

THE MUSLIMS ARE COMING!

Islamophobia, Extremism,
and the Domestic War on Terror

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In its campaign to transform Islamic identity, liberalism itself underwent a transformation: it became an ideology of total war that led its advocates into what Italian theorist Domenico Losurdo calls “a tragic performative contradiction.”⁶¹ War on terror liberals reproduced the weaknesses of the conceptual scaffolding they inherited from the cold war. They located the problem of radical political challenges to Western society in alien ideologies that by their very nature were bound to produce violence. In so doing, they disavowed the structural violence on which liberal society itself depended: the ways in which racialized “others” live in a “state of exception” in which liberal norms are permanently suspended—paradoxically, in the name of defending the liberal way of life.⁶² Fighting an extremist enemy constructed as Huntington’s “ideal enemy”—both “ideologically hostile” and “racially and culturally different”—required that liberalism become an identity politics, a call to recharge the batteries of belonging, to take a stand defending a way of life—militarily, intellectually, and culturally—while still claiming the mantle of a universal civilization.⁶³

CHAPTER 4

The Myth of Radicalization

Religion had nothing to do with this. We watched films. We were shown videos with images of the war in Iraq. We were told we must do something big. That’s why we met.

—Hussein Omar, interviewed after participating in a plot to bomb the London Underground on July 21, 2005

How a government makes sense of political violence directed against it usually tells us at least as much about the nature of that government as it does about the nature of its violent opponents. After Ulrike Meinhof, of West Germany’s Red Army Faction, was found hanged in her prison cell in 1976, officials secretly removed her brain in the hope that neuropathologists might discover why she gave up her successful career as a journalist to cofound the far Left armed group. To state officials it seemed more natural that the source of her violence was located in brain deformities than in the political conflicts of postwar Germany. Likewise, Mau Mau rebels captured in the 1950s by the British army in colonial Kenya were examined by the psychiatrist J. C. Carothers, who claimed to find “hard scientific evidence” demonstrating that the uprising was “not political but psycho-pathological,” a conclusion which conveniently validated the need for continuing colonial government.¹

In the aftermath of 9/11, public discussion of the causes of terrorism was largely curtailed, on the assumption that there could be no explanatory account of terrorism beyond the evil mind-set of the perpetrators. Culturalists, whose analysis tended to prevail, saw terrorists as motivated by a fanaticism that was inherent to Islam and did not require much in the way of further analysis. Those wanting

to cover such simple formulae in the veneer of scholarship turned to the founding father of terrorism studies, Walter Laqueur, whose "new terrorism" thesis distinguished between older, political forms of terrorism inspired by nationalism, communism, or fascism and the new "Islamic fundamentalist violence" that he saw as "rooted in fanaticism."² By 2004, however, this account of terrorism was showing its limitations. No longer believing that killing and capturing could by themselves bring success, governments began looking for a new discourse that could better guide their counterterrorism efforts. The taboo on discussing the causes of terrorism now had to be broken. The concept of radicalization emerged as a vehicle for policy makers to explore the process by which a terrorist is made and to provide an analytical grounding for preventive strategies that went beyond the use of state violence.

Peter Neumann, director of the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation at Kings College, London, is one of the founders of the new radicalization discourse; he is also a scholar with access to policy makers in Westminster and Washington. In 2008 he wrote about the value of the concept of radicalization:

Following the attacks against the United States on 11 September 2001 . . . it suddenly became very difficult to talk about the "roots of terrorism," which some commentators claimed was an effort to excuse and justify the killing of innocent civilians. Even so, it seemed obvious [then] that some discussion about the underlying factors that had given rise to this seemingly new phenomenon was urgent and necessary, and so experts and officials started referring to the idea of "radicalisation" whenever they wanted to talk about "what goes on before the bomb goes off." In the highly charged atmosphere following the September 11 attacks, it was through the notion of radicalisation that a discussion about the political, economic, social and psychological forces that underpin terrorism and political violence became possible again.³

In the context of the evolving war on terror, this new discussion of radicalization could present itself as the wiser, more liberal alternative to the simple accounts of terrorism offered immediately after

9/11. It acknowledged that terrorism was a problem that could be investigated, analyzed, and subjected to policy solutions beyond the use of physical force. In actuality, however, the radicalization discourse was, from the beginning, circumscribed to the demands of counterterrorism policy makers rather than an attempt to objectively study how terrorism comes into being. Rather than provide a location for the scholarly understanding of the causes of terrorism—what Kant called the "public use of reason," aimed at the general enlightenment of society—the radicalization discourse limited itself to the "private use of reason" (serving the needs of a "particular civil post or office"), constraining the intellectual process to the needs of government security establishments.⁴

As such, the concept of radicalization inherited at birth a number of built-in, limiting assumptions. Those perpetrating terrorist violence are drawn from a larger pool of extremists who share an ideology that inspires their actions; entry into this wider pool of extremists can be predicted by individual or group psychological or theological factors; and knowledge of these factors could enable governments to develop policies that reduce the risk of terrorism. The study of radicalization, ostensibly a reflection on the causes of terrorism, is thus in practice limited to a much narrower question: why do some individual Muslims support an extremist interpretation of Islam that leads to violence? This question, of course, takes terrorist violence to be a product of how Islam is interpreted and so renders irrelevant consideration of terrorism not carried out by Muslims. An a priori distinction is drawn between the new terrorism, seen as originating in Islamist theology, and the old terrorism of nationalist or leftist political violence, for which the question of radicalization is rarely posed. Answers to the question of what drives this process are to exclude ascribing any causative role to the actions of Western governments or their allies in other parts of the world; instead, individual psychological or theological journeys, largely removed from social and political circumstances, are claimed to be the root cause of the radicalization process. While some accounts acknowledge politics as a component—using euphemistic phrases such as "grievances against real or perceived injustices"—this is only done in the face of overwhelming empirical evidence, before they

quickly move on to the more comfortable ground of psychology or theology. While terrorist violence is not seen as having political causes, nonviolent political activity by Muslim groups that are thought to share an ideology with terrorists is seen as another manifestation of the same radicalization process, with roots in individual theological and/or psychological journeys; it is thereby depoliticized and seen as complicit with religiously inspired terrorism. As historian Mark Sedgwick argues in one of the few critical reflections on the radicalization discourse:

The concept of radicalisation emphasizes the individual and, to some extent, the ideology and the group, and significantly de-emphasizes the wider circumstances—the “root causes” that it became so difficult to talk about after 9/11, and that are still often not brought into analyses. So long as the circumstances that produce Islamist radicals’ declared grievances are not taken into account, it is inevitable that the Islamist radical will often appear as a “rebel without a cause.”⁵

In pursuing this path, radicalization analysts supply what policy makers demand. Following the murder of Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh in Amsterdam in 2004 and the 7/7 attacks on the London transport system in 2005, the issue of homegrown terrorism, involving citizens of European countries carrying out violence domestically, came to prominence. Government officials, first in the Netherlands and later elsewhere, began to devise counterradicalization policies they hoped would preempt such violence. Their assumption was that knowledge of the indicators of individual or group radicalization would allow for the construction of an early warning system to detect theological violence. Authorities came to believe they could monitor and profile Muslim citizens for these signs of radicalization and then intervene to prevent the drift to extremism. Rather than providing governments with a full analysis of the causes of homegrown terrorism, think tanks and terrorism studies departments—which had been established in universities after 9/11 to attract new government funding for national security research—began to model the process by which an individual was thought to become a supporter of the extremist ideologies assumed to lie behind terrorist violence. After

all, addressing the wider political context of terrorism was a nonstarter with government officials, for whom the basic parameters of foreign policy in the Middle East and South Asia were written in stone.

For those establishing themselves as purveyors of this knowledge, the period from 2004 onward was a time of new opportunities, new funding, and new audiences, first in Europe and then in the US, especially following the election in 2008 of a president who wanted a new way of talking about counterterrorism and who was confronted, a year and a half into his term, with the attempted car bombing of Times Square by an American Muslim. Disraeli once remarked, at the high point of British colonial expansion, “The East is a career.” Edward Said used the phrase as the epigraph to his *Orientalism*. Today counterradicalization is a career, as young scholars enter the mini-industry of national security think tanks, terrorism studies departments, law enforcement counterterrorism units, and intelligence services to work on modeling radicalization. Of course, scholars of political violence should want societies to make use of their work in order to reduce such violence. But true scholarship also involves a duty to question the underlying assumptions that define the discipline, particularly when those assumptions reflect the priorities of governments that are themselves parties to the conflict under investigation.

