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Insights from Recent Study on Roots of Violent Radicalization in the UK

By Zulkifli Mohamed Sultan and Muhammad Haniff Hassan

This article focuses on the roots of violent radicalization in the UK through two counter-terrorism strategic plans known as CONTEST and Prevent implemented by the UK government.

Many countries in the world have become increasingly fearful of the home-grown terrorism emerging within their societies. Although this phenomenon is not exclusive to Muslims, its emergence among them is one of the key security concerns since the 9/11 incident.

The key to solving the problem lies in accurately understanding the radicalization process that would contribute to its prevention. This makes understanding radicalization an important research topic among scholars and researchers.

United Kingdom (UK) is arguably an important case study to provide insights to this issue. It has one of the most comprehensive counter-terrorism strategic plans. This plan, known as CONTEST, recognizes radicalization as one of the four strategic factors that have enabled terrorist groups to grow, flourish and espouses counter-radicalization strategy known as Prevent. CONTEST was formulated in 2003 and first published in 2006. It has gone through changes and republished in 2006 and 2011.

When the coalition government under Prime Minister David Cameron was formed, Prevent strategy went into extensive review due to criticism received from the Muslim community. The result of the review is a revamped version of Prevent strategy (Prevent Review) released in June 2011. Prevent Review lays down not only the strategy and policy that will be implemented but also explains their rationale which are based on studies done and feedback collated by the UK government.

In January 2012, a report was released on the roots of violent radicalization in the UK context.

This was based on the study done by the UK House of Commons Home Affairs Committee (the Committee). Its main objective is to independently test "the evidence base for the Prevent Review". The focus of the study is to examine:

- the root causes of violent radicalization in the UK
- the individuals and groups particularly vulnerable to radicalization
- the locations where radicalization takes place.

Although radicalization is not a major problem exclusive only to Muslims, much of the findings made in the study relates to its occurrence among Muslims because Al Qaeda related terrorism is assessed as the most significant threat to the UK's security.

The study was done by conducting reviews on oral evidences and written submissions, visits to prisons and organizing a conference and a round-table discussion with a group of students from the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London.

The report of the study is arguably the most recent work on radicalization till date. Although the context is specific to the UK, it could still provide useful insights.

The report is divided into two parts:

- 1) On root causes of violent radicalization for the purpose of understanding the problem
- 2) On Prevent strategy implementation for the purpose of evaluating and improving its effectiveness.

This article will focus on the first part of the report only. It seeks to provide a snapshot of the findings by the Committee with regard to causes of radicalization. In the process, it will compare the findings with studies made in the Prevent Review and other works that evaluate the problem in a broader context.

State of Radicalization

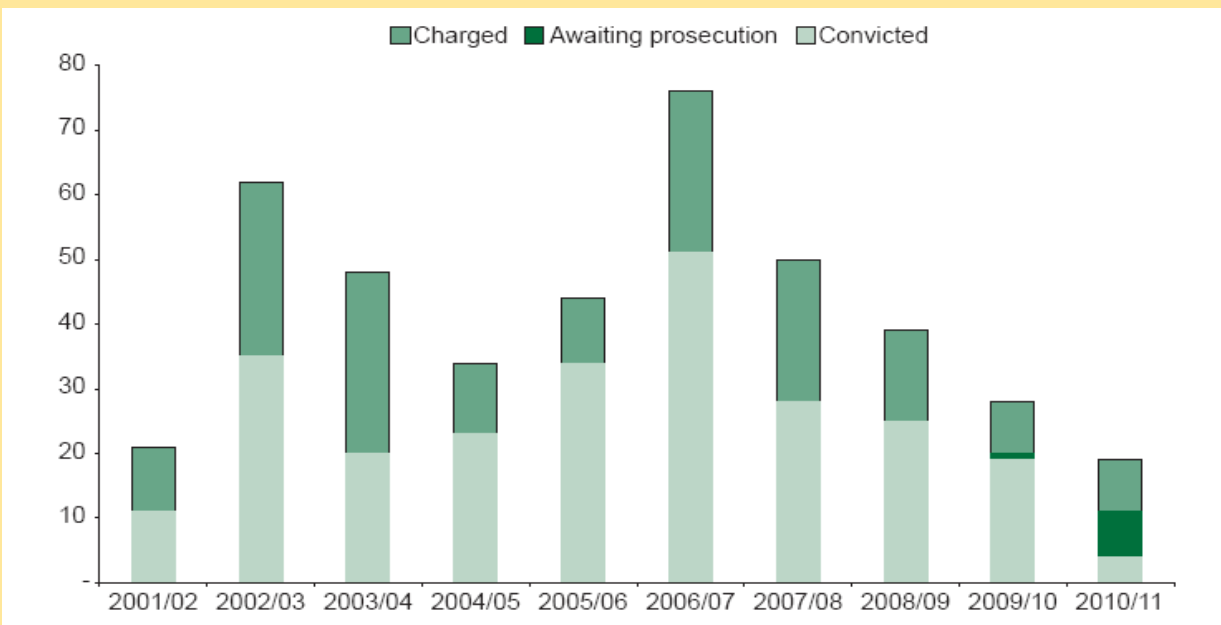
Based on interviews with experts and supporting data in the chart below, the paper concludes that the problem of Islamist radicalization is declining. This corresponds with surveys and studies made by others at a global context that support for Al Qaeda is either small or has declined, although the figures remain high in some countries.

