef, son of a Palestinian mother and Pakistani father. Arrested in the Philippines two years later and brought back to America for trial, Yousef represented a Pakistani strain in Jihadism. Indeed, the Egyptian Qutb had drawn on the work of a contemporary, Sayyid Abul A’la Mawdudi, who was born in British-ruled India and went on to become a leading intellectual and political figure in Pakistan (the Muslim country was formed when Britain withdrew from its Indian colony).⁵¹

Mawdudi argued that all governments should answer only to God and should

impose God’s law in the public and private sphere. The Taliban, who originated in Pakistan after the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, drew on Mawdudi’s inspiration in imposing their harsh and restrictive laws on personal conduct, especially on women’s behavior. The laws reflected their vision of *sharia*, or God-given law. Yousef could claim both personal and family ties to the anti-American jihad strategy. Apart from mounting the first jihadist attack on American soil, he was the nephew of Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, who is widely held to have originated the idea of flying hijacked

airliners into targets and proposed the plan to bin Laden. Mohammed has been in U.S. custody since 2003.

Mohammed’s career illustrates another critical element in the development of jihadism in the United States, and the West in general: personal experience in a targeted country. Like Qutb himself, who lived in the U.S. as an exchange student in 1948-50, Mohammed lived in the United States for three-and-a-half years in the early 1980s, most of that time studying for a mechanical engineering degree, which he received from North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University in Greensboro.⁵²

Use of Informants Draws Fire in California

Muslim defendant says he refused to become mosque informant for FBI.

Even “lone-wolf” jihadists need someone to talk to. And in the post-Sept. 11 world, that someone may well be an undercover agent or a confidential informant.

Heavy use of infiltrators has led to dozens of arrests, including several men recently for allegedly attempting to travel to Somalia to join the jihadist militia, and to destroy federal buildings in Springfield, Ill., and Dallas.

A trial now under way in New York grows out of an informant-assisted investigation of four men charged with plotting to blow up synagogues in the Bronx and to fire Stinger missiles at military aircraft at Stewart International Airport in Newburgh, N.Y. Defense lawyers are arguing that informant Shahed Husain was the main instigator. Prosecutors counter that the defendants were bent on violence.¹

But reliance on informants can backfire, as proved by a case involving the infiltration of a Southern California mosque by a jihad-promoting informant. Some Muslim organizations have said the case confirms all their fears of an overreliance on informants. “Federal law enforcement cannot establish trust with American Muslim communities through meetings and town hall forums, while at the same time sending paid informants who instigate violent rhetoric in mosques,” the Washington and Los Angeles-based Muslim Public Affairs Council (MPAC) said last year.²

An arrest by the FBI in February 2009 in Tustin, Calif., prompted the council’s statement. FBI agents wearing body armor arrested a naturalized U.S. citizen originally from Afghanistan, a small-business man, Ahmadulla Sais Niazi, on charges of failing to disclose ties to terrorist organizations when

he was applying for citizenship. He has pleaded innocent and is awaiting trial.³

The alleged terrorist tie was to Niazi’s brother-in-law, Amin al-Haq, reportedly Osama bin Laden’s security coordinator. During Niazi’s arraignment, an FBI agent said he had been recorded speaking sympathetically of bin Laden and of terrorist organizations, and recounted blowing up empty buildings.⁴

But Niazi said he was being charged because he’d refused to become a confidential informant among his fellow worshippers at the Islamic Center of Tustin. Whether Niazi spoke favorably of terrorism and refused to inform remain unproved. But mosque leaders did say Niazi had told them that a new member of the mosque was talking about jihad and proposing a terrorist attack. A mosque leader and an official of the Council on American-Islamic Affairs said they reported the man to the FBI.⁵

Meanwhile, the mosque obtained a restraining order against the man, Craig Monteilh. He then came forward to declare that, yes, he had been working as an informant among Muslims for the Orange County Joint Terrorism Task Force, which includes the FBI. Monteilh acknowledged that he had served time in prison after that stint for defrauding two women of \$157,000, and said he had also worked as a paid police informant in drug cases, using connections he’d made behind bars.⁶

Although the FBI has never said explicitly that Monteilh had been an informant, an agent did say in court that Niazi and other mosque members had reported the jihad-talker.⁷

Monteilh has sued the FBI and other task force agencies for alleged failure to pay him what he said was a promised

Hunt for U.S. Jihadists

Major jihadist attacks in the years immediately following Sept. 11 hit U.S. allies — but not the United States itself.

