

## Chapter 5

# **After Bin Laden: Jihadist Terrorist Use of Strategic Communication to Enlarge the Community of Believers**

**Carsten Bockstette**<sup>1</sup>

### **Introduction**

On May 1<sup>st</sup> 2011, the spiritual leader of al-Qaeda, bin Laden, was killed in a counter terrorist operation. One year earlier, in May 1<sup>st</sup> 2010, Mr. Faisal Shahzad, a thirty year old Pakistani legal immigrant to the United States, tried to blow up a car bomb parked on Times Square, one of the busiest areas of New York City. For technical reasons, the bomb failed to properly ignite. This unsuccessful attack demonstrated once again the ability of the terrorist cause to recruit self-radicalized adherents.

In this instance, the self-radicalization happened partially due to the effective use of strategic communication. For al-Qaeda, strategic communication is a vital part of its asymmetrical war fighting campaign. Countering this threat requires knowledge of what motivates, feeds, and “sanctions” radical Islamist terrorists and their followers. Research and analysis of the root causes and underlying conditions, motivators, and enablers of terrorism—including the propaganda strategies of terrorists—are vital to shaping appropriate countermeasures to the threat from radical Islamist terrorism. The mass media, and especially the Internet, have become the key enablers and the main strategic communication assets for terrorists and have ensured them a favorable communication asymmetry. With these assets, terrorists are able to compensate for a significant part of their unfavorable asymmetry as measured in conventional military power. Al-Qaeda-networked terrorists place a great deal of emphasis on developing comprehensive communication strategies in order to reach their desired short-, mid-, and long-term goals, as well as their desired end states. They craft their strategies based on careful audience analysis, and adapt their messages and delivery methods accordingly, adhering to the fundamental rules

---

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Bockstette, German Bundeswehr officer, has served in CTWG, and is a specialist in terrorism who has lectured at the NATO school and other defense institutions.

underlying any communication or public relations campaign. Their skillful use of the mass media, cell phones and the Internet to compensate for asymmetrical disadvantages has enabled them to keep generating new generations of radical Islamist terrorists.

The recent fusion of terrorist messages with the global mass media has allowed terrorism to take on a worldwide dimension. For the purposes of this chapter, terrorism is defined as political violence in an asymmetrical conflict that is designed to induce terror and psychic fear (sometimes indiscriminate) through the violent victimization and destruction of noncombatant targets or iconic symbols. Such acts are intended to send a message to a local, national, or global community from a non-statist illicit, clandestine organization. The purpose of terrorism is to exploit the media in order to achieve maximum attainable publicity as a force multiplier in order to influence the targeted audience(s) in pursuit of short- and mid-term political goals and/or desired long-term end states.

As has been observed by Brian Jenkins and others, terrorists do not primarily aim at producing maximum physical damage with their attacks, but, rather, strive for the greatest possible psychological effect. Terrorism uses a strategy that primarily relies on the symbolic strength of the act. Thus terror does not primarily serve the purposes of fighting, injuring, or destroying the opponent; rather, its primary purpose lies in the conveying of messages to the target audience(s). Terrorists perpetrate their acts without regard for the conventions of warfare. The symbolism originating from terrorist acts and the media marketing thereof is intended to address the broad public, to use them as a vehicle and a communication channel to influence the political representatives/decision makers and other target audiences like potential recruits. Al-Qaeda offers a coherent worldview with a simplistic, unitary explanation of ostensibly disparate phenomena that neatly packages the potential recruit's frustrations with the struggles of Muslims across the globe. In these messages, there are only two choices: continue to suffer, or join the jihadists and fight the oppressor.

In this context, I define strategic communication as the systematic planning and realization of information flow, communication, media development, and image care with a long-term horizon. Strategic communication conveys deliberate messages through the most suitable media to designated audiences at the appropriate time to contribute to and achieve the desired long-term effect. It has to bring three factors into balance: the messages, the media channels, and the audiences.