Whereas before 2001 the term “radicalization” had occasionally been used informally in academic literature to refer to a shift toward more radical politics (usually not referring to Muslims), by 2004 the term had acquired its new meaning of a psychological or theological process by which Muslims move toward extremist views. By 2010, over one hundred articles on radicalization were being published in peer-reviewed academic journals each year. In this chapter, I examine the work of some of the leading scholars of radicalization and show how their analyses owe more to the aims and objectives of the states that are the primary consumers of their literature than to an objective study of the subject. This is not solely a matter of biases introduced by funding, by the revolving doors between government agencies and think tanks, or by other institutional pressures, but rather a matter of ideological assumptions that determine what

counts as legitimate and illegitimate within the terms of this discourse. The result is that radicalization scholars systematically fail to address the reality of the political conflicts they claim they want to understand. Instead a concept has been contrived that introduces biases and prejudices into officials' thinking; in turn, this thinking shapes government practices and structures introduced to combat radicalization, resulting in discrimination and unwarranted restrictions on civil liberties. My method is not to challenge the conclusions of radicalization scholars with alternative sets of empirical data but rather to explore the conceptual frameworks used to make sense of the data where they exist, and to show that even the limited data that are available ought to lead to different conclusions.

A Cultural-Psychological Predisposition

A 2004 article by Walter Laqueur provides a bridge between the older terrorism studies and the then-emerging radicalization literature and a useful starting point. Laqueur, a seasoned Washington insider who first came to prominence in the 1950s as Israel's representative to the CIA-funded Congress for Cultural Freedom,⁶ begins by asserting that "al Qaeda was founded and September 11 occurred not because of a territorial dispute or the feeling of national oppression but because of a religious commandment—jihad and the establishment of *shariah*." His argument for rejecting any linkage between terrorism and either poverty or causes such as Palestine is that there are many groups who suffer poverty or oppression but not all resort to violence. With this he moves away from a macro focus on economics or politics and descends to the level of the individual: "How to explain that out of 100 militants believing with equal intensity in the justice of their cause, only a very few will actually engage in terrorist actions?" Here we confront the founding question of the radicalization discourse, which, Laqueur states, has been hitherto neglected. Answering it will provide a root cause that no longer references the wider political context but instead focuses on what he calls "a cultural-psychological predisposition." Framing the root cause question in this way, and providing a model of this "predisposition," also, of course, offers intelligence and law enforcement

agencies the possibility of an analytical framework that can be used for surveillance purposes. Scholarship that associates a particular kind of predisposition, be it cultural, psychological, or some combination, with terrorist violence enables intelligence gatherers to use that predisposition as a proxy for terrorist risk, and to structure their surveillance efforts accordingly.

To illustrate the argument, Laqueur turns his attention to Europe, which he describes as "probably the most vulnerable battlefield" and "the main base of terrorist support groups." He claims that this is the result of a process "facilitated by the growth of Muslim communities, the growing tensions with the native population, and the relative freedom with which radicals could organize in certain mosques and cultural organizations." The failure of "Muslim newcomers" to integrate into Europe—"cultural and social integration was certainly not what the newcomers wanted"—reflected a desire to maintain a separate religious and ethnic identity. This, in turn, led to "the radicalization of the second generation of immigrants" that featured acute feelings of "resentment and hostility" toward the authorities and non-Muslim neighbors, nourished by underachievement and "sexual repression." Hence a "free-floating aggression" underlies the "milieu in which Islamist terrorism and terrorist support groups in Western Europe developed."

In this early account, the main components and confusions of the radicalization discourse are already present: the focus on the religious beliefs and psychology of individuals and the downplaying of political factors; the view that terrorism is rooted in a wider youth culture of anger and aggression; and the listing of factors likely to drive individuals toward support for terrorism, such as anti-Western attitudes, religious fundamentalism, and self-segregation. Already the term "radicalization" tends to merge a number of meanings—disaffection, youth alienation, radical dissent, religious fundamentalism, propensity to violence—which ought to be kept analytically distinct. Already unfounded and biased assumptions about the social and political history of Muslims in Europe are being introduced, and a causal process from a "cultural-psychological predisposition" to violence is being asserted without any substantial evidence. Finally, it is worth noting that there is no mention of US

and UK government rhetoric on the need to fight a war against radical Islam, of the war on Iraq, of the uniting of millions of European Muslims and non-Muslims to actively oppose it, and of the failure of these mobilizations to prevent the war by democratic means.

Later writers of works in the radicalization discourse can be seen as attempts to systematize the basic framework laid out by Laqueur in 2004; they travel in a number of directions from this starting point. For some the question of religious belief—the cultural part of Laqueur's predisposition—is most significant. If a set of religious beliefs, an ideology, can be identified that terrorists share with a wider group of radicals but which moderate Muslims reject, then a model can be developed in which such beliefs are seen as indicators of radicalization, a point along a pathway to becoming a terrorist. This can be called the theological approach to radicalization. It offers a scientific basis for security officials to target surveillance and investigative resources at a group of people who happen to have specific religious beliefs—say, for example, Salafi Muslims. The problem is that if there is no real reason to think that these radical religious beliefs are associated with terrorist violence, then the theological radicalization model is merely legitimizing unwarranted state intrusion into the private religious lives of large numbers of citizens.

The other direction of travel from Laqueur's 2004 paper is to attend to individual and group psychology. What is the process by which some individuals' mental states of alienation or resentment escalate to extremist beliefs whereas others' do not? This psychological approach to radicalization offers the same predictive possibilities, and a more complex account is developed. A psychological process, such as a group dynamic or a struggle with identity, is seen as interacting with a process of acquiring an extremist ideology. A particular combination of psychological factors and religious beliefs becomes the best guide to identifying radicalization. Implicit in both the theological and psychological approaches is the notion that the circulation of extremist ideas, seen as a kind of virus, is able to turn people into violent radicals. This then leads law enforcement agencies to try to prevent exposure to this virus, whether it is found in the contents of books or Web sites, or in the words of preachers or radical activists.

One further point worth noting: because security officials are interested in patterns of belief and behavior that *correlate* with terrorist risk, irrespective of whether they *cause* terrorism, questions of causality are usually left unaddressed in this discourse, despite theorists' claims to be interested in root causes. Instead of answering the question of what causes terrorism—the key question demanded by Kant's "public use of reason"—radicalization discourse claims predictive powers but lacks explanatory powers. Scholars generally talk of factors or indicators that are statistically associated with radicalization, and which intelligence agencies can put to use in their efforts to detect future threats, while tending to refrain from reflecting on the larger question of causality.

Radicalization as a Theological Process

A 2009 study by Daweed Gartenstein-Ross and Laura Grossman, entitled "Homegrown Terrorists in the US and UK: An Empirical Examination of the Radicalization Process," published by the Foundation for Defense of Democracies (FDD), provides a case study of scholarship that attempts to demonstrate the central role of theology in radicalization. While the study is typical of many in its approach and conclusions, it stands out for the authors' claims to rigor—"an empirical examination of behavioral manifestations of the radicalization process in 117 homegrown 'jihadist' terrorists"—and in the interest it has attracted among policy makers in Washington.

The key question the study sets out to answer: "What clues might there be that an individual is self-identifying with, or being indoctrinated into, jihadist ideology?" The data for the study is statements by terrorists themselves, trial transcripts, and newspaper reports that provide biographical information on "every known Islamic homegrown terrorist in the US and UK who perpetrated an attack, attempted to do so, or illegally supported Islamic terrorism through the end of October 2008." Based on this data, the authors claim to discover clusters of indicators that recur sufficiently to suggest a shared trajectory of radicalization. The indicators are not regarded as sufficient conditions to produce a terrorist but as useful markers of risk.

This study primarily focuses on specific behavioral changes that homegrown terrorists went through as they radicalized. It examines six manifestations of the radicalization process: the adoption of a legalistic interpretation of Islam, coming to trust only a select and ideologically rigid group of religious authorities, viewing the West and Islam as irreconcilably opposed, manifesting a low tolerance for perceived religious deviance, attempting to impose religious beliefs on others, and the expression of radical political views.

The study concludes that the first five factors—all associated with religious ideology—are sufficiently present in enough cases to demonstrate that

the individuals' theological understanding was a relatively strong factor in their radicalization.

