HOME GROWN TERRORISM IN THE UNITED STATES: COMPARING RADICALIZATION TRAJECTORIES IN BRITAIN AND AMERICA

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By

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ABSTRACT

U.S. policymakers need to improve their understanding of the underlying conditions and proximate drivers which appear to prompt and propel radicalization among American citizens to combat the upsurge in homegrown Islamist terrorist plots in the U.S. since 9/11. Keeping in mind that radicalization is a dynamic, inherently personal process that entails a unique combination of environmental strains, ideology, motivations, and socialization processes, this paper examines two case studies to explore whether there are similarities between drivers of radicalization in the United Kingdom and the United States. The comparison of Omar Hammami -- an American citizen who today is a prominent field commander and propagandist for the Somalian terrorist group Al Shabaab -- and Mohammad Sidique Khan -- a British citizen who was the ringleader of the terrorist cell that conducted the 2005 London subway bombings -- highlight the centrality of identity crises, perceived discrimination, and social isolation through involvement in cliques to the radicalization process.

Identity crises typically occur when individuals have trouble reconciling differences between the social and ideological frameworks provided by their families and communities. Such crises become acute when individuals undergoing an identity crisis experience discrimination, real or perceived, firsthand or through a variety of channels including videos, sermons, and the Internet. Social cliques -- small groups of like-minded people -- provide
individuals alienated from society and searching for a new identity with an alternative social network. Clique members only articulate and promote ideologies that reinforced their existing beliefs. This narrow, petri dish environment enables the potent elements of identity crisis and perceived discrimination to incubate, in some cases becoming combustible as individuals move from cognitive to violent extremism.

Although it is not possible to extrapolate definitive conclusions from these case studies alone, they augment current efforts to develop a more detailed body of research on different pathways to radicalization, specifically among individuals who go on to serve as terrorist cell leaders and recruiters. Future research is needed to determine the extent to which these findings are broadly applicable across other case studies, and might have significance for policymakers and counterterrorism practitioners as they develop counter-radicalization strategies.
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INTRODUCTION

For a long time, many in the U.S. thought that our unique melting pot meant we were immune from this threat – this despite the history of violent extremists of all kinds in the United States. That was false hope, and false comfort. This threat is real, and it is serious.

--- Denis McDonough, U.S. Deputy National Security Advisor, 6 March 2011

On November 5, 2009, Major Nidal Malik Hasan, a U.S. Army psychiatrist, entered the Soldier Readiness Center at Fort Hood and opened fire, killing 12 people and wounding 32 others. Adam Gadahn, a California native who has become a spokesperson for Al Qaeda, applauded Hasan’s efforts in an English-language video released by As Sahab (Al Qaeda’s media branch) in March 2010 and encouraged other aspiring terrorists to follow Hasan’s example of selecting reasonable targets which have symbolic resonance. Samir Khan, a Saudi-born American citizen who grew up in New York and North Carolina, is the editor of an English-language magazine called “Inspire” which has been published by Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula since July 2010. The magazine promotes homegrown Islamist terrorism in the West through an edgy, colorful mix of feature stories, photos, theological backgrounders, and hands-on instructions for operating weapons and pursuing violent actions.

American officials have long been concerned with mitigating the potential for terrorist attacks against U.S. interests at home and abroad, particularly in the wake of the 9/11 attacks. However, their attention has been focused largely upon external threats emanating from radical

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Islamist terrorist groups. The incidents outlined above are examples of another type of threat which has undergone a noticeable surge since the spring of 2009, namely the phenomenon of homegrown Islamist terrorist plots. From May 2009 through November 2010, a series of arrests of American citizens or legal permanent residents of the U.S. were made for involvement in twenty-two different homegrown terrorist plots. More homegrown terrorist plots were uncovered in this year and a half timeframe than were uncovered in the seven and a half year period from September 2001 through April 2009.

Even if the upsurge in homegrown Islamist terrorist plots does not reflect a permanent upwards trend, Islamist-inspired homegrown attacks nonetheless pose a distinct challenge for American intelligence and law enforcement agencies. First, it is harder to detect these smaller conspiracies, which will likely develop with greater rapidity than more intricate plots. Second, even if homegrown terrorist attacks are conducted on a smaller scale than conventional terrorist attacks, any successful attack will have considerable physical, psychological, and socioeconomic impact. Third, U.S. citizens who develop radical Islamist leanings and decide to engage in terrorism have an unprecedented ability to travel easily throughout the U.S. and abroad due to their ability to successfully blend in linguistically and culturally. This allows potential terrorists to maneuver more easily without garnering suspicion, including travel to locations where they can participate in terrorist training camps to hone their skills. Moreover, their familiarity with

4 Homegrown terrorists may take many forms, from “lone wolf” individuals to groups which have trained and maintain contact with other transnational terrorist cells. In this paper, the term “homegrown” encompasses all of these individuals and groups, and may be applied by the country in which either the radicalization, planning, or actual terrorist attack took place. See Kimberley Thachuk, Marion Bowman and Courtney Richardson. *Homegrown Terrorism: The Threat Within* (Washington, DC: National Defense University, 2008), 2.


Western practices renders homegrown terrorist quite attractive to the planning branches of organizations such as Al Qaeda, which are eager to leverage the abilities such individuals for their own purposes.\(^7\) For example, U.S. legal resident Najibullah Zazi lived in the U.S. for ten years prior to his arrest for involvement in a September 2009 plot to bomb the New York City subway. Zazi received bomb-making training in Pakistan in 2008 while fighting with Taliban forces, and was persuaded by Al Qaeda operatives to return to the U.S. as a suicide bomber.\(^8\)

American intelligence and law enforcement agencies are currently engaged in a broad range of efforts aimed at disrupting potential domestic terrorist plots, but the federal government has thus far refrained from addressing the issue of how and why some U.S. citizens turn to violent, Islamist-inspired extremism. Nonetheless, the issue of radicalization\(^9\) is fundamental to addressing homegrown terrorism, and an effective national counterterrorism strategy would benefit from integrating a counter-radicalization component that focuses on preventing or disrupting radicalization. Although European experiences with counter-radicalization programs have underlined the inherent difficulty of developing, implementing, and measuring the “success” of such programs, the potential to prevent even a small number of potential terrorists from radicalizing to the point that they are willing to engage in violent extremism render the pursuit of counter-radicalization programs both compelling and advisable.

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7 Al Qaeda experts Peter Bergen and Bruce Hoffman noted in a 2011 article, “A key shift in the past couple of years is the increasingly prominent role in planning and operations that U.S. Citizens and residents have played in the leadership of Al Qaeda and aligned groups.” See Peter Bergen and Bruce Hoffman. “Assessing the Jihadist Terrorist Threat to America and American Interests.” Studies in Conflict and Terrorism 34:2 (2011): 65-101.


9 Many scholars make a distinction between cognitive radicalization and violent radicalization, and there seems to be a tentative consensus that the former precedes the latter. In this analysis, the term radicalization is defined as the “process of a change in attitude whereby an individual or a group adopts extreme Islamist views and uses these views to justify extra-constitutional, violent acts designed to bring about political change.”
To begin developing effective counter-radicalization tactics, U.S. policymakers must first improve their understanding of the underlying conditions and proximate drivers that appear to prompt and propel radicalization among American citizens. Since the phenomenon of homegrown Islamist terrorism in the United States has emerged relatively recently, there is currently a dearth of extensive research on the subject of radicalization among American citizens.\(^\text{10}\) However, there is a substantive body of research on drivers of radicalization among immigrant and convert populations in Europe. This paper endeavors to add to the nascent scholarship on homegrown terrorism in the United States by comparing the radicalization trajectories of homegrown Islamist-inspired terrorists in Britain and the United States. The main research question of this paper is: *how similar are the drivers of radicalization in the United Kingdom and the United States?*

**Paper Scope**

While it is certainly true that incidents of homegrown terrorism in the United States are not exclusive to Islamist-inspired plots, these plots do comprise a significant subcategory with unique characteristics that must be taken into consideration by researchers, counter-terrorism practitioners, and policy makers. Community development and law enforcement programs should seek to mitigate the potential for all forms of extremism. However, social science research indicates that such efforts must be carefully tailored to individual needs to be effective. This paper therefore focuses on Islamist-inspired radicalization to further develop the current body of research on homegrown radicalization in the United States.