This kind of terrorism is ostensibly motivated by an extreme, literal interpretation of Islam. Its practitioners regard the use of violence as a divine duty or sacramental act (EUROPOL 2007). Al-Qaeda's self-proclaimed goal is to reinvigorate the Islamic Ummah and to mobilize the Muslim community in a revolutionary transformation of the Muslim world population to participate in a confrontation with the international order embodied by Western society. Al-Qaeda, and like-minded groups, strive for the creation of a new global Islamic caliphate, which Islamist terrorists widely consider to be the ideal Islamic form

of government to represent the political unity and leadership of the Muslim world. Relying on successful agitation and increasingly self-radicalization, they strive to expand the Ummah. In a 2006 interview, the al-Qaeda ideologue and second-in-command Abu Musab-al Zarqawi explained the jihadists' goal thus:

“Our political agenda, ... is that of the saying of the Prophet (peace be upon him), I have been sent with the sword, between the hands of the hour, until Allah is worshipped alone ... this is what determines our political goal. We fight in the way of Allah, until the law of Allah is implemented, and the first step is to expel the enemy, then establish the Islamic state, then we set forth to conquer the lands of Muslims to return them back to us, then after that, we fight the kuffar (unbelievers) until they accept one of the three. I have been sent with the sword, between the hands of the hour; this is our political agenda.”

## **Short-term Goals**

In the short term, the terrorists' primary aim is to enlarge the scope of their supportive patronage. Therefore, the persuasion and self-radicalization of receptive global Muslim audiences via the heightening of an Islamic identity in confrontation with the West is one of their primary short-term goals. As Brian Michael Jenkins illustrates, “the recruiting vocabulary focuses on humiliation, shame and guilt, contrasted with dignity, duty and honor.” Or, as John Venhaus notes: “The al-Qaeda legend portrays the group as the acme of jihad, and this legend is its greatest asset. It is a glorious, wispy presence, just out of reach, which only the most dedicated, most committed, and purest of heart can hope to obtain.”

In addition, the terrorists exploit troop presents and their military action in the Muslim world in order to implement their media strategy. The presence of troops and their actions produce the desired graphic footage of “occupation of Islamic nations” like Afghanistan, Iraq and parts of the Caucasus that furthers their media-centered strategy. It thrives on emotive images and words about every innocent civilian killed by Western bombs transmitted via television and the Internet, producing intense antipathy towards the West. Building on this sentiment, the terrorists can more effectively call for the end of foreign influence in Muslim countries. Therefore, even though it is an obvious contradiction, another of their stated short-term goals is to drive those they call invaders from Muslim nations.

## **Intermediate and Long-term Goals**

In the mid-term, al-Qaeda's goals include the removal of all political leaders who currently govern secular Muslim states and the elimination of the state of Israel. The terrorists' aim is to install supportive Islamic regimes and transform the current fractious political landscape of the Muslim world from a decentralized network organization to a massive Islamic movement that strives toward their desired end state. The 2011 Arab Spring is the opposite of what al-Qaeda strives for. Like Abu-t-Tanvir Kavkazskii, a leading ideologist of the Caucasus

Emirates Jihadist Network, stated in 2010: "In the near future we can assume that after the liberation of the Caucasus, Jihad will begin in Idel-Ural and (...) all these lands will again be a united state living only by the law of Allah – the Caliphate."

Al-Qaeda's primary long-term goal is to restore a devout Islamic caliphate by politically uniting all countries that have a Muslim majority into an Islamic realm through a monolithic Islamic religious and social movement. The desired end state is the caliphate's rule worldwide. Al-Qaeda's communication strategy is inseparable from their political strategy, as their terrorism and rhetoric alike work toward their common goals and desired end state. Consequently, their communication goals are based on their short-, mid-, and long-term goals. Their primary long-term strategic communication goal is the propagation and enlargement of their movement through the global dissemination of information among receptive Muslim audiences and potential converts to expand the Ummah. The terrorist communication strategy aims ultimately at a fundamental restructuring of the political discourse and identity of the Islamic world.

The legitimization of al-Qaeda's movement and methods—establishing its social and religious viability while they engage in violent acts—requires a continuous communication effort. Their violent methods and the killing of innocent people inevitably face contradictions with some of the core tenets of Islam. This built-in drag on the organization's legitimacy can in the long run only be circumvented through an unceasing communication effort in which, as Weimann notes, "Violence is presented as a necessity foisted upon the weak as the only means with which to respond to an oppressive enemy." Therefore, legitimacy and the ostensible demonstration of compliance with Islamic law are prominent in their communication strategy. The utopia of their aimed-for end state and their Islamist-jihadist worldview fulfills a significant purpose: the utopia is not only the goal of their violent action, but also its moral and religious justification. They try to portray their movement as one made up of freedom fighters, forced against their will to use violence due to a ruthless enemy that is crushing the rights and dignity of their community. They communicate the messages to reinvigorate a pan-Muslim identity with a vengeful defiant underdog narrative in which Islam is under constant and global attack. This makes legitimization of their terroristic deeds their second strategic communication goal.

