

“playboy” of the group. He frequented popular discos and drank beer with his classmates.

- Ramzi bin al-Shibh was Yemeni and came from a moderately religious family and he was familiar with the Quran. From 1987-1995, he worked as a clerk for the International Bank of Yemen. He applied for asylum in Germany using false documentation and moved to Hamburg where he met Atta in 1995.¹³⁰
- Zakariya Essabar was a Moroccan citizen who moved to Germany in 1997 and to Hamburg in 1998. He studied medical technology and met bin al-Shibh through the mosque.
- Said Bahaji was born in Germany but raised in Morocco. He attended the Technical University of Hamburg-Harburg (TUHH) in 1996 in pursuit of a career as an electrical engineer. He had no formal Islamic education and was known to be a fan of video games and Formula One Racing.
- Mounir Motassadeq, a Moroccan who came to Hamburg in 1995 to study electrical engineering at TUHH.¹³¹

STAGE 2: SELF-IDENTIFICATION

- **Gravitating to Salafi Islam.** As one of the few gathering places for Middle Eastern Muslim students in Hamburg, the Al Quds Mosque in Hamburg became the ideological incubator for the Hamburg cell. In fact, many of the 9/11 terrorists met in the mosque and galvanized the relationship that ultimately formed the Hamburg cell.
 - Mohammed Atta arrived in Hamburg seeking to be a successful architectural designer. While he had numerous acquaintances, his introverted and dour personality closed him off from much of German culture and society. As his isolation from his friends and family in Egypt grew, a newly-found reliance on religion took hold. Atta began praying five times a day, strictly observing a halal diet, and avoiding normal student social events like clubs and sporting events.¹³²
 - Following a trip to Egypt and his return from hajj in 1995, Atta became returned even more reserved, intolerant, and intense in his observance of sharia. He began to grow a beard and spent increasing amounts of time at the mosque.¹³³
 - Jarrah’s religious transformation followed his 1996 trip to visit his family in Lebanon during holiday break.
 - It is unclear what occurred there, but Jarrah returned more devout, causing friction with his secular girlfriend in Germany. He began to chastise her for not being sufficiently devout.¹³⁴
 - By 1998, Jarrah began spending time at the Al Quds mosque with bin al-Shibh and eventually Atta.¹³⁵

- The death of Marwan al-Shehi's father may have been the catalyst for his transformation. Soon after his father passed, he became more pronounced in his faith and stopped wearing Western clothes. In early 1998, he transferred to school in Hamburg and soon joined Atta's religious study group.¹³⁶
- **The Salafi Mosque.** Al Quds Mosque served as the initial radicalization venue for the members of the Hamburg cell. Founded by Moroccans, but with an ethnically diverse congregation, the Al Quds mosque was known for its harsh jihadi-Salafi rhetoric. The mosque would regularly sponsor radical imams, who encouraged killing of unbelievers, martyrdom and jihad.
 - By 1996, Atta had developed a circle of acquaintances and was also led many of the student religious study groups.
 - As members of these different study groups, Atta met both Mounir Motassadeq, the Moroccan electrical engineering student and Ramzi bin al-Shibh.
 - Over time, Atta and bin al-Shibh become religious mentors for the study groups—accelerating the proliferation of the Salafist message for other students, who were seeking identity through religion to include Zakariya Essabar, Said Bahaji and Mounir Motassadeq.
 - The Hamburg cell formed as these men spent countless hours thinking, talking, reading and debating this interpretation of Islam.¹³⁷

STAGE 3: INDOCTRINATION

- **Withdrawing from the Mosque.** In 1998, as the Hamburg cell became further radicalized, the group moved their meetings from the mosque into both a bookstore near the mosque and Atta's residence—an apartment with which he shared with al-Shehi, bin al-Shibh and others.
 - A year later, Atta and some of his friends moved to another apartment, which they named "Bait al-Ansar" or The House of the Supporters of the Prophet. The group, along with some others, held weekly meetings at the residence with a focus on jihad.¹³⁸
- **Politicization of Beliefs.** Mohammed Haydar Zammar, an auto mechanic and one of the members of the Hamburg jihadi-Salafi community, was instrumental in advancing the group's objective towards political activism. He was the Hamburg group's "spiritual sanctioner". As a jihadi veteran who had fought in Afghanistan and Bosnia, the 300-pound, Syrian-born Zammar used his bona fides as a mujahedeen to support the legitimacy of jihad and the necessity for it in response to the conflicts in Afghanistan, Bosnia, and Chechnya.