The bombing of a nightclub in Bali, Indonesia, in 2002 killed 202 people, many of them tourists from Australia. An Indonesian affiliate of Al Qaeda claimed responsibility.⁵³

Two years later, a jihadist group largely of Moroccan immigrants planted bombs in four commuter trains bound for Madrid, killing 191 people. Seven suspects killed themselves by detonating a bomb in an apartment as police closed in.⁵⁴

In 2005, four young men blew themselves up in suicide attacks on three subway trains and a bus in London. All of the bombers were British citizens, three from Pakistani immigrant families, one from Jamaica.⁵⁵

Smaller-scale attacks or attempts during the four years following 9/11 took place in Turkey, Morocco and Kenya, in addition to Chechnya and Russia, which have been embroiled in separatist campaigns with religious and ethnic dimensions.

Meanwhile the jihadists’ prime target, the United States, escaped actual attacks, though Richard Reid, an Al Qaeda-trained British Muslim, did try to set off a shoe bomb on a U.S.-

bound airliner in 2001.⁵⁶ The paradox of an unscathed U.S. helped give rise to the consensus that Europe faced a greater danger because its Muslims tended to be more alienated from the surrounding societies, and hence more susceptible to jihadist ideology.

Another reason for the absence of actual attacks for eight years could be a federal law-enforcement offensive started after the 2001 attacks.

The Justice Department mounted hundreds of prosecutions on terrorism-related charges during those years. A comprehensive database assembled by the New York University law school’s Center on Law and Security showed that 230 people allegedly affiliated with jihadist

\$100,000 and other benefits. In early August, the FBI was dismissed from the suit, which also sought to reverse his fraud conviction on the grounds that it was tied to his drug informant work.⁸

Meanwhile, federal prosecutors who had earlier emphasized Niazi's alleged terrorist ties joined with his defense lawyers in a successful request to loosen his 24-hour house-arrest restrictions.⁹

The outrage of the organized Muslim community over an apparently clumsy infiltration attempt may have been predictable. But some counterterrorism experts agree that building trust between law enforcement agencies and Muslim communities is the key to early detection of jihadist recruitment.

"You have families intervening to keep sons and daughters from going down dangerous paths," Brian M. Jenkins, a counterterrorism expert at the RAND Corporation think tank, told the House Intelligence, Information Sharing and Terrorism Risk Assessment Subcommittee in May. "You have interventions by very close acquaintances. That's something that the authorities are not going to have the knowledge of."¹⁰

The best channel for that information is local police, he said. "I would be as wary of the federal government program to deal with a Muslim-American community as I would be wary of a federal government program to deal with any other community . . . local police, answer to locally elected officials, and I think that's a much safer place for that to take place."¹¹

Still, given a string of recent cases based on informants and undercover agents, there's no reason to expect federal law enforcement agencies to drop their use of infiltrators. Even the

MPAC, which criticizes "overreliance" on informants, acknowledges their usefulness. "We do not argue that the use of informants should be discontinued altogether," the council said in a recent report. "They can serve as an effective and legitimate law enforcement tool to bring criminals to justice."¹²

— Peter Katel

¹ Kareem Fahim, "Agent Wanted Backup Charge in Synagogue Bomb Case, Defense Says," *The New York Times*, Aug. 26, 2010, www.nytimes.com/2010/08/27/nyregion/27plot.html?scp=3&sq=informant%20and%20terrorism&st=cse.

² "FBI Losing Partnership With American Muslim Community," Muslim Public Affairs Council, Feb. 25, 2009, www.mpac.org/article.php?id=793.