However, the paper warns of two developments that will pose serious social problems:

- 1) growth of support for non-violent extremism among Muslims due to feelings of alienation, and
- 2) growth of a more extreme and violent form of far-right ideology.

List of sources used by the study includes:

- Brian Michael Jenkins, *Stray Dogs and Virtual Armies: Radicalization and Recruitment to Jihadist Terrorism in the United States Since 9/11*, 2011.
- National Security Preparedness Group, *Preventing Violent Radicalization in America*, Bipartisan Policy Center, June 2011.
- Charles Kurzman, *Muslim-American Terrorism Since 9/11: An Accounting*, Triangle Centre on Terrorism and Homeland Security, February 2011.
- Charles Kurzman, *Muslim-American Terrorism in the Decade Since 9/1*, Triangle Centre on Terrorism and Homeland Security, February 2012.
- "Osama bin Laden Largely Discredited Among Muslim Publics in Recent Years", Pew Global Attitudes Project, 2 May 2011.
- Juliana Menasce Howowitz, *Declining Support for bin Laden and Suicide Bombing*, Pew Global Attitudes Project, 10 September 2010.



Source: Roots of violent radicalization, Nineteenth Report of Session 2010–12, prepared by UK House of Commons Home Affairs Committee. <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201012/cmselect/cmhaff/1446/1446.pdf>, P7

The Vulnerable Group

Prevent Review suggests that Muslims vulnerable to radicalization are:

- “young people and people from lower income and socio-economic groups;
- those who distrust Parliament and who see a conflict between being British and their own cultural identity; and
- those who perceive discrimination, experience racial or religious harassment, and have a negative view of policing.”

However, the Committee finds that reality is more ambiguous. It concludes, “it is clear that individuals from many different backgrounds are vulnerable, with no typical profile or pathway to radicalization.” It must be noted that this conclusion is consistent with findings made by many other researchers such as:

- James W. Jones, *Blood That Cries Out From the Earth: The Psychology of Religious Terrorism*, 2008.
- Paul K. Davis, Kim Cragin et. al., *Social Science for Counterterrorism: Putting Together Pieces*, 2009.
- Brian Michael Jenkins, *Stray Dogs and Virtual Armies*.
- Lorenzo Vidino, *Countering Radicalization in America: Lessons from Europe*, November 2010.
- National Security Preparedness Group, *Preventing Violent Radicalization in America*.
- H.A Hellyer, *Engagement with the Muslim Community and Counter-Terrorism: British Lessons for the West*, December 2007.

The reason cited is the lack of objective data gathered because much of the data is held by people who are working with vulnerable individuals on the ground. The Committee recommends that proper methodology be devised for the collation of data for analysis purposes. This can be shared to the wider research community that enhances better understanding of the problem.

Drivers of Radicalization

Based on the evidence gathered by the Committee, it concludes that “there were many drivers of, and routes into Islamist radicalization.” Nevertheless, it notes the key role played by sense of grievance and its link to social exclusion in radicalization process. From the evidence gathered, the Committee agrees with the Prevent Review’s sources of grievances:

- being target of police stop and search power provided by counter-terrorism legislation,
- general approach of counter-terrorism strategy,
- bias and Islamophobia in the media,
- foreign policy of the government towards Muslim countries, Israeli-Palestinian conflict and war in Iraq.

This finding is similar to a recent Home Office-commissioned research paper which states, “The empirical evidence base on what factors make an individual more vulnerable to Al Qaida influenced violent extremism is weak. Even less is known about why certain individuals resort to violence, when other individuals from the same community, with similar experiences, do not become involved in violent activity.”

