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# Exploring the Causes of Islamic Radicalization and Recruitment and the General Strain Theory in Identified Terrorists

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Exploring the Causes of Islamic Radicalization and Recruitment  
and the General Strain Theory in Identified Terrorists

By

Julian A. Torres

A Research Project Presented in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Masters of Criminology

Regis University

August, 2013

ISLAMIC RADICALIZATION AND GST

EXPLORING THE CAUSES OF ISLAMIC RADICALIZATION AND RECRUITMENT  
AND THE GENERAL STRAIN THEORY IN IDENTIFIED TERRORISTS


by

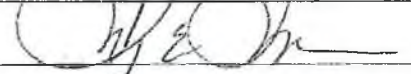
Julian A. Torres

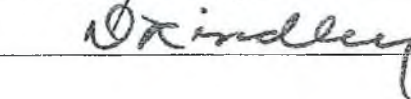
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**Abstract**

Little research has been done exploring the relation between the General Strain Theory and Islamist radicalization and recruitment. This author will explore a possible relationship between collective social strain and its impact on one's decision to engage in radical Islamist extremism. This author based the research on the General Strain Theory which states that when individuals experience strain or pressure, under certain circumstances, that strain can lead to offending or delinquent behavior. Muslims living in the United States and abroad, regardless of generation or nationality, can find themselves subject to discrimination, poverty, inequality and other real or perceived injustices. This author examined existing literature detailing convicted, identified or self-professed terrorists and their possible exposure to collective strain. Examining these strains as a possible springboard towards violent extremism and terrorist acts could produce mechanisms to identify those at risk of radicalization and recruitment and thereby possibly identify means for prevention.

*Keywords:* radicalization, recruitment, terrorism, general strain theory

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

The use of terror as a modality to affect politics has been around for centuries. The root of the term “terrorism” stems from the Latin term *terrorem* meaning to “frighten”. In ancient Rome, the term evolved to “*terror cimbricus*” which described the panic and fear Roman soldiers encountered when facing an attack. The origins of modern terrorism began after the French Revolution when the “Reign of Terror” was initiated by the Revolutionary government (Sookhdeo, 2012).

Beginning in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Islamism arose from the beliefs by certain sects that Islam was being weakened by the influences and actions of Western nations. Reform movements championed the cause for the return of Islam to a more fundamental and pure status that it bore during the Golden Age of Islam (Sookhdeo, 2012). Fast forward to today, the ultimate goal of Islamists is to re-establish the historic Caliphate and instill a global Islamic State under Islamic law. In 1996, the now deceased Osama bin Laden, issued the “Declaration of Jihad Against the Americans Occupying the Land of the Two Holy Mosques (Saudi Arabia)”, declaring, “I say to our Muslim brothers across the world: your brothers in Saudi Arabia and Palestine are calling for your help and asking you to share with them in the Jihad against the enemies of God, your enemies the Israelis and Americans” (Salem press, pp. 1-5). This declaration of Jihad was the first of two by bin Laden calling for the destruction of America and the West for their “hostility to Islam and Muslims”.

The rise of Islamist extremism as a vehicle for terror has been a growing concern since the attacks of September 11, 2001. No longer is the threat of violence associated with radical



Islamists centralized abroad. Violent terrorist attacks have occurred around the globe, indiscriminate of region or population.

Just as there is no one universally accepted definition of terrorism, there is no one cause for it. The reasons why people or groups of people engage in global Jihad vary. The direction of research and literature exploring this has shifted from “who” could do this to “why” people do this. Two common themes have emerged as to the causes of terrorism; social/political injustice and the belief that violence will pilot change. Accepting these causes, and under the model of the General Strain Theory, it’s the intention of this author to explore certain sociological conditions which may inspire a path towards violent Jihad.