³ Salvador Hernandez, "House arrest ruling follows change of mind," *Orange County Register*, June 14, 2010; Carol J. Williams and Christine Hanley, "Al Qaeda figure's in-law arrested," *Los Angeles Times*, Feb. 21, 2009, p. B1.

⁴ Salvador Hernandez, "Niazi ordered to submit to electronic monitoring," *Orange County Register*, Feb. 26, 2009.

⁵ Salvador Hernandez, Doug Irving and Sean Emery, "Man claims he informed on O.C. Muslims for FBI," *Orange County Register*, Feb. 28, 2009.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Gillian Flaccus, "Judge poised to dismiss informant's suit vs. FBI," *The Associated Press*, Aug. 12, 2010.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Hernandez, "House arrest. . . ," *op. cit.*

¹⁰ House Homeland Security Subcommittee on Intelligence, Information Sharing and Terrorism Risk Assessment, *CQ Congressional Transcripts*, May 26, 2010.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Alejandro J. Beutel, "Building Bridges to Strengthen America: Forging an Effective Counterterrorism Enterprise Between Muslim Americans & Law Enforcement," Muslim Public Affairs Council, April 2010, p. 27, www.mpac.org/publications/building-bridges/MPAC-Building-Bridges-Complete_Unabridged_Paper.pdf.

organizations (in addition to 78 others allegedly affiliated with Lebanon's Shiite militia, Hezbollah, and pro-Palestinian organizations that have carried out attacks in Israel, but not elsewhere) were put on trial in the period Sept. 11, 2001-Sept. 11, 2009.⁵⁷

All told, the Justice Department filed 337 terrorism-related prosecutions against 804 individuals in terrorism-related cases. However, most defendants weren't said to be affiliated with any organizations at all. And the most common alleged affiliation of all was the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), a guerrilla organization involved in drug trafficking.

The center's study also concluded that cases filed immediately after the

Sept. 11 attacks often did not live up to initial accusations of terrorism. Specifically, defendants eventually were tried on lesser charges in nine of 10 cases. One explanation was that law-enforcement agencies were following a policy of "prevention," in which charges that fell short of terrorism were used to keep suspects off the streets.⁵⁸

Plots that law-enforcement agencies took credit for disrupting ranged from a scheme by a group of men in Miami to destroy the Sears Tower in Chicago — a case that prosecutors took to court three times before obtaining convictions — to a scheme to kill soldiers at Fort Dix, N.J. Six men, all Muslim immigrants, were arrested in 2007 and convicted in 2008; four

were sentenced to life in prison and one to a 33-year term (the sixth, who pleaded guilty to illegal possession of weapons received a 20-month sentence).⁵⁹

In the post-9/11 period, other cases also centered on groups of young men who had undergone jihad training in the Middle East or Afghanistan, or trained for violence in the United States. The groups included six young men from Yemeni immigrant families in Lackawanna, N.Y., who pleaded guilty in 2003 to attending a Qaeda training camp in Yemen personally supervised by bin Laden; and nine men in Northern Virginia who pleaded guilty or were convicted on charges of training for violence, in some cases at Pakistani jihad training grounds.⁶⁰ ■

CURRENT SITUATION

Mosques in America

Mosque projects throughout the United States, including an Islamic cultural center planned near “ground zero” in New York City, are sparking local protests.

Many opponents of the projects view Islam and the West as fundamentally at odds.

“The problem America faces today from Islamic jihadists is not simply one of terrorism,” wrote author Robert Spencer, “but of a larger attempt to insinuate elements of Islamic law (sharia) into American society, and to assert the principle that where sharia and American law conflict, it is American law that must give way.”⁶¹

Anti-Islamic author Pamela Geller, who with Spencer has organized street protests against the New York project (and co-authored an anti-Obama book with Spencer⁶²), insists that aggression is hard-wired into Muslims’ religion.

