

THE FALCON AND THE FALCONER

To more effectively combat terrorism, we need to understand why homegrown Western converts turn against their own societies, argues Miranda Darling Tobias

The best lack all convictions, while the worst

Are full of passionate intensity.

W B Yeats *The Second Coming*

A militant Islamist ideology is feeding on the unfocused anger of young men all over the world. The numbers speak for themselves: 9/11, 7/7, 3/11, 10/08—the latest being the date a mega-terror attack on planes leaving Heathrow was foiled. Some, born in free and prosperous countries, are embracing this theology and turning against their societies with great hostility. These home-grown terrorists are not born flaming with righteous religious rage. A few are not even born Muslims. Their anger begins rather as unfocused frustration, a sense that they have somehow been denied something by twenty-first century life. This disaffection colours their interpretation of fundamental religious beliefs; it makes them susceptible to al-Qa'eda's worldview, a hostile

doctrine that urges followers to harm the society that has, in their eyes, humiliated them. While this dynamic does not belong to radical Islam alone, the al-Qa'eda-inspired terror network is the only militant religious movement that has such growing and global appeal. Al-Qa'eda and the Islamist *internationale* have become the 'parasites of anger', as Christopher Reuter neatly refers to them in his book about Palestinian suicide bombers, *My Life is a Weapon*.

Interviews conducted with terrorists reveal recurring themes of humiliation and frustration. Jessica Stern, a Harvard lecturer and author of *Terror in the Name of God: Why Religious Militants Kill*, personally interviewed Islamic, Jewish and Christian terrorist leaders. She writes that while local grievances play a part in their motivation, the common link is an overwhelming perception of humiliation. She quotes a former Kashmiri

Miranda Darling Tobias is a Research Fellow at The Centre for Independent Studies.

militant leader: 'Muslims have been overpowered by the West. Our ego hurts. We are not able to live up to our own standards for ourselves.' These sentiments were echoed in conversations with an Identity Christian cultist and a man involved in a violent wing of an anti-abortionist movement.

Stern put it to another terrorist leader that it seemed to her that terrorists were motivated by their perceived humiliation, relative deprivation and a sense of personal and/or cultural fear; that all the other reasons that terrorists the world over gave were 'just sloganeering and marketing'. The terrorist leader responded: 'This is exactly right. Sometimes the deprivation is imagined, as in America. In Kashmir, it's real. But it doesn't really matter whether it's real or imagined.'

For members of the Muslim diaspora who turn to violence, this shame could be civilisational, or linked to cultural ideas of honour and manhood. For western converts to militant Islam, the humiliation is more likely to be personal. Offered an extreme religious belief that demonises the society they hold responsible for their pain, and that shows them they are superior to it, is surely attractive to both groups.

Islamic radicalisation

The burgeoning phenomenon of global religious militancy is examined in the work of French terrorism expert Olivier Roy. Roy looks at how future Islamist terror could arise from *within* western societies, from Muslims born, bred and radicalised in the west, and completely familiar with western culture. He believes radicalisation can happen in two ways: the first is 'diasporic radicalism' which can occur in a community that still has very close ties with its country of origin; the second—and far more dangerous—way is through 'universalist' or 'ideological' Islam, whereby a virtual Muslim supranational community or *umma* is emphasised over all other ties.

In this transnational form, Islam is separated from any country of origin and takes on new characteristics. 'Unmoored from traditional Islam, second-and-third generation jobless males provide fertile ground for recruiters to radical Islam' (Roy). Western converts to radical Islam fit this social profile just as easily. Echoing Roy, Tanveer Ahmed wrote in the Autumn 2005 edition of

Policy magazine: 'International Muslim revivalist movements. . . have encouraged this concept of a "cultureless" Islam. The revivalists often dominate Islamic gatherings due to their commitment, pre-existing networks and defined ideological agenda.' While the idea of a culture-free form of religious community may appear tenuous, the idea is propagated on the web and becomes in a sense quite real.

Al-Qa'eda's strategic application of the new information technologies has allowed them to reach and radicalise new groups of recruits, to shape their general world view and to link them to likeminded online communities. The internet is playing a vital role in building widespread ideological backing among young Muslims, from rallying support to providing detailed instructions on how to set up a terrorist cell. The virtual networks are replacing defunct training camps and removing al-Qa'eda's organisational and educational efforts from the reach of law enforcement. These virtual networks will become more dangerous as they spread and grow stronger, more numerous and more technologically sophisticated.