Additionally, Atta was already studying other terrorist groups with political agendas.

- Atta had a home page on the university's server and with two clicks of the mouse, he was able to access the home page for Hamas, the Palestinian terrorist group.¹³⁹

STAGE 4: JIHADIZATION.

Although the concept for the September 11 plot was already in the planning stages of al-Qaeda in 1996, it wasn't until 1999 that the critical piece to conducting the attack arrived on bin Ladin's doorstep: the first four members of the Hamburg cell--fluent in English, Western-educated, and accustomed to Western culture and lifestyle. Upon having accepted jihad as a means to an end while in Hamburg, Mohammed Atta, Ramzi bin al-Shibh, Marwan al-Shehi and Ziad Jarrah departed Germany for jihad in Afghanistan.

In years following September 11, 2001, both the Al-Muhajiroun Two and Mohammed Siddique Khan, the leader of the 7/7 London bombers, among others, would follow Atta and the Westernized 9/11 hijackers' footsteps, coming to Afghanistan/Pakistan with the intention to conduct jihad as mujahedeen in the region, but instead be re-directed to launch a terrorist attack in the West.

- **Accepting Jihad/Decision to Commit Jihad.** According to his former students, at a certain point, Mohammed Atta began to both believe and preach that the Quran provided the answer and necessity of jihad – to get rid of the Jews and Americans.¹⁴⁰ He used his religious study sessions to further push the group towards a similar acceptance of jihad.

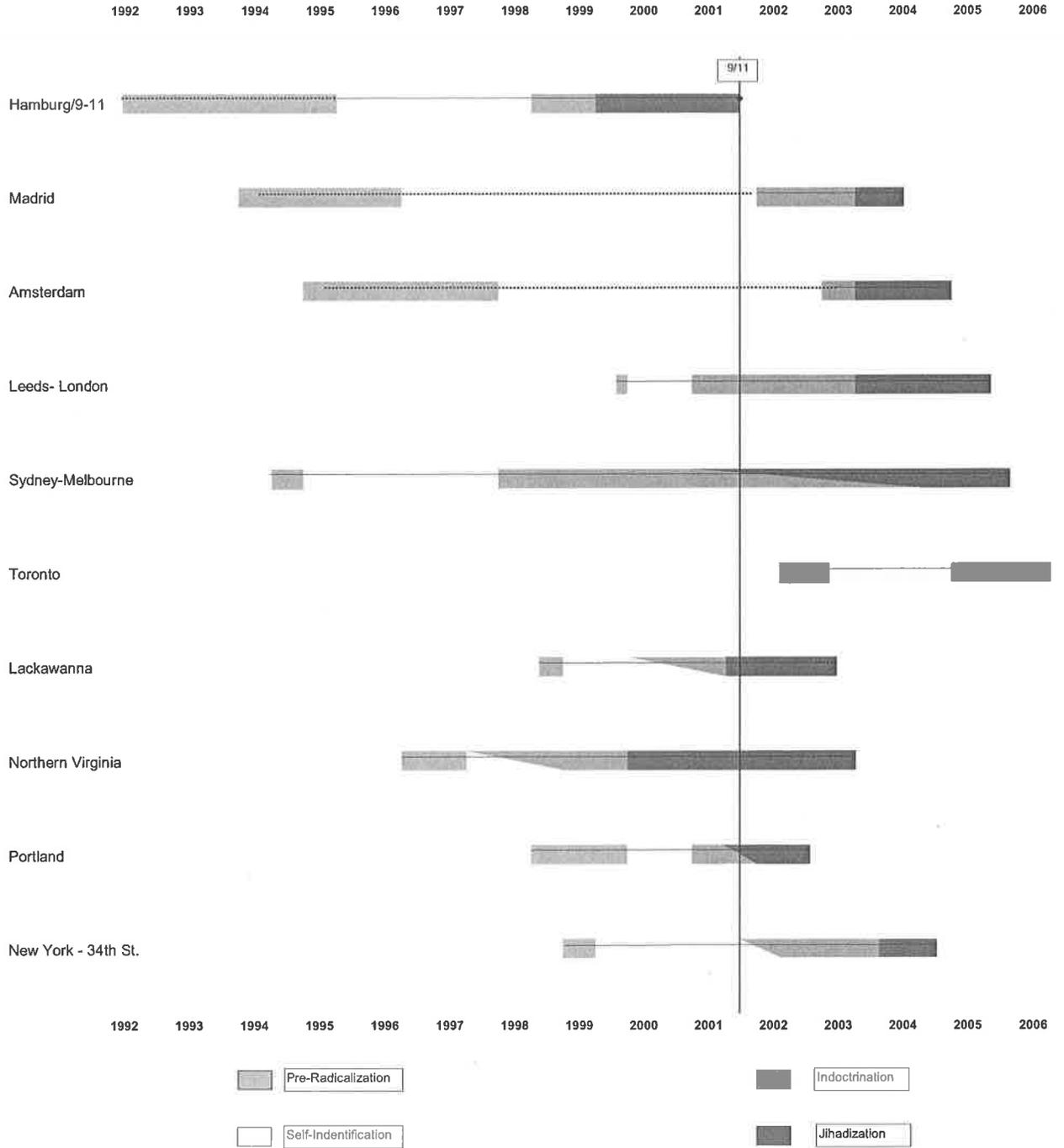
By the end of 1999, the group's adoption and indoctrination into jihadi ideology became complete. Discussions shifted from debates on whether or not jihad was legitimate or not to where and how should they become jihadists. The group now wanted to fight; it just had to choose the war.