“Islam has since its inception had a political and expansionist character, and that would mean that ties to Islam had a greater significance than simple allegiance to this or that religious group,” she said in an interview posted on her blog. “Islamic anti-Semitism is part of the Koranic imperative.”⁶³

But Muslim advocacy organizations say Geller and other opponents of the Manhattan project are effectively aiding jihadists by promoting the doctrine that Islam and the West are at war.

“People like Geller are literally writing up bin Laden’s talking points as we speak,” says Beutel of the Muslim Public Affairs Council.

The proposed Islamic center in New York has gotten strong support from

Mayor Michael Bloomberg, other local and national politicians and political operatives and from most liberal commentators, as well as tempered backing from President Obama. He said initially that Muslims have the “right to build a place of worship and a community center on private property in Lower Manhattan,” but added the next day that he was not commenting “on the wisdom of making a decision to put a mosque there.”⁶⁴

As Obama seemed to be suggesting, the fight over the proposed center isn’t as simple as anti-Muslim opponents versus Muslim proponents, and their allies. Schwartz of the Center for Islamic Pluralism, like the project’s religious leader, Abdul Rauf, an adherent of the mystical Sufi branch of Islam, said the proposed center “isn’t something a Sufi would do . . . Sufism is supposed to be based on sensitivity toward others.” A better approach, he said, is that of Muslims “who hate terrorism and who have gone privately to the site and recited prayers for the dead silently and unperceived by others.”⁶⁵

Taking a similar stance, Abdel Moety Bayoumi, a senior member of the Islamic Research Institute at Al Azhar Mosque and University in Cairo, which is influential among Sunni Muslims, said the project “will create a permanent link between Islam and 9/11.” He asked, “Why should we put ourselves and Islam in a position of blame?”⁶⁶

Some conservatives echo the fears of Muslim civil rights activists who worry that the anti-Muslim character of some opponents is effectively promoting jihadism. “To view all Muslims as per se extremists is to give up this fight in advance, and to push real moderates into the hands of the extremists,” author Ronald Radosh, an adjunct fellow at the conservative Hudson Institute think tank and a retired professor of history at City University of New York, wrote in a blog posting. “If all Muslims are our enemy, we give credibility to the radical Islamofascists, who claim that their view of the [Koran] is the only true one, and if

one is a real Muslim, they must join bin Laden and the other radicals in their holy Jihad against the West.”⁶⁷

The New York project seems both to be fostering and reflecting an ongoing wave of opposition to Islam around the country, which intensified after 9/11. “What’s different is the heat, the volume, the level of hostility,” Ihsan Bagby, professor of Islamic studies at the University of Kentucky, told *The New York Times*. “It’s one thing to oppose a mosque because traffic might increase, but it’s different when you say these mosques are going to be nurturing terrorist bombers, that Islam is invading, that civilization is being undermined by Muslims.”⁶⁸

In Gainesville, Fla., there are no mosque plans, but Pastor Terry Jones of the Dove World Outreach Center, is seizing the approaching Sept. 11 anniversary as an occasion for outright religious warfare. Jones is planning to burn copies of the Koran on Sept. 11.

“We believe that Islam is of the devil, that it’s causing billions of people to go to hell, it is a deceptive religion, it is a violent religion and that is proven many, many times,” Jones said.⁶⁹

In Murfreesboro, Tenn., a proposal to expand an Islamic community center has sparked controversy. A candidate for the Republican nomination for Congress tried to capitalize on the issue with a billboard urging, “Defeat Universal Jihad Now.” (The candidate, Vijay Kumar, was defeated in the primary.)⁷⁰

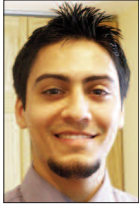
“It shouldn’t be surprising that there’s a negative reaction to this mosque,” said Richard Lloyd, a sociology professor at Vanderbilt University in Nashville. “Because you can connect it to this global media event in New York, it just reinforces this siege mentality local residents have.”⁷¹

A sense of siege apparently isn’t limited to the Nashville suburbs. In Temecula, Calif., a proposed mosque expansion has generated suspicion about Islam. “The Islamic foothold is not strong

Continued on p. 718

At Issue:

Are U.S. Muslim organizations doing enough to counter jihadist doctrine?