Young Muslims who have no link to any country other than the western one they were born in, and who have had a secular upbringing with all the western life experiences of girlfriends and alcohol, are now able to access this virtual 'universalist' Islam, which replaces traditional cultural ties. The young people drawn into this transnational form of Islam become, in Roy's words, 'born-again Muslims'. This uprooted form of Islam is also obviously easily accessible to western converts. Disconcertingly, Roy's argument that radicalisation requires a total 're-Islamisation', a virtual 'starting from scratch' approach, leaves the door to radical conversion open to much larger pools of young people.

Islamist ideology

Religiously-motivated violence the globe over has risen in the last decade: the Rand Corporation's Bruce Hoffman has calculated that of the thirty five terror networks operating worldwide, thirty one are *jihadi*. Hoffman's data shows that there were twice as many terrorist attacks in the two years after September 11 than in the two years before. This increase has not been instigated by US imperialism, the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, abject poverty,

western cultural insensitivity, or the break-up of colonial holdings; these 'root causes' have existed for decades now.

These causes are often cited by al-Qa'eda and their supporters but they are part of a motivational or 'marketing call', not the impetus for terrorism in the West. As Scott Atran points out, the US was not involved in Iraq or Afghanistan at the time of the September 11 attacks, so that could not have been a direct motivation. Spain pulled out of Iraq in response to the Madrid bombings, but several domestic *jihadi* terrorists attacks have since been thwarted. The US has also removed most of its presence from Saudi Arabia with no noticeable impact on bin Laden's activities. Roy adds:

Although the Palestinian cause is popular among European Muslims, their support has never gone further than street demonstrations numbering fewer than 5,000 people in Paris, in company with traditional left-wing and anti-imperialist non-Muslim European sympathisers. Support for the Palestinian cause is generally not expressed in religious terms, and neither is opposition to a U.S.-led war against Iraq.

The extremists sell their hostile ideology on its 'authenticity'. However the Islamist *internationale* are a very much a product of modernity, both in their philosophy and their methodology. Their ideas are heavily influenced by the works of Sayyid Qutb, an Egyptian writing in the 1950s, who lived in the US for two years and didn't like what he saw. The new ideologues are culturally resistant but technologically enabled, diffusing a particularly antagonistic worldview via the web. Suddenly it seems that you cannot be a 'true' Muslim unless you are violently opposed to the West, and if you act on that ideological violence you are the more dutiful Muslim. The belief system is even more widespread than the violence.

Both 'born-again' Muslims and Western converts to the cause are more zealous, eager to prove their worthiness and dedication to their new-found ideological community. It is therefore harder for these groups, who may have little or no cultural bearings or grounding in the religion, to resist radical interpretations of Islam. Muslims who don't

speak Arabic may feel excluded from mosques where ordinary imams preach in a language they don't understand. The religion can be 'mis-sold' more easily. Extremist groups are constantly evolving and, with local converts to the faith increasingly being used to actually carry out missions, they will remain difficult to track.

Angry young men

While the numbers of terrorist converts are thankfully few, more numerous are the angry young men who wage a 'religious' war of crime and violence on their fellow citizens. Squadrons of homegrown suicide bombers are unlikely to become an immediate danger; however militant Islam as a serious law and order problem could. In the crime-besieged city of Malmö in Sweden, young immigrants have admitted to 'waging a war' against Swedish citizens. It is virtually unreported, but the almost all of these ethnic groups are from countries of Muslim origin. A study by sociologist Petra Åkesson found that these groups of young men cite things like 'a feeling of power' and the perceived cowardice of the Swedish youth as reasons for their harassment, as well as the perception that they are despised. Åkesson concludes that it is often the desire to 'reverse the humiliation felt by these youths' that leads them to intimidate 'Swedish kids'—a poignant parallel to Stern's ideas about the fundamental motivators of violence. It is likely a similar dynamic is at work in France. It seems young people could be taking up religion as a badge of rebellion. When the flames of urban frustration are fanned by global militant ideologies and technologically-enabled terrorists, the problem is potentially very serious.

This use of intimidation tactics—thuggishness, a show of numbers, the language of hate, death threats—was seen around Europe and the world after the publication of the cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed. It was an extreme form of bullying by a few corrupt Danish imams and their supporters, intended to create fear in the population in order to force it to submit to the will of a few. Television footage, screaming headlines, radical language has made the hostile Islamic ideologues seem much more powerful than they really are. This only helps recruit the disaffected to the cause.