### **The Problem**

Islamic radicalization in the United States is an ever evolving process that has recently become a troublesome and largely misunderstood concern. Recent events such as the Boston Marathon bombing have exposed an insider threat to the United States; an individual living domestically can transform from a non-violent person into a radicalized Islamist intent on causing harm against persons living within our borders. The path to violent radicalization is individualized; there is no one concrete or defined path to Jihadism. The choice to become radicalized is an individual choice influenced by emotional, political and social dynamics. It is the aim of this study to examine relationship (if any) between the impact of social strain and one’s decision to adopt an extremist ideology with intent of committing a terrorist act. Radicalization alone is generally not cause for concern. In the United States, the Constitution protects free speech and freedom of religion. Of concern is the dynamic of radicalization *and* recruitment to extreme violence.

## **Significance**

Identifying a possible relationship between social strain and Islamist radicalization and recruitment could be significant in attempts to prevent its occurrence. By identifying the effects of strain on Muslim's, attempts could be made to mitigate the negative impact associated with social strain and thereby reduce the likelihood of a person becoming radicalized and recruited.

## **Statement of the Problem**

Despite its weakened state, evidence suggests that terrorist groups such as Al-Qaeda remain a real threat against the United States (FBI.gov). It is the Jihadi ideology that drives potential recruits to adopt a sense of duty when exploring radicalization. This radicalization process encourages hatred and calls for violent acts of terrorism upon citizens of the host country.

An individual's choice to become radicalized can stem from a variety of influences that include emotional, political, and social motivations. These influences can have powerful affects in swaying one towards violent extremism. Research has shown that the effects of social strain can be a factor in determining crime causation (Musa, 2011). The General Strain Theory states that when individuals experience strain or pressure, under certain circumstances, that strain can lead to offending or delinquent behavior (Bartol, 2011). The central proposal of this paper is to determine a relationship, if any, between strain and a person's decision to explore a pathway towards violent radicalization and recruitment.

Muslims living in the United States, regardless of generation or nationality, can find themselves subject to discrimination, poverty, inequality and other real or perceived injustices. Examining these strains as a possible springboard towards violent ideology and terrorist acts could produce mechanisms to identify those at risk of radicalization and recruitment thereby

possibly preventing such. It should be clarified that holding radical beliefs is not the same as being radicalized with the intent to harm. Therefore, it was the aim of this exploration to determine what social grievances may motivate an otherwise non-violent individual to adopt a Jihadi ideology for the purposes of committing Jihadi terrorism.

According to Borum (2011), a qualitative review commissioned by the Danish Ministry of Justice described the radicalization process as;

“Radicalization often starts with individuals who are frustrated with their lives, society or the foreign policy of their governments. A typical pattern is that these individuals meet other like-minded people, and together they go through a series of events and phases that ultimately can result in terrorism. The rest stop or drop out of the radicalization process at different phases” (p. 41).

Borum (2011) proposed a four-stage conceptual model explaining the mindset of a terrorist. The model was derived after analysis of multiple violent extremist groups espousing extreme ideologies in an attempt to determine commonalities of the radicalization process. The model attempted to explain how grievances and vulnerabilities manifest into an individual's choice to adopt hatred towards a group or government. The model was developed to assist law enforcement and is not a formal theory. The four stages of the model are as follows: Grievance, Injustice, Target Attribution and Distance/Devaluation. In the Grievance stage, one adopts feelings of “it's not right” as a result of an event deemed unequal or offensive. The Injustice stage manifests feelings of “it's not fair” as a result of viewing an event as unjust. The Target Attribution stage identifies a person(s) or target as being responsible for the injustice (typically

the West) and the person adopts an “it’s your fault” mentality. In the Distance/Devaluation stage the person responsible for the injustice is seen as a villain with a “you’re evil” mentality.

