ABSTRACT

Lone Wolves: An Assessment of the Ideology
Behind Homegrown Islamist Individual Terrorists

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Lone wolf terrorism is an increasing threat in the United States. However,

there is little information available that examines the nature of lone wolf terrorism.

This thesis interprets the available literature regarding militant Islamist lone wolf

terrorists in the United States. I define lone wolf terrorism as terrorism committed

by individuals who operate independently from formal terror networks. Individuals

who engage in lone wolf terrorism typically   `` combine personal motivations with

a particular radical ideology to justify their attacks. I examine one particular radical

ideology, that is militant Islamism, and the role it plays in motivating individuals to

carry out terrorist attacks. I conclude that, despite efforts from formal terrorist

organizations such as al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, the majority of militant

Islamist lone wolf terrorist operations are ineffective due to these individual's

inexperience in planning and executing attacks.

Lone Wolves: An Assessment of the Ideology
Behind Homegrown Islamist Indiviudal Terrorists

by

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CHAPTER ONE

Defining Lone Wolf Terrorism

Introduction

What exactly is a lone wolf terrorist? This thesis addresses the motivations,

ideology, methodology, practices, and national security responses towards

individuals described as lone wolf terrorists. Terrorism is generally regarded as a

collective endeavor; small communities engaged in planning and executing terror

activities while operating according to certain social dynamics[1]. Conversely, there is

a type of terrorism initiated by individual actors that has received far less research

and attention.

Perceptions regarding the threat of lone wolf terrorists generally lean

towards paranoia of a hidden threat. The media tends to embellish the portrait of a

lone wolf as a highly skilled, unpredictable agent embedded within society who can

attack with minimal warning signs. An example of such embellishment is evidenced

in Cruickshank and Lister's *CNN* article covering Amine El Khalifi's failed bombing

attempt of the U.S. Capitol in February 2012, where they describe the lone wolf

terrorist as "the unknowable face of terror."[2] Additionally, public figures can

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[1] Ramon Spaaij, "The Enigma of Lone Wolf Terrorism: An Assessment," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 33 (2010): 854–870, doi: 10.1080/1057610X.2010.501426.

[2] Paul Cruickshank and Tim Lister, "The 'Lone Wolf'—The Unknowable Face of Terror," *CNN*, February 18, 2012, http://edition.cnn.com/2012/02/18/opinions/lone-wolf-terror/?hpt=hp_t1 (accessed March 26, 2012).

heighten public fear regarding the threat of lone wolf terrorists. In the wake of

Mohamed Merah's shooting spree in France during March 2012, which resulted in

seven deaths, French presidential candidate Marine Le Pen sought a link between

the threat of lone wolves and France's immigrants, commenting, "How many

Mohamed Merahs, in planes and boats, arrive each day in France?"[3]

 Through embellished headlines and extravagant remarks, both the media

and public officials have distorted an already ambiguous idea of lone wolf terrorism.

To answer this question, one must begin with a definition of terrorism. Next, I

provide different theories for what motivates individuals to become terrorists.

These theories range from applying rational choice theory to the terrorist mentality,

to psychological theories for terrorism, to collective pressure upon individuals to

participate in terrorist attacks.

After a brief overview of theories that discuss what may lead individuals to

become terrorists, I present a profile of individuals who decide to operate as lone

wolf terrorists. I accomplish this by providing Raff Pantucci's typology that

attempts to classify lone wolf terrorists according to a scale of contact with

networked, command-control terrorist organizations.[4]

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[3] Daniel Flynn, "After Mohamed Merah Killing Spree, Nicolas Sarkozy to Ban Radical Imams in France," *National Post*, March 26, 2012, http://news.nationalpost .com/2012/03/26/after-mohamed-merah-killing-spree-nicolas-sarkozy-to-ban-radical-imams-from-france (accessed March 26, 2012).

[4] Raffaello Pantucci, "A Typology of Lone Wolves: Preliminary Analysis of Lone Islamist Terrorists," *The International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence*, (2011): 13, http://www.icsr.info/publications/papers/ 1302002992ICSRPaper_ATypologyofLoneWolves_Pantucci.pdf (accessed January 20, 2012).

While multiple definitions of terrorism exists, this thesis uses the Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI) definition of terrorism:

> "the unlawful use of force and violence against persons or property to intimidate or coerce a government, the civilian population, or any segment thereof, in furtherance of political or social objectives" (28 C.F.R. Section 0.85)"[5]

This definition readily applies not only to groups of people who engage in terrorism, but also to individuals who engage in terrorism as lone wolves. What distinguishes lone wolf terrorists from other terrorists is that lone wolf terrorists operate independent of outside support; they generally formulate, plan and carry out attacks on their own without guidance, assistance, or even knowledge of organized, formal terror networks.

With limited scholarly literature pertaining specifically to lone wolf terrorists, I review three explanatory theories for general terrorism and apply these theories as a means of developing a definition for lone wolf terrorism.

In his article "The Mind of the Terrorist," Jeff Victoroff, neuropsychologist at the University of Southern California, reviews popular theories regarding why individuals decide to engage in terrorism[6]. This thesis provides a comprehensive review of Victoroff's presentation of rational choice, psychological, and group learning theories for terrorism.

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[5] Federal Bureau of Investigation, "Terrorism 2002-2005," U.S. Department of Justice Reports and Publications, http://www.fbi.gov/stats-services/publications/terrorism-2002-2005 (accessed January 20, 2012).

[6] Jeff Victoroff, "The Mind of the Terrorist," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 49 (2005): 3-42, http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.baylor.edu/stablepdfplus/30045097.pdf?acceptTC=true (accessed January 20, 2012).

Terrorism as Rational Choice

Within the scope of terrorism, rational choice theory argues "terrorist action derives from a conscious, rational, calculated decision to take this particular type of action as the optimum strategy to accomplish a sociopolitical goal"[7]. Rather than interpret acts of terrorism as violent acts committed by irrational actors for some unintelligible purpose, rational choice theory perceives terrorism as a strategic option implemented by rational actors as a mean of most effectively achieving their ends.

In her article "The Logic of Terrorism," Martha Crenshaw applies rational choice theory to terrorism to describe two motivations for extremist groups that choose to engage in terrorism. One reason extremist groups resort to terrorism is that the extremist group lacks popular support or resources: "The imbalance between the resources terrorists are able to mobilize and the power of the incumbent regime is a decisive consideration in their decision making."[8] The general public may disagree with the ideology of the extremist group, therefore limiting the amount of support for the extremist group.

A second reason extremist groups resort to terrorism is to capitalize upon a limited opportunity: "A change in the structure of the situation may temporarily alter the balance of resources available to the two sides, thus changing the ratio of

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[7] Victoroff, 14.

[8] Martha Crenshaw, "The Logic of Terrorism: Terrorist Behavior as a Product of Strategic Choice," in *Terrorism in Perspective*, ed. Sue Mahan and Pamala L. Griset (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2008), 26.

strength between government and challenger"[9] These opportunities present

themselves as chances to delegitimize the regime and gain more support, garner

more resources, or the regime making itself vulnerable to attack.

After discussing these motivations for extremist organizations resorting to

terrorism, Crenshaw weighs the costs of employing terrorism against its

advantages. Government retaliation and the potential for extremist groups to lose

popular support make terrorism a costly endeavor. However, she notes "radicals

may look to the future and calculate that present sacrifice will not be in vain if it

inspires future resistance."[10] Along with this advantage of potentially fueling further

resistance, terrorism draws the attention of the public consciousness to the

extremist organization's political agenda. Further, should the government overreact

against an extremist organization's attack, public sentiment may turn against the

government as tighter restrictions are placed upon society. Extremist organizations

may strategically choose terrorism to most effectively accomplish their goals.

Drawing from Sandler and Arce's 2003 article, Victoroff highlights several

strengths of applying game theory to terrorist behavior.[11] First, game theory

captures the interdependent nature of the interactions between both terrorists and

targeted governments. Second, game theory discovers the implications of both

terrorist and government actions as each group seeks to thwart the other. A third

advantage of game theory that Victoroff cites is that it acknowledges uncertainty as

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[9] Crenshaw, 27.

[10] Crenshaw, 28.

[11] Victoroff, 14.

a major factor in government/terrorist relations. Proponents of game theory cite how terrorists shifted their tactics from skyjackings to kidnappings after the installation of metal detectors at airports, which demonstrates how both terrorists and governments display strategic, rational behavior while adapting and adjusting to each other's tactics.

Despite its potential explanatory power and ability to predict likely terrorist behaviors and actions, three criticisms of rational choice theory by different scholars highlight potential pitfalls. First, critics of applying rational choice theory to terrorist behavior question whether a terrorist's actions can be considered rational. For example, Martha Crenshaw notes that the stated goals of some terrorist organizations, such as the establishment of a worldwide caliphate, are so unlikely that anyone willing to work to achieve such goals could hardly be labeled rational. Moreover, those willing to attack civilians, non-combatants, or other soft targets due to unconventional or otherwise ambiguous motivations have convinced other critics that terrorists cannot be considered rational actors.

In response, proponents of rational choice theory argue that while some terrorist organizations' stated goals might appear unreasonable, rational choice theory is capable of taking into account that the successes achieved by terrorists are not necessarily their stated goals (world caliphate, extermination of inferior races, etc.), but include achieving other goals such as martyrdom, public awareness, and fear. For example, a suicide terrorist who successfully completes his mission might see the benefits of martyrdom and social recognition as outweighing the cost of his

life. Since this theory can account for these less obvious winnings, rational choice theory remains a viable option for predicting terrorist behavior.

A second criticism of rational choice theory is that, while it is capable of predicting terrorist actions, it runs the risk of assuming that its predictions are set in stone and that a terrorist's actions will necessarily follow the outcomes provided by game theory. This critique criticizes game theory for not taking into account uncertainty and the unintended consequences of a given action. If this theory is incapable of accounting for uncertainty between players—governments and terrorists—then the flexibility of the theory is greatly reduced as predicted outcomes are assumed as inevitable outcomes. In response, Victoroff argues that while uncertainty will remain a factor in making predictions, the amount of uncertainty will decrease as more light is shed on how governments and terrorists interact with one another.

A third and similar criticism of game theory is that the profile of a typical player may not necessarily predict the outcome of a terrorist's behavior. Since there exists no standard profile of a typical terrorist, much less a standardized definition of terrorism rational choice theory cannot account for any idiosyncratic behavior exhibited by terrorists. In response, Victoroff states that the law of large numbers prohibits a complete success rate, and that the theory remains viable as a tool for understanding otherwise obscure factors that influence terrorist and government behaviors.

Despite these advantages, rational choice theory alone is insufficient for explaining terrorist motivations and behavior. For example, while capable of

predicting likely targets for terrorist attacks or a terrorist organization's response to government efforts of deterrence, this theory cannot explain why or how individuals decide to become terrorists or why so few cross the threshold to commit violence on others. Therefore, it is necessary to explore other theories regarding how individuals become terrorists.