Al-Qa'eda's global terror strategy needs home-

grown recruits. They are less noticeable to local law enforcement and are familiar with the territory. Local militants have been used in most of al-Qa'eda's attacks, from the embassy bombings in East Africa in 1998, to the Khobar towers, to the attempted hit on the World Trade Center in 1993, to the bombings in Casablanca and Istanbul in 2003. Western converts to militant Islam are tactical gold for al-Qa'eda, being almost invisible to law enforcement surveillance. Jean-Louis Bruguière, the leading French anti-terrorist investigating judge, declared in 2003 that al-Qa'eda had apparently stepped up its European recruiting efforts, in particular looking for women and light-skinned converts. The usefulness of westernised Muslims, and Anglo-Celtic converts in particular, to global terror networks makes them worthy of notice. Indeed, the deputy director of Direction de la Surveillance du Territoire, the French intelligence agency, has stated that 'converts are our most critical work now.'

The Westerners

Small numbers of young Westerners (mostly male) in Europe, America and Australia are heeding the call. They are choosing to reject their society by converting to a form of Islam that is violently hostile to it, and by embracing violence in its name. Andrew Rowe, Jason Walters, Richard Reid, Jack Roche, David Hicks, John Walker Lindh, Jose Padilla, Don Stewart-Whyte, Muriel Degauque: their names are known but their motivations remain perplexing. Tracing the lives of this particular sub-group of radicals could reveal lesser-known dynamics that may be driving the broader energies of global militant Islam. Ultimately, understanding the motivations of radical Islamists, confounding the dynamics of their terrorist cells, and diverting the energies of the communities that support them, is the surest and most sustainable way to prevent homegrown terrorist incidents. Perhaps demystifying the dynamics of radicalisation might also help reduce the fear of Islam—and even increase tolerance for it—in the 'besieged' populations.

Young men rebelling against the society they were brought up in is nothing new, and the number of Western converts currently on trial for, or convicted of, terrorist offences is admittedly small. However, the extreme and violent nature of the

views of these men, the higher and wider destructive potential of the technologically-enabled individual operator, and the global ideological community of support make this sub-group of radicals worth noting. Could the trend spread? Militant Islamist ideology has tapped into a deep pool of frustration and anti-Americanism the world over and is skillfully exploiting it. Could this extreme theology become the ultimate act of youth rebellion: turn into a radical Islamist and wage a war of fear on the society you resent?

The Western converts to Islam convicted of, or awaiting trial for, terrorism offences (listed below) all have varying degrees of substance abuse, petty crime, and/or some form of social and family dysfunction in their backgrounds. A sense of alienation rather than commitment to a religio-political cause seems to be the driver. Most were brought up in secular households in relative material comfort, received a proper education and have no connection to the Middle East. While there is no psychological profile for a terrorist—suicide or otherwise—common social dynamics could be playing a key role in their radicalisation. These converts to the cause may well believe—and it is irrelevant whether there is truth in the perception or not—that their society has let them down, humiliated them, or in some way left them behind.

Andrew Rowe: convicted in London after being caught with materials to facilitate terrorist attacks; also suspected of trafficking arms to Chechen militants. Rowe was born in west London to Jamaican parents. He dealt and used drugs in his teens and dabbled in petty crime. He converted to Islam in the 1990s at the Central Mosque in Regent's Park. *The Guardian* reported that Rowe converted after a 'drug-fuelled conversation' at a rave party. He apparently described the experience to the jury as 'intense' and an event that 'put meaning into [his] life'.

Jason Walters: planned to assassinate Dutch politicians. Walters was described in the *Washington Post* as 'the consummate outsider' with few friends, often the target of bullies. His parents—Dutch mother and black American father—were divorced and he converted to Islam when he was 16. The local mosque apparently banned him because of

his extreme ideas. When the Dutch police raided his house he lobbed a grenade at them, injuring three men.

Richard Reid: convicted of trying to blow up a plane. Reid was born to a Jamaican father and an English mother in a middle-class suburb of London. According to the BBC, his father was in prison for most of Reid's childhood. Reid went to jail for a series of muggings in the 1990s before joining the Brixton Mosque. BBC News quoted the chairman of the mosque saying that radicals targeted 'weak characters' and that he believed Reid was 'very, very impressionable'.

Jack Roche: nine years jail for trying to blow up the Israeli embassy in Canberra. Roche was working in Sydney at a factory and as a taxi driver. He apparently converted to Islam to try and beat his alcoholism. He had traveled to Afghanistan, met Osama bin Laden and received training in explosives.

David Hicks: captured in Afghanistan while fighting for the Taliban. Born in Australia, Hicks was expelled from school at fourteen and dabbled in drink and drugs. He joined the Kosovo Liberation Army, leaving behind two children and a failed relationship. The BBC reported Hicks told his parents he had discovered how to join up on the internet.