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\(^{10}\) Vidino correctly points out that there have been incidents of Islamist-inspired homegrown terrorism in the U.S. dating back to the 1970s. However, he also concedes that these incidents differ in many ways from today’s prototypical phenomenon. See Lorenzo Vidino. “Homegrown Jihadist Terrorism in the United States: A New and Occasional Phenomenon?“ *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol. 32 (2009), pp. 1-17.
There is considerable debate within academic and policy circles about the nature and relative importance of the underlying, proximate, direct, and indirect drivers of radicalization. Most scholars emphasize the inherently individual and personal nature of radicalization. Anja Daalgard-Nielsen puts it succinctly: “For some, radicalization appears to result from a search for meaning and for a new start, for some it appears to result from a search for community. For a few, typically accomplished and resourceful individuals, radicalization appears to be more of a conscious intellectual process driven by ideology, religion, and political grievances.”  

In keeping with the notion that there are different sets of motivational paths that account for radicalization, Peter Nesser, a research fellow at the Norwegian Defence Research Establishment, has developed a typology of terrorist cell members that is based upon extensive empirical research on radical Islamist networks in Europe. He proposes that it is possible to discern four broad categories of individuals who have distinct motivations for radicalizing: (i) entrepreneurs, who embrace Islamism through intellectual processes and proactively recruit and socialize their cadre, (ii) proteges, who are similar to the entrepreneurs and appear to become radicalized through a combination of loyalty to the entrepreneur and intellectually justified activism, (iii) misfits, who typically join the group due to a combination of loyalty to friends and to cope with personal problems such as troubled backgrounds and/or criminal records, and (iv) drifters, whose dominant motivations for joining appear to relate to social commitments, elements of youth rebellion, or a search for adventure.

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Since a comprehensive analysis of the similarities and divergences among radicalization trajectories in Britain and the United States is beyond the scope of this analysis, the paper will instead draw upon Nesser’s model and focus exclusively on the entrepreneur category because these individuals typically serve as terrorist cell leaders and recruiters. According to Nesser, entrepreneurs are motivated primarily by ideology and a desire to address perceived societal grievances which they feel unable to affect through nonviolent means. They are typically intelligent and charismatic individuals who seek out radical Islamist organizations to obtain a platform and network which enables them to engage in activism. Moreover, they embrace jihadism as a rational means of achieving their goals and actively seek to recruit others by providing them with an ideological framework that resonates with their own personal grievances.\footnote{13} Although Nesser’s model has significant limitations and his categories are not absolute, it is nonetheless a useful analytical tool for thinking in a more differentiated manner about the phenomenon of radicalization. Radicalized entrepreneurs who believe that acts of violent extremism are acceptable in pursuing political goals are dangerous in their own right due to their intelligence and willingness to employ terrorist tactics, but they pose a security threat of far greater magnitude in their desire and ability to radicalize and mobilize vast numbers of other potential extremists.

The paper will compare the radicalization trajectories of Omar Hammami in the United States and Mohammad Sidique Khan in the United Kingdom.\footnote{14} These cases were chosen because the two individuals in question represent the most challenging type of entrepreneur for counter-radicalization and counter-terrorism practitioners to detect and defend against. Both young men

\footnote{13} Peter Nesser. “Joining jihadi terrorist cells in Europe,” pp. 87-114.  
\footnote{14} Use of the word “trajectory” is not meant to imply that radicalization pursues a linear path.
were born in the West to first-generation immigrant families, came from mainstream socio-economic backgrounds, were married, and were culturally and linguistically integrated into society. Nonetheless, both emerged as entrepreneurs and encouraged others to become radicalized and engage in violent extremism. Khan was the ringleader of the terrorist group which conducted the London subway bombings on July 7, 2005, while Hammami remains at large in Somalia as a prominent field commander and propagandist for the Somalian terrorist group al-Shabaab.

By closely examining the cases of Omar Hammami and Mohammad Sidique Khan, this paper hopes to continue the efforts of previous authors in developing a detailed body of research on different individual pathways to radicalization. \(^{15}\) Radicalization is a dynamic, inherently personal process that entails a unique combination of environmental strains, ideology, motivations, and processes of socialization. Thus, although it will not be possible to extrapolate definitive conclusions from these case studies alone, they will augment current efforts to develop more generalizable patterns of commonalities and divergences among radicalization trajectories among so-called “entrepreneurs” in Britain and the United States.

The first section of the paper briefly presents and analyzes current theories about the drivers of radicalization and violent extremism. A critical and comprehensive understanding of the causes of radicalization is necessary to determine the potential explanatory value of these different drivers at the individual level. The second section draws upon the framework created in the previous chapter to compare the radicalization trajectories of Omar Hammami and Mohammad Sidique Khan. The paper concludes with suggestions for future research.

DRIVERS OF RADICALIZATION AND VIOLENT EXTREMISM\textsuperscript{16}

The current body of literature on the subject of terrorist radicalization is fraught with more questions than answers. As psychologist David Mandel has pointed out, the term “radicalization” itself is relative, subjective, and value-laden.\textsuperscript{17} By many accounts, radicalization creates the motivational or cognitive preconditions that increase the potential that an individual will resort to violence. However, there does not appear to be a fixed sequence of “radicalization stages” that an individual travels through which ultimately results in the decision to resort to terrorist violence.\textsuperscript{18} Nonetheless, there is undeniably a nexus of sorts between radicalization, ideological extremism, violent radicalization, terrorist recruitment, and the employment of terrorist tactics.

Most studies do not examine the issue of radicalization from a comprehensive perspective, but instead focus on a particular group, country, or type of driver. A useful framework for analyzing the convergences among various elements of the radicalization process is to divide the issue of radicalization into three interdependent and reinforcing components: (i) Root Causes/Strains, (ii) Ideology and Framing, (iii) Socialization and Mobilization.\textsuperscript{19}

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\textsuperscript{16} There is a large literature devoted to describing potential drivers of radicalization and violent extremism. This chapter describes theories which are representative of the breadth of explanations within the field.
\textsuperscript{18} Authors have proposed several models for the radicalization process. McCauley has proposed a pyramid, Moghadam suggests a staircase, and Baran suggests a conveyor belt. The pyramid and staircase models are useful because neither suggests that everyone who begins the radicalization process necessarily becomes a terrorist. The conveyor belt model does not convey this distinction.
\textsuperscript{19} The author is indebted to Dr. Peter Neumann, Director of the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence in London, for this insight.
\end{flushleft}
ROOT CAUSES AND STRAINS

Theories which center upon root causes contend that individuals become radicalized as a result of external tensions which may be real, perceived, or some combination of the two. Commonly cited strains include poverty, social inequality, lack of education, ethnic or religious discrimination, social alienation, socioeconomic marginalization, and political injustice.\(^{20}\) Noted psychologists Neal Miller and Neil Smelser, whose research focuses on translating psychological concepts into behavioral terms, propose that the frustration caused by such strains leads to some form of collective action including, but not limited to, violence.\(^{21}\) However, empirical research conducted on homegrown Islamist terrorists has convincingly shown that this group is exceedingly heterogeneous, and many individuals who become radicalized have not been subject to the strains enumerated above.\(^{22}\) For example, Major Nidal Hasan (Fort Hood shooting 11/09) was a medical doctor making around $90,000 per year and Shehzad Tanweer (London subway bombing 7/05) was from a well-integrated middle-class family.\(^{23}\) Counterterrorism expert Edwin Bakker’s research on the backgrounds of individuals implicated in terrorist incidents in Europe from September 2001 to October 2006 underlined the fact that the unemployment rates of these individuals were generally reflective of European averages.\(^{24}\)