Psychological Theories for Terrorism

Victoroff's psychological theories focus on individuals and personal motivations and behaviors that could lead individuals into terrorism. He divides these theories into psychoanalytic-psychological theories and non-psychoanalytic psychological theories. Psychoanalytic theories propose that unconscious factors drive a person's mental life and heavily influence how a person identifies himself and how he interacts with other people. Additionally, this approach emphasizes the influence of one's upbringing and how the way a person is raised is closely connected to her mental health. This section will focus on two psychoanalytic theories for terrorism, followed by one non-psychoanalytic theory.

The first psychoanalytic theory Victoroff discusses is identity theory. This theory proposes that a typical profile for a terrorist is a young person with low self-esteem and a weak sense of identity. A 1994 study conducted by Taylor and Quayle interviewed Irish and European terrorists and reported that many who were interviewed participated in political violence in search of a sense of purpose and self-worth. Another interview of eight German terrorists conducted by Bollinger posited "over controlling parents prevented these respondents from developing

autonomy, leading to identity crises that made violent struggle irresistible." [12]

Identity theory is rooted in Freud's proposition that an individual's sense of identity is linked to an impulse for destruction. Those lacking a strong sense of identity may seek purpose through violent outlets, such as join a terrorist organization, in order to find a place of belonging.

A second psychoanalytic theory Victoroff mentions is the absolutist/apocalyptic theory. Based upon a study of the apocalyptic group Aum Shinrikyo and other similar cults, this theory describes the apocalyptic mindset as a highly polarized, moralistic mindset that sees destruction of the existing paradigm as necessary in order to usher in a new and just world. This theory argues that individuals with weak identities find this absolutist mindset highly appealing and that terrorists often see themselves as "uncompromising moralists who see the world in starkly polar terms."[13]

Victoroff remarks that the primary strength of psychoanalytic theories of terrorism is its incorporation of individual experiences into its accounts in order to create a fuller picture of a terrorist. However, because psychoanalytic theories do not employ the scientific method, there is therefore a lack of empirical, verifiable data to support the theories' claims.

That being said, Victoroff moves from discussing psychoanalytical theories to non-psychoanalytical theories. My thesis focuses on one theory in particular: that would-be terrorists engage in terrorism as a means of encountering new

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[12] Victoroff, 22.

[13] Victoroff, 25.

experiences. Known as the novelty-seeking theory, this theory states that individuals are motivated to become terrorists because it can be exciting and thrilling: "political violence may satisfy innate, perhaps genetically determined needs for high-level stimulation, risk and catharsis."[14]

A 1988 study conducted by Saper indicates that those who seek thrills in terrorism follow a general pattern. First, these individuals are typically young, impressionable adolescents whose political sentiments are generally unformed and who are open to indoctrination. As these individuals mature, their political sentiments become more concrete, such that they become rigid and unwavering in their beliefs. In the final stage, Saper states that as these individuals mature further, they are less likely to engage in violence. As these would be thrill seekers age, their appetite for violence diminishes.

Terrorism as a Group Process

Victoroff's final theory of terrorism discussed in this thesis is group process theory. This theory envisions terrorism as primarily a collective endeavor. Adherents to this theory see the terrorist group as offering its members a sense of belonging, identity, and connectedness, wherein individual identity is subordinated to the identity of the collective. A 2003 article by Post, Spriznack, and Denny describe the role that repetition, indoctrination and group peer pressure has upon an individual's identity within the group:

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[14] Victoroff, 28.

"An overarching sense of the collective consumes the individual. This fusion with the group seems to provide the necessary justification for their actions with an attendant loss of felt responsibility"[15]

This loss of personal accountability may explain why individuals participating in terrorist groups are more likely to engage in acts of violence, eschewing any sense of responsibility towards the will of the group.

Current discussion among advocates of group theory is whether or not group dynamics are both a necessary and sufficient explanation for how individuals radicalize and engage in terrorism. One side of the debate perceives group pressures as sufficient for radicalizing an individual into a collective mindset, and that individual identities are absorbed into the collective identity. Others argue that while individuals may find themselves comfortable within the collective identity of a terrorist group, their personal history and background contributes to their motivations for participating within this group. Individuals within a terrorist group may possess homogenous identities, but this side argues that each individual participates at least initially for their own reasons.

In his 2008 book *Leaderless Jihad*, Marc Sageman emphasizes the importance of group dynamics in the radicalization of individuals from nonviolent observers to active participants in terrorism. He sees peer pressure and in-group loyalty as key factors leading individuals to engage in terrorism. For example, in response to the claim that methods at terrorist training camps brainwash trainees to commit violent terror acts, he states that those who decide to enroll in these camps do so out of commitment to their friends as well as a sense of adventure: "The groups who came

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[15] Victoroff, 30.

to Afghan training camps were in search of thrills, fame, and glory"[16]. The enthusiasm of shared experiences strengthens in-group loyalty, as each member fuels the zeal of one another. As Sageman notes, "The shared nature of this experience is consistent with the finding that social bonds came before ideological commitment. " Sageman argues, "The process of joining Al Qaeda central was a collective process."[17]

Sageman marks four stages of radicalization that lead an individual towards participation in terrorism. This radicalization begins with the individual experiencing a sense of moral outrage. An individual may feel outrage upon viewing a specific act of injustice inflicted upon a victim by another person. A specific example of a moral outrage Sageman cites is a Palestinian child caught in the crossfire between Israeli Defense Forces and Palestinian snipers. In order to elicit moral outrage, a specific event must seen as a major moral violation on the scale of causing physical harm to another.

While experiencing a sense of moral outrage at certain injustices committed by one human towards another may begin an individual's radicalization process, it is in and of itself insufficient. Many people experience outrage towards atrocities committed throughout the world, yet few people decide to engage in terrorism in order to prevent these acts from recurring. Therefore, in order for an individual to further radicalize, Sageman argues that this individual must frame this sense of moral outrage within a larger narrative of oppression:

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[16] Marc Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 17.

[17] Sageman, 17.

> "This outrage has to fit into a moral universe, to resonate with one's own experience and to be amplified within a group for it to reach a level where it contributes to the formation of an Islamist terrorist" [18]

Within the context of militant Islamist ideology, this larger narrative of oppression portrays Islam as under assault. Injustices committed against Muslims around the world are not simply unfortunate events but an intentional Western war against Islam. Within this framework, participants view themselves as righteous warriors engaged in establishing a better world through the elimination of Western influence.

Upon establishing this framework, Sageman argues that individuals on the path towards radicalization must link this narrative of oppression with their everyday experience. This narrative of oppression must be internalized by the individual and must be witnessed in his daily experiences: "[This narrative]" is more likely to be adopted if the idea that there is a war against Islam resonates with one's everyday experiences"[19].

This internalization of the narrative of oppression may be enough to anger an individual, but by itself remains insufficient for converting this individual to engage in terrorism. In order to achieve the final phase of radicalization, Sageman argues that an individual's aggression must be channeled into action through incorporating into a network of people that share his sentiments but are more willing to commit violence:

> "Only other people who share their outrage, beliefs, and experiences, but who are further along the path to violence or who are willing to explore it

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[18] Sageman, 75.

[19] Sageman, 83.

with them, can help them cross the line from venting their anger to becoming terrorists. [20]"

Upon linking with a group of people who share the same worldview an individual feels his beliefs are validated as he finds a place of belonging within the group. As these bonds are strengthened, the group dynamics instill a sense in-group loyalty. The support gained through participation in the group leads the individual to readily carry out the will of the group.

From the survey of theories above, it should be noted that forming theories of terrorist behavior is as nebulous as forming definitions of terrorism. Rather than endorse one particular theory as sufficient for fully explaining terrorism, I argue that each theory discussed above serves as a useful tool for examining a particular aspect of terrorism. For example, while rational choice serves as an excellent theory for examining the methodology employed by a terrorist, it fails to account for how this terrorist became radicalized. Similarly, whereas group process theory excels at examining the interactions and influences social dynamics have towards radicalizing an individual, it proves ineffective for examining a terrorist's methodology. Finally, psychological theories for terrorism are helpful tools that examine potential personal and ideological avenues for an individual's radicalization. Each of these theories for terrorism excel at examining a particular aspect of terrorism.

Now that the general theories for terrorism have been discussed, I now discuss more specific theories regarding lone wolf terrorism. I begin with Spaaij's

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[20] Sageman, 84.

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definition of lone wolf terrorism, followed by his brief overview of lone wolf terror

acts in history. I then present Pantucci's typology of lone wolf terrorists.

Lone Wolves

In his article "The Enigma of Lone Wolf Terrorism," Spaaij describes three

defining elements of lone wolf terrorism, each centered about lone individuals:

> "[Lone wolves] operate individually, do not belong to an organized terrorist group or network, and whose modi operandi are conceived and directed by the individual without any direct outside command or hierarchy"[21]

Central to Spaaij's definition of lone wolf terrorism is the notion of individuality and

autonomy. He describes individuals who operate as lone wolves as acting

independently from any terrorist organization; they select a target, plan the attack,

and execute the operation alone: "Their terrorist attack or campaign, however,

results from solitary action during which the direct influence or support of others,

even those sympathetic to the cause, is absent"[22].

This solitary action most distinguishes lone wolf terrorists from other

terrorists. Since Spaaij places such emphasis on the individual aspect of lone wolf

terrorism, small cells of individuals formally unconnected to any terrorist

organizations do not strictly meet requirements of his definition of lone wolf

terrorism. By Spaaij's definition, individuals who seek outside aid or assistance

through other individuals, networks, or representatives of networks cannot be

considered lone wolf terrorists.

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[21] Spaaij, 856.

[22] Spaaij, 856.

After defining lone wolf terrorism, Spaaij provides a brief overview of lone wolf terrorism as it has evolved through history. He traces its roots to nineteenth-century anarchism, where "individual acts of violence were regarded by a small minority of anarchists as part and parcel of revolutionary action."[23] These individual acts of terror eventually became labeled as propaganda by the deed, and were seen as methods to spark a revolution and ultimately overthrow the ruling regime. As anarchist Peter Kropotkin notes in his 1880 pamphlet *The Spirit of Revolt*, acts of individual terror demonstrate the weakness of the existing regime and inspire the public to revolt:

> "One courageous act has sufficed to upset in a few days the entire governmental machinery, to make the colossus tremble; another revolt has stirred a whole province into turmoil, and the army, till now always so imposing, has retreated before a handful of peasants armed with sticks and stones. The people observe that the monster is not so terrible as they thought they begin dimly to perceive that a few energetic efforts will be sufficient to throw it down. Hope is born in their hearts, and let us remember that if exasperation often drives men to revolt, it is always hope, the hope of victory, which makes revolutions."[24]

Spaaij notes that anarchists carried out this propaganda by the deed through assassinating notable political figures and bombing government buildings or institutions that propagated bourgeois values. However, individual terror attacks committed by anarchists waned in twentieth century as they sought other means of spreading their message.