The coercion and intimidation of opponents both nearby and abroad is al-Qaeda's third main strategic communication goal. The near enemy is composed of apostates, or secular Muslim regimes, especially ones that receive Western (in the case of the Caucasus-Russian) support. The far enemy is, in their view, made up of Jews, unbelievers, and Western society as a whole. They try to manipulate the near enemy in order to reach their mid-term political goal of removing the near enemy from power. They also try to intimidate the far enemy into a complete withdrawal from the Muslim world and a removal of support from secular Muslim regimes (i.e., "the near enemy"). The effective propagation

of the desired end state—global rule by a devout Islamic caliphate—is the all-embracing long-term communication goal.

## **Communication Infrastructure**

During the 1990s, al-Qaeda communicated with their audience using more traditional means, such as storytelling, journalist interviews, fax, face-to-face propaganda, and even press conferences. At the end of 1998, there was a shift in the primary means of strategic communications due to technological advances and the rise of the Al-Jazeera television network. Al-Jazeera became a channel for broadcasting al-Qaeda's messages to the Muslim world, and would then provide the tapes to CNN and other international news organizations. To a certain extent, the media mutated from its role as a critical observer and reporter and, perhaps unwittingly, came to play an increasingly active role as a conflict participant.

After 11 September 2001, al-Qaeda expanded its communication infrastructure and methods of communication considerably. Importantly, that year saw the formation of the As-Sahab (The Cloud) Islamic Media Publication Company. It is essentially the main entity of the media production division of al-Qaeda, which relies heavily on the Internet. As of 2007 Mohamed Abayath aka Abd al-Rahman al Maghrebi is steering As-Sahab as leader of the al-Qaeda Media committee. Today, al-Qaeda communicates primarily through three media communication channels: Fajr, the Global Islamic Media Front, and As Sahab.

The organizational structure changed after the loss of Afghanistan as a physical base for al-Qaeda. The conversion from a clandestine organization to a decentralized, open network organization represented the Islamist terrorist movement's only possible means of survival. Their previous dependence on traditional broadcast mass media was replaced and its impact was multiplied by their adoption of the Internet as their medium of choice and supplemented by the dissemination via CDs, DVDs, cell phones and night letters. After losing their base in Afghanistan, al-Qaeda decreased the size of their attacks to a target victimization of around 50 to 200 casualties, like the bombing of the Marriott Hotel in Islamabad on 20 September 2008. The blast of 600 kg of RDX and TNT occurred hours after Pakistan's new president, Asif Ali Zardari, told the Pakistani parliament that the country would continue its fight against terrorism. Bigger and more complex operations with thousands of victims, like the attacks on New York and Washington in September 2001, are no longer the operational norm. The risk that operations of this scope could be detected and stopped by law enforcement and intelligence agencies is too great. According to a report to the Committee on Foreign Relations of the United States Senate from January 2010, intelligence and military officials agree that al-Qaeda's capacity to carry out large-scale operations has been significantly degraded. Their financial and popular support is declining and allied operations have killed or captured much of al-Qaeda's leadership. Many terrorists have taken refuge across the Afghan border in Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Area. This area largely remains a major safe haven. According to intelligence

and counter-terrorism officials, hundreds have relocated primarily to Yemen and Somalia. Both of these nations have weak central governments that exercise little or no control over vast swaths of their own territory. According to the former Director of the US National Intelligence, Dennis C. Blair, al-Qaeda “today is less capable and effective than it was a year ago.” In June 2009, Mustafa Abu al-Yazid, al-Qaeda’s leader in Afghanistan, released an audio message asking desperately for money: Al-Qaeda members were short of food, weapons and other needed supplies.

Radical Islamist terrorists now resort to the tactic of “guideless resistance,” in which responsibility for planning operations rests solely with the decentralized actor (Abu Musab al Suri wrote a lengthy essay on this scheme). Decentralized operations became even more important after the death of bin Laden in 2011. In recent years, these attacks are increasingly committed by self-radicalized Muslims and self-radicalized converts. Al-Qaeda concentrates on producing abstract directives and “motivational” audio and video calls in order to steer their movement. Processes running in parallel and coordinated via the World Wide Web enable the jihadist terrorists to survive as a loosely connected network. The fusion of interpersonal communication, e.g., cell phones and mass communication—connecting audience members who all can also be publishers or broadcasters at the same time via the World Wide Web—enhances the resonating space available to terrorists and greatly increases their access to audiences.

Even though mainstream press outlets tend to adhere mainly to official news sources, the terrorist message still receives abundant international coverage. There is always the clear danger that the mainstream press will become the outlet for the state’s or the terrorists’ “spin” if their research and investigation does not provide the necessary intellectual context and depth.