Jose Padilla: known as 'the Dirty Bomber' because of his desire to detonate a 'dirty' bomb in the US. Padilla was born in the US and got involved with gangs in Chicago. He converted to Islam in Florida, possibly while serving jail time. Details are unclear but *TIME* believed he traveled to Afghanistan or Pakistan to make contact with al-Qa'eda. He received bomb-making instructions and money. He was captured by the FBI on his return.

Muriel Degauque: blew herself up in a suicide mission in Iraq. Degauque was the daughter of a factory worker in Belgium and had a job at a local bakery. BBC reports say apparently she was a runaway and used drugs when she was younger. She converted to marry her first husband, but they

divorced. When she married her second husband, a Moroccan Belgian, her religious beliefs apparently became extreme. She traveled to Iraq with her husband who may also have been shot while trying to launch a suicide attack.

Don Stewart-Whyte: suspected of trying to blow up passenger aircraft leaving Heathrow. Arrested in August 2006, Stewart-Whyte changed his name in early 2006 to Abdul Waheed. His father was a Conservative Party member who died when Stewart-Whyte/Waheed was 14. He dropped out of school and, went 'off the rails' abusing alcohol and drugs. He overcame his addictions when he converted to Islam. He married a Muslim girl and was working at an electrical store as a salesman.

The background of these radical western converts above seems to show that personal circumstances were pivotal to their radicalisation. The conversion to radical Islam focused a pre-existing disaffection in a clear direction, away from personal responsibility, and outwards to society. It made them vulnerable to the pull of violent Islamist ideology. Those who convert are welcomed as 'brothers', offered support and explanations of how western society is to blame for their ills. The explanatory narrative can also absolve converts of blame for past crimes. Help is offered to new radicals in practical ways, like kicking drug and alcohol dependencies. This might be why the conversion rate is so high in the prison population: vulnerable people coupled with dedicated, fully-networked teams, offering a clear, empowering path.

The power of the gang

Most of the captured converts were unsuccessful, bumbling even, in their attempts but their stories reveal the network of support behind the scenes. The group dynamic is key in the formation of active terrorist cells. Terrorist psychologist John Horgan emphasises the power of the gang—brothers or friends operating in tight-knit circles—in his work, citing it as central to recruitment, and to reinforcing commitment to the cause. The London bombers are an example of this force at work: four Muslim friends who 'rediscovered' their religion and set off together to bomb the London Underground in a suicide mission. The driving force behind

fundamentalist religious groups is the belief in *inequality*. It provides a clear sense of who is 'us' and who is 'them'. 'The culturelessness of militant Islam', writes Tanveer Ahmed, 'is attractive—especially to those who feel alienated from their own culture.' Jessica Stern focuses on the sense of identity that comes with belonging to a group:

One of the primary tasks of a religious terrorist leader is to capitalize on some feeling of humiliation, often related to identity, that they find in potential members. It could be a personal feeling of humiliation, or it could be civilisational, national. They make their followers feel that the way to forge a new identity is by getting involved with this violent group.

Is this new militant and religious ideology mopping up the pools alienated young men who want to fight the system, the men who might have been anarchists, or radical leftists in the 1970s and 1980s? The recent violence in France and other European countries certainly seems to point to that possibility. But today the rebellion is taking place in religion, not in politics. Perhaps this is because religion goes straight to the heart of identity. The more fundamental a belief system, the stronger and more fixed the identity that the convert or the 'born-again' takes on. The extreme religious ideology condenses frustration into an active hostility, and the newly-formed sense of identity that comes with that focus can be comforting to those who might feel they have lost their way. Religion can provide a sense of brotherhood, the discipline of rituals and the attraction of empowerment. Religious language too seems to have become an idiom of protest against a largely secular society. As Roy points out, the only two Western radical protest movements are the anti-globalisation movement, and the radical Islamists. What makes the radical Islamists so much more attractive? According to Ahmed:

Identity Islam is sustained by a sense of moral superiority and Muslim cheerleading. It is not an intellectual critique of alternatives but rather a rejection of the 'Other', namely the West. Instead it creates a de-cultured, rule-based space where one

asserts Muslim 'difference' based on gender segregation, romantic recreations of the past and apologetic articulations of Islam.