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[23] Spaaij, 859.

[24] Peter Kropotkin, "The Spirit of Revolt, 1880," Anarchist Archives, http://dwardmac.pitzer.edu/anarchist_archives/kropotkin/spiritofrevolt.html (accessed January 20, 2012).

Where the anarchists moved away from lone wolf attacks, white

supremacists and antigovernment groups in the United States embraced the

strategy in the second half of the twentieth century.   Adopting the concept of

leaderless resistance, white supremacists and anti-government militia saw terror

acts committed by individuals as efficient, low cost means of avoiding detection and

deterrence by law enforcement. Louis Beam, a notable white supremacist and

proponent of leaderless resistance, describes this method of individual terrorism:

> "Utilizing the Leaderless Resistance concept, all individuals and groups
> operate independently of each other, and never report to a central
> headquarters or single leader for direction or instruction, as would those
> who belong to a typical pyramid organization"[25]

Recently, al Qaeda and its affiliates, namely al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula

(AQAP), have promoted lone wolf terrorism as an effective strategy to attack

Western targets. Through the distribution of literature such as the English

recruiting magazine *Inspire* and videos of radical clerics' sermons on jihad, AQAP

encourages its audience to participate in lone wolf terrorism, or what it calls

individual jihad. The next chapter discusses AQAP's ideology and strategy to

promote individual jihad in further detail.

Compiling data from the Global Terrorism Database and the Terrorism

Knowledge Database from 1968 to 2010 in 15 countries, Spaaij finds that, of 11,235

terrorist attacks recorded, 198 of these attacks resulted from lone wolf terrorism.[26]

While a marginal occurrence, the majority of these attacks occurred within the

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[25] Louis Beam, "Leaderless Resistance," The Seditionist, http://www.louisbeam.com/leaderless.htm (accessed January 20, 2012).

[26] Ramon Spaaij, *Understanding Lone Wolf Terrorism* (New York: Springer, 2012), 26.

United States and, according to the data, the occurrence of lone wolf terrorism in the United States has increased over the past three decades. Spaaij notes that the high occurrence of lone wolf terrorist attacks in the United States is rooted in prevalence of right wing and anti-government militants historically adopting the leaderless resistance model.[27]

While there exists no single profile for individuals who engage in lone wolf terrorism, Spaaij describes common characteristics found among individual actors. Whereas the general theories for terrorism discussed above typically discount psychological disorders as prevalent among terrorists, Spaaij argues lone wolf terrorists are more likely to posses some form of psychological disability: "In comparison with group-actor terrorism, lone wolves tend to have a greater propensity to suffer mental health issues."[28] In a series of five case studies of lone wolf terrorists, including Ted Kaczynski, Franz Fuchs, Yigal Amir, David Copeland, and Vulker van der Graaf, Spaaij finds that four of these individuals studied appeared to have experienced depression. Additionally, lone wolf terrorists typically exhibit a form of social ineptness and are typically solitary individuals. While solitary and likely possessing some form of psychological disturbance, Spaaij argues that these common characteristics found among individuals engaging in lone wolf terrorism do not inhibit them from rationally planning and executing attacks.

Ideologically, lone wolf terrorists typically combine personal motivations with a variety of militant ideologies to justify their attacks. With respect to ideology,

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[27] Spaaij, 31.

[28] Spaaij, 50.

similar to Sageman's theory that communities serve as the impetus for radicalization, researcher Raff Pantucci argues that exposure to radical literature via the internet can serve as a surrogate community that can help radicalize the individual: "the internet now means that it is much easier for any alienated loner to make contact or locate a high level of both radical material and operational support material through it."[29]

However, as Sageman and others have established, exposure to radical ideology alone is insufficient in motivating an individual to engage in terrorism. In his book *Jihad Joe*, investigative journalist J. M. Berger identifies six typical personal motivations that, combined with radical ideology, drive individuals towards terrorism.[30] The first personal motivation Berger identifies is idealism or altruism. Individuals motivated through idealism or altruism believe their actions might positively impact the world. A second personal motivation Berger describes is the propensity towards violence might also engage in terrorism: "Sometimes people seek out a convenient rationalization for their worst impulses, and sometimes that rationalization happens to be jihad"[31] A third personal motivation that can drive individuals towards terrorism is identity politics. Individuals motivated by identity politics find solace, identity, and a sense of belonging within radical narratives such as militant Islamism or white supremacy.

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[29] Pantucci, 35.

[30] J. M. Berger, *Jihad Joe* (Washington, D.C.: Potomac Books, 2011), 206.

[31] Berger, *Jihad Joe,* 207

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In a similar fashion, individuals who experience a sense of alienation exhibit a fourth motivation that could drive individuals towards terrorism. The radical narratives of militant ideology may empower otherwise alienated individuals to engage in terrorism. A fifth personal motivation Berger identifies is sexual repression. He points to a plethora of jihadist propaganda discussing the rape of innocent Muslims as signifying a "fetishized view of sex and women."[32] Additionally, he cites the examples of Ft. Hood shooter Nidal Hassan as desperately searching for a virtuous wife and radical cleric terrorist Anwar Awlaki's inclination towards female prostitutes as individuals exhibiting typical traits found among those engaged in terrorism. A final personal motivation for individuals to engage in terrorism may indeed be simply ideological. While certainly a minority, these individuals may immerse themselves in radical literature readily available online, and the internet becomes the surrogate community that radicalizes them towards crossing the threshold from thought to action.

This combination of militant ideology with personal motivations can be evidenced in the case of Allen Muhammed who, with another individual, engaged in a sniping campaign in Washington DC in 2002. Sociologist Jessica Stern notes that Muhammed combined "personal vendettas with religious or political grievances."[33] While Muhammed supported the terrorist attacks against the United States on September 11th and opposed US policy towards predominately Muslim countries, he also expressed anger towards his ex-wife for not allowing him to see his children.

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[32] Berger, *Jihad Joe,* 210.

[33] Jessica Stern, *Terror in the Name of God* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2003), 172.

Further, some of the victims of his attacks Muhammed considered personal

enemies.[34]

In his article "A Typology of Lone Wolves," Pantucci identifies four general

types of lone wolf terrorists. He scales these types according to the amount of

interaction each type has with a formal terrorist organization, ranging from no

interaction with a formal terrorist organization to close contact with a formal

terrorist organization.

Pantucci uses three criteria for establishing a guide for classifying lone wolf

types. In order to narrow the scope of those studied, Pantucci's first criteria is that

the individuals and groups must employ militant Islamist ideology to justify their

actions. Second, these individuals must appear to execute or plan to execute their

operations alone. This criterion establishes the "lone wolf" aspect of these

individuals, in that they operate independent of any formal terror network. Third, a

plot was uncovered and those involved were convicted, or an attack was carried out

and those involved are well into the conviction process. This criterion establishes

the identity of those studied so that they are properly classified.[35]

The first type Pantucci discusses is the loner. He describes loners as" isolated

individuals who seek to carry out an act of terrorism using some form of extremist

Islamist ideology as their justification".[36] These individuals may use extreme

Islamist ideology to justify committing acts of terrorism, but there is no apparent

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[34] Stern, 173.

[35] Pantucci, 14.

[36] Pantucci, 18.

connection or contact between these individuals and other extremists, outside of what radical literature they are exposed to through books, video, and the Internet. These individuals satisfy the basic criteria Pantucci established at the beginning of his article; they operate alone without any apparent command or control structure and use militant Islamist ideology as justification for their actions. While they may be exposed to militant Islamist ideology through literature or videos, that is the extent of their interactions with other militants.

The second type Pantucci describes is the lone wolf. Similar to loners, lone wolves operate alone. However, what distinguishes lone wolves from loners is that, whereas loners have no direct connection with other extremists, lone wolves have communicated through various means and in different degrees with other extremists. Ideologically, these individuals may find themselves agreeing with the jihadist narrative of Al Qaeda. However, while this ideology may be reinforced through online contacts with fellow extremists, it remains self-taught.

The third type Pantucci discusses is the lone wolf pack. Similar to the lone wolf, the pack is simply a small collection of individuals who self radicalize. However, this small cell remains disconnected from any formal terrorist network. Rather, they are simply a small group of individuals who share the same interests but lack any formal ties to any actual terrorist organization: "they remain within the confines of the broader community of loner terrorists, since they lack a formal connection to either al Qaeda core or one of its affiliates"[37].

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[37] Pantucci, 24.

The final type Pantucci describes is the lone attacker. While these individuals may plan and execute their attacks alone, in contrast to the previous three groups, they do posses formal ties to actual terror networks and are carrying out their orders through a command and control structure. Additionally, they possess contacts with actual, active extremists, as opposed to the previous groups who may only possess loose ties with aspiring extremists. These individuals are highly trained and are dispatched to carry out their missions alone.

The final two types Pantucci discusses do not strictly qualify as lone wolf terrorists. Lone wolf packs by nature do not satisfy the criteria for lone wolf terrorism because, despite having no formal ties with any organized terrorist network, these individuals do not carry out operations alone and therefore cannot be considered lone wolf terrorists. As will be discussed in further detail in chapter three, individuals who seek outside aid in planning and executing operations, including those who mistakenly contact FBI undercover agents, do not qualify as lone wolf terrorists because they sought outside assistance in order to progress in their operations. Regarding the threat of lone wolf terrorism, Berger states:

> "The lone wolf we need to worry about is truly solitary and self-motivated: someone who doesn't talk to people about his plans and doesn't require meaningful assistance from informed accomplices. Anyone who fails to meet those conditions is a different kind of threat."[38]

As will be evidenced in the next chapter, through its recruitment magazine *Inspire*, AQAP seeks to promote this kind of leaderless, solitary, and self-motivated individual to wage a campaign of terror against the West.

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[38] J. M. Berger, "The Boy Who Cried Lone Wolf," *Foreign Policy*, February 21, 2012, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2012/02/21/lone_wolves (accessed February 23, 2012).

CHAPTER TWO

Militant Islamist Ideology and Lone Wolf Terrorism

Introduction

As mentioned in the previous chapter, lone wolf terrorists typically combine radical ideology with personal motivations in order to justify their actions. While examining personal motivations for individuals engaging in terrorism is an interesting and worthwhile endeavor, this thesis explores one particular radical ideology, that is militant Islamism, and the role it plays in motivating individuals to carry out terrorist attacks. Specifically I focus on how al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) attempts to recruit grassroots terrorists through its *Inspire* magazine to wage what it calls individual jihad.