The intensive, sometimes obsessive coverage in the media given to a terrorist act often generates the desired psychological effect. Terrorist actions are planned and organized in a manner that causes a strategically maximum communicative impact, while requiring minimal resources. The symbiotic relationship between terror events and the media is apparent: the perpetrators would have far less impact without media publicity, and the media can hardly be expected to resist reporting on terror events. Terrorists already make abundant use of the Internet for internal and external communication. They raise capital, franchise their brand names, lay the basis for self-radicalization to recruit followers, find partners and suppliers, provide training materials through their online library, and manage operations. Terrorists capture information about the users who browse their sites. Users who seem most interested in their terroristic cause or well suited to carrying out its work are then contacted, but more often, they try to get in contact with al-Qaeda themselves. Regularly the recruits followed a “bunch of guys.” The theory was proposed by Marc Sageman. According to Sageman, the individual usually seeks information about al-Qaeda through friends and associates.

## **Al-Qaeda's Media Structure**

For years, terrorists could rely on an almost streamlined Islamic media infrastructure, which willingly conveyed the desired messages and videotapes and helped terrorist groups shape a "brand name." Until the advent of the Internet, terrorists focused their attention on television, radio, or the print media. But these traditional media have "selection thresholds," which are multi-stage processes of editorial selection over which terrorists have no control. In addition to this obstacle, by early 2003 the media environment in the Arab world had begun to fragment, becoming increasingly crowded and competitive. A growing array of satellite television stations began to ensure competition and therefore a diversity of opinion, which hampers the communication strategy of the terrorists on the TV front. The quantity and volume of anti-al-Qaeda voices in the Arab media have dramatically increased since 2003, with many al-Qaeda-linked terror attacks being met by a chorus of Arab criticism and condemnation. Public opinion polls have shown steep declines in support for al-Qaeda, particularly in countries directly affected by its terror attacks. Facebook, Twitter and Arab satellite television became one of the strongest forces today pushing for change in the region, and that represents one of the biggest obstacles to al-Qaeda's agenda of imposing a monolithic Islamic identity through a streamlined Muslim media voice. It therefore poses the greatest challenge to the terrorists' political vision, and accelerated the use of the Internet as an information-spreading platform to compensate for the loss of satellite TV as a friendly media outlet. This further entrenches the Internet as they key enabler and main strategic communication infrastructure asset for terrorists. As Abu Omar expressed it, "We are the energy behind the path to jihad. Just like the jihadis reached their target on September 11, we will reach ours through the Internet."

## **Target Audiences and Communication Channels**

While some propaganda messages are intended for a broad audience, the majority are tailored to a particular target group. The messages, the channels by which these messages are communicated, and the languages they use are customized to suit the special needs of the target group. The terrorists select and segment the strategically desired target audience, the transmitting medium, and the targets for destruction. They determine the location and timing of their actions to satisfy media criteria for newsworthiness that fit in with the media's deadlines and news cycles in order to effectively reach the desired audience. The actual violent operation is embedded within their strategic communication efforts as, for example, the suicide bombers in Moscow's subway system by the "Caucasus Emirate" Jihadi Network in March 2010 showed. Radical Islamist terrorists have become extremely adept at exploiting the unique attributes of the Internet. It offers the possibility to communicate in near real time. The Internet is also used extensively as a terrorist knowledge transfer base and education medium for the movement's own followers. Further, they use the

medium extensively for command and control, to gather intelligence, and to distribute information among their sympathetic audience to stimulate self-radicalisation. The Internet has enabled the rise of numerous loose and decentralized terrorist networks and enables terrorist groups to operate like decentralized franchises or freelancers. This revolutionary electronic medium enables the terrorists to operate as virtual transnational organizations and reach their audiences around the globe to maintain group identity, indoctrinate new members, and demonstrate the implementation of its revolutionary ideology and principles. The Internet, as an uncensored medium, carries information regardless of its validity or potential impact. It allows even small groups to amplify their messages and exaggerate their importance and the size of the threat that they pose. The target audiences of the Radical Islamist terrorists can be divided into two groups: those who lie outside and inside the Ummah.