- Originally, the group had planned to go to Chechnya to fight the Russians. Russian atrocities against Muslims in Chechnya had motivated them to join the jihad. However, as a result of a chance meeting on a bus, they were discouraged from going to Grozny and instead decided to go to Afghanistan for training.
 - Mohammed Zammar, the auto mechanic and former mujahedeen, played an important role in helping them realizing their goal of participating in jihad as he ran a "travel agency" for jihadists seeking to go to Afghanistan.¹⁴¹
 - In November of 1999, Atta, al-Shibh, al-Shehi and Jarrah departed Germany for jihad training in Afghanistan. Following a route designed by Zammar, at least two flew via Turkish airways to Karachi, Pakistan via Istanbul, Turkey. From there it was on to Kandahar, Afghanistan.¹⁴²

- **Training/Preparation.** Once in Afghanistan, Atta and company were approached by Khalid Sheikh Mohammed and recruited for the September 11 plot. There they met other al-Qaeda-trained conspirators Hani Hanjour, Khalid al-Midhar and Nawaf al-Hazmi.
 - Upon Atta and his three fellow compatriots' return to Germany, in the spring of 2000, another four from the Hamburg cell--Abdelghani Mzoudi, Mounir Motassadeq, Zakariya Essabar, and Said Bahaji—left Germany to train in Afghanistan.¹⁴³
- **Attack Planning.** Although the targets and mode of attack had already been determined by al-Qaeda, upon his arrival in the United States Mohammad Atta planned every phase of the September 11 operation, including designing the teams and assigning roles for all four groups of hijackers, arranging the flight training, reconnoitering the airplanes and the flights and lastly, choosing the date.
 - Atta was not a veteran mujahedeen, nor was he an experienced or accomplished terrorist. Yet, the September 11 plot's success was enabled by an intelligent and disciplined individual who became radicalized while in a Western country, and "joined" al Qaeda (not recruited from above) while seeking an opportunity to fight in Chechnya. He took on the role of "operational leader" for this plot.
- **The Result.** On the morning of September 11, 2001 the nineteen hijackers carried out their devastating attack on the United States.

Without a group of radicalized jihadists, who had been homegrown in the West to lead this plot, the chances of the 9/11 being a success would have been reduced considerably. The Hamburg group underwent a process of homegrown radicalization that matched almost exactly those of the Madrid, Amsterdam, London, Sydney/Melbourne and Toronto clusters. The primary difference between the 9/11 hijackers and the 7/7 bombers was that when the members of the Hamburg cluster came to Afghanistan in search of becoming mujahedeen, they were recruited for a plot against a third country -- the U.S.-- and not redirected to conduct jihad against their place of residence in the West, as was Mohammed Siddique Khan -- against the U.K.