First, a theoretical framework studying the role of religion in terrorism is necessary. In developing this framework, I outline common characteristics found in religious violence, followed with an overview of potential stimuli that provokes religious violence. Next, I examine how AQAP's *Inspire* conforms to this theoretical framework, as well as its efforts to create and recruit grassroots, leaderless terrorist movements in the West. AQAP provides religious justifications for its activities, inspires would-be jihadists through the telling of war stories and martyrologies, and encourages these would-be jihadists to engage in their own individual jihad by educating them in basic terrorist tactics.

Holy Terrorism

In his article "Fear and Trembling," scholar David Rapoport describes religious terrorism as divinely sanctioned violence committed in order to honor the deity or deities and accomplish political ends:

> "The holy terrorist believes that only a transcendent purpose which fulfills the meaning of the universe can justify terror, and that the deity reveals at some early moment in time both the end and the means and may even participate in the process as well"[39]

Rapoport continues by stating that, prior to the Enlightenment, invoking religious authority provided the only means of justifying violent actions. He notes three particular terrorist organizations, the Thugees of India, the Assassins in the Middle East, and the Zealots-Sicarii in Palestine, as religiously motivated organizations prior to the Enlightenment who employed religion as justification for carrying out terrorist attacks.

While certainly not a new phenomenon, sociologist Magnus Ranstorp reports that, between the 1960's and the 1990's, the number of religiously motivated terrorist organizations tripled.[40] Scholar Mark Juergensmeyer sees the cause of this rise in religiously motivated terrorism resulting from strong reactions against globalization and secularism. In his article "The Religious Roots of Contemporary Terrorism," he identifies three common attributes found among religiously motivated terrorist organizations. First, religiously motivated terrorist groups

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[39] David C. Rapoport, "Fear and Trembling: Terrorism in Three Religious Traditions," in *Terrorism in Perspective*, ed. Sue Mahan and Pamala L. Griset (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2008), 48.

[40] Magnus Ranstorp, "Terrorism in the Name of Religion," in *Terrorism and Counterterrorism: Understanding the New Security Environment*, ed. Russell D. Howard, Reid L. Sawyer and Natasha E. Bajema (Boston: McGraw Hill, 2009), 210.

reject what they see as compromises between their particular mainstream religious

tradition and liberal values and secular institutions. In the case of militant Islam,

religious terrorists would reject the notion of establishing a government that does

not conform to and enforce the statutes of Islamic law. For example, commenting on

the wave of protests in 2011 that resulted in the resignations of Tunisian ruler Zine

El-Abidine Ben Ali and Egyptian ruler Hosni Mubarak, Shaykh Ibrahim al-Rubaish

states:

> "However the shari'ah isn't implemented and man-made laws are
> worshipped besides Allah. Today's situation is similar to the time when the
> polytheists would substitute an old idol for a better and new one."[41]

Al-Rubaish continues by warning his readers that while the people may experience

some economic reforms, he concludes that they will likely replace one secular ruler

with another

Along with this rejection of compromise between religion and liberal values,

religiously motivated terrorists refuse to accept the boundaries placed upon them

by a predominately secular society and non-religious institutions[42]. Religious terror

organizations reject the secular notion of religion as a private affair and a matter of

individual conscience that holds no place in the public sphere. Dr. Ayman Zawahiri,

the current leader of al Qaeda Central, summarizes his rejection of the separation

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[41] Ibrahim al-Rubaish, "Al Sauyd: Lodging a Criminal," *Inspire* 5 (2011): 47-48, http://info.publicintelligence.net/InspireMarch2011.pdf (accessed January 23, 2012).

[42] Mark Juergensmeyer, "The Religious Roots of Contemporary Terrorism," in *The New Global Terrorism: Characteristics, Causes, Controls*, ed. Charles W. Kegley (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2003), 187.

between secular and religious spheres by exhorting the Tunisian people to establish

a new government ruled by Islamic law:

> "It is the duty of the free people of Tunisia to stand in the way of their [The West] fraud and to continue their sacrifices and effort until Tunisia comes back to the castle of Islam, Jihad and *ribat*."[43]

By rejecting the boundaries placed by secular societies and secular

institutions on religion, religious terrorist organizations seek to deprivatize their

faith and effectively reestablish religion in the public realm. In order to accomplish

this goal, Juergensmeyer notes that religiously motivated terror networks create

new forms of religiosity void of the perceived diluted and compromising aspects of

the modern mainstream religion.   Through strict interpretation of religious statutes

and deprivitization of the faith, this new form of rigorous religiosity seeks to

recreate the perceived original practices of the faith. For example, Ansar al-Sharia

in Yemen, a front group and social wing of AQAP, capitalized upon the turmoil

created during Yemen's protests and lack of central governance by providing social

services, utilities, and a justice system for towns along the southern region of the

country.[44]

Juergensmeyer provides two causes for the recent resurgence in modern

religiously motivated terror networks. He argues that these causes stem from

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[43] Ayman al-Zawahiri, "The Overlooked Backdrop," *Inspire* 5 (2011): 37-38, http://info.publicintelligence.net/InspireMarch2011.pdf (accessed January 23, 2012).

[44] Aaron Zelin, "Know Your Ansar al-Sharia," *Foreign Policy,* September 21, 2012, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2012/09/21/know_your_ansar_al_ sharia?page=full (accessed September 23, 2012).

individuals and communities struggling to find meaning in an increasingly globalized, pluralistic world[45].

Juergensmeyer states that first cause for the recent resurgence in modern religiously motivated terror networks is a loss of faith in secular institutions. He notes that social structures such as secular institutions are only as strong as individuals believe them to be: "Such institutions are legitimized by the 'symbolic capital' they accrue through the collective trust of many individuals."[46] This collective trust directly relates to how individuals perceive themselves and their success in society. So long as social institutions are perceived to contribute to an individual's sense of identity and success, these institutions are regarded as legitimate institutions. However, should an individual lose faith in these social institutions, the institutions lose legitimacy and the individual seeks other means for making sense of his existence. Juergensmeyer uses sociologist Jurgen Habermas' term "crisis of legitimacy" to describe this occurrence of individuals losing faith in social institutions. He further notes that this loss of faith is experienced not only as a loss of belief in an institution's legitimacy, but as a loss of personal agency.

Juergensmeyer states that this loss of personal agency can occur when individuals view society as having gone astray, and that the root cause of this calamity lays a deeper, cosmic conflict between good and evil. This conflict, he notes, is inherently violent and often leaves individuals with a sense of powerlessness. It is this sense of powerlessness that is converted to anger towards

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[45] Juergensmeyer, 191.

[46] Juergensmeyer, 188.

the government, an entity perceived as conspiring with evil, that can empower individuals to take violent action against the government for a greater good.

Juergensmeyer remarks that secular governments serve as popular targets for some religious terror networks because to some extent, secular governments truly pose a potential threat towards religion: "By its nature, the secular state is opposed to the idea that religion should have a role in public life".[47] He notes that secularism has historically opposed an established religion's monopolistic control over society. The Enlightenment values of secular nationalism, the social contract, and rationalism generally marginalized religious commitment to the realm of private sentiment.

Since these secular, public institutions are perceived as having failed to deliver on their promises of prosperity and freedom, some disillusioned individuals see a return to religion as the only means of solving this crisis of legitimacy. However, this return to religion as a means of resolving their crisis of legitimacy may actually lead some individuals towards embracing more militant forms of religiosity. They see mainstream religion as having compromised its convictions with modernity and retreating to the realm of personal sentiment. This perceived compromise between mainstream religion and secular society may motivate disillusioned individuals to seek more rigorous forms of religiosity that claim to practice a purer, undiluted form of the religion.

Juergensmeyer cites the example of Mahmud Aboulhalima, a terrorist involved in the 1993 attacks on the World Trade Center as an example of

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[47] Juergensmeyer, 188.

experiencing a crisis of legitimacy and turning towards militant Islam as a means of solving this crisis. He notes that Aboulhalima perceived secular culture as well as mainstream Islam as "soft" and without substance. In militant Islam, however, Aboulhalima found a source of stability that he described as a "rock and pillar of mercy."[48] He perceived this more rigorous form of Islam as the same faith practiced by the first Muslims—unadulterated with the compromises mainstream Islam had made with modern, secular society. Militant Islamism's dualistic depiction of the forces of good engaged in conflict with the forces of evil provided a framework for Aboulhalima to make sense of the world and his place within that world.

In addition to experiencing a crisis of legitimacy due to a loss of faith in public institutions, Juergensmeyer states that modern religious terrorism arises as a violent reaction against globalism. With the dramatic global shifts that occurred at the end of the Cold War, as well as the rise of transnational corporations not accountable to any single state, he notes that the authority of the secular state increasingly became challenged. These shifts in power, coupled with a new global economy, allowed for the international interaction between multiple cultures. The rise of transnational corporations lead to an international broadcast and eventual saturation of Western cultural ideas and values throughout the world.

Just as individuals can experience a loss of faith in public institutions, Juergensmeyer states that individuals can experience a loss of faith in ideological cultural frameworks. With respect to religious terror networks, these communities see Western ideological and cultural frameworks, such as the idea of secular

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[48] Juergensmeyer, 187.

nationalism as a source of identity as opposed to traditional ethno-religious sources of identity, as foreign concepts imposed upon and threatening to traditional values. These religious terror networks reject secular ideology and seek to establish religion, particularly their own form of religiosity, as the dominating world paradigm.[49]

In order to accomplish this goal of establishing a transnational religious order, religious terror networks employ violence as a means of legitimizing their worldview: "Acts of religious terrorism have thus been attempts to purchase public recognition of the legitimacy of its view of the world at war with the currency of violence."[50] Similar to their anarchists predecessors, militant religious networks employ terrorism in order to demonstrate the weakness of the ruling regime and to demonstrate to the general public the legitimacy of their particular religious worldview. Through terror tactics, these networks intend to evoke a similar violent response from secular governments in order to demonstrate to the world the evils of these secular governments. Juergensmeyer notes that another reason militant religious networks employ terrorism as a means of drawing general public's attention to the great conflict between good and evil.

 In addition to employing terror tactics in order to accomplish their goals, many religious terror networks also aim to demonstrate the legitimacy of their religious worldview to the general public through social service organizations. Religious terror networks may take a bottom-up approach of deprivatizing religion

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[49] Juergensmeyer, 190.

[50] Juergensmeyer, 192.

through offering social services in order to gain credibility among the public as a viable religious alternative to secular institutions.

Ranstorp states that religious terror networks efforts to gain legitimacy though using both terrorism and participating in the existing government's political process began in the late 20th century, where some of these groups transitioned from "relying on terrorism while re-Islamizing their environment to complementing terrorism with the use of the electoral process to advance their sacred causes."[51] For example, Hizb' allah, a terror network responsible for the attacks on international forces in Beirut as well as numerous plane hijackings, also provides social services and participates in the Lebanese government.[52]

Rapoport notes other distinguishing characteristics of religious terrorism. In comparing historic religious terror networks such as the Hindu Thugees, the Muslim Assassins, and the Jewish Zealots-Sicarii, he notes religious terror networks justify their actions by appealing to the past, where the original followers of the religion received Divine instruction: "Their struggles are sanctified with respect to purpose and with respect to means; this is why their violence must have unique characteristics."[53] The overarching characteristic unique to religious terror networks is that acts committed by religious terror networks are perceived to be committed through divine participation. Through proper understanding of divinely revealed sources, religious terror networks claim they are capable of not only

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[51] Ranstorp, 214.