A model developed by the New York Police Department (NYPD) to better explain to law enforcement personnel the phenomenon of Jihadization also consists of four stages: (1) Pre-Radicalization, (2) Self-identification, (3) Indoctrination and (4) Jihadization (Silber, 2007). Each of these stages has unique characteristics. The pre-radicalization stage describes a person’s environment; status, religion, education, neighborhood and lifestyle. It is within this stage when a person may be exposed to social strains, either real or perceived. The self-identification stage marks the point where internal and external influences begin to shape an identity. It is within this stage that the same social strains begin to form into a state of identity crisis. As noted in the NYPD model, the key influences during this stage of conflict include trusted family members, religious leaders, literature and on-line resources. The indoctrination stage is when a person intensifies his or her beliefs and adopts a religious or political view that justifies and legitimizes violence against those deemed responsible for injustices. Finally, the Jihadization stage is when a person accepts their duty to commit Jihad, or religious war, and often describe themselves as “holy warriors”. At this point, the person actively seeks to plan, prepare and execute acts of violence in furtherance of their radical ideologies (Musa, 2010).

### **Research Questions**

Exploratory research provides insights to an issue not clearly defined (Babbie, 2007). This type of research is used to help formulate research methods and data collection for future study or to better understand a social phenomenon. Because it lacks statistical evidence, exploratory

research should yield definitive conclusions only with extreme caution. For purposes of this paper the following exploratory research questions were addressed.

(1). Does social strain have an impact on an individual's decision to become a radicalized Islamist?

(2). Is there a relationship between the existence of social strain and the real or perceived injustices often cited as the catalysts for one becoming a radicalized Islamist?

### **Definitions**

**General Strain Theory.** As further developed by Sociologist Robert Agnew, Robert Merton's General Strain Theory states that under certain conditions individuals may resort to crime as a response to certain strain in their lives. Strain theorists believe that crime may occur when there is a perceived discrepancy between the materialistic goals and values and the availability of such goals. According to Agnew, crime is a more likely response to strain when it results in negative affect such as anger and frustration (Bartol, 2011). The term "social strain" for purposes of this paper, is defined as the negative impact of real or perceived inequalities as a result of emotional, political or social dynamics.

**Radicalization.** The radicalization process can be a long, complex journey with devastating results. The term "radicalization" covers a broad spectrum and can have several meanings. The FBI defines radicalization as "the process by which individuals come to believe their engagement in or facilitation of nonstate violence to achieve social and political change is necessary and justified" (FBI.gov, pp 1-3) German law enforcement and intelligence agencies describe radicalization as the "turning of individuals or groups to an extremist mind-set and

course of action and the growing readiness to facilitate or engage in nondemocratic methods up to the execution of violence to achieve their goals” (Borum, 2011).

Radicalization is sometimes used interchangeably with Islamic “home-grown” terrorists. As witnessed recently with the Boston Marathon bombing subjects, as well as other disrupted terrorism plots in the United States, the phenomenon of “home-grown” terrorism has gained tremendous awareness. McCauley (2011) defines the term “home-grown” terrorism as “Islamic terrorism is present when the terrorist act is perpetrated by native citizens of said country, naturalized immigrants, and permanent residents from an Islamic background” (pp. 301-302). Furthermore, the United States Violent Radicalization and Homegrown Terrorism Prevention Act of 2007, defined homegrown terrorism as, “the use, planned use, or threatened use of force or violence by a large group or individual born, raised or operating primarily within the United States” (HR 1055, p 1).

**Jihadist.** For purposes of this paper, the term “Jihadist” refers to an individual who believes that an Islamic state governing an entire community or land must be established, and, if necessary, violence should be implemented to further this agenda (Sibler, 2007).

**Islamist.** The term “Islamist” refers to a person who espouses radical and violent religious views and promotes violence to further the radical ambitions of some in Muslim community (Sibler, 2007).

**Islamism.** As defined by Patrick Sookhdeo (2012), in his essay, *The West, Islam, and the Counter-Ideological War*, “Islamism” refers to the following :

“A set of political ideologies derived from conservative (and sometimes violent) formulations of sharia law...it holds that Islam is not only a religion but also a political system that governs sharia law” (p.18).