RADICALIZATION TIMELINE



FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

FINDINGS

- Al-Qaeda has provided the inspiration for homegrown radicalization and terrorism; direct command and control by al-Qaeda has been the exception, rather than the rule among the case studies reviewed in this study.
 - The four stages of the radicalization process, each with its distinct set of indicators and signatures, are clearly evident in each of the nearly one dozen terrorist-related case studies reviewed in this report.
 - In spite of the differences in both circumstances and environment in each of the cases, there is a remarkable consistency in the behaviors and trajectory of each of the plots across all the stages.
 - This consistency provides a tool for predictability.
 - The trans-national phenomenon of radicalization in the West is largely a function of the people and the environment they live in. Much different from the Israeli-Palestinian equation, the transformation of a Western-based individual to a terrorist is not triggered by oppression, suffering, revenge, or desperation. Rather, it is a phenomenon that occurs because the individual is looking for an identity and a cause and unfortunately, often finds them in the extremist Islam.
 - There is no useful profile to assist law enforcement or intelligence to predict who will follow this trajectory of radicalization. Rather, the individuals who take this course begin as “unremarkable” from various walks of life.
 - Europe’s failure to integrate the 2nd and 3rd generation of its immigrants into society, both economically and socially, has left many young Muslims torn between the secular West and their religious heritage. This inner conflict makes them especially vulnerable to extremism—the radical views, philosophy, and rhetoric that is highly advertised and becoming more and more fashionable among young Muslims in the West.
 - Muslims in the U.S. are more resistant, but not immune to the radical message.
 - Despite the economic opportunities in the United States, the powerful gravitational pull of individuals’ religious roots and identity sometimes supersedes the assimilating nature of American society which includes pursuit of a professional career, financial stability and material comforts.
 - The jihadist ideology combines the extreme and minority interpretation [jihadi-Salafi] of Islam with an activist-like commitment or responsibility to solve global political grievances through violence. Ultimately, the jihadist envisions a world in which jihadi-Salafi Islam is dominant and is the basis of government.
 - This ideology is proliferating in Western democracies at a logarithmic rate. The Internet, certain Salafi-based NGO’s, extremist sermons /study groups,
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Salafi literature, jihadi videotapes, extremist-sponsored trips to radical madrassas and militant training camps abroad have served as “extremist incubators” for young, susceptible Muslims -- especially ones living in diaspora communities in the West.

- The Internet is a driver and enabler for the process of radicalization
 - In the Self-Identification phase, the Internet provides the wandering mind of the conflicted young Muslim or potential convert with direct access to unfiltered radical and extremist ideology.
 - It also serves as an anonymous virtual meeting place—a place where virtual groups of like-minded and conflicted individuals can meet, form virtual relationships and discuss and share the Salafi-jihadist message they have encountered.
 - During the Indoctrination phase, when individuals adopt this virulent ideology, they begin interpreting the world from this newly-formed context. Cloaked with a veil of objectivity, the Internet allows the aspiring jihadist to view the world and global conflicts through this extremist lens, further reinforcing the objectives and political arguments of the jihadi-Salafi agenda.
 - In the Jihadization phase, when an individual commits to jihad, the Internet serves as an enabler—providing broad access to an array of information on targets, their vulnerabilities and the design of weapons.
 - Individuals generally appear to begin the radicalization process on their own. Invariably, as they progress through the stages of radicalization they seek like-minded individuals. This leads to the creation of groups or clusters. These clusters appear almost essential to progressing to the Jihadization stage—the critical stage that leads to a terrorist act.
 - “Group think” is one of the most powerful catalysts for leading a group to actually committing a terrorist act. It acts as a force-multiplier for radical thought while creating a competitive environment amongst the group members for being the most radical.
 - Although there are many groups or clusters of individuals that are on the path of radicalization, each group needs certain archetypes to evolve from just being a “bunch of guys” to an operational terrorist cell. All eleven case studies had:
 - A “spiritual sanctioner” who provides the justification for jihad—a justification that is especially essential for the suicide terrorist. In some cases the sanctioner was the nucleus around which the cluster formed.
 - An “operational leader” who is essential as the group decides to conduct a terrorist act—organizing, controlling and keeping the group focused and its motivation high.
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- The full radicalization of a Western individual, or groups of individuals, does not always result in the committing of a terrorist act in the West. Many fully-radicalized individuals have first looked to conduct jihad by becoming mujahedeen and fighting in conflicts overseas.
 - The image of the heroic, holy warrior or “mujahedeen” has been widely marketed on the Internet as well as in jihadi tapes and videos. This image continues to resonate among young, especially Muslim, men 15-35 years-old—men who are most vulnerable to visions of honor, bravery and sacrifice for what is perceived as a noble cause.
 - Among those individuals who travel abroad in search of jihad, some end up as mujahedeen and fight in foreign lands; some are re-directed to commit acts in the West, often in their country of origin, while others give up and return home because they can’t endure the training or have a change of heart.
 - For those groups of homegrown radicalized individuals who do not seek jihad abroad, the dedication and commitment of their leader to jihad is often the main factor in determining whether the group will commit a terrorist act, or not.
 - Although the 9/11 attack, with its overseas origins, is more of an exception in terms of how terrorist plots have been launched since the destruction of the Twin Towers, it has probably been the most important factor in proliferating the process of radicalization, especially in the West. More importantly, 9/11 established the current trend of committing an act in the name of global jihad as a natural culmination of full radicalization and the ultimate responsibility for the fully radicalized jihadist.
 - Prior to 9/11, the entire radicalization process moved at a much slower rate. There was no direct link to jihad, other than to become a mujahedeen. Aspiring jihadists would travel to Afghanistan without any idea that they could become actual terrorists. Now, there is no longer any illusion as to what the adoption of jihadi-Salafi ideology means.
 - The radicalization process is accelerating in terms of how long it takes and the individuals are continuing to get younger. Moreover, with the higher risks associated with heading down this pathway, individuals will seek to conceal their actions earlier, making intelligence and law enforcement’s job even more difficult.
 - It is useful to think of the radicalization process in terms of a funnel. Entering the process does not mean one will progress through all four stages and become a terrorist. However, it also does not mean that if one does not become a terrorist, he or she is no longer a threat. Individuals who have been radicalized but are not jihadists may serve as mentors and agents of influence to those who might become the terrorists of tomorrow.
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- The subtle and non-criminal nature of the behaviors involved in the process of radicalization makes it difficult to identify or even monitor from a law enforcement standpoint. Taken in isolation, individual behaviors can be seen as innocuous; however, when seen as part of the continuum of the radicalization process, their significance becomes more important. Considering the sequencing of these behaviors and the need to identify those entering this process at the earliest possible stage makes intelligence the critical tool in helping to thwart an attack or even prevent the planning of future plots.