[52] Ranstorp, 214.

[53] Rapoport, 61.

understanding the will of the deity, but also the means by which to accomplish the will of the deity.

In contrasting historic forms of religious terrorism with secular terrorism, Rapoport states that, whereas historic forms of religious terrorism acted according to ritualistic, set means of carrying out their attacks, secular forms of terrorism incline more towards pragmatic and innovative, applying the scientific and rational methods in order to best accomplish their goals. Rapoport regards historic religious terror groups as inflexible in their execution of attacks, employing predetermined, sanctified methods in their operations: "the ends are predetermined, and no real evidence exists that the participants learn to alter their behavior from others within their own tradition, let alone from those outside it."[54] In contrast, Rapoport notes that secular terrorists draw from multiple sources in order to determine the best means of carrying out their attacks. For example, the first anarchist handbook on terrorism provides its audience with information on the techniques necessary to most effectively plan and execute their attacks. This open source handbook's subsequent editions have been revised and updated to include the latest techniques. Rapoport notes that historic religious terrorism lacks the innovation and rationalism typically found among secular terrorism.

In contrast to their historic predecessors, modern religious terror networks have adapted the rationalism and pragmatism of their secular peers. The great conflict Juergensmeyer mentions between good and evil is a total war, where the enemy is clearly defined and the forces of good must do what is necessary in order

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[54] Rapoport 62.

to succeed. Rather than confine themselves by ritual like their historical counterparts, modern religious terror networks adapt a rationalistic approach, sanctifying their tactics through employing religious terms.

Ranstorp notes that while the current methods of modern religious terrorism mostly involve guns and bombs, religious terror organizations express ingenuity with respect to target selection and the methods of attacking that target. For example, militant Islamist organizations harness concept of martyrdom to embolden their followers to carry out their attacks. Ranstorp mentions how Shia clerics initially struggled with the occurrence of suicide bombers, since Islam generally prohibits. However, suicide attacks eventually became sanctioned as a last resort option of resistance. This justification for implementing suicide attacks on the enemy demonstrates how religious organizations sanctify their actions through combining religious ideology with terror operations.

Not only do religious terror networks combine religious ideology with their chosen methods of attacks, they also apply religious ideology towards the selection and timing of an attack. Religious terror networks often target symbols of their enemy's influence in order to demonstrate their enemy's weakness and to gain credibility towards their chosen audience. These attacks may be carried out on significant holy days or on anniversaries of previous terror attacks in order to instill and maintain a sense of fear among the general population.

 For example, al Qaeda frequently targeted foreign embassies, military vessels, and financial institutions in order to protest the perceived corruption and moral decay these foreign governments posses and impose upon the world. For

example, Osama bin Laden, the deceased founder of al Qaeda core, claims he sanctioned these attacks, such as the attack on the World Trade Center on September 11th, to avenge the ignored cries of Muslims throughout the world oppressed by the foreign policies of greater world powers: "When these men retaliated [via the operations of 9/11] on behalf of their oppressed sons, brothers, and sisters in Palestine and elsewhere in the lands of Islam, the whole world cried out."[55]

With respect to timing terror attacks, religious terror organizations may select holy days or other significant days in order to further ingrain its message in public consciousness. For example, Ranstorp notes that the bombing of the Federal Building in Oklahoma City occurred to "commemorate the second anniversary of the FBI's assault on the Branch Davidian's Waco, Texas compound; [and] to mark the date 220 years before when the American Revolution began at Lexington and Concord."[56]

Putting Theory into Practice

Now that a general theory for the causes and attributes of religious terrorism are established, I focus on how one particular religious terror organization, AQAP, exemplifies these theories in its attempts to garner recruits to wage individual jihad in the West. Through its digital English recruitment magazine *Isnpire*, AQAP seeks to promote its proclaimed pure form of Islam and equip its targeted audience of

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[55] Osama bin Laden, "Oath to America," in *The al Qaeda Reader*, ed. Raymond Ibrahim (New York, Broadway Books, 2007), 193-5.

[56] Ranstorp, 219.

Muslims residing in the West with the necessary skills for participating in Jihad. To

date, AQAP has released nine issues of this magazine and it is readily available on

popular jihadist online internet forums. In the first issue of *Inspire*, editor in chief

Yahya Ibrahim states that the purpose of *Inspire* is "to give the most accurate

presentation of Islam as followed by the *Salaf as Salih.*"[57][58]

By hearkening to the time of the *Salafis*, the pious ancestors of the faith who

practiced Islam in its undiluted form, AQAP seeks to establish credibility with its

readers as it exhorts them to imitate their example of following the original

teachings of Islam. Each issue of *Inspire* typically contains four sections geared

towards educating and equipping the faithful to engage in Jihad. Through the

combination of religious teaching, war stories from the fronts, martyrologies of

those sacrificed for the cause, and through a practical section detailing tactics and

guides on crafting and handling weapons, *Inspire* hopes to turn its readers into

active participants in individual jihad.

Inspire justifies its operations and encourages its readers to join its cause by

appealing to Islam. Through examining *surah* from Islam's holy book the Quran, and

through citing notable religious authority figures, *Inspire* seeks to educate its

readers on the true nature of Islam and how to properly follow the commandments

of Allah: "This Islamic Magazine is geared towards making the Muslim a *mujahid* in

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[57] "Letter from the Editor," *Inspire* 1 (2010): 1,
http://info.publicintelligence.net/CompleteInspire.pdf (accessed January 23, 2012).

[58] *Salafism* is a conservative Sunni Muslim movement that seeks to emulate
the practices of the *Salaf al Salih*, or the original Companions and Followers of the
Prophet Mohammed. This movement is known for its strict interpretation of the
Qur'an and opposition towards secularism.

Allah's path."[59] Through textual exegesis and authoritative commentary, *Inspire* not only justifies AQAP's use of terrorism, but also encourages its readers to wage individual jihad against the enemy.

One series of articles written by Abu Musab As-Suri explain AQAP's justification for the use of terror and, through theological and historical justifications, exhorts the reader to participate in individual terror attacks against the enemy. In his first article, As-Suri deconstructs the modern, negative connotations associated with terrorism, and blames Western propaganda for obscuring a true understanding of terrorism: "'Terrorism' is an abstract word, and like many of the abstract words, it can carry a good or bad meaning according to the context."[60] The context of the action determines whether or not terrorism falls into what he labels either blameworthy terrorism or praiseworthy terrorism.

As-Suri defines blameworthy terrorism as "every action, speech, or behavior that inflicts harm and fear among the innocent without a true cause"[61]. He explains that thieves, invaders, oppressors or illegitimate rulers all fall under this category of blameworthy terrorism and describes individuals who employ terrorism absent a true cause as criminals.

In contrast, As-Suri describes praiseworthy terrorism as terrorism committed by righteous individuals in response to oppression: "it [praiseworthy

[59] "Letter from the Editor," 1.

[60] Abu Mus'ab As-Suri, "The Jihadi Experiences: Individual Terrorism Jihad and the Global Islamic Resistance Units," *Inspire* 5 (2011): 29, http://info.publicintelligence.net/InspireMarch2011.pdf (accessed January 23, 2012).

[61] As-Suri, "Individual Terrorism," 29.

terrorism] removes injustice from the oppressed. This is undertaken through terrorizing and repelling the oppressor"[62] As-Suri describes Security forces, resistance fighters rebelling against an oppressive regime, and those fighting to defend themselves as examples of individuals engaging in praiseworthy terrorism.

As-Suri argues that terrorism is not only a praiseworthy activity when committed with righteous intent, but a religious duty. As-Suri cites the following verse from the Quran and states that this verse not only condones the use of terror when fighting the enemy, but also obliges the faithful to use terrorism:

> "'And make ready against them your strength to the utmost of your power, including steeds of war, to strike terror into (the hearts of) the enemies of Allah and your enemies, and others besides whom you may not know of, but whom you shall spend in the cause of Allah, shall be repaid unto you, and you shall not be treated unjustly'"[63]

According to As-Suri, this verse commands the faithful to adequately prepare themselves in order to terrorize the enemies of Allah. He states that the Quran commands the *mujahidin* to use terrorism against the enemy for the defense of the faith, and that, apart from accepting the Oneness of God, there is no greater duty than to wage jihad: "This is one of the most important religious duties. In fact, there is no duty more obligatory than this, except believing that Allah is One, as has been established by Islamic jurists and clerics."[64] Additionally, he notes that mainstream Islam has either forgotten or caved to Western pressure to omit or downplay the significance of this verse.

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[62] As-Suri, "Individual Terrorism," 29.

[63] As-Suri, "Individual Terrorism," 30

[64] As-Suri, "Individual Terrorism," 31.

Juergensmeyer's theory that religious terrorists envision their conflict as a

battle between good and evil aligns with As-Suri's deconstruction of and defense for

engaging in terrorism. Regarding Western ideology as illegitimate and a corrupting

influence, As-Suri exhorts the faithful to engage in terrorism in order to defend the

faith from its oppressors.

In contrast to compromised, mainstream Islam, As-Suri and AQAP contend

that they follow the religion practiced by their ancestors, and that these ancestors

understood that "terrorism is a religious duty, and assassination is a Prophetic

tradition."[65] He then cites instances in history where righteous individuals used

terror tactics such as assassination to silence enemies of the faith.

Another instance of AQAP appealing to religious ideology to justify its attacks

is with respect to the killing of non-combatants. While Islamic scholars agree that it

is permitted to kill combatants in a time of war, the notion of killing non-combatants

such as women, children, and the elderly remains in dispute. Anwar al-Awlaki, a

cleric popular among aspiring jihadists in the West, addresses the notion of

targeting non-combatants in an issue of *Inspire*. He states that non-combatants

become legitimate targets when they participate in the war effort against Muslims

either directly through fighting or indirectly through financial support.[66] Otherwise,

it is prohibited to intentionally target non-combatants. In an article concerning the

priority of targets when engaging in individual jihad, As-Suri states that individual

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[65] As-Suri, "Individual Terrorism," 30.

[66] Anwar al-Awlaki, "Targeting the Populations of Countries that are at War with the Muslims," *Inspire* 8 (2011): 41, http://info.publicintelligence.net/ InspireFall2011.pdf (accessed January 23, 2012).

terrorists should avoid attacking civilians who hold no ties to the conflict in order to uphold the reputation of the resistance. [67]

Similar to its justification for using terrorism against the enemy, AQAP appeals to religion in order to legitimize its support for targeting non-combatants. Through extrapolating the ruling of Islamic scholars from multiple traditions, AQAP appeals to a pristine past and implies that it follows the same religion practiced by the original followers.