### **Limitations**

Limitations of this paper stem from the inability to interview the five identified subjects for additional information regarding their exposure to social strain. This author relied on existing secondary research and literature on the radicalization process and the affects that social strain has on an individual's propensity to become radicalized and recruited.

An additional limitation for this study is the lack of identified terrorists willing to be interviewed for fear of exposure and/or capture. For this reason, the majority of research conducted for this paper was literature reviews and the analysis of existing secondary research.

## Chapter 2

### Review of Literature

#### Theoretical Framework

In recent years, the phenomenon of radicalization has become increasingly studied and researched. Researchers attempt to understand the psychodynamics of the radicalization process in hopes of understanding the core roots of an individual's desire and decision to transform from a non-violent champion of a cause to a radical extremist impelled to commit violent acts of terrorism (FBI.gov).

Most of the current literature and research concerning Islamic radicalization is conceptual rather than empirical (Borum, 2011). Early efforts studying radicalization processes focused on the individual-level, assuming that a person adopting such an extreme ideology would have to be afflicted with a clinically based personality disorder. This prompted an attempt to explain the beliefs and actions of a terrorist from a psychological perspective in order to establish a typical "terrorists profile" (Borum, 2011). After more than forty years of research on terrorism, social scientists have discovered (a) that there is no one "profile," (b) that individuals adopt extreme views for a myriad of reasons, and (c) that terrorists are not all "mentally ill" (Borum, 2011). This suggests a shift in research from wanting to understanding the type of person who becomes a terrorist, to exploring reasons why a person chooses to engage in, and espouse violent ideologies.

A review of the literature revealed that there are many paths to radicalization. Individuals were asked why they chose their violent behaviors. Results suggested those interviewed came from all aspects of socio-economic status, race, and religions.



There is no one universally accepted definition of terrorism, terrorists or extremists.

Terrorism is defined in the United States Code of Federal Regulations as “the unlawful use of force and violence against persons or property to intimidate or coerce a government, the civilian population, or any segment thereof, in furtherance of political or social objectives” (28 C.F.R. Section 0.85) (FBI.gov, pp1-2).

According to the FBI, the threat of modern-day Islamist extremists emerged in the middle of the last century but was typically centered in the Middle East. However, it is no longer a Middle-East problem; it is a concern without borders or limitations. Islamist extremism is a contentious term which is often used to describe the radical and violent ideologies of certain Muslims (or groups) who espouse violence against the West for political and/or religious reasons (Sibler, 2007). For purposes of this study, the term “Islamist extremists” will refer to individuals or groups who believe in the literal text of Islamic teachings to advocate for or use violence against those who are deemed an obstacle to their religious/political goals. It should be noted that not all Islamists are terrorists; rather, it is the campaign of violence which separates an Islamist from an Islamist extremist (Sibler, 2007).

Extremist radicalization does not appear to be a community based phenomenon but instead an individual one (Jenkins, 2011). Jenkins (2011) studied 82 cases of Jihadi radicalization involving 176 Americans identified as Jihadists who had been arrested and/or indicted for terrorism related offenses between the periods of September 11, 2001 through 2010. The majority of the 82 cases involved the events of a single person. Those studied averaged an age of 32 and the median age was 27. More of the studied Jihadists started college at a rate higher than the national average but graduated at a rate lower than the national average. The low

number of college graduates could be contributed to their decision to become radicalized and recruited into a violent campaign which eventually resulted in their incarceration or death.

Ben-Simhon (2012) argues that perceived social, economic and political discrimination can play a role in one's decision to become radicalized and recruited. The discrimination could result in a violent, or non-violent strike against perceived discriminators. He further argues that personal grievance and revenge tend to be the more common motivators for violent radicalization.