### **The Ummah**

Ummah is an Arabic word used to describe the Muslim diaspora or, more precisely, “Community of Believers” (or “Nation of Believers”) and thus the global community of Muslims. This group can be segmented into insiders and outsiders of the al-Qaeda audience. The outsiders include two groups: the sympathizers and the neutrals. They consist of the Muslims and converts who could potentially be persuaded to become Ummah insiders and in a follow on step develop into active al-Qaeda terrorist. In the long run, major portions of this audience are needed in joining the community of ummah insiders to realize the desired end state of a global devout Islamic caliphate. This means in consequence that the terrorists’ primary target audience is neither a minority of radicalized terrorists nor the public of the nations with a Muslim minority, but the vast majority of the Muslim public and potential converts. Not in possession of a central recruiting organization (autonomous jihad), the main communication channels for reaching this vast audience consist of face-to-face methods, utilizing prayers, speeches, and sermons in mosques and madrassas; the mass media; and increasingly, the Internet. Especially for converts, the internet plays a significant role. In order to stimulate transformation of Muslim and non-Muslim Ummah outsiders to Ummah insiders and jihadists, the terrorist network provides inspiration for homegrown self-radicalization. Social networks and local group dynamics, especially peer pressure plays a significant role in forging intimate emotional ties. Suffering identity crises, a majority of jihadists began as “unremarkable” individuals living ordinary lives, before they were “reborn” in their late teens and early twenties as Ummah insiders. Next to other competing models, the New York Police Department developed a compelling four-phased model in 2007 describing this multi-step self-radicalization process:

1. Pre-radicalization phase

Receptive individuals initiate the first step, the so-called pre-radicalization phase. This step characterizes the period before every process of radicalization in which the individual lives an essentially ordinary life,

not showing any ambitions to become an Ummah insider or to convert to Islam in the first place. In a two year research project that investigated the difference between violent and non-violent radicals, 58 in-depth profiles of “homegrown” terrorists were analyzed. The study by Jamie Barlett et al. found that usually the recruits have experienced some degree of societal exclusion, experienced an identity crisis of sorts, a hatred for western foreign policy and/or felt a disconnection from their local community. This is in a similar way supported by John Venhaus, a career psychological operations officer experienced with foreign media influence operations. He came to the conclusion that potential recruits have unfulfilled needs to define themselves. He divides them in four groups: The revenge seekers need an outlet for their frustration, the status seekers need recognition, the identity seekers need a group to join, and the thrill seekers need their need for adventure saturated. Al-Qaeda presents itself as the best way to satisfy their needs by providing a clear narrative that appeals to their concerns.

## 2. Self-identification phase

Frequently, the occurrence of an unexpected event triggers the individual to, if not already Muslim, convert to Islam and join the Ummah and continue on to become an Ummah insider. Often, a key political, social, personal or economical occurrence or message shakes the individuals' certitude in previous held beliefs and leads to some kind of cognitive attitudinal shift that catalyzes the individual to be “reborn” as Ummah insider. This occurrence marks the beginning of the self-identification phase. The Jihad-Salafi ideology and derived communication messages provide simple answers to complex disputes. These messages resonate especially well with certain politically naïve Muslims and converts. In general, they have an inadequate understanding of their own religion. That makes them vulnerable to misinterpretations of religious doctrines by jihadist advocates. The messages generally justify and endorse the use of violence against all kinds of kafir (non-believers). Based on moral outrage, al-Qaeda propagates three key messages to receptive individuals that reverberate with personal experience in this phase:

- Broadly appealing message to withdrawal from the impure mainstream society and the need for violent action to cleanse it
- Jihad is represented as the only way to permanently resolve glaring problems of global injustice faced by Muslims
- It incites moral outrage against perceived attacks upon Islam.

After the individual has been inspired to self-radicalize, they are now Ummah insiders. The Ummah insiders consist of two groups as well: the supporters and followers. The supporters are committed Muslim radicals who provide operational, financial, administrative or potential “ultimate” support to the global al-Qaeda movement as martyr. For this audience, the main communication channel is the Internet, with the

mass broadcast media providing a secondary avenue. But reaching both elements of the Ummah is crucially important to the jihadist movement. As Ayman al-Zawahiri stated in July 2004: "We are in a battle, and more than half of this battle is taking place in the battlefield of the media.... (W)e are in a media battle for the hearts and minds of our Ummah." Yet expanding the Ummah alone is not sufficient. Al-Qaeda needs indoctrinated terrorists to actively, and violently, support al-Qaeda's goals.