More nuanced theories within the root cause school of thought have been put forth by Gilles Kepel, Olivier Roy, and Farhad Khosrokhavar. These scholars of political science and political sociology suggest that Islamist radicalization in Europe occurs when second and third generation Muslim immigrants experience a “conflict of identity” resulting from the dissolution of traditional identities and communities through processes of globalization and migration.25 Firsthand experiences with different forms of discrimination, perceived or actual, further this sense of non-belonging. Faced with a world perceived to be hostile and foreign, young Muslims undergo a search for identity and meaning that may make them receptive to Islamist ideology. Roy emphasizes the importance of the concept of “ummah” -- a constructed transnational community of all Muslims -- which provides individuals alienated from the Western society in which they reside an alternative sense of identity and community.26

These theories are useful in explaining why Islamist ideology might appeal to individuals who are well-off and well-integrated, and their findings are supported by empirical case studies which focus on individual-level motivations.27 However, explanations which focus on causes at the structural/societal level meet with several difficulties: (i) societal-level grievances cannot account for differences in individual responses, (ii) similar radicalization trajectories can be caused by distinct types of grievances, and (iii) societal-level grievances cannot account for why radicalization occurs at a particular time.28 However, root causes can create a permissive environment in which the ideologies of extremist groups can acquire greater resonance among

28 Anja Dalgaard-Nielsen. “Violent Radicalization in Europe: What We Know and What We Do Not Know” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol. 33, Iss. 9 (Sept 2010), pp. 801; Wiktorowicz (no date), 3
target audiences. For example, social scientist Quintan Wiktorowicz, who conducted extensive fieldwork on the radical Islamist group al-Muhajiroun in the United Kingdom, has argued that root causes and strains are not sufficient to explain radicalization, but they can produce “cognitive openings” which render individuals “more receptive to the possibility of alternative views and perspectives.” If the individual is exposed to a compelling ideology during this period of relative openness to new ideas, the potential for radicalization is increased.

**IDEOLOGY AND FRAMING**

Ideologies are comprehensive sets of beliefs that guide and inspire action. The two primary shortcomings of arguments which propose that ideologies alone are responsible for radicalism are that such arguments cannot explain why exposure to an ideology does not necessarily result in radicalization, nor do they explain why one ideology gains more traction than another. In response to these difficulties, scholars have proposed a number of theories to explain when and how ideologies can become successful in radicalizing individuals.

Olivier Roy argues that ideologies resonate when they address and leverage powerful grievances and strains. Similarly, Marc Sageman, a former CIA analyst, sociologist, and Al Qaeda expert, proposes that traumatic events (experienced personally or learned about indirectly) spark a sense of “moral outrage” which, when interpreted through a certain type of ideology, leads to collective action. Quintan Wiktorowicz’s theory of a “cognitive opening” would also fall into this category. However, Wiktorowicz takes his theory a step further by arguing that the

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perceived personal characteristics of the “messenger” who is promoting an ideology play a large role in whether a potential recruit accepts the ideology.\textsuperscript{31} The importance of a credible, charismatic leader is supported by Jytte Klausen’s research on incidents of homegrown jihadism in the United Kingdom from 1999 to 2010. A political scientist who has conducted significant research on the integration of Muslim faith communities in Europe, Klausen used network analysis to demonstrate that four out of five of the 350 Jihadists in the dataset “belonged to a shared network that can be traced back to one or more of four sheikhs who formed the nucleus of ‘Londonistan’ in the 1990s, or to their organizations.”\textsuperscript{32}

In summary, ideologies appear to play an important role in the radicalization process if individuals are experiencing a “cognitive opening” that makes them receptive to new ideas, and if these ideas are presented in a compelling manner that resonates with the target audience. The likelihood for achieving resonance can be enhanced if the ideology is able to leverage and channel key grievances, or if it is framed in a compelling and attractive manner.\textsuperscript{33} Islamist ideology can be a particularly powerful tool because it selectively draws from Islamic texts and experiences, and convinces potential recruits that the organization in question follows a “pure” or “true” form of Islam. By rooting their ideology in a major world religion, Islamist extremists have an easier time achieving resonance with those they seek to recruit.

\textsuperscript{31} Wiktorowicz conducted an extensive empirical study in Britain of the radical group al-Muhajiroun, in which he interviewed group members and leaders and regularly attended member-only sessions. He concluded that a primary reason the proffered ideology resonated with the individuals who attended al-Muhajiroun events was that the group’s leader, Omar Bakri Mohammed, inspired feelings of credibility and trust. See Quintan Wiktorowicz. “Joining the Cause: Al-Muhajiroun and Radical Islam,” pp. 20.


SOCIALIZATION AND MOBILIZATION

Combining theories about strains and ideological frames creates a more compelling framework for explaining radicalization processes. However, radicalization does not take place in a vacuum and therefore the last critical component involved in explaining radicalization is the social dimension of the process. At a basic level, group interactions create opportunities for collective action and can also facilitate individual decisions to engage in action of a particular sort through mechanisms such as peer pressure, bonding, and indoctrination. Studies from social movement theory and network theory have compellingly demonstrated the importance of personal networks for recruitment processes.

David Snow, Louis Zurcher, and Sheldon Ekland-Olson conducted extensive psychological and sociological research on methods of recruitment among religious and political organizations, and determined that 60-90 percent of individuals join such groups due to personal connections.34 Studies of recruitment patterns for non-religious organizations, civil rights movements, and terrorist groups demonstrate a similarly high correlation between interpersonal linkages and group involvement.35 Moreover, the riskier a particular form of collective engagement and action, the stronger and more numerous are the personal ties required.36

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In his study of al-Muhajiroun, Quintan Wiktorowicz outlined how initial contact with the group often took place through existing personal networks, and gradually developed as the potential recruit was exposed to the group’s ideology. Moreover, the group was cautious about introducing the individual to the more violent parts of al-Muhajiroun’s message until s/he had accepted the central tenets of the group’s ideology.37 Subsequent empirical work and case studies by Neumann, Rogers, Slootman, and Tillie, well-respected European experts on terrorism and radicalization, support Wiktorowicz’s work in a broader sense.38

Marc Sageman approaches the issue of mobilization through a social network theory lens, emphasizing the importance of the internet and a shared ideology in connecting a horizontal, global network of militant Islamists. His theory is useful in that it explains the occurrence of bottom-up radicalization and self-radicalization through the internet.39 He also highlights the importance of social cliques in propelling radicalization. According to Sageman, a clique is a social construct that increases bonds among members while simultaneously isolating the group from mainstream society:

[Cliques] are the social mechanism that puts pressure on prospective participants to join, defines a certain social reality for the ever more intimate friends, and facilitates the development of a shared collective social identity and strong emotional feelings for the in-group.40

Clique can provide a particularly attractive social network for individuals who feel disconnected or alienated from mainstream society. As the members of a clique increasingly withdraw from

40 Marc Sageman. Understanding Terror Networks, pp.154.
society and interact only with one another, clique identity subsumes individual identity. Edwin Bakker’s biographical research on over 200 individuals affiliated with terrorist cells in Europe supports Sageman’s and Wiktorowicz’s theories of the importance of social networks.  

**RADICALIZATION CASE STUDIES**

This section of the paper will use the triadic framework of strains, ideology, and mobilization established in the previous section to examine the factors which prompted and propelled the radicalization trajectories of Omar Hammami and Mohammad Sidique Khan. It is important to reiterate from the previous section that the three components of this framework -- strains, ideology, and mobilization -- are interdependent and self-reinforcing. Analytically, the three components are useful tools for assessing radicalization trajectories. However, employing this framework results in some overlap among the three sections of the analysis, which complicates the chronology within each case study.

Omar Hammami is an American citizen born and raised in Alabama who today serves as a prominent field commander and propagandist for the Somalian terrorist group Al Shabaab. His recruitment videos have garnered much attention for their deliberate targeting of English-speaking, Western audiences.  