However, as al-Awlaki demonstrates from citing various *hadiths*, this prohibition on targeting non-combatants turns on whether or not the attacker intentionally attacks non-combatants. Should non-combatants be present and die during an attack, the terrorist is not at fault. Awlaki draws support from Islamic antiquity, citing a ruling that condoned the use of siege weapons when combating the enemy. He equates the use of mangonels to target the enemy with the use detonating bombs. Both inflict the same area of effect type damage, and both are intended to wound the enemy. The attacker is not held responsible for the unintended deaths of non-combatants.[68]

This logic applies to AQAP's support for individual jihad. While As-Suri acknowledges there exists little precedence for this occurrence in the past, he notes that most instances of individual jihad occur "as an expression of an emotional

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[67] Abu Mus-ab As-Suri, "The Jihadi Experiences: The Most Important Enemy Targets Aimed at by the Individual Jihad," *Inspire* 9 (2012): 24, http://info.publicintelligence.net/InspireMay2012.pdf (accessed April 5, 2012).

[68] al-Awlaki, "Targeting the Populations," 41.

reaction following some hostile acts against Muslims."[69] These emotional reactions

against oppression have arisen spontaneously, with individuals acting without

training or guidance from fellow mujahidin. Through *Inspire*, AQAP aims to use the

momentum created by these spontaneous attacks to encourage fellow believers who

may not have the means or ability to travel to engage in jihad abroad to do so where

they are:

> "Hence, our method should therefore be to guide the Muslim who wants to
> participate and resist, to operate where he is, or where he is able to be
> present in a natural way. We should advise him to pursue his everyday life in
> a natural way, and to pursue jihad and Resistance in secrecy and alone, or
> with a small cell of trustworthy people, who form an independent unit for the
> Resistance and for the individual jihad."[70]

AQAP encourages would-be *mujahidin* to engage in individual jihad where they are.

In one letter to the editor, a writer moved by the contents of the magazine states

that he desires to travel abroad and engage in jihad with his fellow brothers, but

seeks advice on how to communicate with fellow mujahidin because he has no

contacts abroad. In response, *Inspire* encourages the writer to remain in the West

and wage jihad where he his: "This is because killing 10 soldiers in America for

example, is much more effective than killing 100 apostates in the Yemeni military."[71]

In another article, As-Suri discusses the principles and advantages of

individual jihad. The most prominent advantage of individual jihad As-Suri notes is

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[69] As-Suri, "Individual Terrorism," 32.

[70] Abu Mus-ab As-Suri, "The Jihadi Experiences: The Main Arenas of
Operation for Individual Jihad," *Inspire* 8 (2011): 18-19,
http://info.publicintelligence.net/InspireFall2011.pdf (accessed April 5, 2012).

[71] Anwar al-Awlaki, "Inspire Responses: Responding to Inquiries," *Inspire* 5
(2011): 11, http://info.publicintelligence.net/InspireMarch2011.pdf (accessed
January 23, 2012).

its secrecy. Since individuals engaging in lone jihad operate independently from greater terror networks, they are less likely to be detected by law enforcement. Through the dissemination of operational information such as bomb-making and other terror tactics, proponents of individual jihad seek to transform the movement from a series of spontaneous, visceral reactions against oppression to an organized, strategic, and leaderless resistance movement.[72] Through the combined efforts of these leaderless resistance cells engaging in individual jihad, AQAP seeks to exhaust the enemy through attrition and to motivate the greater Islamic community to participate in the resistance.

Another method *Inspire* uses to encourage its readers to engage in individual jihad is through the telling of war stories. These stories often come from the front lines of jihad, where the mujahidin directly engage with the enemy. These stories aim to make the cosmic conflict between good and evil more tangible through vivid accounts of mujahidin in action.

One article gives the account of Hashim al-Hindi, a *mujahid* involved in the insurgency in Fallujah, Iraq. Throughout his account of hardships and engagements with coalition forces, al-Hindi recounts numerous miracles occurring that aided the insurgents in their fighting: "The brothers received extraordinary miracles from

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[72] Abu Mus'ab as-Suri, "The Jihadi Experiences: Conditions for the Resistance to Use Individual Jihad," *Inspire* 6 (2011): 15, http://info.publicintelligence.net/InspireSummer2011.pdf (accessed January 23, 2012).

Allah as a sign to strengthen them and these miracles were in all different forms."[73]

Through divine assistance, al-Hindi boasts he and his fellow mujahidin destroyed

many coalition forces, inflicting about 100 casualties per day.

Along with these battle reports, each issue of *Inspire* includes a section

dedicated to those who gave their life in the cause of jihad. These martyrologies

give detailed accounts of mujahidin sacrificing themselves for Allah. One

martyrology describes Abu Ali al-Harathi's journey from a desert dweller to an

active participant in jihad. Nicknamed the Veteran Lion, al-Harathi decided to

participate in jihad shortly after coalition operations began in Iraq. One anecdote

from al-Harathi's life praises the *mujahid's* valor during a surprise attack: "He had no

fear of the enemy and eagerly wanted to die in the path of Allah."[74]" Harathi's hope

for martyrdom became fulfilled as an unmanned aerial drone eventually destroyed

his vehicle. The eulogist commemorates Harathi's death by stating that this death

was "the death [he] waited for." These accounts of battle and martyrdom seek to

make concrete abstract narrative of a cosmic conflict between good and evil and to

encourage readers to imitate the example of these *mujahidin* fighting on the front

lines.

After providing religious justifications for the use of terror, and after

providing detailed accounts of actual *mujahidin* on the frontline, *Inspire*, seeks to

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[73] Hashim al-Hindi, "My Life in Fallujah," *Inspire* 5 (2011): 59,
http://info.publicintelligence.net/InspireMarch2011.pdf (accessed January 23,
2012).

[74] Muhannad, "Abu Ali al-Harithi: The Veteran Lion," *Inspire* 6 (2011): 18,
http://info.publicintelligence.net/InspireSummer2011.pdf (accessed January 23,
2012).

equip its audience with the skills necessary for them to wage their own individual

jihad campaigns. In a recurring section entitled "Open Source Jihad," *Inspire*

provides training for those willing to participate in jihad but are unclear on how to

proceed: "My Muslim brother: we are conveying to you our military training right

into your kitchen to relieve you of the difficulty of traveling to us."[75] These sections

typically include instruction on various tools employed in terrorism, ranging from

guides on bomb making to the maintenance and operation of firearms. These

sections take the ideological underpinnings of jihad and cosmic conflict and apply

them in practical guides on how to engage in individual jihad.

One series of articles regarding the practical aspects of individual jihad

details the proper mindset for engaging in jihad: ""Knowing what to expect in jihad

is vital in order to avoid confusion, shock, and even depression."[76] These articles

focus on those capable of joining the mujahidin in training camps and deal with

making contacts, how to handle cultural and language barriers, and what to bring

for the journey.

Another article by Uthman Ibn al-Igthyal describes the ideal urban assassin:

"Here, we will strip the assassin of his physical qualities, armaments, and gear, and

touch upon his most exceptional qualities that qualify him as a tool for the religion's

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[75] The AQ Chef, "Make a Bomb in the Kitchen of your Mom," *Inspire* 1 (2010): 33, http://info.publicintelligence.net/CompleteInspire.pdf (accessed January 23, 2012).

[76] Mukhtar Hassan, "What to Expect in Jihad: Part One," *Inspire* 1 (2010): 45, http://info.publicintelligence.net/CompleteInspire.pdf (accessed January 23, 2012).

victory."[77] He describes this urban assassin as a pious individual who continually improves his method and readily adapts to circumstances in order to best carry out his attacks while maintaining his cover as a normal citizen. This portrait of an ideal individual terrorist combines the ritual of the historic religious terror networks with the ingenuity and adaptability of secular terror networks.

Combined with theological justifications, these practical sections exemplify the characteristics of modern religious terror networks. As seen in Rapoport's description of historical religious terrorism, AQAP immerses its attacks in religious ritual, and encourages its readers to imitate its example by incorporating prayer into their routine and asking for God's help in planning and executing attacks. Additionally, similar to secular terrorism, AQAP desires to develop within its readers a pragmatic, rational mindset when it comes to strategically planning and executing terror attacks.

AQAP's shift from an overt command and control scheme for international operations to a leaderless resistance model demonstrates a modern religious terror network's penchant for adaptability. Unlike historic religious terror networks, these groups no longer confine themselves to set ritualistic methods, but are able to infuse pragmatic strategies with religious undertones.

Conclusions

This chapter outlined general theories behind the resurgence of religious terror networks. Juergensmeyer theorizes that religious terrorism occurs due to a

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[77] Uthman Ibn al-Ightiyal, "Qualities of an Urban Assassin," *Inspire* 9 (2012): 37, http://info.publicintelligence.net/InspireMay2012.pdf (accessed June 15, 2012).

crisis of legitimacy arising from a loss of faith in public political institutions and in

public ideological and cultural values. These religious terrorists describe their

world in terms of a cosmic conflict between the forces of good and evil. They see

existing regimes as conspiring with the forces of evil and threatening the livelihood

of the faithful. Therefore, the government becomes a legitimate target for religious

terrorists. When carrying out attacks, many modern religious terror networks

blend religious ritual with pragmatism in order to most effectively damage their

intended targets while gaining credibility for their cause.

One final example of AQAP's adaptability is its recent shift from encouraging

a leaderless resistance model to having more operational oversight. As will be seen

in the next chapter, the relative ineffectiveness of recent individual jihad operations

has lead AQAP to take a more involved to its individual jihad model by encouraging

would-be *mujahidin* contact AQAP with their plans so that together both the

network and the individual can plan an effective operation. While increasing the

risk of detection, having more operational oversight might increase the chances of a

successful attack.

CHAPTER THREE

Methods, Tactics and Effectiveness of Islamist Lone Wolves in the US

Introduction

The previous chapters developed a definition for lone wolf terrorism, as well as examined one particular militant ideology employed by lone wolf terrorists and formal terrorist networks' attempts to educate and encourage similar attacks in the West. This chapter examines the methods employed by lone wolf terrorists motivated by militant Islamist ideology in the United States. Drawing from surveys from Ramon Spaaij's study of general lone wolf terrorist attacks as well as Brian M Jenkins' more specific study of militant Islamist lone wolf attacks in the United States, I conclude that the current threat of individual jihadist terror attacks remains ineffective due to these individuals' lack of experience and training in planning and executing attacks.

The first half of this chapter examines the number of militant Islamist lone wolf terrorist attacks that have occurred in the United States, the demographics of the individuals involved in these attacks, and the methods typically employed by individual actors. The second half of this chapter analyzes the effectiveness of these lone wolf attacks, and presents possible explanations for not only their relative ineffectiveness, but also their low occurrence, despite campaigns from AQAP and other formal terror networks to promote this style of attack.