### 3. Indoctrination-phase

Therefore, this development is followed by the indoctrination phase. Using strategic communication methods, Ummah insiders are stimulated to be more receptive for Jihadi-Salafi messages and to seek information to reinforce their newfound spiritual commitment. At the same time, they are looking for like-minded Ummah members to exchange beliefs and increase their commitments. Usually eager acolytes coalesce into autonomous cells in small like-minded groups (in effect, mini Ummah's). These mini Ummah's function as catalysts, creating a competitive peer pressured environment amongst the members vying to be the most radical. Converts seem to be the most zealous members trying to prove their new religious convictions more aggressively. Within these mini-Ummah's common physically stimulating group leisure activities, like soccer, serve as additional binding forces. This radicalization process makes little noise and is therefore hard for security services to detect. Many self radicalized mini Ummah members at some point in this phase come into contact with a charismatic al-Qaeda leader or radical Imam who effectively function as communication channel, providing ideological background and moral justification by communicating and propagating suitable messages.

### 4. Jihadization-phase

The final step in the radicalization process is the Jihadization-phase, in which the Ummah insider is indoctrinated to the extent that he is willing to commit terrorist attacks and possibly sacrifices his life in order to prove the firmness of his beliefs as a jihadi by becoming a martyr. The main attribute of this phase is characterized by the readiness to perform as terrorist.

## **The Adversary Outsiders**

This audience includes apostate secular Muslim regimes, sometimes referred to as troublemakers, and all unbelievers: the so-called crusaders, Zionists, Apostates, Jews, and the West, of which the United States is considered the leader. These segments are further dissected into the near enemy (apostates, secular Muslim regimes) and the far enemy (Jews, Unbelievers, and Western society). The preferred communication channel to reach these groups is the global mass media, especially television, with the Internet playing a secondary role.

## Findings and Recommendations

That terrorists use strategic communication techniques is certain, as this article has attempted to demonstrate. The terrorists have defined their communication objectives, developed their communication tactics, and established the media strategies necessary to reach these communication goals.

Al-Qaeda's communication goals aim at legitimizing their methods, propagating their membership, and intimidating their opponents. They customize their strategies based on thorough audience research, and shape their messages and media choices accordingly, following the established rules of any successful public relations campaign. Their skillful use of many forms of electronic media has enabled them to promote their message and continually win new adherents to their cause. Through Strategic Communication, al-Qaeda provides the inspiration for becoming an Ummah insider and for homegrown radicalization. Becoming an al-Qaeda terrorist is a gradual, multi-step process. It usually involves informal congregations and prayer groups in mosques, cafes, schools, prisons and via the internet. Eager acolytes often coalesce into autonomous "mini Ummah's." Their unremarkable record, background and appearance make it especially difficult for law enforcement agencies to expose a potential self-radicalized terrorist. There is no single psychological/sociological/ethnological profile. They usually do not easily fit into one distinct economic profile. Often they seem to be seeking adventure, esteem in the eyes of their peers looking for a sense of brotherhood and a sense of purpose.

Nevertheless, overall the recruiting process seems to be inefficient and the yield is low. This information asymmetry must be further undermined in order to counter the threat of a growing radicalization of the Muslim community more effectively. This can best be accomplished by calling al-Qaeda's credibility into question. It is possible to counteract the three primary communication goals of the terrorists that have been outlined in this essay: legitimization, propagation, and intimidation. Next to eliminating the root causes and alleviating the underlying conditions, motivators, and enablers of terrorism—e.g., rooting out the terrorists' physical bases—developing an effective counter strategic communication plan that exploits weaknesses and contradictions in al-Qaeda's use of strategic communication is a vital step in winning the asymmetrical conflict with terrorists.

A successful counter strategic communication plan must destroy the psychological appeal of the al-Qaeda "name brand" by destroying and displacing the feelings that draw young men to the cause. In this context, President Barak Obama sent a very strong communicative message to all potential recruits, and potential and current terroristic leaders right after bin Laden's death: Terrorist leaders cannot hide. The US-President can (virtually personally) hunt down any terroristic leader, while safely watching the operation live from the White House. This message is of the same communicative magnitude as the 2001 attacks. This message will have even greater impact than the fact that bin Laden can no longer execute al-Qaeda leadership functions.

But at the same time, options need to be presented that satisfy adolescent developmental needs, to reduce the likelihood for al-Qaeda of becoming the chosen path. Being radical and rebelling against the received values of the status quo is, as much research has illustrated, an important part of being an adolescent. Effective ways must be found to ensure that young individuals can be radical, dissenting, and make a difference, without it resulting in serious or violent consequences. A good way to fight radical ideas is with a liberal attitude to dissent, radicalism and disagreement. Governments must focus on the things they can realistically change. But the lead role ultimately rests with society at the local level. Individuals, groups, organizations and communities that understand and respond to these complexities at the individual level play a significant role. Radical ideas that do not break the law should be given air, but they should be debated and renounced. Governments and, more importantly, independent voices, especially Muslims, have to set out clear counter arguments as to why particular radical ideas are wrong. Local social workers, teachers and sports coaches with local street credibility should play a central role.