Mohammad Sidique Khan was a British citizen born and raised in the United Kingdom by Pakistani immigrant parents. He was the ringleader of the terrorist group which conducted the London subway bombings on July 7, 2005. In his 27-minute long, Al Qaeda-produced martyrdom video, Khan applauds Osama bin Laden, justifies his own actions as

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41 Edwin Bakker. *Jihadi Terrorists In Europe*, pp. 52-53.  
defensive measures taken to protect the Muslim *umma* from attack by Western governments, and lambasts British Muslims for assimilating into mainstream British society.\textsuperscript{43}

**Omar Hammami**

“We need more like him, so if you can encourage more of your children and more of your neighbors and anyone around you to send people like him to this jihad, it would be a great asset for us.” -- Omar Hammami, praising a martyr in a propaganda video, March 2009\textsuperscript{44}

**Strains**

Omar Hammami was raised by a middle-class family in the small town of Daphne, Alabama, and was enrolled at an early age in a program for gifted students. Teachers and friends remember him as charismatic, bright, competitive, and something of a rebel.\textsuperscript{45} In keeping with the theories of Kepel, Roy, and Khosrokhavar, the origins of Hammami’s radicalization can be traced back to a series of strains and significant events that prompted him to redefine his identity within a confusing and often hostile environment.

Hammami’s first identity conflict grew out of his difficulty in reconciling the Baptist teachings of his American mother and the Islamic instruction of his Syrian father. Hammami’s sister Dena recalls that the children received conflicting religious advice from relatives on different sides of the family – their mother’s family told them that all non-Christians were destined for hell while their father’s relatives would emphasize the opposite on brief trips the family took to Damascus when Dena and Omar were young. According to Dena, growing up in

\textsuperscript{44} Bill Roggio. “American Shabaab commander Omar Hammami releases tape that mocks reports of his death.” *Long War Journal*, 10 April 2011.
the Hammami household entailed constant exposure to “two different schools of thought under one roof” that she likened to “thunder and lightning.”  

Accounts by Hammami’s friends describe a young man who was increasingly torn between his parents’ different religious teachings, and who oscillated back and forth between the two faiths as he attempted to resolve his identity conflict. A friend of Hammami’s since middle school told reporters that Omar “hated his dad’s religion” and at first was “completely rebellious against it.” Meanwhile, the father of a student who attended high school with Hammami recalls that Omar would tell people “he was not fulfilled by his Baptist experience.” At age 6, Omar spontaneously asked to be baptized in the middle of a church service, and later told his friend Trey Gunter, “I believe it; I wanted it.” By the time he reached high school, however, Hammami converted to Islam while spending the summer between his freshman and sophomore years in Damascus with his father’s family.

Hammami’s identity conflict reached a key inflection point during high school. When he returned from Damascus, his behavior demonstrated that he had undergone a profound change. He had begun high school as one of the most popular kids in the school, winning over other students with his energy and charm and even becoming elected sophomore class president. However, his newfound religious fervor caused other students to ridicule him. Hammami’s friend since the fourth grade Bernie Culveyhouse, who converted to Islam under Hammami’s influence, recalls that Omar was not discouraged by this negative feedback. Instead, this encounter with

46 Ibid.
prejudice reinforced Omar’s desire to immerse himself in Islam. Hammami began praying daily in the schoolyard, took Fridays off to attend the mosque in Mobile, broke up with his girlfriend, and started integrating Islam into both his social and academic life. Previously, his favorite Friday-night routine had been to watch football, eat at Waffle House, sometimes smoke a cigarette, and play on his nintendo for hours.

Despite his conversion to Islam, Hammami’s behavior throughout the remainder of his high school years clearly indicated that he had not yet resolved his identity conflict. Moreover, the strains caused by his ongoing search for identity expressed themselves in increasingly antisocial behavior. He refused to say the Pledge of Allegiance, verbally assailed his longtime favorite teacher for being Jewish, and even tried to choke a fellow student who interrupted him while he was reciting the Koran. Nonetheless, he maintained such high grades and test scores that he was able to skip his senior year to enroll at the University of South Alabama, where he was quickly elected president of the university’s nascent Muslim Student Association.

The next identity crisis Hammami underwent can be tied directly to 9/11, which took place during his first semester at the University of South Alabama. The events of 9/11 marked a defining moment in the way Hammami viewed his faith, as well as in the way that others viewed him. Indeed, 9/11 appears to have produced the sort of cognitive opening described by Quintan Wiktorowicz. Shortly after the attacks, Hammami was interviewed by the University of South Alabama newspaper about the potential impact of the attacks on Muslim communities. He noted, “Everyone was really shocked. Even now it's difficult to believe a Muslim could have done this.”

51 Ibid.
52 One of Hammami’s teachers recalls that he would only choose to represent Muslim nations for the school’s Model UN team. See Andrea Elliott. “The Jihadist Next Door” and Christof Putzel. "American Jihadi."
54 Ibid.
He also mentioned that he was worried about misguided acts of retribution against Muslims and stated, “The only way to diffuse this is to get the word out. With ignorance comes fear and with fear comes violence.”

**Ideology**

The 9/11 attacks were a traumatic event that rendered Hammami receptive to new views, creating the “cognitive opening” that Wiktorowicz describes. In keeping with Wiktorowicz’s theory, Hammami’s cognitive openings prompted a period of “religious seeking,” in which he sought new explanations for the experiences which previous ideological frameworks were unable to explain. Friends of Hammami’s recall that the 9/11 attacks led Omar to question the depth of his knowledge about Islam. He did not feel that his father’s mosque had provided him with an adequate understanding of Islam for understanding the post-9/11 environment, and he began to study Islam with Tony Sylvester, a prominent voice in the American Salafi movement.

The Salafi school is a movement within Islam that seeks to “purify” Islam by eschewing any religious innovations introduced since the origin of Islam in the seventh century. Salafis adhere only to the *Qur’an* and *Hadith*, and denounce new jurisprudential rulings as illegitimate. Salafism has attracted many followers among second and third generation Muslim immigrants in the West, who seek “a more authentic Islam than that of their assimilative parents.” While some scholars point to Osama bin Laden as a stereotypical Salafist and

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57 The next section on ideology and framing will explain the significance of Salafism.
58 Teachings of the Prophet Muhammad
60 Andrea Elliott. “The Jihadist Next Door”
extrapolate that this ideology is inherently linked to terrorism, others emphasize the diversity within the Salafi community and correctly note that the individuals within this community have widely divergent stances on the acceptability of using violence to achieve political goals. For many, Salafism is an apolitical, deeply conservative religious framework upon which to model one’s personal life. However, some Salafis fuse this religious framework with political aspirations, and advocate for the establishment of an Islamic theocracy through nonviolent means. Of these, only a small fringe group fervently believes that militant jihad should be used to establish a “pure” Islamic State.

Hammami was drawn to Salafism due to his desire for a new intellectual framework for explaining an increasingly confusing post-9/11 world, and Tony Sylvester’s teachings resonated with him due to Sylvester’s charisma and credibility. Sylvester was a compelling individual whose background made it easy for Hammami to identify with him. He was also a convert to Islam, and had grown up in rural Pennsylvania. Under Sylvester’s guidance, Hammami quickly came to believe that the solution to Muslim suffering was to reclaim true Islam by practicing it with greater devotion. He stopped attending his father’s mosque and instead met only with Sylvester’s study circle.

Hammami and his friends became increasingly dogmatic, no longer interacting with women or listening to music. He also began to wear prayer caps and thobes. Culveyhouse, who

62 Yasir Qadhi is a prominent American Salafist who studied theology both in Saudi Arabia and at Yale University. He publicly condemns violence and has a history of engaging in dialogue with the U.S. counterterrorism community. Qadhi has over 10,000 followers on Facebook, disseminates his sermons on YouTube, and has a growing following on Twitter. More than 20,000 people have signed up for one of the online seminars that Qadhi teaches about sex in Islamic marriage. Interestingly, Qadhi has been publicly criticized by Samir Khan, the current editor of Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula’s “Inspire” magazine, as a “sellout” whose “wrongdoings...can destroy the Muslims.” See Andrea Elliott. “Why Yasir Qadhi Wants to Talk About Jihad.” New York Times, March 17, 2011.
64 Andrea Elliott. “The Jihadist Next Door.”
joined Omar in this behavior, recalls that the two were met with extreme prejudice. Some people screamed at them, “You need to go back to your country you damned A-rab.” As in high school, Hammami was not phased by this treatment and instead redoubled his efforts to educate those around him by practicing Da’wah, the preaching of Islam. Hammami dropped out of college to master Arabic and began attending Islamic conferences around the country. While Hammami’s behavior arose primarily out of a desire for a new intellectual framework, it was also fueled in part by father-son tensions. A fellow convert close to Hammami told reporters that Omar’s decision to study Salafism was in large part “an excuse to disobey his father.”