There are a number of rather obvious problems with the study that can be noted initially. The study does not include a control group of persons who are not terrorists, and so it has no basis on which to associate terrorism with the religious manifestations it is considering. There seems to be no basis on which these six manifestations of the radicalization process were chosen as opposed to other possibilities. One might also ask how much insight into ideology can be gleaned from breaking down a person's beliefs into six discrete religious and political manifestations. Even if these problems are set aside, there remains the difficulty that selecting to study the category of so-called jihadist terrorism assumes that this form of terrorism has specific causes that differ from other forms of violence. In fact, this assumption runs up against even the limited data gathered by Gartenstein-Ross and Grossman. The study's sixth ideological manifestation, what it refers to as the expression of "radical political views," is summarized:

Western powers have conspired against Islam to subjugate it, both physically and morally. At the same time, Muslims worldwide have lost their faith, and lack the strength that they possessed during Muhammad's time. The only proper response to the present situation is military action.

It turns out that belief in this political narrative scores highest among the manifestations examined; indeed, there are no cases in which this political dimension was found to be absent. But the study seeks to evade the implications of its own data. Having noted that the political component of radicalization appears more consistently than the theological, the authors immediately caution that to conclude politics is more significant than religion would be "crude" because "when individuals are committed to a physical fight against the West, it is natural that they will try to justify this on multiple levels"—which rather defeats the purpose of looking to a person's own account of their beliefs, as the study sets out to do. The authors go on to ask whether

individuals' religious awakening *preceded* or followed their political awakening. For the homegrown terrorists who exhibited signs of political radicalization, the religious awakening preceded the political awakening 40.7 percent of the time. In contrast, we found that political radicalization preceded any kind of religious radicalization 11.6 percent of the time. (In the other 47.7 percent of cases, it is unclear whether political or religious ideology came first.) Thus, in our view, a nuanced look at the role of religious ideology in homegrown terrorists' radicalization should find that religion likely plays an important role.⁸

But whether religious awakening or political radicalization comes first in the process of becoming a terrorist is only relevant if we assume that one must be a gateway to the other; only then does it make sense to ask the order in which these manifestations occurred. No empirical evidence is offered for this assumption. Within the study's own framework, a more natural interpretation of the data would be that religious awakening is neither a precursor to political radicalization nor vice versa, and that political radicalization is the key factor in becoming a terrorist. In any case, without including a comparison with cases of radicalization that did not result in terrorism, it is impossible to draw any positive conclusions that associate a particular set of beliefs with jihadist terrorism.

Why this eagerness to downplay political factors, even when the data suggests otherwise? Part of the answer might lie in the politics

of the study's publishers and funders. The FDD is one of several neoconservative pressure groups set up in the wake of 9/11 that helped build support for the US war on Iraq. The study was funded by three private foundations, one of which was the Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation that donated more than \$1.2 million to the neoconservative Project for the New American Century and has provided millions of dollars to Islamophobic propaganda groups in the US, such as the Center for Security Policy and the David Horowitz Freedom Center.⁹ For such groups it is convenient to root terrorism in religious ideology rather than in the political interaction of Western foreign policy and Muslim terrorist groups. But perhaps the main reason is a bias in favor of knowledge claims that can be put to use by national security practitioners without institutional discomfort. Breaking down religious extremism into different manifestations that can be scientifically associated with terrorism is knowledge that law enforcement and intelligence agencies can easily utilize; on the other hand, painting a more reflexive picture, in which state agencies and terrorists are caught in a dynamic political conflict, is much harder to sell. In an introductory section to the FDD study, Brian Jenkins Mead, a prominent analyst of terrorism at the RAND Corporation, makes clear its potential use by law enforcement and intelligence agencies: "The indicators identified by Gartenstein-Ross and Grossman . . . have value . . . in deciding whether to initiate a closer look or to not waste limited resources where it is not warranted."¹⁰ And the FDD study's lead author has, according to his Web site, provided

instruction to members of the US military preparing for deployments to the Horn of Africa, Afghanistan, and the Persian Gulf. He also designs training courses and specific modules for use by US government agencies, including the State Department's Office of Anti-Terrorism Assistance.¹¹

Radicalization as a Theological-Psychological Process

Counter-radicalization policy in the US and Europe is pluralist and involves making compromises among multiple approaches within the limits of the basic assumptions outlined above. Radicalization

scholarship reflects this range of approaches. While accounts that focus purely on religious ideology have had a certain influence, at least as significant have been more complex models that involve processes and interactions among theological and social psychological journeys. Religious beliefs by themselves do not drive individuals to violence; rather, the picture is one in which ideology becomes more extreme in response to what is called a "cognitive opening," an identity crisis, or a group-bonding process. This implies a more sophisticated counter-radicalization practice that addresses the interdependence of theology and emotions, identity, and group dynamics.

Among the most prominent exponents of this perspective is Marc Sageman, whose *Understanding Terror Networks* and *Leaderless Jihad: Terror Networks in the Twenty-First Century* together constitute perhaps the most ambitious attempt to develop a comprehensive theory of radicalization.¹² His model has come to be known as the "bunch of guys" theory because of its emphasis on friendship and kinship as central to the radicalization process. Sageman, a psychiatrist, was, as noted earlier, formerly a CIA operations officer specializing in Afghanistan, and he was based in Islamabad from 1987 to 1989, where he ran "unilateral programs with the Afghan Mujahedin."¹³ (Who better to carry out research on the causes of "jihad" than someone who used to be an official organizing the US government's funding of the Afghan jihad against the Soviets? Unsurprisingly, that particular history plays no role in his analysis.) Sageman has also been an adviser to the New York City Police Department (NYPD) for a number of years, and in 2008 was named its scholar-in-residence.¹⁴

In line with the basic assumptions of the radicalization literature, Sageman rejects accounts that consider economic or political circumstances as significant, on the grounds that these factors affect millions of people whereas only a small number become terrorists. And he breaks with those who think religious ideology can by itself create a terrorist: "These perspectives imply an overly passive view of terrorists, who are the recipients of social forces or slaves to appealing ideas." Instead, he argues convincingly that we need to ask how terrorists interpret the structural conditions that they are confronted with and how they attempt to forge a common struggle in response.

In addressing these questions, Sageman makes strong claims to academic rigor, claiming to bring the methods of social science (statistics, sampling theory, survey techniques, measurement, data analysis) to the study of radicalization. Yet the object of his study lacks any objective definition. The closest we get is his statement that he is interested in analyzing

the men responsible for the September 11, 2001, attacks and all those who, like them, threaten the United States and the West on behalf of a larger community, the vanguard trying to establish a certain version of an Islamist utopia.

This, he says, gives him a database of around five hundred persons "linked" to the 9/11 attackers. Based on this sample, he claims, the most striking feature of the jihadist profile is that

joining the global Islamist terrorism social movement was based to a great degree on friendship and kinship . . . About two-thirds of the people in the sample were friends with other people who joined together or already had some connection to terrorism.

He concludes that there are two major pathways into terrorism: the bunch of guys deciding collectively to join a terrorist organization; and joining a childhood friend who is already a terrorist. Social bonds, therefore, "come before any ideological commitment."

Sageman delves into the process by which a bunch of guys radicalizes, trying to establish what it is about the dynamics of the group that brings them to the point of supporting terrorism. He identifies four prongs to this process: first, a sense of moral outrage about a perceived injustice in the world; second, "an enabling interpretation," such as that there is a war on Islam, which places this outrage in the wider context of a moral conflict; third, personal experiences, such as of discrimination, which become "another manifestation of the war on Islam"; and fourth, mobilizing networks.

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

explore it with them, can help them cross the line from venting their anger to becoming terrorists.

Thus, a "natural and intense loyalty to the group, inspired by a violent Salafi script, transformed alienated young Muslims into fanatic terrorists." For Sageman it is the embedding of theological radicalism within a group dynamic that is the root cause of radicalization.

He argues that the response should be a reformist approach to the war on terror: policy makers should understand that the "war against the al Qaeda social movement is basically a battle for the hearts and minds of the Muslim community." He summarizes as follows: community policing can preempt the radicalization process by reducing alienation; the American Dream of equal opportunity and individualism is the best way of integrating Muslims; and the Iraq war was counterproductive, because it fostered moral outrage. Above all, governments should work with pro-Western Muslim leaders, and assist them to convince young Muslims that the US is not engaged in a "war on Islam."¹⁵ Sageman's work provides an analytical basis for those who favor a managerial approach to Muslim grievances, using soft power methods to contain radical dissent and promote shared values without asking too many questions about where that radicalism comes from.