The first phase in developing an effective counter-communication plan is research. The goal of this phase is to take a comprehensive look at all the variables that will have an impact. To attain a complete picture of the root causes that are driving the terrorists, it is crucial to research and synthesize the causes at different levels. This includes mapping the spectrum at the individual, group, societal, and governmental levels. Besides political sciences, it involves numerous additional academic fields like computer science, comparative sociology and religion, psychology, and ethnology. Addressing the underlying root causes that facilitate self-radicalization, recruitment and support for terrorists is an elementary part of such an effort. Alternatives to extremism need to be offered for development of the revenge-, status-, identity- and thrill-seekers in our societies, so that they do not fall for al-Qaeda. Our society must offer them what they are searching for.

The fragmented strategic communications efforts in nations opposing the effective pervasiveness of al-Qaeda need to be harmonized. In order to successfully employ a strategic counter communication plan, it has to be woven into a comprehensive approach of coercive military and law enforcement measures and conciliatory political, diplomatic, and socio-economic measures. These measures and the counter-communication plan have to be synchronized at all levels of government (political, diplomatic, law enforcement, military, and intelligence) and with our partners and allies in order to harmonize international efforts within a grand strategy. This grand strategy—a comprehensive approach as security philosophy—is an all-embracing approach that can only be developed within networked security structures based on a comprehensive international security rationale that effectively combines civilian and military instruments. Data on terrorism research should, as far as possible, be made public and shared to reduce the “hidden knowledge” in disparate databases and disconnected researchers. We need to move further from a “need to know” to a “need to share” mentality – that is, move away from risk aversion and in-

formation protection to more risk acceptance and broader information dissemination. By internationally democratizing data and integrating both qualitative and quantitative information utilizing different academic fields, we can dramatically increase our knowledge and bring greater empiricism to this field of research.

Al-Qaeda's capacity to carry out large-scale operations has been significantly degraded. Their financial and popular support is declining and allied operations have killed or captured much of al-Qaeda's leadership. The communication management by the White House of bin Laden's death on May 1<sup>st</sup> 2011 was a historic asymmetric communicative turning point to the disadvantage of al-Qaida. In recent years bin Laden had become the ideological figurehead. Bin Laden was one iconic symbol without whom al-Qaida will not recuperate to its former strength. Without his leadership, spiritual guidance and virtual recruiting power, al-Qaeda lost direction, cohesion and its inspiration. If David Rapoport's four waves' theory of international terrorism is applicable, the wave of recruits radicalizing in society might have past its peak and is on a decline. According to the EUROPOL Terrorism Situation and Trend Report 2010, the overall number of all types' terrorist attacks in all Member States in 2009 decreased by 33% compared to 2008 and is almost half of the number of attacks reported in 2007. The fourteenth-century ideology promoted by al-Qaeda and the indifferent killing of innocent people, both Muslims and unbelievers, holds little appeal for the majority of Muslims. According to Peter Waldmann, they have no wish to live under a repressive theocratic dictatorship in a new Islamic caliphate striving for global domination. The Facebook and Twitter revolutions in Bahrain, Egypt, Libya, Syria, Tunisia, and Yemen clearly showed that al-Qaeda's ideology is not appealing and its influence is diminishing. The Arab Spring in conjunction with the death of bin Laden will further accelerate al-Qaeda's decline. If the terrorists' effective strategic communication—and in particular their use of the Internet—can be curtailed by a counter-communication plan embedded in a grand strategy as part of an internationally unified effort, the basis of their favorable asymmetry can be eroded. If al-Qaeda can be prevented from expanding the pool of Ummah insiders and generating self-radicalized adolescents and young adults, finding new physical bases in safe havens or in ungoverned areas, including those on the World Wide Web, jihadism may ultimately prove to be yet another instance of fanatical backlash that eventually fades.

## Homegrown Terrorism Reaches the United States

**John J. Le Beau**

Following the 9/11 attacks, and for some time thereafter, a familiar litany in U.S. counterterrorism circles was that the country did not have a real problem with terrorist leanings within its own Moslem community. Generally, it was conterminously asserted that Europe, by contrast, was in a more vulnerable position, with signs of radicalization in several countries. The 2005 jihadist attacks in London were cited as an example of this “homegrown terrorism.” All of that changed dramatically in 2009, with the discovery of various jihadist plots by U.S. residents or citizens and, most alarmingly, the successful 2009 assault at Fort Hood, Texas by Major Nidal Hasan that left thirteen dead and many wounded.