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WRITTEN FOR *CQ RESEARCHER*, AUG. 15, 2010

American Muslim communities have made enormous efforts to counter violent extremist ideology in the past nine years, focusing the majority of their efforts along three critical areas: theology, identity and cyberspace.

Since 9/11, Muslims in America and around the world have consistently condemned terrorism and extremism as a fundamental violation of Islamic teachings, but sadly their words have received scant attention from national media outlets. In fact, the online magazine *The American Muslim* compiles thousands of denunciations by Muslim religious scholars of extremism and violence in the name of Islam.

These same religious leaders have also lectured extensively and published numerous books on the subject, knowing that religious literacy is one of the best antidotes to extremism. Ensuring that these statements reach the average mosque-goer the Muslim Public Affairs Council (MPAC) launched its National Grassroots Campaign to Fight Terrorism in 2005.

Going hand in hand with using theology to combat extremism, political empowerment and social identity are also extremely important. On this front, the MPAC has been very proactive. For the past four years MPAC has held its National Muslim American Young Leaders Summits. The Summit focuses on bringing young Muslims from around the country to visit Capitol Hill and meet with government officials to discuss various issues of interest from a socially conscious and faith-based perspective. This year it also initiated its I Am Change Civic Leadership Program — a community-focused initiative empowering Muslim Americans to become civically active.

And because indoctrination is taking place online, mainstream religious leaders have placed greater attention on “e-dawah,” or electronic faith-based outreach, to counteract extremists’ seductive “jihadi cool” image. Most recently, MPAC and the Islamic Society of North America released a video featuring nine of America’s most influential imams and scholars denouncing extremism and violence. The video has received significant attention within Muslim communities and mainstream media, and will be followed up with additional videos.

Can more be done? Certainly. Communities and organizations must continue to ramp up their religious, social, civic and cyber outreach. Many of these types of programs are in their infant or intermediate stages of development. Nonetheless, Muslim Americans have been, and continue to be, on the front lines against violent extremists. Through their multifaceted work against toxic ideologies, Muslim-Americans have helped to take our nation’s fight directly to the extremists themselves.



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While some organizations are doing good work to counter violent extremism, there is much more that can be achieved.

Many U.S. Muslim organizations have challenges within their own internal infrastructures. Some are focused around individuals rather than on the development of institutions. Some organizations are weak at the grassroots level but are more focused on discussions in Washington. Many groups are centered on events and annual meetings, while their functionality in the phases between those meetings needs improvement.

The effective functionality of mosques has to be reevaluated. In many cases, a non-integrated, imported individual who is unaware of the cultural norms of the United States is the central figure at the mosque. This is followed by a lack of effective discussions of current challenges. As a result, positive solutions and developing mechanisms for civic involvement by the congregations are missing.

Organized mechanisms to increase civic engagement as well as develop stronger counter-narratives and theological knowledge to counter the predators out there is needed — and largely absent — in the mosques. Part of this vacuum stems from the paranoia Muslim institutions have developed because of the previous tactics of law enforcement agencies against these institutions.

U.S. Muslim communities need to work hand in hand with law enforcement agencies to develop trust with each other. Ongoing engagement, knowledge and understanding of their common interests are critical, as is having the comfort to communicate at a broader level about safety concerns.

This trust would make it easy for the U. S. Muslim community to reach out to law enforcement agencies when they identify an individual or group that poses a real threat to society.

Here are key areas where U.S. Muslim communities can improve general well-being while also implementing specific protections for reducing the risk of violent extremism:

- Integrate U.S. Muslims within U.S. society.
- Educate the larger society to understand how its actions are isolating and marginalizing Muslims.
- Create a strong counter-narrative on the Web to the current toxic jihadist narratives.
- Identify effective advocacy mechanisms to help develop better domestic and foreign policy.
- Strengthen the family structure.
- Counter the harsh, rigid and totalitarian version of Islam with the facts.