Sageman's stress on social networks has been a major influence on how law enforcement and intelligence agencies understand radicalization, and has obvious implications for investigators. If tomorrow's terrorists are likely to be today's associates of terrorists, then that gives agencies a simple formula for identifying suspects: Suspicion by association has long been a staple of counterterrorism policing anyway. But claiming social bonds to be the root cause of terrorism is inadequate. Even if we accept the implication that terrorism spreads like a virus from a person already infected to his associates, all we have done is explain the process of infection; we have said nothing of why the virus exists in the first place. More importantly, Sageman's work shares with the rest of the radicalization discourse a failure to distinguish between radical beliefs and violent methods. Despite his stated aim to explore how terrorists interpret their situation and how they decide to respond, we get no discussion of the

conditions under which violence is chosen over other means. Even if his model offered a plausible explanation of how radical ideas circulate, it has nothing to say on what causes supporters of such ideas to favor violence over other means of advancing their cause. By default, then, the question of violence can only be answered by assuming certain ideologies are inherently violent. The picture is one in which the Salafi script is already a predisposition to violence that only needs a friendship dynamic to activate it. Sageman argues, with regard to al-Qaeda and the “many other terrorist groups that collaborate in their operations [that] Salafi ideology determines its mission, sets its goals, and guides its tactics.”¹⁶ In other words, as this bunching of guys intensifies their beliefs in a radical theological worldview, violence is likely to follow. For that violence to pose a terrorist threat, the only other necessary condition is that the social network is able to successfully find the “global Salafi jihad” in order to access skills and resources.¹⁷ Thus, for Sageman, jihadi terrorism is the product of a socialization process of friendship and kinship, progressive intensification of beliefs leading to acceptance of the Salafi ideology, and a link to know-how and support.¹⁸ At the heart of his model remains an unexamined assumption that violence has its origins in dangerous theological ideas.

A similar approach is favored by Quintan Wiktorowicz, another of the leading advocates of a combined theological and social psychological model of radicalization. Wiktorowicz spent a number of months in London in 2002 conducting ethnographic fieldwork with al-Muhajiroun, the radical Islamist group founded by Omar Bakri Muhammad. This research was published in 2005 as *Radical Islam Rising: Muslim Extremism in the West*.¹⁹ He subsequently worked at the US embassy in London at a time, after the 7/7 terrorist attacks, when the US government became keenly interested in the potential radicalization of Britain’s Muslim population. Diplomatic cables subsequently published by WikiLeaks reveal that the US embassy in London made available grants of \$50,000 to support antitexterminist projects among UK Muslims, including the possibility of fostering an “anti-extremist genre” of Bollywood films.²⁰ Wiktorowicz built up a network of links in Britain and observed the impact of the UK government’s Preventing Violent Extremism policy. In early 2011,

given the White House’s interest in developing similar policies, Wiktorowicz was appointed to the National Security Council and credited with developing the Obama administration’s counter-radicalization policy.²¹

In his *Radical Islam Rising*, Wiktorowicz seeks to answer the question of why “thousands of young Britons are attracted to the panoply of radical Islamic movements with bases or branches in the United Kingdom, including Hizb ut-Tahrir, Supporters of Shariah, al-Muhajiroun, and al-Qaeda.” Al-Muhajiroun is taken as a case study. Like Sageman, he emphasizes the way that groups place grievances within an interpretative “frame” and on the importance of socialization into the group’s construction of reality to create a “network of shared meaning.” But his account of radicalization adds still more levels of complexity while maintaining the same underlying assumptions. He introduces the concept of cognitive opening, which refers to a psychological crisis in which previously accepted beliefs are shaken and an individual becomes receptive to other views and perspectives. This might be caused by emotional distress (such as a death in the family), experiences of discrimination, political repression, confusion over identity, or as a result of “consciousness raising” or persuasion by activists. Those who experience a cognitive opening may then attempt to find religious answers to the discontent that has prompted it, through initiating a process of “religious seeking.” Finally, exposure to networks of radicals socializes individuals into participation in the movement, as would-be activists are “cultured” into accepting the religious authority of the movement’s leaders and adopting their ideology.²²

Wiktorowicz begins his study with an account of two erstwhile members of al-Muhajiroun—Asif Mohammed Hanif and Omar Khan Sherif—who in 2003 attempted to carry out a suicide attack on behalf of Hamas at the Mike’s Place bar in Tel Aviv. The rest of the text effectively becomes an attempt to explain how these two British citizens could possibly be willing to carry out such an act of violence. Yet the people studied by Wiktorowicz, through his interviews and participant observations, are radical activists, not terrorists, a distinction that gets lost in the attempt to construct a

model of radicalization. Most of al-Muhajiroun's activities were ideological, but the group supported violence in certain contexts, and individual activists and former activists have been involved in violent actions. But Wiktorowicz offers little reflection on what factors legitimized or delegitimized the use of violence within the group. In fact, during the 1990s, Omar Bakri Muhammad made use of the Islamic concept of *'aqd al-aman*, or covenant of security, to legitimize an arrangement with the British security services in which his followers in Britain were not permitted to break the law, and he was likely a source of intelligence, in return for allowing his movement to propagate its ideology freely.²³ But in January 2005, he cited the intensifying war on terror and the pressures it was putting Muslims under in Britain as reasons for saying the covenant no longer held, and for the first time he encouraged his followers to join al-Qaeda.²⁴ What is significant is that this shift occurred not because of any theological reinterpretation or because of changes in group psychology, but because of the changed political context.

In Wiktorowicz's study, as with Sageman's work, the question of what causes radical religious beliefs becomes a proxy for the question of what causes violence. As Wiktorowicz himself acknowledges at the end of his study, the social psychological process by which individuals become active in radical Islamist groups is "not all that different" from moderate, nonviolent Muslim groups, or from non-Islamic social movements, even if the content of the ideology differs; it therefore becomes impossible to use his account of that process to credibly explain why violence occurs.²⁵ Like other radicalization scholars, Wiktorowicz argues correctly that by themselves political and economic circumstances are insufficient to account for radical activism. For support, he quotes Trotsky from *The History of the Russian Revolution*: "The mere existence of privations is not enough to cause an insurrection; if it were, the masses would be always in revolt." It follows, he states, that the real question is "why some aggrieved individuals choose to join Islamic groups while others do not"—a question which is answered by considering psychological and theological journeys.²⁶ This is a different inference from that made by Trotsky, who follows the above quote with these sentences, which Wiktorowicz's text does not include:

It is necessary that the bankruptcy of the social régime, being conclusively revealed, should make these privations intolerable, and that new conditions and new ideas should open the prospect of a revolutionary way out. Then in the cause of the great aims conceived by them, those same masses will prove capable of enduring doubled and tripled privations.²⁷

Wiktorowicz's rejection of a mechanical model of grievances directly causing revolutionary action is convincing. But whereas this leads him to turn to the individual religious and cognitive trajectory, he ignores the other possibilities suggested by Trotsky's text, which emphasize the perceived legitimacy of the present state of affairs and the plausibility of alternatives—in other words, politics. From this perspective the question would be, What kinds of political circumstances, combined with what kinds of political narratives (even if expressed in religious terms), are necessary for particular kinds of violence to be seen as legitimate within a given movement? This is a question Sageman and Wiktorowicz are unable to address with their models.

Radicalization Models as Policing Tools

The view shared by Sageman and Wiktorowicz—that radicalization is essentially a theological-psychological process in which dangerous religious beliefs and identities, activated by group dynamics or cognitive openings, transform individuals into terrorists—has been influential among law enforcement agencies. In 2007, the Intelligence Division and Counter-Terrorism Bureau of the NYPD published a study, entitled "Radicalization in the West: The Homegrown Threat," that outlined a simplified version of this kind of radicalization model. It was the first time the NYPD had chosen to publish a document that claimed any kind of scholarly credentials; it did so, it stated, in order "to contribute to the debate among intelligence and law enforcement agencies on how best to counter this emerging threat." The report is backed by outside experts, such as Brian Jenkins Mead of the RAND Corporation, and strongly influenced by the work of Sageman and Wiktorowicz; it identifies "jihadist ideology" as the key

driver of radicalization and suggests four phases an individual passes through in going from being “unremarkable” to a person “quite likely to be involved in the planning or implementation of a terrorist act”: preradicalization (before they are exposed to “jihadi-Salaḥī Islam”); self-identification (they begin to explore Salaḥī Islam as a result of a cognitive opening, which leads to the breakdown of an existing identity and to associations with like-minded others); indoctrination (the progressive intensification of their beliefs which, as a result of group socialization, leads to the complete adoption of the ideology); and jihadization (their acceptance of their individual duty to participate in jihad). These four stages are described as a “funnel” through which ordinary persons become terrorists, as their religious beliefs become progressively more radical. The NYPD study argues that each of these four stages of radicalization has a distinct set of indicators that allow predictions to be made about future terrorist risks. For example, stage two of the radicalization process has “typical signatures” that include:

- becoming alienated from one’s former life; affiliating with like-minded individuals;
- joining or forming a group of like-minded individuals in a quest to strengthen one’s dedication to Salaḥī Islam;
- giving up cigarettes, drinking, gambling and urban hip-hop gangster clothes;
- wearing traditional Islamic clothing, growing a beard;
- becoming involved in social activism and community issues.