Below are listed a number of individuals associated with disrupted plots and attacks targeting the U.S. (not all of them hatched in the U.S.) that were broken up by law enforcement (either FBI or local police departments) before they could be carried out. Some of the accused terrorists cited below are U.S. citizens; others are permanent or temporary legal residents.

- The three Duka brothers, of Albanian ethnic extraction, formed the core of a six man Islamist cell in New Jersey. The men were convicted for “conspiracy to commit murder” in 2008 of training for and planning to carry out a small arms attack against personnel at Fort Dix, a U.S. Army base. The plan had similarities to the Nidal Hasan attack at Fort Hood some years later.
- Najibullah Zazi planned an explosives attack on the New York subway system, and was arrested in September 2009. Zazi is an Afghan citizen and legal resident of the United States. Zazi is accused of having been trained in terrorist camps in Pakistan and planned the attacks on the orders of the external operations chief of al-Qaeda central. Zazi’s father and uncle were indicted on related charges.
- Daniel Patrick Boyd (also known as Saifullah) plead guilty to terrorism charges in February 2011. Boyd is a convert to Islam and fought with the Mujahedeen against the Soviets in Afghanistan in 1989. Boyd was accused of recruiting six individuals, including two of his sons, to participate in violent jihad. Boyd had traveled to Gaza, Israel and Kosovo in the past.
- Coleen Renee LaRose, better known as “Jihadi Jane” in the popular press, was arrested in October 2009 for conspiracy to commit murder and providing material support to terrorists. LaRose is a U.S. citizen and convert to Islam. She pleaded guilty in 2011 to plotting to murder Lars Vilks, a Swedish cartoonist who had drawn one of the controversial “Mohammed cartoons.”
- The “Christmas bomber,” Nigerian citizen Umar Farouq Abdulmutallab. This episode was not “homegrown terrorism” in the sense that the at-

tacker or his co-conspirators were resident in the United States. They were not, and the planned bombing seems to have been designed in Pakistan and Yemen. Nonetheless, it was a plot that was meant to take place in the United States, failed (for technical reasons) and was subsequently handled by domestic U.S. law enforcement – the FBI. The perpetrator confessed, provided information to his interrogators and was subsequently prosecuted on terrorism charges.

- The “Times Square bomber,” Faisal Shahzad, a naturalized U.S. citizen of Pakistani ethnicity, was arrested in May 2010 for attempting to detonate a car bomb in one of the busiest parts of New York City. Shahzad was unrepentant in his court appearance, claiming to be a jihadist warrior.
- Imam Anwar al-Awlaki. Awlaki is a U.S. (and also Yemeni) citizen who traveled to Yemen in 2004 to serve as an internet-based jihadist ideologue. He had served as an imam in the U.S., including in the Washington, D.C. area. Awlaki, an English-speaker regarded by some as charismatic, is a prolific author of Islamist tracts and tapes justifying violent jihad. Awlaki has served as an inspirational figure for several accused or convicted terrorists, and was in direct email contact with Nidal Hasan and others. He is accused by U.S. authorities of being an al Qaeda organizer, recruiter and trainer.
- David Headley (anglicized name; born Daood Sayed Gilani), a U.S. citizen of Pakistani ethnicity, born 1960, plead guilty to terrorism charges in March, 2010. Headley had conducted ground surveillance, covert photography and support activities for the deadly assault on Mumbai hotels in 2008, and the disrupted plot to attack a newspaper office in Denmark.
- Ahmed Ferhani and Mohamed Mamdouh are arrested for plotting to blow up synagogues and churches in multiple attacks planned for New York City. Both individuals are of North African descent. One is a U.S. citizen, the other a legal resident alien. Arrests took place in June 2011.

In addition to the various conspirators who plotted or conducted attacks aimed at the United States, there have also been a number of cases where radicals resident in the United States have traveled to other countries to carry out or support attacks as part of an international jihad. Considerable media attention has been given to the Somali diaspora community, especially in the Minneapolis area. This community has supplied a number of young men (at least twenty according to U.S. government officials) to fight in Somalia on behalf of the Al-Shabab (“The Youth”) terrorist insurgency. Their radicalization, based on the information presently available, appears to have taken place in the United States. They regard their onward travel to Somalia as participation in jihad.