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CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS

The Radicalization of Diasporas and Terrorism

A Joint Conference by the RAND Corporation and the Center for Security Studies, ETH Zurich

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The research in this conference proceeding was conducted within the Intelligence Policy Center (IPC) of the RAND National Security Research Division (NSRD). NSRD conducts research and analysis for the Office of the Secretary of Defense, the Joint Staff, the Unified Commands, the defense agencies, the Department of the Navy, the Marine Corps, the U.S. Coast Guard, the U.S. Intelligence Community, allied foreign governments, and foundations. The conference was cosponsored by the Center for Security Studies (CSS) at ETH Zurich, a Swiss academic center of competence that specializes in research, teaching, and information services in the fields of international relations and security policy.

ISBN 978-0-8330-4047-3

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Published 2007 by the RAND Corporation
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Diaspora[1] involvement in terrorist activity is not a new phenomenon; however, new trends have begun to emerge in the modus operandi of the global jihadist movement. Specifically, and perhaps most alarmingly, members of Diaspora communities are now participating in terrorist attacks against their adopted governments. Historically, Diaspora communities provided support to terrorist organizations involved in homeland conflicts. Violence may have occurred in their adopted countries, yet the government and its citizens were not the principal target of such attacks. Western governments often tolerated this support for violence because it was not considered an internal threat, but a foreign problem. Since September 11, 2001, this perception has drastically changed. Diaspora communities are not only supporting terrorist attacks targeting western countries; they are directly participating in them through recruitment, fundraising, training, operations, and procurement.

Terrorists who come from Muslim Diasporas can be placed into three categories: converts to Islam, second-generation failed assimilations, and first-generation migrants who do not fit into their new society. Each group presents its own challenges and affects different countries in a variety of ways.

The European Union frequently considers terrorism to be an internal threat, an issue that affects individual member states rather than the community as a whole. In fact, counterterrorism in Europe is traditionally approached from a legal and a policing perspective. As such, there is no democratically endorsed, obligatory, and comprehensive inter-pillar European Union (EU) counterterrorism policy.

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[1] This conference did not seek to define the term Diaspora, nor did it limit the presenters' interpretations of the word. In his presentation, Francois Haut defined Diaspora as referring to "the dispersion of any group and its people, that is, any group or community that can be defined and delineated." While this may have been the general understanding of the word, it was not established as such. If presenters used the term in a different context, it was often explained in their remarks.

For political reasons, counterterrorism and immigration links are being avoided. Many European governments fail to accept that immigration has become permanent.

The fact that the July 7, 2005 (7/7) London bombers were British-born Muslims focused greater attention on the Islamic community. Interviews with non-British Muslims revealed the perception that Muslims are not prepared to integrate into British society; however, these interviews also highlighted the fact that Britons are not necessarily ready to integrate with the Muslim population either. The effects of 7/7 resulted in heightened tensions and negatively impacted social cohesion, and has resulted in an even greater degradation of race and religious relations in Britain than did the 9/11 attacks in the United States. The media is frequently blamed for legitimizing stereotypes and spreading false information.

Islam, which is primarily South Asian in character in the UK, has become a powerful identifying force among Muslims. Interviews suggest that British Muslims are very integrated into a global Muslim *umma*, or community. Events in Palestine, Iraq, Afghanistan, Chechnya, and the Balkans have provided the driving force for activism and recruitment. Religion, not ethnicity, defines many second- and third-generation British Muslims.

After France, the Netherlands is home to the second largest concentration of Muslims in Europe, with individuals who practice Islam making up 5.6 percent of the population. These communities are concentrated in the country's four largest cities, and segregation remains a significant problem. Immigration in the Netherlands is decreasing, however. Reforms to laws governing immigration have made permanent settlement difficult, and many migrants have chosen to seek opportunities in other European countries.