In fact, the findings on the importance of grievances in radicalization is also made by many other researchers such as:

- Farhad Khosrokhavar, *Inside Jihadism: Understanding Jihadi Movements Worldwide*, 2009.
- Marc Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad*.
- *Declassified Key Judgements of the National Intelligence Estimate “Trends in Global Terrorism Implications for the United States,”* Office of the Director of National Intelligence, April 2006.
- National Security Preparedness Group, *Preventing Violent Radicalization in America*.

- Quinton Wictorowicz, *Radical Islam Rising: Muslim Extremism in the West*, 2005, chapter 2.
- Pew Global Attitudes Project, *Islam and the West: Searching for Common Ground*, Pew Research Centre, July 18, 2006.
- *Opening Briefing: U.S Image in Middle East/ North Africa*, Gallup, January 27, 2009.
- David Gartensein-Ross and Laura Grossman, *Homegrown Terrorists in the U.S and U.K*, April 2009.
- Darcy M. E. Norick, "The Root Causes of Terrorism," *Social Science for Counterterrorism: Putting the Pieces Together*, edited by Paul K. Davis and Kim Cragin, 2009.
- Todd C. Halmus, "Why and How Some People Become Terrorists," *Social Science for Counterterrorism*.
- Angel M. Rabasa et al, *The Muslim World after 9/11*.
- Bartlett, Birdwell and King, *Edge of Violence*, April 2010.

These studies highlight the significance of the war in Iraq and, to a lesser extent, Afghanistan in radicalizing Muslim youths to join the jihad effort and plot attacks against foreign military powers in both countries.

The Committee's finding is in stark contrast with Prevent Review which gives great importance to ideology as a factor of radicalization.

The Committee however agrees with Prevent Review that people who reject mainstream political process because they have lost confidence in it are more vulnerable to violent radicalization. But, the Committee views that "there is an insufficient focus within Prevent on building trust in democratic institutions at all levels" and recommends more to be done in this respect.

Places of Radicalization

To identify where radicalization occurs, the Committee looks into the following places;

- Universities

The Committee differs from Prevent Review which drew a link between university education and violent radicalization. It notes that the evidence gathered suggest the link is less direct and obvious and held that the emphasis on role of universities in radicalization is disproportionate. It highlights that a Home Office document published as recent as November 2011 implies the same conclusion when it notes that Muslims involved in violent radicalization, "tend to be educated to a similar level... as the broader population in which they live."

- Religious institutions

The Committee agrees with the Prevent Review that the risk of violent radicalization in religious institutions is small. Evidences from witnesses suggest that "there was very little threat from the mosques" and, as a whole, "religious institutions are not a major cause for concern."

- Internet

In agreement with the Prevent Review, the Committee notes "internet does play a role in violent radicalization, although a level of face-to-face interaction is usually required", except in self-radicalization cases because they usually take place in isolation from the society. On this regard, the Committee raises concerns about the impact of 'Sheikh Google' (a person who issues fatwas on the internet) on vulnerable individuals whose journey on the path of radicalization is not known yet.

- Prison

The Committee is also in agreement with the Prevent Review on violent radicalization in prisons that there is lack of concrete evidence to prove if convicted terrorists were radicalized while they were in prison. It thus concludes that the role of prisons in radicalization is less obvious. However, the Committee recommends authorities to work closely with Muslim organizations in order to understand better on issues relating to prison inmates and their links with the outside world due to the vulnerability of prison inmates.

- Others

The Committee notes that the evidence of radicalization in public places is weak. More often instead, it takes place in private premises such as homes of radical individuals. This is because of the heightened awareness among members of the Muslim community on the dangers of radicalization, their willingness to cooperate with the authorities and increased surveillance by the authorities.

The Committee recommends a study on criminal gangs as a source of radicalization in view of the fact that some terrorist organizations outside the UK have identified gangs within prisons as a source for radicalization.

Conclusion

Three findings of the Committee correspond with other studies and surveys which indicates their significance for counter-radicalization work:

- 1) The declining support for violent radicalization, which means counter-radicalization will be more difficult because the threat is diffused to smaller populations. However, vigilance must be maintained and complacency should not be allowed to take place because past terrorism inci-

dents have shown the devastation that violent radicals can cause.

- 2) The multiplicity of radicalization pathways, which necessitates a multi faceted approach of counter-radicalization work and the continuation of study on the causes of radicalization that will improve and refine the current understanding.

- 3) The important role played by grievances in radicalization, which means security and law-enforcement approach is not and cannot be the silver bullet to radicalization problems. Success and effectiveness of counter-radicalization plans are dependent on political, social and economic approach to address perceived and real grievances.

Understanding radicalization, even in a single context like the UK, is not an easy task and study on it is bound to produce differing views due to differences in data set and how they were interpreted. This, however, must not stop attempts to improve the understanding of radicalization through methodological research.