Shafik Hammami wore conventional American clothing, was president of the moderate Mobile mosque, and did not agree with his son’s newfound Salafism. A breaking point came when Omar refused to pose in a family picture in April 2002. Shafik threw him out of the house and Omar spent two weeks living in a storage unit without electricity or running water.

At the age of 20, a college dropout frustrated by the lack of acceptance he found in small-town Daphne, Hammami moved with Culveyhouse to Toronto, where the two quickly integrated themselves into the Somali-American community. In Toronto, they frequented an Islamic bookstore and quickly became integrated within the Somali immigrant community, marrying into the same Somali family. Hammami’s previous exposure to Islam had been through a purely religious lens, and he had largely dismissed politics as a worldly distraction from matters of faith. In Toronto, however, he was introduced to a Muslim community that was very vocal about

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65 Christof Putzel, "American Jihadi."
68 Christof Putzel, "American Jihadi."
American foreign policy, and expressed critical views about the Iraq war. Hammami began to question his interpretation of Salafism, and in an email message referring to this time he notes, “I was finding it difficult to reconcile between having Americans attacking my brothers, at home and abroad, while I was supposed to remain completely neutral, without getting involved.”

In an attempt to reconcile how his understanding of Islam could explain what was taking place in the Muslim world, Hammami began searching for guidance on the Internet. Culveyhouse recalls that Hammami began to reevaluate his purely religious approach to Salafism, and grew to believe that there was a strong relationship among Islam, jihad, and politics. Although Hammami does not appear to have internalized these sentiments until Toronto, interviews with his high school teachers suggest that Hammami had already maintained radical ideas as a teenager. For example, during a junior-year discussion about the 1998 bombings of U.S. embassies in Africa, Hammami reacted negatively to another student’s suggestion that Osama bin Laden should be shot for his involvement in planning the bombings. Hammami demanded to know what the student would do if he said the same about Billy Graham, and when the boy responded that bin Laden was a terrorist and couldn’t be compared to Graham, Hammami retorted: “One man’s terrorist is another man’s freedom fighter.”

Mobilization

Hammami engaged with two key groups that facilitated and reinforced his radicalization. The first was Tony Sylvester’s Salafi study group and the second was the Somali immigrant community in Toronto. Sylvester introduced Hammami to Salafism, providing him with a

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70 Andrea Elliott. “The Jihadist Next Door.”
71 Ibid.
fundamentalist framework for understanding Islam as well as a feeling of intellectual brotherhood which he found lacking in Daphne. The study group operated much like the cliques that Sageman describes. All the study group participants adopted new names, met weekly, disengaged themselves from the non-Salafi Muslim community, and attended Islamic conferences together. With Sylvester’s guidance, they even opened and ran a small Islamic bookstore in Mobile. Hammami’s social dependence on the study group was augmented by his growing alienation from his family, as well as his difficulty connecting with his fellow citizens in Daphne, who viewed his proselytizing with suspicion and anger. He also had difficulty finding employment that was not inimical to his faith, and the odd jobs he did hold (cleaning carpets, loading trucks, and taking inventory at Walmart) undoubtedly furthered his sense of frustration and social exclusion.

In Toronto, Hammami moved from the clique of the study group to the closely knit Somali immigrant community. Culveyhouse recalls that Omar quickly identified with Somali youth who, similar to Hammami, experienced conflicts of identity when attempting to reconcile their secular Canadian identities with their Somali Muslim origins. His newfound job delivering milk to Somali housewives deepened his connection to the greater Somali community. Moreover, Hammami and Culveyhouse maintained their close friendship and, apart from their interactions with the Somali community, appear to have kept largely to themselves. Culveyhouse even arranged an introduction for Hammami to his Somali sister-in-law, whom Hammami quickly persuaded to adopt the abaya, socialize exclusively with women, and marry him only

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72 Andrea Elliott. “The Jihadist Next Door.”
73 Ibid.
74 Christof Putzel. "American Jihadi."
two months later in March 2005. In short, all of Hammami’s activities were restricted to interactions with his longtime friend Bernie Culveyhouse, the Somali sisters they married, and the Somali community in Toronto.

It is also important to note that Hammami engaged in a degree of self-mobilization, both through the extensive time he spent in an Islamic bookstore and through the internet. Culveyhouse recalls that Hammami spent hours in Habib Islamic Bookstore browsing the literature and conversing with the owner, an Afghan immigrant who had fought against the Soviets in Afghanistan and who allegedly maintained ties to the Taliban. While in Toronto, he also discovered and became mesmerized by an online documentary about the life of Amir Khattab, a legendary jihadist who fought in Chechnya. Hammami related to Khattab and saw him as an inspiring figure who had devoted his life to furthering the cause of Muslims by carrying out jihad in defense of Muslim land to create an Islamic State.

The internet would continue to play an important role in Hammami’s radicalization when he, Culveyhouse, and their wives moved to Egypt in 2005. Once there, Omar would spend hours in internet cafes and became a frequent contributor on the “Islamic Networking” forum, where he railed against U.S. foreign policy. It was also through “Islamic Networking” that Hammami became acquainted with another American convert to Islam, David Maldonado. The two soon began spending considerable time together in person and, as events unfolded in Somalia, they reinforced each other’s desire to travel there to take part in the emerging Islamist insurgency.

75 Andrea Elliott. “The Jihadist Next Door.”
77 Christof Putzel. "American Jihadi."
Hammami’s recruitment into al-Shabaab appears to have been self-initiated. When Hammami learned through the internet that an insurgent group was attempting to establish an Islamic State in Somalia, he was immediately drawn to the cause. In July 2006 Hammami posted: “They have done something awesome. And we need to pray that it comes to fruition. If you can advise them or help them in any way, do it.” Hammami’s decision to travel with Maldonado to Somalia was perhaps aided by the fact that Culveyhouse had left Egypt several months prior due to his disillusionment with Egypt. It is uncertain whether Culveyhouse’s continued presence would have moderated Hammami’s growing fervor, but his absence likely rendered Hammami more prone to seek out a new social group via the internet and, in particular, to begin interacting with Maldonado. Culveyhouse recalls observing a change in his friend around this time, namely that his longstanding emphasis on pursuing knowledge began to develop into statements about this being “not a time for knowledge, but a time for action.”

In late 2006, Hammami set out for Somalia with Maldonado. He gradually found his way to al-Shabaab, assumed a new name -- Abu Mansour Al-Amriki -- and rapidly rose through the ranks to become a military commander and an influential propagandist. By October 2007, Hammami made his TV debut in an interview with Al Jazeera, and a year later he was leading military attacks. In March 2009, he appeared in a widely distributed thirty-one minute video that showed him leading foreign fighters preparing for an ambush while a soundtrack of his English jihadi rap played in the background, explaining to Western youth why they should join the

78 Christof Putzel. "American Jihadi."
80 Christof Putzel. "American Jihadi."
81 Maldonado was captured on the Somalia-Kenya border by a multinational counterterrorism team and has been convicted in the U.S. He is currently serving a 10-year sentence.
In April 2011, he released two new videos called “Send Me a Cruise (missile)” and “Make Jihad With Me,” which extolled the virtues of dying as a martyr and invited Western youth to join him:

Stand up heroes of Islam o Mujahideen
Keep moving forward for Allah’s word to reign supreme
Respond to the calls of the oppressed and improvise
You’ve been promised two possibilities in life
It ain't do or die, it's do or paradise

Terrorism experts in the U.S. speculate that al-Shabaab leaders quickly noticed Hammami’s intelligence and charisma and decided to capitalize upon these qualities to further their cause in the West. In his new incarnation as an al-Shabaab leader, Hammami finally appears to have resolved his perennial identity conflict. In December 2009 he wrote his sister Dena a long email, in which he concluded:

I have become a Somali you could say. I hear bullets, I dodge mortars, I hear nasheeds and play soccer. Sometimes I live in the bush with camels, sometimes I live the five-star life. Sometimes I walk for miles in the terrible heat with no water, sometimes I ride in extremely slick cars. Sometimes I’m chased by the enemy, sometimes I chase him!...I have hatred, I have love...It’s the best life on earth!”