Continued from p. 716

here, and we really don't want to see their influence spread," Bill Rench of Calvary Baptist Church, which would be next door to the proposed mosque, told the *Los Angeles Times*. "There is a concern with all the rumors you hear about sleeper cells and all that. Are we supposed to be complacent just because these people say it's a religion of peace? Many others have said the same thing," he said.⁷²

The African Connection

War-torn Somalia, in East Africa, is the latest country to attract jihadists looking to engage in all-out combat. The country's U.S.-supported provisional government, which is barely holding a few blocks of the capital, Mogadishu, faces a fierce jihadist militia that has already welcomed some Americans into its ranks.

Most of the estimated 20 Americans or American residents who've joined al-Shabab come from Somali immigrant families in Minneapolis. But the group includes at least one American of non-Somali origin. Omar Hammami, who grew up in a Syrian immigrant family in Daphne, Ala., is now known in the jihadist Web universe as Abu Mansour al-Amriki.⁷³

Hammami, 26, who appeared in an online video this year that raised his profile among jihad sympathizers and counterterrorism agents, is among 14 people indicted by federal grand juries in August for allegedly providing support to the Shabab. "He has assumed an operational role in that organization," Attorney General Eric Holder said in announcing the indictments.⁷⁴

Of the other people indicted, only two were in the United States: two women from the Minneapolis émigré community accused of knowingly raising money for Shabab. Both women have declared themselves innocent.⁷⁵

Weeks before the indictments, 20-year-old Zachary Adam Chesser of

Virginia was arrested after allegedly trying to travel to Somalia. And in June, the FBI arrested Mohamed Mahmood Alessa, 20, and Carlos Eduardo Almonte, 24, of New Jersey, after they allegedly made the same attempt. More recently, in early August, Shaker Masri, 26, of Chicago, was arrested, for allegedly trying to travel to Somalia to join the Shabab.⁷⁶

Alessa, Almonte and Masri had all allegedly confided their plans to undercover agents and an informant for the FBI.

Those plans — as well as allegations against the 14 other people indicted — didn't involve targeting Americans or American facilities in the United States or abroad. But counterterrorism officials worry that people who acquire combat skills abroad can be ordered to put that training to work in the United States.

"Often, individuals will seek to travel abroad to participate in a field of jihad such as Afghanistan, Pakistan, Kashmir, Chechnya, Somalia or Iraq," Mitchell D. Silber, director of intelligence analysis for the New York Police Department, told the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee, "only to be redirected back to the West to do 'something for the cause' there."⁷⁷

And Shabab, which claims solidarity with Al Qaeda and is believed to have contacts with bin Laden's network, has now branched out from guerrilla warfare to international attacks. In July, the group claimed responsibility for two bombings that killed 74 people watching the World Cup final game in a restaurant in Uganda's capital, Kampala. Shabab declared that the bombings were retaliation for Uganda's participation in a peacekeeping force in Somalia. Previously, forces from largely Christian Ethiopia, had entered Somalia to fight al-Shabab.⁷⁸

Ethiopia's involvement is a purely local aspect of the Somali civil war. The Somalis who have journeyed to their homeland to join al-Shabab aren't "equivalent to Zack Chesser," says

counterterrorism consultant Brachman. "They see Ethiopians invading, and they want to kick Christian ass."

But, says Beutel of the Muslim Public Affairs Council, practical considerations may have pointed non-Somalis to al-Shabab. "Iraq has become a very, very hostile place to Al Qaeda and foreign fighters," he says. "You still have people trying to go to Afghanistan, but that's harder. Somalia is easy to get in and out of." ■

OUTLOOK

Pakistan Seen as Key

American jihadists may personally be rooted in the United States, but the future of their movement will be determined by events in the Muslim heartland in South Asia and the Middle East, some experts say.

For Schwartz at the Center for Islamic Pluralism, U.S. jihadism is nearly entirely dependent on doctrine and guidance from jihadists in Pakistan. Moreover, the seizure of power there by jihadists would invigorate their brethren everywhere else and make comprehensive training and funding readily available. "If Pakistan falls to the Taliban, everything changes completely; it will be a very dangerous situation," he says.