Indeed, much has been achieved to understand the problem since 9/11 as a result of various research initiatives. Continuous research may not totally eliminate the fog over the problem but it surely can reduce it significantly that will contribute to an improved and effective solution to the problem.

Policy makers must accept and live with certain levels of ambiguity to the problem. The key is for them to learn how to navigate all the differing views in order to arrive at a best decision. In this regard, constant consultation and close collaboration between government agencies, academic institutions and community on the ground is an imperative.

Investigating the mind of a terrorist: Grasping the nexus between ideology and narrative

By Mohamed Feisal Mohamed Hassan

This article discusses the close relationship between ideology and narrative using a case study conducted on a prison inmate belonging to Jemaah Islamiyah (JI).

To understand contemporary terrorism, one needs to analyze ideas. In both terrorist and counter-terrorist circles, ideas are at work. The catchphrase "War of Ideas" justifies the centrality of ideas in shaping terrorism studies today.

On 23 February 1998, a unified idea was declared by five different individuals that shape the future of today's violent religious extremism. These five individuals are Shaykh Usamah Bin-Muhammad Bin-Ladin; Ayman al-Zawahiri, amir of the Jihad Group in Egypt; Abu-Yasir Rifa'i Ahmad Taha, Egyptian Islamic Group; Shaykh Mir Hamzah, secretary of the Jamiat-ul-Ulema-e-Pakistan; and Fazlur Rahman, amir of the Jihad Movement in Bangladesh. The idea was in the form of a religious edict, a fatwa, once the exclusive prerogative of the highest religious authority in Islam, the Mufti.

The fatwa declared in Al-Quds newspaper: "On that basis, and in compliance with Allah's order, we issue the following fatwa to all Muslims: The ruling to kill the Americans and their allies— civilians and military— is an individual duty for every Muslim who can do it in any country in which it is possible to do it, in order to liberate the al-Aqsa Mosque and the holy mosque [Mecca] from their grip, and in order for their armies to move out of all the lands of Islam, defeated and unable to threaten any Muslim."

In this pseudo-fatwa, violent ideas are justified. An idea of violence was established through legalizing killings of the purported enemy. To magnify the idea, the institution of fatwa was hijacked. Pseudo-religious authority was founded and supported by the media's oblivious coverage of the declaration. The five individuals disintegrated the status of knowledge, intricacies

of processes, and the institution of Mufti. While the declaration was to kill Americans and the infidels, more harm was done by using an idea to confuse public opinion. The pseudo-fatwa as an idea, critically fragmented the Muslim world.

In dealing with ideas, several concepts emerge. How are narratives and ideologies understood? According to the Oxford English dictionary, a narrative is "a representation of a history, biography, process, etc., in which a sequence of events has been constructed into a story in accordance with a particular ideology; a story or representation used to give an explanatory or justificatory account of a society, period, etc." We understand a narrative as discussing a framework.

A terrorist rehabilitation framework deliberates on the basic structure of understanding the threat, the discourse, the agents, the policies, the strategies, the implications and the factors of measuring outcomes. Central to the framework, is to understand the ideology, described by the Oxford English dictionary as "a systematic scheme of ideas, usually relating to politics, economics, or society and forming the basis of action or policy; a set of beliefs governing conduct." Thus a terrorist rehabilitation narrative profiles the framework of winning hearts and minds of radicals and extremists as practiced and learnt today in places as far apart as Saudi Arabia and Singapore, as distinctly different as Sri Lanka and Iraq, and most importantly, as urgent as minimizing the deaths of innocents from Jakarta to Kabul to London.

Between Terrorists' Narrative and Ideology

In formulating a terrorist rehabilitation framework, the terrorist narrative needs to be put to the forefront and to be analyzed so as to provide critical pointers towards framing a counter-narrative. Terrorist narrative is understood as the story obtained through various modes of qualitative research and field interviews. Qualitative research includes strenuous academic profiling of groups, personalities, and occurrences. Field interviews are critical in providing firsthand and critical information in understanding the terrorist narrative. This work will highlight the use of both qualitative research and field interviews in capturing the terrorist narrative.

Let us use a case study based on a field interview conducted by the International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research (ICPVTR). In October 2010, ICPVTR analysts met with Ali Imron in a prison in Jakarta, currently serving a life sentence for his role in the 2002 Bali bombings that claimed 202 lives. The meeting provided us with a shocking realization

on the importance of narratives. Even in the midst of serving a life sentence, there was no sign showing Ali Imron was perturbed. He was passionate in his stance that Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), the group that he had served for many years, was in its current state of 'filtration', not disintegration. He believed the current period of curtailment by the authorities faced by JI is a test of its future survival.