Omar Hammami’s radicalization can be viewed as a reinforcing kaleidoscope of strains, ideology, and mobilization. Islam provided him with a distinct sense of identity and community that he found lacking in Daphne. Later, the Salafi views promulgated by Tony Sylvester provided him with an ideological framework that resonated with Hammami in part due to its ability to leverage both his father-son frustrations as well as the anti-Muslim discrimination that he

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85 Islamic songs
experienced in Daphne. The U.S. invasion of Iraq sparked a second cognitive opening that resulted in an ideological frame realignment. Surrounded by a politically active Muslim community in Toronto, Hammami resolved this new identity crisis by reinterpreting his Salafism within a political framework that promoted the validity of jihad.

From his time in Toronto through his decision to fly to Somalia, Hammami actively sought out information, both in Habib Islamic Bookstore and on the internet, that reinforced his increasingly radical views. He also established a strong virtual community with like-minded individuals. This clique was the only group he socialized with after his long-time friend Culveyhouse departed Egypt and lost contact with Hammami for the first time since they met as children in Alabama. The insurgency in Somalia provided a catalyst that prompted Hammami to realize his politico-religious beliefs by engaging in what he viewed as legitimate jihad. Although Hammami’s father Shafik is convinced that Omar was not radicalized until after his arrival in Somalia and told reporters, “Whatever happened to him, it didn’t happen here. It happened somewhere else,” the evidence suggest that Omar Hammami began his radicalization trajectory while he was at Daphne High School.

Many of the elements which played a role in Hammami’s radicalization also featured in the radicalization of Mohammad Sidique Khan. Although their family and community environments were different, Khan also experienced an acute identity conflict and underwent a cognitive opening that led him to seek out a more conservative form of Islam than that practiced by his family. This development sparked what would develop into a full-fledged estrangement from his family. Khan’s sense of social isolation was exacerbated by growing frustration with his

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87 Christof Putzel. "American Jihadi."
community and professional environments. Moreover, his sphere of social engagement increasingly narrowed to cliques of individuals who shared his views, took part in the same religious discussion groups, and spent time at the same Islamic bookstore viewing pro-jihad materials. The following section analyzes the particulars of Khan’s radicalization using the same triadic framework of strains, ideology, and mobilization that were applied to the Hammami case study. The section will close with a thorough analysis of the similarities between the two cases.

**MOHAMMAD SIDIQUE KHAN**

“Your democratically elected governments continuously perpetuate atrocities against my people all over the world. And your support of them makes you directly responsible, just as I am directly responsible for protecting and avenging my Muslim brothers and sisters...Until we feel security, you will be our targets. And until you stop the bombing, gassing, imprisonment and torture of my people we will not stop this fight. We are at war and I am a soldier. Now you too will taste the reality of this situation.” -- Mohammad Khan, martyrdom video, broadcast on 1 September 2005 by Al-Jazeera

**Strains**

Mohammad Sidique Khan, the youngest of four children, was born in 1974 in the British city of Leeds to first generation Pakistani immigrant parents. He was raised in Beeston, an economically underprivileged residential area close to Leeds, where he attended ethnically diverse schools, went by the nickname “Sid,” and was quite popular among his fellow students. High school friend Robert Cardiss recalls, “Sid wasn’t in your face or outspoken, but…he wasn’t completely strait-laced either. He was friends with the in-crowd. He had white mates as well as Asian, and he would quite often be round the back of the gym at breaktime smoking a fag with the rest of us. He didn’t have any girlfriends that I know of, but he’d talk to girls. He was

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friendly.” Khan attended secular schools and was not raised in a strictly religious household. Colleagues and neighbors describe him as being well-integrated and personable. The mother of an 11-year old girl who attended the school at which Khan worked noted that he was “brilliant with the children” and expressed her disbelief that he could be involved in the attacks.

Although Khan was seemingly well-integrated into British society and some deemed him a “model immigrant,” others suggest that he did experience some tension over his identity as a youth. One account described him as a teenager who constantly attempted to “shed his ethnic skin” and pointed to his Westernized nickname “Sid” and typical garb of leather jacket and cowboy boots as an indication that Khan was attempting to carve out an identity distinct from that of his parents’ immigrant generation. The relative dearth of accounts from Khan’s teenage years render an assessment of this early stage of his life difficult, and the conflicting recollections of friends and family do not suggest that Khan was engaging in activity outside the bounds of normal teenage behavior. By his early adulthood, professional colleagues of Khan uniformly viewed him in a positive light as a “sharp, switched-on professional” and “tower of strength within the community” who was “doing good work on drugs, racial issues, and education aspiration issues.”

While there are no definitive indications that Khan began a process of cognitive radicalization in his teenage years, there are several indications that he began undergoing processes of religions and social redefinition while at university. His older brother Gultasab

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recalls that Khan became interested in Wahhabism in the mid-1990s, and this resulted in family friction because the remainder of the family held traditionalist Barelvi convictions. Wahhabism, similar to the Salafi doctrine that Omar Hammami studied with Tony Sylvester, is a reform movement within Islam that emerged in the 18th century to advocate a return to “true” Islam as it was practiced by the Prophet Muhammad. Khan later told colleagues that he had turned to religion to find a new start “after a far from blameless youth” that involved some drug use and several run-ins with the police where he received warnings for assault and being in the possession of stolen goods.

In 1999 Khan’s father asked the family’s longtime spiritual priest Sultan Fiaz ul-Hassan to intervene and persuade Khan to revoke his Wahhabi sentiments. Ul-Hassan claims that Khan was no longer willing to accept his guidance and told him that he wanted to travel to Afghanistan to receive training in jihad. Discord evolved into outright ostracism when Khan decided in October 2001 to marry a Deobandi Muslim of Indian descent. A former friend of Khan’s recalls that his family “wanted nothing to do with him” after his marriage. The situation appears to have remained strained despite the birth of Khan’s daughter in 2004.

The primary strains that Khan experienced appear to have been interpersonal strains with family members, in particular father-son tensions, and disagreements over Islam. Although the Beeston area is economically deprived (over 10,000 of the 16,300 residents have living standards

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95 Salafism and Wahhabism have distinct historical roots, but many in the West use the terms interchangeably. Some Muslims consider Wahhabism to be a specific form of Salafism practiced in and exported around the world by Saudi Arabia. Both schools of thought emphasize the need to “purify” Islam by taking all religious lessons directly from the Koran and the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad. See Blanchard, Christopher M. “The Islamic Traditions of Wahhabism and Salafiyya.” (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service), 24 February 2008.


that are among the worst 3% nationally), Khan’s level of education and income were considered good for the area, and he and his wife were able to afford buying a house and a car.99 Khan’s earliest discernible grievances appear to have been socially, rather than religiously, motivated. In 1997 he participated in a demonstration in Leeds to protest the City Council’s decision to build a housing development on a location that the Kashmiri Welfare Association wanted to use for a community center. In an interview with the Yorkshire Evening Post he stated, “A centre is needed more than anything around here. There are a lot of problems for youths and we need somewhere to meet. The existing centre is too small.”100 Khan continued to voice his discontent with the system while working as a mentor for children with learning disabilities at Hillside Primary School in Beeston, which had such a high turnover rate that often only 25% of the student population remained consistent from year to year. In a 2002 interview to The Times Educational Supplement, Khan described his frustration with the dismal social problems of the Beeston community and the slowness of the government response.101

**Ideology**

Although Khan was vocal in expressing his social views, there is little record that he publicly expressed religious views indicative of potential radicalization.102 What can be determined is that Khan became increasingly religious while at university and no longer identified with his family’s traditional Barelvi views, instead converting to Wahhabism. His

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100 Peter Nesser. “Joining jihadi terrorist cells in Europe,” pp. 103.
brother Gultasab recalls that Khan could not identify with the community-run Hardy Street mosque which the family attended because the organizers spoke Urdu and had difficulty connecting with younger Muslims. Khan continued to use the mosque’s basement space as a gym and youth meeting place until 2001, when he and his friends got into a dispute with the mosque and were asked to leave. The mosque’s secretary told investigators that Khan and his friends subscribed to Wahhabi views and had upset some of the mosque’s members, but did not go into further detail.