The study acknowledges that these behaviors are “subtle and non-criminal,” but nevertheless, the need “to identify those entering this process at the earliest possible stage” means that intelligence gathering based on these indicators is “the critical tool in helping to thwart an attack.”²⁸

The NYPD’s study bases its analysis on eleven actual and alleged plots that took place in the US, the UK, Spain, the Netherlands, Canada, and Australia, each involving a handful of perpetrators. Not only is this too small a sample upon which to base positive knowledge claims about the relationship between religious behaviors and

terrorism, it also lumps together individuals in widely varying social and political contexts. Additionally, there is no control group of individuals who fit the pattern of religious behaviors associated with radicalization but do not become terrorists. In order to show a correlation between a set of religious behaviors and terrorism, it would be necessary not only to show that terrorists are statistically likely to have passed through a process in which those behaviors were manifest, but also that nonterrorists are statistically unlikely to show the same behaviors. In fact, the behaviors the NYPD study associates with radicalization are common to large numbers of people who never become terrorists. Likewise, the study does not consider cases of terrorism that are not carried out by Muslims, for example, terrorist activity carried out by individuals in far Right movements. By failing to compare across cases of terrorism with different ideological motivations, the study ignores the possibility of indicators of risk that are not specific to Muslims but have a general applicability to terrorism in general. The claim that terrorism carried out by Muslims is driven by a radicalization process different from other forms of terrorism should, if made, be derived from whatever case-based evidence is available to support it rather than assumed as a given in the design of the study. Finally, even constraining ourselves to the small number of cases the NYPD study actually describes—and ignoring the absence of a control group and the absence of comparisons with other forms of terrorism—the study offers weak evidence for any correlation between religious behaviors and terrorist activity, because its assertions linking religious behaviors and terrorist acts are generally impressionistic, arbitrary, and lacking in any analytic rigor.

Following Sageman and Wiktorowicz’s emphasis on the group dynamic in radicalization, the NYPD considers it crucial to identify the venues where socialization into radical ideology is occurring, what it refers to as “radicalization incubators.” These the study describes as “places where like-minded individuals will congregate as they move through the radicalization process.” They can be mosques but are more likely to be “cafes, cab driver hangouts, flophouses, prisons, student associations, non-governmental organizations, hookah (water pipe) bars, butcher shops and book stores [or] extremist websites and chat-rooms.”²⁹ Thus, in the hands of the NYPD, Sageman’s and Wiktorowicz’s

radicalization scholarship becomes a prospectus for mass surveillance of Muslim populations.

An investigation by the Associated Press, published in a series of articles beginning in August 2011, revealed that the NYPD's Intelligence Division, headed by thirty-year veteran of the CIA David Cohen, has considered every aspect of Muslim life in and around New York worthy of observation and infiltration. More than 250 mosques in New York and New Jersey and hundreds more "hot spots," such as restaurants, cafés, bookshops, community organizations, and student associations, have been listed as potential security risks for reasons that included endorsing conservative religious views or having devout customers. A secret team known as the Demographics Unit has dispatched undercover officers (known as "rakers") and recruited informants ("mosque crawlers") to eavesdrop at these "locations of interest" to listen for "hostility to the United States."³⁰ The unit invested resources in mapping "residential concentrations" of different ethnic groups within the tristate area, seeking to "gauge sentiment" and identify locations "where community members socialize." The communities to be monitored were identified on the basis of their origins in twenty-eight majority-Muslim countries, as well as those described as "American Black Muslim." Staff of the NYPD's Moroccan Initiative have watched Moroccan restaurants, gyms, barbershops, meat markets, and taxi companies—and compiled a list of every known Moroccan taxi driver.³¹ Muslims who changed their names to sound more traditionally American or who adopted Arabic names were investigated and catalogued in secret NYPD intelligence files.³² One of the architects of this surveillance program was CIA analyst Larry Sanchez, who worked within the Intelligence Division from 2002 to 2010 while remaining on active duty with the CIA. He reportedly told associates that its methods were modeled on Israeli techniques used in the military occupation of the West Bank.³³ It is clear that none of this activity was based on investigating reasonable suspicions of criminal activity. According to a deposition by Assistant Chief Thomas Galati of the Intelligence Division, the work of the Demographics Unit produced no criminal leads between 2006 and 2012, and probably did not before then either.³⁴

Another part of the NYPD's Intelligence Division is the Analytic Unit, headed until recently by Mitchell Silber, who coauthored the NYPD's radicalization study. It consists of a team of two dozen civilian analysts who are responsible for the cultural analysis of Muslim communities in the US and abroad.³⁵ The NYPD Intelligence Division also has a program for international efforts, the International Liaison Program, with offices in eleven foreign capitals. The NYPD's 2010 budget for counterterrorism and intelligence was over \$100 million, with a thousand officers reportedly employed.³⁶

Central to the NYPD's counterradicalization strategy has been the use of informants. In 2012, a Muslim-American student decided to end his relationship with the department and speak publicly. He told the Associated Press that he had been instructed to take photographs inside mosques, collect the names of innocent people attending study groups on Islam, and to "bait" Muslims into making inflammatory statements. Shamiur Rahman, aged nineteen, said he had followed a police strategy called "create and capture," which involved initiating conversations about jihad or terrorism, then capturing the response and sending it to the NYPD's Intelligence Unit. He had earned as much as one thousand dollars a month for his work. He had begun working for the police after a string of minor marijuana arrests; an NYPD plainclothes officer approached him in a Queens jail and asked whether he wanted to turn his life around. Among his assignments was spying on the Muslim Student Association at John Jay College in Manhattan, where he was asked to note down "radical rhetoric." Rahman said he never witnessed any criminal activity or saw anybody do anything wrong. He eventually felt his work for the NYPD was "detrimental to the constitution."³⁷ According to the Associated Press investigation, by 2006 the police had identified thirty-one Muslim student associations and labeled seven of them "of concern," including branches at Brooklyn College, Baruch College, City College, Hunter College, La Guardia Community College, and Queens College.³⁸ Many of the colleges had informants or undercover agents operating among the student population. In another case, the NYPD sent an undercover officer to student rallies protesting against Israel's Operation Cast Lead attack on Gaza in 2009. The officer pretended to be a fervent sympathizer with the

Palestinian cause and sought to ingratiate himself with activists. He constantly used violent and provocative rhetoric, in an attempt to incriminate those around him, but ended up producing no tangible cases. Then the agent came across Algerian-born Ahmed Ferhani, a twenty-seven-year-old with a history of mental health problems: he had been involuntarily committed to psychiatric wards thirty times during the previous ten years. Over a six-month period Ferhani was pressured by the undercover agent to buy weapons. Eventually he agreed and was prosecuted for a supposed plot to blow up Manhattan's largest synagogue.³⁹ Ferhani was sentenced to ten years in prison and faces deportation to Algeria upon his release. His conviction was the first under a New York State antiterrorism law that was passed in response to 9/11.⁴⁰

Once these tactics have become commonplace in relation to Muslims, they can easily be extended to others. The NYPD monitors nonviolent political groups, such as African-American community groups protesting against police racism and pro-Palestinian groups.⁴¹ The *New York Review of Books* has reported strong evidence that the Intelligence Division infiltrated, spied on, and aggressively harassed organizers of Occupy Wall Street. In doing so, the NYPD is renewing its long history of spying on nonviolent political activists. During the cold war, its Red Squads targeted communists, trade unionists, civil rights organizations, and black radicals. By 1970 it had collected dossiers on over 1.2 million New Yorkers, which it shared with private investigators, academic officials, and prospective employers.⁴² Activists filed a class-action lawsuit the following year, which became known as *Handschu v. Special Services Division*, challenging the NYPD's harassment of political groups. The *Handschu* guidelines, agreed to in a settlement fourteen years later, required the NYPD to restrict its investigations of political activity to cases in which there was specific information that criminal conduct was afoot.