IMPLICATIONS

The global jihadi-Salafi movement poses a significant challenge to law enforcement and intelligence since the radicalization phenomenon that drives it is spontaneous, indiscriminate, and its indicators are subtle. Identifying whether an individual is being radicalized is hard to detect, especially in the early stages.

- The individuals are not on the law enforcement radar. Most have never been arrested or involved in any kind of legal trouble. Other than some commonalities in age and religion, individuals undergoing radicalization appear as “ordinary” citizens, who look, act, talk, and walk like everyone around them. In fact, in the United Kingdom, it is precisely those “ordinary” middle class university students who are sought after by local extremists because they are “clean skins”.
- In the early stages of their radicalization, these individuals rarely travel, are not participating in any kind of militant activity, yet they are slowly building the mindset, intention, and commitment to conduct jihad.

As evidenced by all eleven case studies these groups, or clusters of extremists:

- Act autonomously, can radicalize quickly, and often are made up of individuals, who on the surface, appear to be well-integrated into society.
- Are not “name brand” terrorists or part of any known terrorist group. For the most part, they have little or no links to known militant groups or actors. Rather they are like-minded individuals who spend time together in clusters organized, originally, by previously established social network links.
- Are not crime syndicates and therefore, applying organized crime strategies will fail.

The challenge to intelligence and law enforcement agencies in the West in general, and the United States in particular, is how to identify, pre-empt and thus prevent homegrown terrorist attacks given the non-criminal element of its indicators, the high growth rate of the process that underpins it and the increasing numbers of its citizens that are exposed to it.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Salafi – From the word "Salaf" which is short for "Salaf as-Salih" meaning (righteous) predecessors or (pious) ancestors

Salafi is a generic term, depicting a Sunni revivalist school of thought that takes the pious ancestors of the early period of early Islam as exemplary models. Consequently, Salafis seek to purge Islam of all outside influences, starting with the cultures and traditions of contemporary Muslim societies, and restore it to that of an imagined 7th century utopia (the Caliphate). The Salafi interpretation of Islam seeks a "pure" society that applies the Quran literally and adheres to the social practices and Islamic law (sharia) that prevailed at the time of the prophet Muhammad in the 7th century in Arabia.

jihadi-Salafi – A militant interpretation of the Salafi school of thought that identifies violent jihad as the means to establish and revive the Caliphate. Militant jihad is seen not as an option, but as a personal obligation. This obligation is elevated above other moral standards, which may be abrogated.

Mujahedeen – holy warriors who fight infidels as a religious duty

Takfir – the practice of declaring that an individual, or a group previously considered Muslims, are in fact kaffir(s) (non-believers in God), an act of accusing others of disbelief, used in the context of branding certain persons or whole communities as unbelievers to religiously justify jihad against them.

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