What struck us most was his insistence of correcting the wrong perception of JI's real ability spread by conspiracy theorists. This arose due to critical reviews, of his autobiography entitled *Ali Imron Sang Pengebom* (Ali Imron the Bomber). He claimed that those who were critical of his book denounced JI's lethal ability. He wanted the masses to understand that the Bali bombing highlighted JI's true capability to produce bombs and create panic.



ICPVTR analysts conducting a workshop on Terrorist Rehabilitation and Community Engagement for Indonesian counter-terrorism officials in Singapore on July 2010.

He strongly opposed those who cast doubts on the religious vigor of the Bali bombers. The Bali bombers were indoctrinated to believe that they are true Mujahideen, and not secret agents to destroy Islam as projected by some. He fervently disagreed with the declaration made by several JI members, including the head of JI, Abu Bakar Baasyir, that Bali bombing was not their handiwork, and that the explosives made by them were different to the ones that detonated in Bali.

Determined to expose the truth, Ali Imron believed it was his duty to correct any misunderstanding of JI's ability. While in prison, he is writing a book to counter these misunderstandings.

Ali Imron's passionate belief of JI's violent capabilities have helped keep the narrative alive. Despite a lifelong prison sentence served to him, his brother Mukhlas sentenced to death, and separating him from his wife and children did not discourage his passion of keeping the JI narrative alive.

However, such anecdotes and motivations do not make up the ideology or the belief system of all radical individuals or groups. Al Qaeda theoreticians, ideologues and preachers present a distorted interpretation of different concepts such as *al-Wala wal Bara* (loyalty and hatred) in creating a reality of hate, jihad as the pinnacle of Islam, and *istimata* (searching for death) as the pinnacle of their struggle.



Singapore's Deputy Prime Minister, Teo Chee Hean, addressing the International Conference on Community Engagement organized by the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies in Singapore on September 2011. Photo Credit: ICPVTR

Although it is not considered mainstream Islam and is often distorted, such collective concepts make the ideology of these groups appeal to a narrow segment of Muslims worldwide. To different degrees, those indoctrinated advocate, support, and participate in violence. Ideology propels leaders, members, and followers of a terrorist group into action. Ideology is a belief system, values and an action plan to achieve a political objective.

Counter-terrorism efforts have cast a wider net in engaging with religious scholars to deconstruct the ideology behind such radical and terrorist groups. Key to winning hearts and minds in this battle of ideas is to break the nexus between the radical's narrative and ideology. This is critical towards moulding a sustainable front that plays a crucial role in rehabilitating terrorists and in curbing extremism among the greater masses.

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The Geography of Terror in the Sahel

By Ahmed S. Hashim, Grégoire Patte and Nathan Cohen

This paper analyzes the different natures and dynamics of the active groups in the Sahel, and the difficulties standing in the way of regional and international cooperation to deal with the threat.

Al Qaeda's centre of gravity has shifted from the Afghanistan-Pakistan border regions, known as the ACPAK zone, to the Middle East and North Africa region. The region of particular concern is a large area in the Sahara known as the Sahel which extends from the Western Sahara on the Atlantic Ocean to Somalia on the Indian Ocean. It is part of what is known as the "Arc of Instability", an area that is subject to daily terrorist activities and the one that extends to Yemen, on the Asian continent and beyond into South Asia. The focus of this paper is the Sahel region on the African continent where much of Al Qaeda activity is now taking place. Though the refer-

ence to the "Arc of Instability" is relevant in many ways, it does not provide the key to a complete understanding of the complexity of the situation. One should identify the different natures and dynamics of the active groups and the difficulties standing in the way of regional and international cooperation to deal with the threat.

Moreover, the major threat for Western countries and local governments is not Al Qaeda central anymore, but its allies or franchises such as Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) – assessed by the CIA as a major threat to U.S. interests – Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb



Source: International Center for Terrorism Studies, Potomac Institute for Policy Studies, Yonah, 2012, <http://moroccoonthemove.files.wordpress.com/2012/02/2012-special-update-report-full-report-terrorism-in-africa-from-9-11-to-arab-spring-icts-potomac-2feb2012.pdf>

(AQIM), al-Shabaab, Boko Haram, Ansar Dine and the Touareg rebels. This paper will firstly highlight the diverse nature of the threat, differentiating between objectives, strategies and tactics of the active groups in Sahel and MENA regions. Secondly, the paper will describe and analyse the geopolitical mosaic and the obstacles standing in the way of regional and international cooperation to deal with the security environment in the Sahel.