A year after 9/11, the new head of NYPD Intelligence, David Cohen, told a federal court:

The counterproductive restrictions imposed on the NYPD by the Handschu Guidelines in this changed world hamper our efforts every day, [making it] virtually impossible to detect plans for attack

[and placing] this City, our nation and its people at heightened and unjustifiable risk.⁴³

The guidelines were rewritten, watering down the requirement that investigations be linked to specific criminal activity. The tactics of the old Red Squads were then revived, this time directed primarily at New York's Muslim populations. Moreover, there was no body with significant oversight powers to check whether the NYPD's counterterrorism and intelligence activities were violating civil rights (although New York City Council voted in August 2013 to appoint an inspector general as a potential remedy). An e-mail from a senior FBI official to the private intelligence firm Stratfor that was released by WikiLeaks in 2012 reveals an awareness that the NYPD's counterterrorism activities are unlawful and continue earlier histories of political policing:

I keep telling you, you and I are going to laugh and raise a beer one day, when everything Intel [NYPD's Intelligence Division] has been involved in during the last 10 years comes out—it always eventually comes out. They are going to make [former FBI Director J. Edgar] Hoover, COINTEL, Red Squads, etc look like rank amateurs [sic] compared to some of the damn right felonious activity, and violations of US citizen's rights they have been engaged in.⁴⁴

Ironically, the FBI, which follows a model of radicalization similar to that outlined in the NYPD's report, uses the same "felonious" activities itself.⁴⁵

The Primacy of Politics

Radicalization models, whether based solely on theology or including a social psychological component, have encouraged national security establishments to believe they can preempt future terrorist attacks through intensive surveillance of the spiritual and mental lives of Muslims. As noted earlier, radical religious ideology has been defined as a kind of virus infecting those with whom it comes into contact, either by itself or in combination with psychological

processes. But we have seen that the radicalization literature fails to offer a convincing demonstration of any causal relationship between theology and violence, and there is no evidence of any significant statistical correlation between the supposed indicators of radicalization and terrorist violence. Moreover, the concept of radicalization tends to confuse a propensity for violence with an interest in radical ideas, leading the question of what causes violence to be insufficiently isolated from the question of how belief systems and ideologies come to be adopted.

In a paper that is less widely read than his better known books on Islam, the French sociologist Olivier Roy, a widely respected authority on European Muslims, argues that it makes more sense to separate theology from violence: "The process of violent radicalisation has little to do with religious practice, while radical theology, as salafism, does not necessarily lead to violence."⁴⁶ The "leap into terrorism" is not religiously inspired but better seen as sharing "many factors with other forms of dissent, either political (the ultra-left), or behavioural: the fascination for sudden suicidal violence as illustrated by the paradigm of random shootings in schools (the 'Columbine syndrome')."⁴⁷ While a Salafi vocabulary is used by certain groups to articulate their narratives, this by itself is not evidence that religious ideology is causing violence, merely that, within this milieu, theological references provide a veneer of legitimacy. Religious ideology seems to play at most an enabling role in cohering a group rather than being the underlying driver of terrorism.

In spite of its analytical problems, the radicalization concept continues to be popular among policy makers in Europe and the US. And the alternative possibilities of conceiving of terrorism, particularly of viewing it as a mode of political action, are neglected. While policing agencies search for scholarship that can give them a magical formula to predict who will be a future terrorist, the microlevel question of what causes one person rather than another in the same political context to engage in violence is probably beyond analysis and best seen as unpredictable.⁴⁸ Sizable resources have been allocated to finding a general formula of radicalization, yet no plausible one has been offered. At best, the path to becoming a terrorist can be reconstructed on an individual basis after the event. For law

enforcement agencies, the best approach is therefore to investigate the active incitement, financing, or preparation of terrorist violence rather than wider belief systems which are wrongly assumed to be its precursors. On the other hand, the mesolevel question of what conditions are likely to increase or decrease its legitimacy for a particular political actor (either a social movement or a state) is amenable to productive analysis. So too is the macrolevel question of how particular social movements and states are constituted to be in conflict with each other, and how the interaction between these different political actors produces a context in which violence becomes seen as a legitimate tactic.⁴⁹ An objective study would examine how state and nonstate actors mutually constitute themselves as combatants in a global conflict between the West and radical Islam and address under what conditions each chooses to adopt tactics of violence, paying close attention to the relationships between their legitimizing frameworks.

Such an approach has the advantage of being consistent with what is known about the biographies, actions, and self-descriptions of terrorists themselves and those who publicly support terrorist violence. Consider, for example, Anwar al-Awlaki. From 2009 until his extrajudicial killing in a US drone strike in September 2011, he was regarded by the US and UK governments as constituting one of the foremost terrorist threats to their countries, and accused of radicalizing American and British Muslims via his use of YouTube, Facebook, and e-mail correspondence. Al-Awlaki was a US citizen who was born in New Mexico, attended school in Yemen, and then returned to the US in 1991, where he lived for twelve years before spending two years in the UK and then returning to Yemen. According to security officials, his familiarity with both Western and Arab cultures made him particularly influential among Western Muslims. Beginning in 2008, he was seen as a figure who could, while based in southern Yemen, drive Western Muslims on a path toward terrorism, using his Internet communications to provide the theological and psychological underpinnings thought necessary for radicalization—a new bin Laden, all the more dangerous for his ability to appeal to disaffected Western Muslims. During this time, FBI agents closely monitored his Internet traffic, including an average of seventy e-mails

a day.⁵⁰ The Obama administration seems to have placed al-Awlaki on its extrajudicial kill list in January 2010.⁵¹ When al-Awlaki's father challenged the US government's targeted killings policy in the courts in September 2010, government officials stopped describing al-Awlaki as a propagandist and began referring to him as an active terrorist. As evidence for this, the administration cited an interrogation with Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, following his failed attempt to blow up a plane traveling from Amsterdam to Detroit on Christmas Day 2009. During the questioning, Abdulmutallab was said to have revealed al-Awlaki's involvement in the plot at an operational level. This claim was never tested in court but Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano said al-Awlaki was actively involved in planning attacks.⁵² And Director of National Intelligence James Clapper said al-Awlaki had joined al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula and was playing a "key role in setting the strategic direction" of the group. In Britain, al-Awlaki was accused of operational involvement in a plot to exploit weaknesses in airport security via e-mail correspondence with Rajib Karim, an employee of British Airways.⁵³ Both Nidal Hasan, who carried out the Fort Hood attack in Texas in November 2009, and Faisal Shahzad, who attempted a car bombing in New York's Times Square in May 2010, were among the thousands of people to have reached out to al-Awlaki by e-mail, but there was no evidence that he directly instructed either of them to engage in violent acts. What is beyond doubt is that by this time al-Awlaki was publishing online material that advocated violence against the West. He praised Nidal Hasan as a "hero" for the attack at Fort Hood that left thirteen people dead, and his document "44 Ways of Supporting Jihad," published in January 2009, suggested various ways of aiding the "mujahideen," such as financial support, advocacy, and training. The text was vague about who the mujahideen are and whom they are fighting, but it was clear that their struggle is global in scope and directed against "the West" as a whole, seen as a cultural system pitted against Islam. He concluded that anyone who thinks clearly can easily work out which groups are truly fighting for Islam today.⁵⁴

A decade earlier, al-Awlaki's ideology had been quite different. Beginning in 2000, he had begun to record a series of lectures on the lives of Muhammad, other prophets, and their companions. These

English-language recordings proved immensely popular and brought him a substantial following. Al-Awlaki was confident, eloquent, and witty, able to relate classical Islamic stories to life in the West today. Though he lacked credentials as a religious scholar, he was regarded as a charismatic popularizer with a talent for engaging commentary. When the 9/11 attacks occurred, he told journalists: "There is no way that the people who did this could be Muslim, and if they claim to be Muslim, then they have perverted their religion." He condemned attacks on civilians, irrespective of the oppression their governments were responsible for—on this basis, he opposed the US war on Afghanistan as much as the 9/11 attacks. He said that while America was responsible for propping up repressive governments in the Middle East, it was not a military enemy, and he hoped bin Laden's views would not win support. In speaking of the concept of jihad, he made the now commonplace distinction between its "greater" form of spiritual struggle and its "lesser" form of physical force in self-defense. Jihad was, he said, first a personal struggle to be a better person and the struggle of a community to rid itself of corruption. He also told journalists:

And if there is an invading force from outside, then we would, too, struggle to defend ourselves, and that is where armed combat occurs. So actually, fighting is only a part of the jihad, and it's considered to be a defensive force in order to protect the religion.⁵⁵