Upon being asked to leave the Hardy Street mosque, Khan began to attend a storefront mosque in Beeston, which he later continued to frequent with his co-conspirators in the 2005 bombing plot, Shehzad Tanweer and Hasib Hussain. He also became active in Islamic groups and mosques throughout Leeds and the surrounding area, including Huddersfield and Dewsbury. By 2003 Khan’s activities at these venues, in addition to running two local gyms which he had established in Beeston in 2000 and 2004, consumed so much of his time that he became remiss in his work at Hillside Primary School. His increasing absences culminated in two months of sick leave from September 20-November 19, 2004, following which the school dismissed him.

At Hillside Primary School Khan spoke out publicly against the 9/11 attacks, and colleagues recall that he gradually became more religious during his tenure there from March

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104 Ibid.
2001 to November 2004. In hindsight, some of his colleagues have suggested that there was “a subtle change in his character around 12 months after starting at the school. He is said to have become less talkative and more introverted. On a couple of occasions, he showed uncharacteristic intolerance out of line with his normally easy going manner. But his behaviour was not unusual enough to cause concern.” Subsequent interviews and investigations following the 7/7 attacks uncovered that Khan spent considerable time volunteering at an Islamic bookstore in Leeds called Iqra, which was known in the community for selling pro-jihad literature and videos with graphic footage of the violence taking place in Bosnia, Chechnya, and Iraq. A friend of Shehzad Tanweer’s, Khan’s “protege” according to the Nesser model framework, claims he saw Khan and Tanweer watching a DVD in the bookstore in which an Israeli soldier violently killed a young Palestinian girl.

Iqra appears to have played a significant role in accelerating Khan’s radicalization. It was here that he was exposed to extremist propaganda material and met Islamist radicals such as James McLintock and Martin “Abdullah” McDaid. McLintock, a convert to Islam who adopted the name Mohammed Yacoub, ran Islamic study sessions at Iqra in 2000 before relocating to Pakistan, where he was arrested on the Afghanistan border by Pakistani security forces in December 2001 for alleged involvement in militant activities. McDaid, a fellow convert and ex-UK Special Forces operative, worked with McLintock in the mid-1990s at an Islamic bookstore in Leeds, and also had close ties to Iqra during the time that Khan was a volunteer.

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110 Peter Nesser. “Joining jihadi terrorist cells in Europe,” pp. 103-104.
114 On the particular significance of Islamic bookstores to the radicalization and recruitment process, see Peter Neumann. Joining al-Qaeda: Jihadist Recruitment in Europe (London: IISS, 2009), pp. 29.
115 Paul Tumelty. “New Developments Following the London Bombings.”
Unconfirmed press reports also place Khan and 7/7 collaborators Shehzad Tanweer and Jermaine Lindsay at the sermons of the notorious radical Islamist preacher Abu Hamza.\textsuperscript{116}

Khan’s increasing involvement with radical Islamist hubs such as Iqra, the storefront mosque in Beeston, and extremist sermons in London during the period of 2001-2004 were likely accelerated further both by domestic conditions in Leeds as well as the global political situation. The summer of 2001 marked a period of racially motivated race riots in the United Kingdom that consumed populations in Oldham, Bradford, Burnley, and Leeds.\textsuperscript{117} In Leeds, the multiracial Harehills area experienced seven hours of rioting during which 26 cars were burned and police teams were attacked with bottles and bricks by over 100 rioters. The catalyst for the riots appears to have been the alleged heavy-handedness of the local policy in questioning and arresting minority suspects.\textsuperscript{118}

Despite Khan’s comparatively high socioeconomic status in the community, it is nonetheless likely that the discrimination he observed in the United Kingdom played a role in his radicalization. Moreover, the combination of perceived social discrimination domestically was undoubtedly amplified by the violent images of conflicts in Iraq and Chechnya, which Khan was exposed to online and through DVDs at Iqra, as well as through listening to radical sermons. According to Roy and Khosrokhavar, such an amalgamation of strains and grievances from the local and international level often propels radicalization by sparking what Marc Sageman refers to as a sense of “moral outrage.”\textsuperscript{119} According to Khosrokhavar, the viewing of video footage

\textsuperscript{116} Peter Nesser. “Joining jihadi terrorist cells in Europe,” pp. 104.
from foreign conflicts in particular often produces a feeling of “humiliation-by-proxy” which provides potential terrorist recruits with motivation for reacting violently against what they view as Western aggression.\textsuperscript{120} Khan’s statements in his martyrdom video (quoted at the beginning of the case study) are consistent with Khosrokhavar’s theory. He claims he is engaging in defensive activities prompted by British foreign policies that result in the perpetration of “atrocities against my people all over the world.”\textsuperscript{121}

**Mobilization**

Khan’s radicalization trajectory highlights the centrality of social mobilization. Not only was Khan’s trajectory due in large part to group interactions, but he also actively promoted and organized group activities to attract and recruit other potential extremists. Beginning in the earliest phase of Khan’s cognitive radicalization, his interest in Wahhabism was likely influenced by the fact that many of his friends were converting.\textsuperscript{122} Some of these young men, including Khan, would go on to become members of a local Beeston gang referred to as the “Mullah” crew. Members of the Mullah crew regularly used the basement space of the Hardy Street Mosque as a gym and youth meeting place until they were asked to leave, at which time they began attending mosques in Beeston and the surrounding towns, and also started frequenting the Iqra bookstore.\textsuperscript{123}

\textsuperscript{123} Aidan Kirby. “The London Bombers as “Self-Starters,”” pp. 418.
The two gyms Khan established in Beeston for local youth were financed with government funds, and served as social spaces for teenagers who had fallen behind in school.\textsuperscript{124} Investigative interviews conducted following the 7/7 attacks uncovered conflicting reports about the activities that took places in the gyms, and much of the information must be classified as hearsay. However, it has been determined that Khan used the gyms as a venue for recruitment and training.\textsuperscript{125} Khan also organized and participated in a series of outdoor activities, such as white-water rafting and paintballing, with young men from the gyms, bookstore, and mosque youth groups. Terrorism experts believe that such outdoor excursions are typically used as a recruitment tactic to identify potential candidates for indoctrination, facilitate group cohesion and bonding, and improve physical fitness required for some extremist activities.\textsuperscript{126} One participant in a paintball outing organized by Khan in the summer of 2002 reported that such outings were preceded by meetings during which the participants viewed graphic videos.\textsuperscript{127}

The continual narrowing scope of Khan’s social interactions and sphere of engagement to the Iqra bookstore, the two gyms he ran, and the mosque youth groups he coordinated reinforced his radicalization by reducing his exposure to more moderate, outside influences. For the most part, all of his activities took place geographically within a mere quarter of a mile from one another.\textsuperscript{128} This intense, narrow engagement with a particular group is an integral factor contributing to radicalization according to social movement and network theories described in