The Number of Islamist Homegrown Terror Attacks in the US

Drawing from available data, Jenkins notes that since the September 11th

attacks, 82 cases of homegrown terrorism have occurred the United States, with 176

individuals arrested or indicted for terrorist activity[78]. The reproduced table below

details the number of individuals involved in homegrown terrorism in the United

States from September 2001 through the end of 2010:

Table 1. Number of Individuals Involved in Islamist Homegrown Terrorism in the United States

Year	2002	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2010
Number of Individuals	18	18	16	12	26	11	4	40	31

Source: Brian Michael Jenkins, *Stray Dogs and Virtual Armies: Radicalization and Recruitment to Jihadist Terrorism in the United States Since 9/11* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2011), http://www.rand.org/pubs/occasional_papers/OP343 (accessed January 18, 2012)

According to the data, the number of individuals involved in homegrown terrorism

in the United States has increased overall throughout the past decade. Jenkins

further examines the number of individuals involved in homegrown terror plots

during 2010. He finds that in 14 of the 31 cases, individuals were charged with

recruiting, providing financial assistance, and attempting to join foreign jihadist

organizations. The other 17 cases involved individuals who were inspired by

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[78] Brian Michael Jenkins, *Stray Dogs and Virtual Armies: Radicalization and Recruitment to Jihadist Terrorism in the United States Since 9/11* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2011), http://www.rand.org/pubs/occasional_papers/OP343 (accessed January 18, 2012), 6

jihadist propaganda to engage in individual jihad, and either discussed or planned to carry out terrorist attacks in the United States.[79]

Of the 82 cases mentioned above regarding homegrown terrorism, 32 involved individual jihadist plots to attack the United States. The remaining 50 cases involved individuals providing financial aid or joining terrorist organizations, but were not necessarily directly involved in plotting an attack. Of these 32 plots, however, only 10 progressed beyond the development stage into operational plans. Of these 10 operational plans, six were actually FBI stings meant to capture would-be individual jihadists.

Applying a narrower definition for a lone wolf, where solitary individuals plan and execute their attacks without operational oversight, only two of the 32 cases properly qualify as homegrown individual terror plots: the case of Derrick Shareef and the case of Nidal Hasan. While Shareef was arrested before he could carry out his plan to attack an Illinois shopping mall, Hasan's successful 2009 attack on Fort Hood resulted in 13 deaths and 31 wounded[80]. Both individuals acted with no operational oversight; they designed and planned to carry out their attacks without assistance from any formal terror networks. Jenkins explains this lack of individuals acting alone in executing terror attacks by describing the plotting of a terrorist attack as primarily a social endeavor: "Terrorist plotting is a social activity in which sharing violent fantasies is in itself a source of psychological pleasure."[81]

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[79] Jenkins, 6.

[80] Jenkins, 36.

[81] Jenkins, 19.

Demographics of Individuals Involved in Homegrown Attacks

The available data in Jenkins' study depicts a varied portrait of individuals engaged in homegrown terrorism. Of the 176 individuals involved in homegrown terrorism, the average age of the group was 32, while the median age was 27. The extent of an individual's participation in homegrown terrorism is roughly divided by age. Younger individuals incline towards personally joining foreign jihadist organizations, while older individuals tend to support the cause through financial or other means of capital contributions for foreign jihadist organizations.

Jenkins notes that the available data is incomplete regarding the citizenship of the sample. From the 31 individuals in the 2010 cases, nine of the individuals were born in the United States, 14 were naturalized citizens, and two others were listed as citizens without any available information as to how they achieved their citizenship.[82] One other individual was listed as a permanent resident, while the citizenship of the remaining individuals is unknown. For the entire sample, 76 of the 176 individuals are known US-born citizens, while at least 49 are naturalized US citizens. Three individuals are listed as US citizens, though Jenkins remarks that the available data is unclear about how these individuals achieved citizenship. Several more individuals are either foreign nationals living in the United States either legally or illegally. The remaining individual's citizenship status is unknown.

Jenkins reports that the educational data for 95 individuals was available. Twenty-four individuals had not completed high school, while 21 individuals had high school diplomas or equivalent. Jenkins notes that this statistic roughly

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[82] Jenkins, 9.

correlates to the national average for males 25 and older.   Thirty-eight had some

college, while 12 had graduated from college. Of these 12 individuals, six received

postgraduate degrees. While the number of individual terrorists who started

college is higher than the national average for the general public pursuing higher

education, these numbers eventually decline due to these individuals leaving their

studies to pursue jihad.

Regarding the spiritual beliefs of these individuals, Jenkins states that all

jihadists identified to date are Muslims. One-fourth of these professed Muslims are

US born Americans with non-Muslim surnames. Of this group, the majority of these

individuals are converts to Islam.[83] The remaining individuals possess

predominately North African, Middle Eastern, or South Asian backgrounds.

Individuals with Somali or Pakistani backgrounds comprised the majority of this

group.

The data above demonstrates that homegrown terrorism in the United States

is increasing. This phenomenon is executed primarily by U.S. citizens of diverse

educational and demographic backgrounds, supporting my earlier claim that there

exists no single profile for a lone wolf terrorist.

Methods, Tools, and Tactics Employed in Lone Wolf Attacks

Homegrown jihadists generally select soft targets—easily accessible public

places with minimal security. While most of these plots never advanced beyond the

theoretical stage, homegrown jihadists targeted infrastructural buildings such as

power plants, bridges, airports, or oil pipelines. Since the majority of these plots

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[83] Jenkins, 9.

never truly progressed past the developmental stage, would-be homegrown

terrorists rarely formulated operational plans that targeted specific locations or

people.

Similar to conventional, collective terrorism, these soft targets selected by

lone wolf terrorists serve as symbols of perceived oppression.[84] For example,

commenting on his 2009 attack on an Army recruiting center in Little Rock,

Arkansas, Carlos Bledsoe states he chose this recruiting center to protest against the

United States government's military engagements the Middle East:

> "It's a war out against Islam and Muslims and I'm on the side of the Muslims
> point plank… The U.S. has to pay for the rape, murder, bloodshed, blasphemy
> it has done and still doing to the Muslims and Islam. So consider this a small
> retaliation the best is to come Allah willing. This is not the first attack and
> won't be the last"[85]

Spaaij states that while the success of their operations vary greatly, lone wolf

terrorists strive to thoroughly and carefully plan their attacks.[86] Bledsoe's case

exemplifies the planning typical among lone wolf terrorists. Before attacking the

Army recruiting center in Arkansas, Bledsoe sought passage to Somalia to receive

training in bomb making. However, upon being detained by Yemeni authorities

with a false Somali passport, Bledsoe was forced to readjust his plans upon

returning to the United States. While abroad, he claimed to have obtained literature

ranging from Internet messages from AQAP affiliated cleric Anwar Al-Awlaki to

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[84] Spaaij, 68.

[85] Kristina Goetz "Muslim who shot soldier in Arkansas says he wanted to cause more death" November 13 2010. "http://www.knoxnews.com/news/2010/nov/13/muslim-who-shot-solider-arkansas-says-he-wanted-ca/" (accessed October 8, 2012).

[86] Spaaij, 66.

instruction manuals on making bombs and sound suppressors for firearms. He

returned to the United States and lived with his parents, where he began stockpiling

weapons and ammunition, researched targets using Google maps, and formulated

two plans to begin his terror campaign.[87]

His first plan involved assassinating three rabbis in Memphis, Little Rock, and

Nashville. After this assassination spree, Bledsoe would target military recruitment

centers from the Southern United States to the capital, as well as other "Zionist"

organizations in the northeast.[88] However, Bledsoe's first foray into terrorism

resulted in failure—a case of Molotov cocktails he threw at a suspected orthodox

rabbi's house in Memphis failed to ignite, while the first military recruiting center he

intended to attack was closed when he arrived. Frustrated, Bledsoe returned to

reformulate a new plan. Bledsoe's second plan involved a spontaneous attack on a

military recruiting center. He selected a recruiting center in Little Rock and fired

upon two Army personnel standing outside of the facility, killing one and wounding

the other.[89]

Jenkins notes that only 13 targets were specifically identified. Of these

specific operational plans, only three attacks were carried out: the attack on Fort

Hood, the attack on an Arkansas Army recruiting center, and a failed attack on New

York Times Square. The other 10 cases were intercepted and thwarted through FBI

sting operations. FBI agents posed as al Qaeda operatives intent on aiding

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[87] Goetz.

[88] Goetz.

[89] Goetz.

homegrown terrorists to successfully execute their attacks. After asking the suspect

a series of questions to gauge his intent on carrying out an attack, the FBI agents

would set up a sting operation, typically by providing the suspect with a fake bomb

for them to use in their operation. Upon transfer of the fake bomb, the suspect was

detained and charged with terrorism.

Despite this risk of detection, the majority of planned homegrown terrorist

plots centered around bombing general locations. When aspiring terrorists failed to

successfully make a bomb, they would seek other means of attaining one, typically

by inadvertently contacting FBI undercover agents.[90]

Due to the high skill level required to successfully make bombs, firearms

served as a simpler, more viable method of carrying out terrorist attacks. Jenkins

numbers four homegrown plots that involved firearms.[91] Spaaij notes that the

widespread availability and the relatively easy means of acquiring firearms in the

United States makes them potentially reliable tools for carrying out a successful

terrorist attack. [92] The most effective lone wolf attacks involved firearms as

opposed to bombs, as evidenced in Hasan's attack on Fort Hood and Bledsoe's attack

on an Army recruiting center in Little Rock. Whereas these two cases alone resulted

in 14 fatalities, individuals employing bombs in their plans have thus far caused

zero deaths.

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[90] Jenkins, 19.

[91] Jenkins, 20.

[92] Spaaij, 864.

The (In)Effectiveness of Homegrown Attacks

From the data above, it is evident that the current effectiveness of the

majority of individual terror attacks committed by homegrown militant Islamists is

minimal.   While few have succeeded in carrying out their attacks with deadly

results, the majority of would-be lone wolf terrorists' plots end in failure. As noted

above, the majority of these plots failed due to their discovery by security forces or

due to operational incompetency.

Despite the instructional material on tactics and guides on crafting and

operating weapons provided by magazines such as *Inspire*, these serve as a poor

substitute to actual, hands-on training. Spaaij describes the importance of

reconnaissance, intelligence, and proper planning in order to successfully carry out

an attack. Since lone wolves by definition act alone, they must perform these duties

without external support: "this task can be relatively difficult to accomplish for lone

individuals who do not have a support infrastructure in place."[93] This operational

inexperience likely accounts for the majority of this would-be lone wolf terrorist's

failure to successfully carry out an attack.