He drew a distinction between terrorism that targets civilians, which he opposed, and insurgencies within specific local contexts that aimed to defend Muslims against military occupations, which he might support. As a teenager at college in the late 1980s he had spent a summer visiting Afghanistan, including spending time with the anti-Soviet mujahideen, who were then supported by the US government. And in the 1990s he seems to have supported the Chechen insurgency against the Russian army. Certainly the US government, which investigated him thoroughly after 9/11, viewed al-Awlaki as a moderate. Indeed, as the imam at the largest mosque in the Washington, DC, metropolitan area, he was invited to a lunch event at the Pentagon, in an attempt by the US Army to reach out to

mainstream American Muslims, and he gave a Friday sermon on Capitol Hill.⁵⁶

The following year the FBI conducted a series of antiterrorist raids on Muslim educational, research, business, and charitable organizations in northern Virginia, where al-Awlaki was based. Angered at the raids, which seemed to target organizations just because they were Islamic, al-Awlaki told his congregation how agents had held women and children at gunpoint and handcuffed them for hours. "If you don't struggle for your rights," he said, "you will be stripped away from them, step by step, until you have nothing left." He called on American Muslims to unite and work with "Islamic organizations with a political orientation and a civil rights orientation" to challenge the war on terror, which had become, he said, a "war against Muslims."⁵⁷ The raids had led al-Awlaki to make radical criticisms of the war on terror and to view it as an attack on his religion. But his objections were framed in the language of civil rights and the need to organize politically to defend the community. His references to Malcolm X and H. Rap Brown suggested that the right strategy for American Muslims was to draw on the history of black political radicalism and community struggle. "Their rights were not handed to them," he said, but were won through political activism. However, al-Awlaki himself told friends he was becoming increasingly disillusioned with the US's criminalization of Muslims and aggressive foreign policy, and that he planned to leave the country. In March 2002, he moved to the UK, where he continued to call for Muslim political activism to defend civil rights and oppose the foreign policy of the war on terror. Two years later he settled in Yemen's southern province of Shabwa.⁵⁸

The first indication that al-Awlaki's position had shifted came in December 2005, with the online publication of his "Constants on the Path of Jihad" lecture. In it he translated into English a text by Yusuf al-Uyayri—a Saudi veteran of the anti-Soviet jihad in the 1980s who went on to be an al-Qaeda activist in Saudi Arabia before being killed by the Saudi regime in 2003—and used the translation as an opportunity to give his own commentary. The lecture begins by noting that powerful nations are "mobilizing on various fronts (i.e. religious, political, social, economic, media, popular mass, etc.*)" to fight

against Islam, and many Muslims are deceived into thinking they are not obliged to fight back. Al-Awlaki no longer thinks of jihad as primarily an inner struggle; it is now an individual obligation for all able Muslims globally to fight for the sake of Allah. Jihad, says al-Awlaki, is not just about personal improvement, or even about the liberation of particular localities from foreign occupations; its real purpose is "to wipe out *kufir* [unbelief] from the world," a struggle that will continue until the day of judgment. This means: "Jihad is global. It is not a local phenomenon." The picture is one in which jihad has been redefined as a global war to defend Islam from the West, without limits in time or place. At this point in al-Awlaki's trajectory, the precise methods to be used in this war remain unclear; what is significant is that it encompasses various kinds of force (military, cultural, ideological), is global in reach, and requires all Muslims to engage in it.⁵⁹

In the summer of 2006, al-Awlaki was arrested by the Yemeni authorities. According to *New York Times* journalist Scott Shane, he was originally imprisoned in relation to a "tribal dispute," but after his initial arrest, the Yemeni government was told by then US director of national intelligence John Negroponte to keep him in prison. After being held for a year and a half, and with mounting pressure in Yemen to end his imprisonment, the US government reversed its decision.⁶⁰ Al-Awlaki was released without charge in December 2007, and shortly afterward gave an interview to Moazzam Begg, a British Muslim who had himself been incarcerated at Guantanamo Bay and later became a campaigner for the rights of prisoners. In a part of the conversation not published at the time, al-Awlaki told Begg he had been "abused" while in prison but did not want to go into details or make public allegations. He also said FBI agents questioned him during his detention and were aware of his treatment.⁶¹

Before his incarceration in Yemen, al-Awlaki had begun to see the world as locked in a global struggle between the West and Islam. Now, having been imprisoned and apparently tortured with the complicity of the US government, any remaining reservations about targeting civilians in the country of his citizenship were abandoned. Within months of his release he had launched a new Web site and blog. Much of his published material continued to take the form of

advice on personal questions such as divorce and fasting, but he also began to announce his clear support for violence against the US. By the summer of 2009, al-Awlaki's mass e-mails were calling any Muslim who is "fighting on behalf of America . . . a heartless beast, bent on evil, who sells his religion for a few dollars."⁶² The following March, in an interview with Al Jazeera, he publicly endorsed Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab's attempted bombing of the US-bound plane. He added that it "would have been better if the plane was a military one, or if it was a US military target," but US civilians, having voted for prowar candidates, were also legitimate targets.⁶³ In a later statement, he commented: "Isn't it ironic that the two capitals of the war against Islam, Washington, DC, and London, have also become among the centers of western jihad? Jihad is becoming as American as apple pie and as British as afternoon tea."⁶⁴ If there had been a propensity to terrorist violence among American Muslims, this would have been the period when significant numbers of al-Awlaki's followers, those attracted to his earlier lectures on the lives of figures from Islamic history, would have taken up arms—taking advantage, for example, of the easy access to guns in the US—to carry out shooting sprees. What actually happened was that the widespread following he had built up dissipated as his new views became evident through documents such as "44 Ways of Supporting Jihad."

How can the transformation of al-Awlaki's views in the decade before his death be explained? Certainly there is no evidence to suggest that a religious awakening led to his adoption of a radically different theology. His theological understanding of jihad had always included a notion of military force as necessary to defend Islam under certain circumstances. Whereas before he had felt the necessity of military force only in specific local contexts, where Muslims were trying to liberate themselves from foreign occupations, by the end of 2005 he had begun to believe Muslims were involved in a global struggle rather than just a series of local wars, and that that struggle had both ideological and military dimensions. From a theological point of view, the key question in advocating such a position is whether it violates the belief, strongly grounded in Islamic jurisprudence, that being a citizen is a form of a contract to follow state laws, violation of which cannot be justified even when that state is at war with majority-Muslim

nations or Muslim nonstate actors. But the change in al-Awlaki's position cannot be traced to a change in his theological position on the Islamic exhortation to honor contracts. In fact, nowhere in his published material does he attempt an answer to the well-known theological objection to his position.⁶⁵ He does, of course, present an Islamic discourse to legitimize his new idea of a multidimensional global war. But what is striking is how his global war concept mirrors the discourse of the war on terror itself, which also imagines no geographical limits and refers to a multidimensional conflict with physical and ideological spheres. Al-Awlaki was a keen student of this discourse, and familiar with the RAND Corporation's calls for a "battle of ideas" to create a "moderate" pro-Western Islam—what he called "RAND Islam."⁶⁶ What was essentially new in al-Awlaki's statements from late 2005 onward was not his theological position but a reinterpretation of the political circumstances that Muslims were in. The ultimate source of his idea of a global war to defend Islam was the militarized identity politics of the global war on terror itself.

"A Call to Jihad," a lecture he gave in 2010, gives his own account of how his new position emerged.

We are not against Americans for just being Americans. We are against evil, and America as a whole has turned into a nation of evil. What we see from America is the invasion of [inaudible] countries; we see Abu Ghraib, Bagram, and Guantanamo Bay; we see cruise missiles and cluster bombs; and we have just seen in Yemen the death of twenty-three children and seventeen women. We cannot stand idly in the face of such aggression, and we will fight back and incite others to do the same. I for one was born in the US. I lived in the US for twenty-one years. America was my home. I was a preacher of Islam involved in nonviolent Islamic activism. However, with the American invasion of Iraq and continued US aggression against Muslims, I could not reconcile between living in the US and being a Muslim. And I eventually came to the conclusion that jihad against America is binding upon myself just as it is binding on every other able Muslim.⁶⁷

If this account of what prompted al-Awlaki's support for terrorism against the US is correct, and there seems no reason to doubt it, then

his radicalization is consistent with the historical pattern of political activists adopting a belief in terrorism when political action fails to bring about change—from the French anarchists who began bombing campaigns after the defeat of the Paris Commune, to the Algerian FLN struggling to end French colonialism, to the Weather Underground's "Declaration of a State of War" following state repression of student campaigns against the Vietnam war.