Heterogeneous nature of the threat

The "Arc of Instability" region defies simple categorization. In Africa, transnational millenarian militants mix freely and clash frequently with local guerrilla movements and criminal syndicates. Each of the four main catalysts of instability: al-Shabaab, the Touareg movement, Boko Haram, and Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb suffer from split personalities. This schizophrenia directly impacts each group's strategy and tactics. This also affects the counter-terrorism strategies adopted by regional and Western governments.

The stability of regional countries is also complicated by serious internal divisions and competition between ethno-sectarian groups. For example, Nigeria - one of Africa's political and economic giants - is composed of 250 ethnic groups. The largest ones are in competition with one another for resources, land and the power to determine Nigeria's political future. Boko Haram has made serious inroads in the Muslim north, large swathes of which are deprived and underdeveloped in contrast with the oil-rich Christian south.

The situations in Somalia and Mali do not easily lend themselves to comparison. For example, Somalia has been a failed state for decades; two months ago Mali enjoyed a democratically elected government. However, Mali's democracy was not able to overcome the considerable ethnic differences between the African south and the Touareg (Berber) north, even though

both are Muslim. Additionally, al-Shabaab flaunts its rejection of the West, while Mali's rebels have an ideologue based in Paris and openly pursue international recognition. Nevertheless both the Somali and Malian insurgencies highlight the important lesson of distinguishing between nationalist and transnational rebellions.

The much publicized rift between the al-Shabaab nationalist faction, led by Mukhtar Roobow and Hassan Aweys, and the transnationalist jihadist faction, led by Ahmed Godane has resurfaced with increased intensity. Recently, Aweys publicly scoffed at the notion of a global caliphate. Compounding the tension is the perplexing Youtube video posted by senior al-Shabaab propagandist and commander Omar Hammami or Abu Mansour al-Amriki and Hammami's subsequent summons to al-Shabaab headquarters. In the video, Hammami said he feared that al-Shabaab members were conspiring to kill him due to differences over strategy and interpretations of Islamic law.

Analysts have been reduced to educated speculation when explaining the circumstances surrounding Hammami's video and his possible arrest. However, considering Hammami's stature within the group and his purported close relationship with Roobow, one can reasonably assume that Hammami's downfall is related to the on-going internal struggle between the transnational and nationalist factions of al-Shabaab. The divisions affect strategy and tactics. Nationalist *jihadists* such as Roobow, Aweys and others have opposed the transnationalists' uncompromising attitude toward Western aid agencies and their callousness towards civilian deaths.

The Touareg rebellion also features a power struggle between nationalists and transnational Islamist militants. The National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA) is a nationalist organization leading the fight for a secular Touareg state. These characteristics sharply distinguish the MNLA from even the nationalist

faction of organisations like al-Shabaab in faraway Somalia and which remains quite dedicated to implementing sharia law in that country. The MNLA collaborated briefly with Ansar Dine, a Touareg Islamist group that reportedly has links to AQIM. After the MNLA scored several quick victories over the Malian army with Ansar Dine's assistance, the relationship between the two groups deteriorated quickly.

Omar Hamaha, a senior Ansar Dine commander, rejects the very notion of the territorial state and all "revolutions not in the name of Islam." As an organization that hoped to obtain international recognition and support, the MNLA realized that a relationship with Ansar Dine is a strategic liability and publicly denounced Ansar Dine's leader, Ayad Ag Ghali, as a "criminal" and his interpretation of Islam as foreign. Ansar Dine responded violently and claimed to have seized Timbuktu from the MNLA, though that assertion remains disputed. Despite the obvious differences between the al-Shabaab and the Touareg rebellions, both cases demonstrate the enduring strength of geographically-based loyalties and how these sentiments can clash with religion based convictions.

The nexus between crime and terrorism represents a second complicating factor in the Sahel. As the cases of AQIM and Boko Haram reveal, it is not always clear who is a criminally-motivated religious extremist and who is a religiously-inclined criminal. In the Sahel as in the rest of the "Arc of Instability," transnational crime is converging with the terrorist world. Also caution must be exercised when comparing AQIM and Boko Haram. As a transnational movement, AQIM does not receive the kind of grassroots support that Boko Haram enjoys in Northern Nigeria.

AQIM's technical expertise far exceeds that of Boko Haram. Boko Haram members have been reported to use rudimentary weapons such as bows and arrows in addition to the standard

Kalashnikovs. In 2011, Boko Haram displayed a comparable level of sophistication in its attacks and this is likely a result of AQIM's tutelage. Both groups use criminal support to bolster their activities.