Conversely, Schwartz argues, a collapse of Iran's clerical regime would have beneficial repercussions, even though the Shiite government doesn't align with the jihadists, who are rabidly anti-Shiite.

But Schwartz and others argue that the 1979 Iranian revolution goaded Saudi Arabia into aggressive proselytizing of its strict Wahhabi form of Islam, which converges closely with jihadism. "If the Iranian regime really falls, everybody in the Muslim world will see it on television," he says. "And the Saudis wouldn't have to compete with the

Iranians to see who is more radical. That would be a substantial change that would deflate everything.”

Moosa of Duke University argues that the U.S. presence in Iraq and Afghanistan helps maintain an America versus Islam paradigm — in jihadist terms — that keeps the fires of conflict burning. “As we draw down in Iraq, that will create a disincentive to leave Afghanistan, because we’re going to see that didn’t go down too well in Iraq, so that we shouldn’t precipitate a withdrawal in Afghanistan,” he says.

Next door to Afghanistan, the war is creating a nurturing environment for jihadism, Moosa says. “We are putting many, many Pakistanis between a rock and a hard thing,” he argues. “If you don’t side with us, we’re going to bomb you into the Stone Age.’ Then people opt for totalizing theologies. People are opting for forms of life that are deeply theological and religious, and religious in a way that might not be compatible with the modern world.”

Saud Anwar, the Pakistani-American activist, agrees that in Pakistan “the perception of the United States is at an all-time low.” He places much of the blame on U.S. missile and rocket strikes from drone aircraft on Taliban and Al Qaeda militants.⁷⁹ “Collateral damage actually leads to more and more people developing anti-American sentiment,” he says.

Hopefully counter-balancing that, Anwar says, is U.S. assistance to victims of the huge floods that now have killed an estimated 1,600 Pakistanis and otherwise affected an estimated 17 million, many of whom have lost their homes and all possessions.⁸⁰ “If we can get the people on board with the perception of the United State that we had prior to the 1980s, people themselves will take care of violent extremists,” he says. “Our society in Pakistan is not fundamentally accepting of the extremist mindset.”

But counterterrorism consultant Brachman of Cronus Global argues that U.S. counterterrorism operations in gen-

eral are proving effective. “As long as we continue taking out the big boys, then the movement will diffuse,” he says. “They’re not replacing them. There will be a flurry of low-level guys until the bottom falls out.”

Ten years from now, Brachman argues, “Jihadism will have changed from a national security issue to a law enforcement issue. We’re somewhere in between right now. It may take a decade, but I don’t see this as having any long-term viability.”

Writer-activist Daniel Pipes disputes such forecasts. He points to the thousands of jihadist-influenced religious schools in Pakistan and to followers in this country as an indication that jihadist ideology remains alive and well. “It’s a growing phenomenon,” he says. “We’ve just seen the beginning.”

But he adds that the effects may not be violent. “I don’t think terrorism has proven to be very efficacious,” he says. “If I were an Islamist strategist, I would probably advise my followers to stay away from violence, work within the system.”

Nevertheless, former CIA operative Sageman notes that past ideologies that gave birth to extremist violence have melted away. Ten years from now, he says, speaking of far-left “urban guerrilla” groups in Germany and Italy, “It will be like the late ‘80s for both the Baader-Meinhoff group and the Red Brigades, with some people still around but not fighting.”

Above all, Sageman says, “It is self-limiting, because young people won’t be attracted any more. It will be what their parents did.” ■

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Daniel Pipes, danielpipes.org. The director of the Middle East Forum and a prolific author and blogger on jihadism and related matters.

Homeland Security Policy Institute, George Washington University, 2300 I St., N.W., Washington, DC 20037; (202) 994-2437; www.gwumc.edu/hspi/. Think tank includes material on jihadism and counterterrorism.

Muslim Public Affairs Council, 110 Maryland Ave., N.E., Washington, DC 20002; (202) 547-7701; www.mpac.org. Reaches out to Muslims in the United States with an anti-jihadist message.

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