Mainstream radicalization analysts who have looked at al-Awlaki's evolution are confronted with a dilemma. According to their theories, it cannot have been the politics of the war on terror that drove him from political activism to supporting violence against the US; there must instead have been a significant psychological or theological process. Since no such process is evident from what is known of his life after 9/11, they try to shift the point in time at which he became radicalized to an earlier date and assume the process occurred then, during a period we have less information on. This would imply either that the definition of radicalization has been widened so far as to include any kind of political opposition to the status quo or that when he was officially considered a moderate, his public statements were just a cover, and he was secretly already an advocate of violence against the US. In support of the latter, radicalization analysts point to the allegation that in 2000 and 2001, three of the 9/11 hijackers attended mosques where al-Awlaki was an imam.⁶⁸ Yet despite repeated investigations, no evidence has ever emerged to prove that this was anything more than coincidence, which is what the FBI itself concluded.⁶⁹

Official radicalization models failed to grasp how al-Awlaki had become a supporter of violence against the US. They also encouraged the idea that his online propaganda was an ideological virus that could infect young Muslims in the West and spawn an upsurge in terrorist attacks. The official reason given by the Obama administration for the extrajudicial killing of al-Awlaki is that he had an active operational role in al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula. The Department of Justice's sixteen-page white paper outlining its claimed legal basis for targeted killings asserts that the government may lawfully kill a US citizen if "an informed, high-level official" decides that the target is a high-ranking figure in al-Qaeda or an

affiliated group who poses "an imminent threat of violent attack against the United States" and that capturing him is not feasible.⁷⁰ The phrase "imminent threat" is used broadly enough to cover anyone who can be presented as active with al-Qaeda and affiliated organizations. A necessary condition for such killings to be considered permissible under international law is that they take place on a battlefield; but the war on terror is seen as involving, in principle, a global battlefield, and drone strikes have taken place in Pakistan, Yemen, and Somalia, all places where the US is not formally at war. Whatever the attempts to give a pseudolegal gloss to the kill list policy, it is likely the real reason Anwar al-Awlaki was killed is that he was seen as a radicalizer whose ideological activities were capable of driving Western Muslims to terrorist violence. But having this role is only plausible if models of radicalization in which a jihadist ideology mechanically causes people to be violent are accepted. There is only one case in which there is any apparent evidence that al-Awlaki's statements worked according to this model—that of Roshonara Choudhry, who attempted to stab the British parliamentarian Stephen Timms at his constituency office in May 2010. During interviews with police officers afterward she spoke about listening to hundreds of al-Awlaki's lectures and, as a result, coming to believe that she had an obligation to carry out acts of violence in defense of Islam. But she also talked about her anger at the Iraq war and said she targeted Timms because he had voted in support of it.⁷¹ It is difficult to know from the available material exactly how religious ideology and political beliefs combined to cause her to attempt the stabbing. But it is precisely because the relationship between ideas and actions is ambiguous that, as a matter of principle, ideas should not be criminalized. If the real reason the Obama administration decided to kill al-Awlaki was to prevent his ideological virus from reaching Western audiences, then it not only based its decision on a flawed model of radicalization, it also violated this liberal principle in the most egregious way possible. Moreover, there were other options that could have been explored. Fawaz A. Gerges, a political scientist at the London School of Economics, notes that Yemen officially charged al-Awlaki with incitement to violence in October 2010. He suggests that if a fair trial had been promised, a deal could

have been struck with local leaders in southern Yemen to hand al-Awlaki over to the Yemeni authorities to face prosecution; one key leader had already said in an interview at the time that he would consider such a proposal.⁷²

In cases where American Muslims have carried out acts of violence, or attempted such acts, the same picture emerges. The perpetrators speak about political circumstances leading them to their actions rather than religious ideology. In February 2006, Faisal Shahzad, then a Pakistani immigrant living in New York, was wrestling with the question of how Muslims should respond to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the plight of the Palestinians, and anti-Muslim racism in the West. He wrote in an e-mail message to a group of friends that Islam forbids the killing of innocent civilians. But equally he could not see how peaceful protest would bring about change: "Can you tell me a way to save the oppressed? And a way to fight back when rockets are fired at us and Muslim blood flows?" After millions-strong demonstrations failed to prevent the Iraq war, there were no easy answers to those questions. Three years later the questions had become more personal. In 2009, President Obama expanded the drone strikes campaign in Pakistan. While the US media dreamed of the new technology's possibilities: for risk-free killing without geographical constraint, in Pakistan the death toll mounted, particularly in Shahzad's Pashtun homeland. US drones killed ninety-eight innocent civilians in Pakistan in 2009, according to the London-based Bureau of Investigative Journalism.⁷³ In April, Shahzad sent another e-mail to friends, attacking Pakistani politicians for failing to defend the country from such attacks.⁷⁴ By this time Shahzad seems to have resolved his earlier questions and come to believe that the killing of civilians could be justified as part of a supposed defensive war against the West. A couple of months later he traveled to Pakistan to seek out the Taliban, and the following May he tried to detonate a car bomb in Times Square. At his arraignment he told the court that his attempted attack was in response to the US's occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan and its drone strikes in Somalia, Yemen, and Pakistan. He said he considered himself "a mujahid, a Muslim soldier." The judge replied that his intended victims were not combatants invading other countries, but civilians.

"Well, the people select the government," replied Shahzad, grasping at whatever arguments he could muster. "Including the children?" the judge asked. There was a long pause before Shahzad finally said: "Well, the drone hits in Afghanistan and Iraq, they don't see children, they don't see anybody. They kill women, children, they kill everybody."⁷⁵ Again, it was the war on terror's own actions that a terrorist was mimicking.

In the case of Nidal Hasan, the army psychiatrist who carried out the Fort Hood attack, it appears that he had been struggling with his role in the US military since the launch of the 2003 Iraq war. On the one hand, his loyalty to the US military required that he might one day be asked to fight Muslims in other parts of the world in wars he considered unjust; on the other hand, did his loyalty to Muslims in other parts of the world require that he leave the US military—or even fight against it? The militarized identity politics of the war on terror were playing out on the deepest levels of his being. From 2003 to 2007, while he was a resident in the psychiatric program at the Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in Bethesda, Maryland, he openly questioned whether he could engage in combat against other Muslims, and asked whether he would qualify for conscientious objector status. He did not. In an academic presentation that he was required to give, he chose to discuss Islamic interpretations of the legitimacy of violence. He confided to a colleague that he applied for his next posting, at the nearby Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences, to avoid being deployed to fight in a majority-Muslim country. In another presentation he asked whether the war on terror was actually a war on Islam, and he proposed a research study on whether Muslims in military service had conflicts between their loyalty to the US and their loyalty to fellow Muslims in other parts of the world.⁷⁶ At the end of December 2008 Hasan e-mailed Anwar al-Awlaki asking for "some general comments about Muslims in the US military." In total he sent eighteen e-mails and received two replies, neither of which answered his original question or suggested any course of action. Hasan was assigned to the Darnall Army Medical Center at Fort Hood, Texas, in July 2009, and he conducted psychiatric sessions with soldiers traumatized by their participation in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Based on his patients' accounts, he requested that his military superiors investigate possible war crimes. The request was declined.⁷⁷ In August Hasan's car was vandalized: after the perpetrator was arrested, it emerged that he had noticed Hasan's Muslim bumper sticker and was motivated by Islamophobia. Two months later the US Army told Hasan he would be deployed to Afghanistan shortly; his long-standing dilemma was now a matter of practical urgency rather than academic discussion. He could no longer contain within himself the split between his two antagonistic identities.⁷⁸ The following month he entered the Fort Hood deployment center and opened fire with a semi-automatic pistol fitted with laser sights, killing twelve US soldiers and one Department of Defense employee and injuring forty-two others.⁷⁹

CHAPTER 5

Hearts and Minds

But though I was initially disappointed at being categorized as an extremist, as I continued to think about the matter I gradually gained a measure of satisfaction from the label.

—Martin Luther King, Jr., *Letter from Birmingham City Jail*

In April 2010, Talya Lador-Fresher, then Israel deputy ambassador to the UK was invited to speak at Manchester University in the north of England. The previous year Israel had mounted the devastating attack on Gaza known as Operation Cast Lead, which had been condemned by the prominent South African jurist Richard Goldstone in the months leading up to Lador-Fresher's lecture. He had been asked to lead a fact-finding mission for the UN Human Rights Council on the war in Gaza, and its report described the Israeli Defense Forces' war crimes and possible crimes against humanity. In Manchester, where students had been clashing bitterly over the issue of Israel and Palestine for years, Palestinian rights activists planned to challenge the deputy ambassador over the allegations in Goldstone's report as she delivered her lecture. However, strict security arrangements meant activists were prevented from entering the building. Hoping to confront Lador-Fresher as she left the university, they assembled at the exit to the university's car park. When her car emerged, they blocked it for a few seconds before the vehicle pushed through the crowd and sped away.¹ One of those who stood in front of the car was Jameel Scott, a seventeen-year-old student and member of the Socialist Workers Party. Jameel was hit by the vehicle as it pushed through the protesters, and was lifted onto his hood, leaving him with a minor limp.