The personal rivalries within AQIM, specifically between current emir Abdelmalek Droukdel and Mokhtar Belmokhtar suggests that the group is split. Droukdel commands AQIM-North out of the Kabylie mountains just east of Algiers. Belmokhtar is the most famous and prominent commander of AQIM-South and operates in the Sahel. While Belmokhtar's rhetoric certainly matches that of Al Qaeda, his nickname, "Mr. Marlboro," reveals another side of his operations. He is notorious for his criminal activities, especially his smuggling of cigarettes, cars, and people.

Another leader, Amari Saifi, aka "Abdelrazak el-Para," was notorious for the spectacular kidnapping of 32 European tourists in Algeria by his group; but was ultimately tracked to and captured in northern Chad. Many attribute AQIM's kidnapping of Westerners to the basic material need for money, and not to a war against infidels.

Similarly, Boko Haram is not strictly the ideological actor its name (which means "Western Education is Sacrilege") denotes. Criminal gangs frequently adopt the name "Boko Haram" when convenient. Indeed, in December 2011 Nigerian police revealed that threatening text messages have been sent in Boko Haram's name in order to extort and intimidate the recipients of the messages. In a February 2012 press conference, Ambassador Kodjo Menan, Togo's Permanent Representative to the UN and the current President of the UN Security Council, warned of Boko Haram's contacts with regional criminal actors.

A nuanced and robust regional counter-terrorism strategy with material support from outside might have an impact on the activities of the terrorists and criminal groups. It is not clear, however, that the concerned regional states and other members of the international community can get their act together.

Obstacles to Regional and International Co-operation

There has been a revival of interest in the political and economic fortunes of the MENA countries; in particular North Africa and the poverty-stricken Sahel region to the south of it have caught the attention of former Western colonial powers and the United States. France is by far the most active European country and since decolonisation, the French military forces have been active in North Africa in accordance with agreements with regional governments.

French diplomatic and military engagements in the region are a part of the "Françafrique" concept which refers to the deep French involvement in every aspect of African social, economic, diplomatic and security issues. Further-

more, faced with its own threats of domestic terrorism, France has reinforced its bilateral co-operation with the countries in the region. For example, the Mauritanian forces that undertook a raid in July 2010 in Mali to free the French hostage Michel Germaneau, were trained by the French Special Operation Commandment (COS). Following the kidnapping of seven AREVA (French energy firm) employees, including five French citizens, at Arlit, Niger in September 2010, the COS has a permanent detachment in Burkina Faso. The COS also trained the Nigerian National Guard, with whom it organized the tragic operation in January 2011 in Mali resulting in the death of two French hostages.

France has negotiated Technical Military Assistance Agreement (ATM) with countries in the Sahel (Morocco, Algeria, Egypt, Mali, Mauritania, Niger and Chad), providing training and material for the local armies. Moreover, France has six military bases in Africa (including Reunion), providing France with a large and efficient power projection capability, especially into the Sahel region.

Since 9/11, the United States is also increasingly concerned by the deterioration of security

Catalysts of Instability in the Sahel

Issue	Nationalist Sentiments	International Jihad	Desertification/Drought	Non-Ideological Crime
al-Shabaab	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Somali Piracy	No	No	No	Yes
Touareg Rebellion	Yes	No	Yes	Unknown
Ansar Dine	No	Yes	Yes	Unknown
AQIM	No	Yes	No	Yes
Boko Haram	Yes	No	Yes	Yes

in Sahel. In 2002, the U.S. government launched the Pan-Sahel Initiative (PSI), with the objective of creating at least one company of 150 specially trained counter-terrorist personnel in each of the four partner countries: Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger. The PSI was replaced in 2005 by the Trans-Saharan Counter Terrorism Partnership (TSCTP), an interagency program to prevent new recruits to join terrorist groups and deny them strongholds within the region. The TSCTP includes in addition to the PSI partners, Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Nigeria, Burkina Faso and Senegal.

The U.S. policy in the Sahel is designed to increase the efficiency of the local security forces and avoid any direct intervention by U.S. forces. The U.S. provides training, supplies, logistical and other technological support mainly for intelligence purposes.

Members of the TSCTP have participated jointly with the U.S., European countries and other NATO members in an annual large-scale exercise named *Flintlock* under the Joint Combined Exchange Training (JCET) program. "The overall objectives of the exercise are to build and enhance the military interoperability of select African, European, and U.S. forces at the operational and tactical levels," said Ambassador J. Anthony Holmes, U.S. Africa Command's deputy to the commander for Civil-Military Activities. He reiterated that the building of enduring relationships and trust among regional states and between them and outside powers will aid in the adoption of mutual solutions to some of the issues that breed discontent and extremism.