Divided Islam

Disaffected figures are vulnerable to extreme and intractable belief systems that tell them they are important, powerful and morally superior—the Islamists have the added advantage of knowing that their embrace of violence strikes fear into the cultures they demonise. In Europe, too many influential voices refuse to speak plainly against the rhetoric of hostile intolerance that radicals and their apologists claim is just an expression of 'diversity', or some kind of cultural difference that ought to be in some way protected. Surely it must frustrate ordinary Muslims who are also targeted by the extremists, many of whom migrated to escape countries where such views are in the majority. As one young Australian Muslim recently posted on an Islamic website:

It's just rather frustrating, which is why I also don't like the whole 'moderate' label thing. It implies that in order to be modern, we somehow have to deny our religious heritage, which is left to the 'puritans' and the 'fundamentalists' ... nothing more than a crock of sh-t (sic). The problem is that hardliners are seen as authentic.

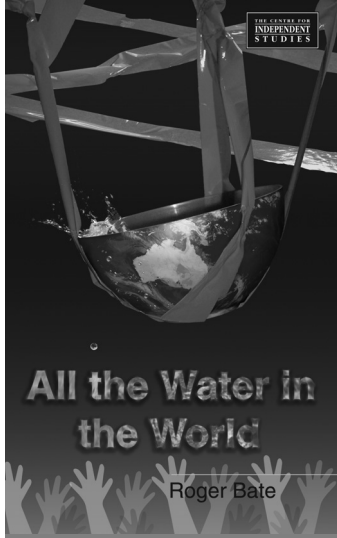
The confusion felt by many Muslims over the issue is reflected in the results of a *Pew Global Attitudes* survey on the views of Muslims and Westerners. The survey found that, although Muslims living in Europe are more moderate in their views than their Middle Eastern counterparts, about one-in-seven in France, Spain, and Great Britain feel that suicide bombings against civilian targets could be justified to defend Islam against its enemies. At the same time, Pew found that Western and Muslim publics alike generally shared concerns over Islamic extremism. Part of fighting homegrown Islamic extremism means eroding sympathy for suicide terrorists and their doctrine: both active sympathy, meaning direct assistance and support, and passive sympathy, meaning ordinary people turning away from the problem, or even excusing certain attacks or behaviour.

The great difficulty for law enforcement and policy makers is that these radicalised groups are often self-selecting and operating under their own auspices. Al-Qa'eda has become a banner, offering strength and a sense of unity to a movement that most experts now agree is not run in a bin Laden-down structure, but rather like a global franchise. Al-Qa'eda literally translates as 'the base'. It sits at the bottom of a pyramid, the founding ideology on which it hopes to build up terrorist attacks in the name of its particular understanding of Islam. Above this base sits a mass of people who feel partially sympathetic to these Islamist ideals, above them a smaller group who openly express support for bin Laden's views, above them an even smaller group who may offer concrete support or succour to terrorists and at the top of the pyramid is the tiny violent tip, those who will actively become terrorists.

While the road from humiliation and anger to religious terror is certainly not direct and inevitable, the role disaffection plays in tripping the violent zeal of converts to militant Islam ought to be recognised. A sense of cultural confusion or personal failure can only make the group dynamic—the sense of

brotherhood and purpose—more effective as a catalyst that pushes unremarkable people to do remarkable things they would not usually entertain as individuals.

Intelligence efforts at home have to focus on confounding the dynamics of terror cell recruitment and operation on all levels of the pyramid. This includes identifying vulnerable groups (not always predominantly Muslim, or particularly religious) who sit at the bottom of the pyramid, confounding the spread of hostile ideas, and trying to de-link *jihadi* networks within their own countries. Disrupting the individuals, groups and governments who fund terror projects, host their authors, or otherwise facilitate the efforts of the global terror network is also vital. Trying to understand who is susceptible to the ideas at the base of the pyramid, and why, is an important part of preventing a terror attack from within. The danger lies in open societies refusing to face the admittedly difficult problem head on. In the long term, winning will mean excising militant Islamist ideology from any legitimate position within Islam. This should be a goal shared by both Muslims and non-Muslims.



All the Water in the World

by Roger Bate (Non-Resident Fellow of CIS and a Resident Fellow at the American Enterprise Institute)

Water shortages are primarily due to mismanagement of water resources. And mismanagement, especially in agriculture, is largely the fault of centralised control by government officials. In this book, Roger Bate argues that water markets, in which individuals (or corporations and municipalities) trade their entitlements to water, introduce flexibility, reduce waste, allow fairer distribution, more rational development of new resources, and therefore smaller environmental impacts.

It focuses on countries like Australia that have allowed and encouraged water trading markets to develop and the benefits they have produced. By looking at semi-arid countries (those with the least available supply) Bate shows how we can better manage this precious resource.

To order please contact the CIS on (02) 9438 4377 or visit www.cis.org.au