Yet unlike communities in other European states, Diaspora communities have not carried out large-scale or multiple attacks inside the Netherlands; it is much more likely that Dutch citizens will be affected by terrorism while abroad. The assassinations of Theo Van Gogh and Pim Fortuyn are notable exceptions in that they were murdered on

home soil. This could also represent a new trend of assassinating highly public figures.

The Dutch government's approach to counterterrorism is broad and encompasses much more than law enforcement issues. Policies are aimed at preventing radicalization and other social problems. Combating segregation and youth disenfranchisement are priorities. Counterterrorism is being approached at the local level so that multiple administrative agencies, including Islamic organizations, are involved in decision-making.

Canada has a history of being a base or locale for many major organizations involved in homeland conflicts. In most cases, these groups have drawn all types of support from Canada's Diaspora communities, including attack planning and operational support. The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) is the most active of these terrorist groups. Canada has also been a financial and propaganda base for Palestinian organizations, and Sunni Islam remains the biggest focus of Canadian intelligence. Jihadist returnees, converts, and 'home-grown' jihadist youth pose potential threats and are a focal point of counterterrorism policy.

Despite this reality, there is little debate in Canada on terrorism, and many deny that it is a threat to the state. As such, security forces have not had the power or tools needed to confront the terrorist threat, and the government has not been successful at communicating a message to counter extremist ideologies. Many new immigrants are not integrating and tensions are growing.

The situation in France is quite distinct. The segmentation of society is strongly criticized and even denied. Nevertheless, the exclusion of groups— whether by choice or circumstance— has become a point of concern, culminating in the riots of November 2005. However, unlike in other European countries, violence among these Diaspora communities is not necessarily ideological in nature. Gangs control territories and participate in drug trafficking and black market operations. While some members are Islamists, for the most part, the population involved in such activity is not attracted to Islam; their main goals are economic, not religious.

The Muslim Diaspora in the United States is much more diverse than that in Europe. Questions of race, ethnicity, and religion are more disconnected in the United States than in other countries. The largest groups are Arabs and South Asians, and in general, Muslim immigrants tend to be well educated and economically successful. This reality has led many to argue that the threat of American Muslims participating in terrorist activities is not as immediate as that in other areas. While socioeconomic factors are certainly important in predicting the potential for violence, it is not the only condition; the risks of sleeper cells and 'hit squads' (groups that enter the country to carry out a specific attack) cannot be dismissed. The influx of conservative ideologies, the marginalization of Muslims (in the United States and abroad), and the growing level of anti-Muslim discourse could also influence certain individuals to become involved in extremist activities. In general, however, the American Muslim community has been active in combating terrorism.

While the environment in Africa appears ideal for terrorist organizations and the spread of extremist ideologies, the African Diaspora's involvement in jihadist activity has been very limited. The African Diaspora has, however, been involved in domestic armed struggles and ethnic conflicts and plays an important role in internal politics. Specific groups with ties to Diaspora communities, such as the Oromo Liberation Front, are popular and receive support from abroad. Yet few Africans, with the exception of North Africans, are affiliated with Al Qa'ida, and Africans have only modest feelings of solidarity with Arabs and 'Arab causes' such as Palestine and Iraq. Overt racism and cultural differences affect this relationship.

Humanitarian crises in Africa have led to an increased presence of Islamic relief groups in Africa. Wahabi institutions have also grown in influence on the continent. Nonetheless, Islam in Africa is noticeably distinct from Middle Eastern Islam. Yet the potential for extremism inspired by these sources remains a concern.

We are faced with the need and challenge of identifying emerging threats embedded in Diaspora communities, but it is imperative to avoid alienating these groups. Profiling must not risk alienation; there must

be a balance between prudence and paranoia. Governments must also consider how they approach this threat. Ideological counterweights must be established, and conflict resolution strategies need to be implemented so that individuals are not inclined to support or participate in terrorist activity. Western nations must also work with Muslim states and moderate Muslim leaders. Terrorism will be defeated by the Muslim community; therefore the active involvement of the Muslim Diaspora is imperative to combating the threat of violence and extremism at home and abroad.