Despite the willingness of Paris and Washington to improve their collaboration with the local partners and to develop African security forces, pol-



A Malian soldier takes a defensive position while an Air Force Special Operations Command CV-22 Osprey departs a landing zone in Bamako, Mali as part of a drill for Exercise Flintlock. Photo Credit: Flintlock Public Affairs http://www.defense.gov/dodcmssshare/photoessay/2008-11/hires_111608-flintlock4.JPG

icy-makers in both capitals are faced with two major hurdles. First, they do not always share the same allies in the region; hence their diplomatic and political agendas are not always complementary. Second, few African partners have the capacities to create a sustainable security environment.

Moreover, in the case of Algeria, Morocco, Egypt and Libya, which have or had (Libya) the most efficient, equipped, trained and numerous security forces, their bilateral diplomacy encounters severe difficulties related to territory claims, international position and strategic partnerships.

Regional cooperation suffers drastically as a result of the tense relationship between two major actors, Algeria and Morocco, largely due to their differences regarding the status of the Western Sahara. For example, Algiers refused to attend an anti-terrorist experts meeting in Bamako in October 2010 which brought together members of the G8, the European Union and regional countries, because of the presence of a Moroccan delegation.

There is also a large disparity in the financial and manpower capabilities between the Maghreb and Sahel countries making the interoperability between the security forces an almost insurmountable task. Additionally, the defence budgets of the Sahel countries are not much larger than what the terrorist groups such as AQIM and al-Shabaab generate from ransoms, smuggling and criminal activities.

Furthermore, it is not far-fetched to assume that the military forces of these non-state actors are better trained and more organized than the armies of Sahel countries. Sahel countries also suffer from many other problems: a high level of corruption among the political elite and the military forces, sparse populations and large expanses of poorly governed areas.

Sahel countries have difficulties in collaborating because of differences of view on the correct counter-terrorist strategy to adopt. For example, the Mauritanian President Mohamed Ould Abdelaziz, pleaded for the Sahel countries to adopt a muscular and offensive posture vis-a-vis the activities of AQIM and the organized criminal groups in the region. His Malian counterpart, Amadou Toumani Toure rejected this unambiguous military posture and suggested a more conciliatory approach. Toure's lack of political will was the key factor in perpetrating the coup by the Malian military forces on 22 March 2012. The Malian case highlights the fact that even as Sahel countries face resources difficulties, political willingness is also missing.

Conclusion

The so called "Arc of Instability" is an enormous zone that extends from the western reaches of Africa to the Indian sub-continent. This paper has highlighted the critical importance of the Sahel region in the African continent, which has become the focus of attention of terrorist organizations and criminal enterprises.

The Sahel is a poverty stricken region characterized by ethnic, tribal, sectarian and clan differences. Furthermore, states suffer from weak institutions and lack of resources. These factors have allowed a variety of Al Qaeda affiliated groups or franchises to set up their sanctuaries and base of operations.

These groups are not controlled by a monolithic central organization; moreover, there are differences between them over the true ideological goals of Al Qaeda. Lastly, their growing connections with the lucrative criminal enterprises in the region – which traffic in drugs, humans, arms, and consumer goods – has begun to raise questions about their adherence to political goals as opposed to purely economic ones.

There are vast disparities in resources, political will-power and traditional inter-state rivalries. International aid and support from concerned major powers have not reduced these problems in any substantive way. The Sahel region deserves more attention to reduce the threat of regional terrorism and instability.

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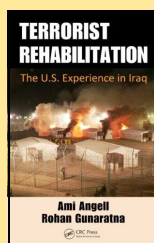
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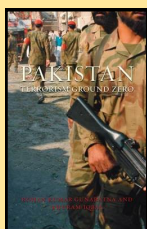
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- Terrorist Rehabilitation: The US Experience in Iraq (CRC Press Taylor and Francis Group, 2011) by Dr. Ami Angell and Dr. Rohan Gunaratna

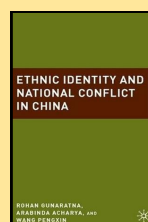


- Pakistan: Terrorism Ground Zero (Reaktion Books, 2011) by Dr. Rohan Gunaratna and Mr. Khurram Iqbal



- International Aviation and Terrorism: Evolving Threats, Evolving Security (Routledge 2009) by Dr. John Harrison

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- Ethnic Identity and National Conflict in China (Palgrave Macmillan 22 June 2010) by Dr. Rohan Gunaratna, Dr. Arabinda Acharya and Mr. Wang Pengxin



- Targeting Terrorist Financing: International Cooperation and New Regimes (Routledge 2009) by Dr. Arabinda Acharya