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{124} Peter Nesser. “Joining jihadi terrorist cells in Europe,” pp. 103.
\item \textsuperscript{125} Report of the Official Account of the Bombings in London on 7th July 2005, pp. 16. Tanweer and Hussain attended the gym established in 2000 and appear to have grown close to Khan there. The second gym established in 2004 had not been opened to the general public but all members of the 7/7 trained there in the months prior to the attack. Some in the community referred to it as the “Al Qaeda” gym. See Aidan Kirby, “The London Bombers as “Self-Starters,”” pp. 418 and Peter Nesser, “Joining jihadi terrorist cells in Europe,” pp. 103.
\item \textsuperscript{126} Report of the Official Account of the Bombings in London on 7th July 2005, pp. 15.
\item \textsuperscript{127} Aidan Kirby. “The London Bombers as “Self-Starters,”” pp. 418.
\item \textsuperscript{128} Shiv Malik. “My brother the bomber,” Prospect Magazine, Issue 135, 30 June 2007.
\end{itemize}
the first section of this paper. Khan’s radicalization conforms to Sageman’s clique theory, which posits that clique identity appears to subsume individual identity as members of a clique increasingly withdraw from society and interact only with one another. Khan gradually became more distant from family, friends, and colleagues as his clique activities took on a central role in his life. By 2004 he was so involved in extremist recruitment, planning, and training that he stopped attending work and sacrificed a professional career to which he had been quite dedicated. Several accounts also note that Khan appears to have experienced marital difficulties around this time and was somewhat estranged from his wife.¹²⁹

Khan’s socialization in the United Kingdom was only one aspect of his mobilization as a convinced extremist. A significant part of his radicalization occurred during two trips which Khan took to Pakistan, the first of which was a two-week visit in July 2003 and the second of which Khan took together with Shehzad Tanweer from November 2004 to February 2005.¹³⁰ It is believed that Khan received some relevant training during his 2003 trip, and that this trip may have provided substantive motivation for the expansion of his recruitment activities in the United Kingdom. During his subsequent trip with Tanweer, both were trained by Al Qaeda operatives at an Al Qaeda camp in the Malakand region of Pakistan’s North West Frontier Province, where they are believed to have received training in bomb-making and counter-surveillance. Khan remained in contact with extremists in Pakistan upon his return to Beeston and through the 7/7 attacks.¹³¹

These two case studies highlight the importance of identity crises, perceived discrimination, and social isolation through involvement in cliques to the dynamic process of radicalization. However, while analyzing Hammami’s and Khan’s radicalization highlights the similarities between these two particular cases, this research is insufficient to extrapolate definitive conclusions about the phenomenon of radicalization throughout Britain and the United States more generally. Future research into other radicalization cases studies is necessary to determine if there are specific radicalization drivers, or sets of drivers, that are unique to Britain or the United States. Additional research should examine whether radicalization trajectories in Britain and the United States share similarities with other countries.

**Conclusions**

The most compelling theories of radicalization which have been developed to explain the phenomenon among second-generation immigrants in Western Europe typically focus on three issues: conflicted identities, socioeconomic grievances, and social mobilization. As the case study of Mohammad Sidique Khan illustrates, all of these explanations hold some relevance. The weakest of the three theories is that of socioeconomic grievances, although if this category is viewed broadly to include issues such as perceived discrimination, Islamophobia, and physical segregation of different faith communities, the explanatory value of socioeconomic grievances makes more sense.

Despite the long-held conventional wisdom that the American “melting pot” immigration model provided a buffer against radicalization among American Muslim communities, the
number of homegrown extremists arrested in the past six years on suspicion of planning terrorist attacks highlights the fallacy of this line of thinking. Although American Muslims generally are better integrated than their counterparts in Britain, the case of Omar Hammami underlines the fact that American Muslims are still prone to conflicts of identity, which can be exacerbated by experiencing discrimination and Islamophobia.

Indeed, despite the different contexts in which their radicalization took place, the drivers which prompted and propelled Hammami’s and Khan’s radicalization trajectories were quite similar. Both young men had trouble establishing an identity that was simultaneously distinct from both the world of their parents’ and that of their birthplace. While Hammami’s initial identity conflict arose from his difficulty reconciling his parents’ different religious teachings, Khan’s resulted from his inability to identity with the Urdu-speaking imams at his family’s mosque, coupled with the social pressure his friends exerted when his entire social clique began converting to Wahhabism. Hammami’s struggle to define his identity was reflected dramatically in the extreme behavior changes he displayed throughout high school. Khan, on the other hand, did not voice any opinions or engage in any activities that might have suggested to his friends, colleagues, or family that he was becoming increasingly radicalized and ultimately planned a suicide attack. Even his trips to Pakistan and his increasing absences from work did not arouse much suspicion, although they did result in his eventual firing and alleged marital difficulties.

The strains and grievances that Hammami and Khan experienced in their respective communities shaped their radicalization in important ways. Hammami experienced prejudice

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133 Khan did appear on the periphery of a 2004 investigation by MI5 into a plot by Omar Khyam to conduct an attack in the UK using fertilizer bombs, but his meetings with Khyam were not deemed suspicious enough to merit further investigation at the time. See “MI5 probe could have hit jackpot.” The Independent, 23 February 2011; “Profile: Mohammad Sidique Khan.” BBC News, 2 March 2011.
firsthand in post-9/11 Daphne, and this contributed to his growing alienation from mainstream society and deepening involvement with his Salafi clique, and later with the virtual community, in particular the “Islamic Networking” forum. There is no evidence that Khan himself experienced discrimination, but his deepening cognitive radicalization took place at a time when violent race riots were prevalent in his region of the United Kingdom. This, combined with the evidence that he regularly viewed footage from foreign conflicts that highlighted atrocities committed against Muslims, suggests that Khan’s radicalization was likely deepened by proxy through perceived grievances against the greater Muslim umma to which he felt he belonged.

Both Hammami and Khan experienced a cognitive opening that prompted them to engage in what Wiktorowicz refers to as “religious seeking,” and both were drawn to a fundamentalist form of Islam. In keeping with Wiktorowicz’s theory, Salafism achieved resonance with Hammami in large part due to his respect for and ability to connect with Tony Sylvester. Interestingly, when he experienced a second cognitive opening in Toronto prompted by the U.S. invasion of Iraq, Hammami’s renewed religious seeking led him to abandon his belief in nonviolence and seek an intellectual framework that promoted action over religiosity. In Khan’s case, his attraction to Wahhabism appears to have arisen not out of religious-seeking per se, but rather out of a motivation for social activism as well as an inability to connect with the Urdu-speaking imams at his family’s traditional, mainstream mosque.¹³⁴

More important than ideology, cliques played a central role in both cases. Khan’s and Hammami’s isolation began as they grew estranged from their families. Their familial...

¹³⁴ Ed Husain, a former member of the British branch of the extremist group Hizb-ut Tahrir, notes that Islamist groups in Britain often lacked any truly religious component, instead promoting political and social activism that was cloaked in Islamist rhetoric. See Ed Husain. The Islamist: Why I joined radical Islam in Britain, what I saw inside and why I left (London: Penguin, 2007), pp. 146-148.
disconnects were exacerbated by interactions with their surroundings -- Hammami experienced discrimination firsthand while Khan’s frustration arose primarily from the social problems of the economically deprived Beeston community, which he experienced daily in his job as a mentor for children with learning disabilities and behavioral problems. Both gradually reduced their involvement with society to a small number of cliques centered on friendship and religious ideology, and this narrow sphere of engagement reinforced their growing radicalization. Khan’s radicalization was closely tied to his cliques at the mosque, the two gyms he ran, and the Iqra bookstore. Hammami, on the other hand, engaged in a large degree of self-imposed radicalization through the internet. Nonetheless, his involvement in different online forums and chat rooms created a “virtual clique” as powerful as those in which Khan participated.

The two cases of Omar Hammami and Mohammad Sidique Khan indicate that identity crises, perceived discrimination, and social isolation through involvement in cliques are the key elements that propel radicalization. Identity crises arose when Hammami and Khan had trouble reconciling differences between the social and ideological frameworks provided by their families and communities. These crises became acute when they experienced discrimination, both real and perceived, firsthand and through different channels including the Internet and violent jihadi videos. Social and virtual cliques provided Khan and Hammami with attractive alternative social networks to the increasingly alienating environments they perceived around them. Clique members only articulated and promoted ideologies that reinforced their existing beliefs, creating a social sphere that was invitingly stable and ideologically consistent. This closed, petri dish environment of the clique enabled the potent elements of identity crisis and perceived
discrimination to incubate and, in the cases of Hammami and Khan, become combustible as they went from being angry young men to terrorists who embraced violence and destruction.
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