It is interesting to note that, despite magazines such as *Inspire's* potential to

educate and equip individuals to engage in their own terror campaigns, few actually

transition from exposure to action. Jenkins notes that this lack of a widespread,

leaderless resistance movement by individual mujahidin results from a lowering of

the threshold of participation in the movement. During the origins of the modern

militant Islam movement when the mujahidin were fighting the Soviets, would-be

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[93] Spaaij, 69.

mujahidin had to make contacts, travel abroad and receive training in order to

adequately serve the cause. Sacrifices had to be made by individuals inspired or

interested in the cause.

Today, however, Jenkins notes that it is much easier and much more

comfortable to serve the cause due to the Internet. Through participation in online

forums and through downloading and disseminating militant Islamist media, would-

be mujahidin feel they are already serving the cause from their homes. The

threshold of participation in the resistance has significantly lowered from

undergoing training and striking at the enemy to simply reading and posting in

online forums:

> "Despite some grumbling from jihadist ideologues about online jihadists not
> pushing back from their computer screens to carry out attacks, the threshold
> for jihad has been lowered. Action remains the ultimate goal but online
> warriors are not viewed as less-dedicated slackers."[94]

In his book *Jihad Joe*, J. M. Berger notes a shift in recruiting trends among

militant Islamist terror networks from the time of their beginnings to today. During

the beginnings of the militant Islamist movement, recruiters would travel

throughout the world and tell the audience about the miracles Allah is performing

on the battlefield. Additionally, current mujahidin would share their stories of

fighting the enemy. The promise of adventure and the chance to witness miracles

was enough for some interested individuals to join the cause and prepare for war.

While at the camps, these recruits would be indoctrinated with the teachings of

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[94] Brian Michael Jenkins, "Is Al Qaeda's Internet Strategy Working?"
(testimony presented before the House Homeland Security Committee,
Subcommittee on Counterterrorism and Intelligence, Washington D.C., United States
December 6, 2011), http://www.rand.org/pubs/testimonies/CT371 (accessed
January 18, 2012), 2

militant Islamist ideology. It is after recruits who had decided to take action by setting off for war that they become radicalized through religious education.

Today, however, Berger notes that the opposite trend is occurring. Rather than have individuals intrigued by the movement taking action and subsequently becoming radicalized, individuals first become radicalized and then they may act on this radicalization:

> "Early jihadist recruits generally had relevant skills, often some kind of traditionally military training. As the Internet replaced the real-world network of recruiters and personal connections, jihadist volunteers began to reflect a different demographic. The most rabid supporters of jihad today are very young concerts with little practical experience in Islam, fighting, or life."[95]

This radicalization can occur through exposure to militant Islamist literature on the Internet. Jenkins notes that the Internet has become a strong tool for al Qaeda and its affiliates in their efforts to extend the reach of its message. Despite this extension in outreach, however, it seems that the majority of AQAP's target audience, young Muslim men dwelling in the West, are not actively taking up the cause of jihad. Some may actively participate in online forums or download and share the latest jihadist media, but their radicalization does not transfer from the online world into the real world.

The few individuals that do make the transition from participating in virtual jihad to participating in real life jihad through individual terror generally lack the skills necessary in order to successfully carry out these attacks. While they may be radicalized, these individuals do not share either the training or the experience of previous mujahidin. As a result, most of these individual jihadist plots are

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[95] Berger, 209.

discovered and thwarted by government security forces or are foiled due to the individual's own operational incompetence. Instead of referring to these individual jihadists as lone wolf terrorists, Jenkins prefers the term "stray dogs" due to these individuals' general ineffectiveness.

Michael Finton's case serves as an example of an individual jihadist plot being discovered by government security forces. Believing he made contact with al Qaeda members, Finton began to inform these members of his plan to bomb a federal courthouse in Springfield, Illinois. In reality, Finton had made contact with an FBI informant posing as an al Qaeda contact. The informant eventually set up a sting operation that allowed Finton to purchase a fake bomb in order to carry out his attack. After he purchased the fake bomb, the FBI summarily detained him.[96]

In another case, Faisal Shazad, a Pakistani born naturalized US citizen, decided to take up the cause of jihad. With the help of the Movement of the Taliban in Pakistan, he learned rudimentary bomb making in Pakistan and, upon his return to the United States, devised a plot to ignite a firebomb in his SUV in Times Square. Unfortunately for Shazad, the incendiary device failed to properly detonate, and he was ultimately arrested. Despite some training and avoiding detection, Shazad 's attack ultimately failed due to his own incompetence.[97]

These two cases exemplify the typical ineffectiveness of individual jihadists. While AQAP and fellow religious terrorist networks hoped for attacks on the scale similar to Hassan's Fort Hood shooting, the majority of individual terror plots are

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[96] Jenkins, 35.

[97] Jenkins, 39.

either foiled or flounder. As a result, the most recent issue of AQAP's magazine *Inspire* shifts its strategy from encouraging a leaderless resistance movement in the West to a more command and control, independent cell-based operation. In the article "Convoy of Martyrs," the author encourages would be mujahidin to submit their ideas for terrorist attacks.[98] An AQAP military board will review these submitted ideas and contact the individual should they approve of the idea. Upon approval, AQAP would provide the individual with the information necessary in order to successfully carry out his attack. By taking more oversight in the planning process, AQAP seeks to improve the effectiveness of these individual jihadists. Should these individuals actually pursue this process, by accepting AQAP's assistance they would no longer be considered lone wolf terrorists. Additionally, though these individuals would receive more training, and therefore would improve their chances of a successful attack, they would forfeit the primary advantages of acting as a lone wolf, which are the element of surprise and the decreased risk of detection by authorities.

In the final section, I will examine how the United States addresses the lone wolf terror threat through its programs of countering violent extremism and extensive counterterrorist initiative.

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[98] "The Convoy of Martyrs," *Inspire* 9 (2012): 24, http://info.publicintelligence.net/InspireMay2012.pdf (accessed April 5, 2012).

CHAPTER FOUR

Conclusions

This thesis interpreted the literature regarding militant Islamist lone wolf terrorists in the United States. Unlike Pantucci's classification of lone wolves based on the amount of contact these individuals have with formal terror networks, I defined lone wolf terrorism as acts of terrorism committed by individuals who operate independently from formal terror networks.

I examined popular theories that could motivate individuals to become involved in terrorism. Rational choice theory serves as an excellent tool for predicting terrorist behavior using cost-benefit analysis derived from game theory. This theory also demonstrates that individuals perceive and therefore choose terrorism from other available options as the most efficient and effective means of achieving their ends.

Another theory seeks to explain individuals becoming terrorists using group dynamics. This theory regards social interaction as an integral factor for explaining how individuals become terrorists. Through peer pressure and in-group loyalty, individuals within the group mutually radicalize one another to the extent that they willingly engage in terrorism. While lone wolves may not participate in real life radical communities, radical online communities such as online forums and chat rooms could serve as a surrogate community and could play a role in radicalizing an individual.

Lone wolf terrorism is not a recent phenomenon. Anarchists first employed this method of leaderless resistance, where individuals carried out terrorist attacks by themselves in order to spread their ideology. Later, white supremacists and militant right wing groups adopted this strategy of lone wolf terrorism and leaderless resistance, as exemplified in literary works such as *The Turner Diaries*, whose characters relied on these tactics to successfully carry out their attacks.

Due to intense counterterrorist efforts by the United States and its allies, religious terror networks such as al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula have recently shifted their tactics, transitioning from a more conventional command and control structure to advocating aspiring terrorists living in the West to engage in acts of lone wolf terrorism.

Labeling its particular style of lone wolf terrorism as individual jihad, AQAP encourages its audience to participate in widespread, grassroots resistance movement of lone wolves who engage in spontaneous, random attacks against Western targets. AQAP uses its magazine *Inspire* to provide theological justification for engaging in terrorism, as well as war stories from the frontlines of jihad and martyrologies to encourage aspiring lone wolves to engage in individual jihad. These ideological justifications are supplemented with practical guides on selecting a target and the handling and making of weapons.

In modern times, religious extremism and violence typically arise due to an individual's loss of faith in the prevailing public political and ideological institutions. These disillusioned individuals see religion as a means to resolve this crisis of identity. The stark division of a cosmic conflict between good and evil as typically

depicted in extremist brands of religiosity seek to bring sense to an individual's worldview. Through participation in this cosmic conflict via acts of violence, the disillusioned individual gains a sense of purpose and belonging in the world as he or she seeks carry out the deity's will.

According to Jenkins' survey tracking lone wolf terrorism from September 2001 to 2010, the number of individuals involved in lone wolf terrorism in the United States has increased. Due the readily availability of firearms and bomb-making materials, weapons from these resources are the preferred choice for lone wolf terrorists.

Despite the increasing number of lone wolf terrorists, currently these individuals generally fail to successfully carry out an attack. As evidenced in the Fort Hood shooting, acts of lone wolf terrorism can be very effective and devastating. However, the majority of aspiring lone wolf terrorists barely progress from the planning phase to the execution phase of their attacks. They are typically detected by law enforcement and counterterrorism agencies before they are able to execute their plans. Some even mistake undercover government agents for al Qaeda contacts and are captured through sting operations. The few individuals who advance to the execution phase of their attack likely fail to successfully complete their mission due to inexperience or incompetence.

This lack of efficacy can be explained by these individuals' lack of formal training in terrorist tradecraft. While the quantity of recruits and radicalized individuals may have increased, the quality of these recruits with respect to formulating and executing a successful terrorist attack has decreased. Additionally,

with al Qaeda franchises like AQAP promoting the cause of jihad online through forums and chat rooms, they have effectively lowered the threshold of commitment for would be jihadists. Whereas previous aspiring jihadists were required to travel abroad, receive training, and actively participate in terrorist attacks, the modern aspiring jihadist feels he properly advances the cause through participation in online forums and the propagation of militant Islamist media. While these individuals may be radicalized, this radicalization rarely translates into real life attacks on real life targets.

The current operational ineffectiveness of lone wolf terrorists does not necessarily guarantee that future lone wolves will remain incompetent. In the ninth issue of *Inspire*, AQAP encouraged aspiring individual jihadists to send their plans for attacks to be reviewed by a strategic council. Individuals whose plans are approved by the strategic council will receive training and guidance in order to increase the likelihood of a successful attack. Additionally, as evidenced by attacks such as the Fort Hood shooting, lone wolves who remain free and pursue their goals remain a continuous threat to the United States.

A helpful avenue for further research could be an empirical examination of Islamist motivated lone wolf terrorism in the United States. This empirical examination could establish a database of every instance of Islamic motivated lone wolf terrorism that examined the demographics and available psychological information of individuals involved in lone wolf terror attacks, as well as their methods employed the success or failure of the attack. This database would not only provide a helpful tool for further understanding lone wolf terrorism, but could

also aid government and counterterrorist officials better understand and respond to future threats of this kind.

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