As previously noted, Agnew's Social Strain Theory argues that an individual's exposure and response to social strain may be a factor in one's decision to resort to criminal activity. Agnew identifies three major types of strain; the failure to achieve positively valued goals, the loss of positive stimuli and the presentation of negative stimuli (Agnew, 1985). Examples of the failure to reach positively valued goals include not making enough money, lack of respect from others, or lack of status. Examples of the loss of positive stimuli include losing a loved one, losing a prized possession, or the end of a treasured relationship. Examples of the presentation of negative stimuli include child abuse, neglect and homelessness (Bartol, 2011).

Building on Serge Mosvivi's Conversion Theory, Lewis Rambo (1975) proposed that political and religious conversion is integrated within a process of relationships, rituals, and roles which interact and reinforce one another to form a thought or belief (Borum, 2011). Rambo developed a seven-component model which accounts for different stages of one's conversion; Context, Crisis, Quest, Encounter, Interaction, Commitment and Consequences. Relevant to the discussion of the impact of social strain are the phases Crisis and Quest. In the Crisis stage, an individual is in a state of disequilibrium as a result of real or perceived social disruption or

injustices. In the Quest stage, an individual begins the process of seeking solutions to restore equilibrium (Borum, 2011).

Lofland and Stark's "World Saver" model addressed the impact of strain on religious conversion. This model divides Rambo's seven elements of conversion into two categories; Predisposing Conditions and Situational Factors. The first three of Rambo's elements are seen as Predisposing Conditions in which an individual seeks a problem-solving perspective resulting in a self-definition of religious seeker. The strains contained and experienced within these stages can stem from personal losses, thwarted expectations, and racial/religious bias. The remaining four elements are seen as Situational Factors that may explain why a person chooses one radical cause or group over another (Borum, 2011).

### **Criminology-The General Strain Theory**

Originally formulated by Robert K. Merton and revisited by Robert Agnew, the General Strain Theory argues that people are fundamentally conformist in nature and that they are strongly influenced by society, its values, and its attitudes. The status and objects that society values therefore become the "right" things to attain. Strain theorists argue that since humans are conformist they seek the "right" elements of society. Of course, not all in society are given an equal opportunity to achieve high status or acquisitions. This can be attributed to social strains such as the lack of education, lack of money, immigration status, race or other real or perceived inequalities. The theory then expects that crime and delinquency can occur when the materialistic achievements are not achieved or when goals are not attained (Bartol, 2011). Agnew (1984) further identified three major types of strain; (1) the failure to achieve positively valued goals, (2) the loss of positive stimuli, and (3) the presentation of negative stimuli.

Agnew expanded on the theory with respect to strain being a possible causal element towards a path of extremism or terrorism. Researchers often cite strain or grievances as a cause of terrorism (Agnew, 2010). This is an important distinction since the causes of general/common crime may be far different than the causes of terrorism because terrorism involves the use of violence against citizens who have not directly provoked the offender. Agnew argues that the experience of “collective strain” by members of a group, usually a political/religious, class/territorial group, increase the likelihood of involvement in terrorism. Angew identifies the collective strains as (a) high in magnitude, with civilian victims; (b) unjust; and (c) are caused by more powerful others. Agnew further argues that the strains reduce social control and leave the offender with the feeling of hopelessness and lacking in other seemingly viable alternatives to the injustice (Agnew, 2010).

### **Chapter 3**

#### **Methodology**

Given the reactionary and political nature of violent radicalization, the topic can conjure-up many personal and political reactions. It should be noted that social strain is examined as a possible influence towards radicalization rather than its primary cause.

Utilizing the Grounded Theory as a methodology, this paper is a qualitative evaluation of existing studies. According to Babbie (2011), Grounded Theory methodology attempts to develop theories from an analysis of patterns, themes and observations. It is this author's responsibility to ensure the genuineness of the initial data examined as well as its credibility and meaning. This study proposal was reviewed and approved by the Regis University Institutional Review Board (IRB). This author received IRB approval on July 10, 2013. The IRB number for this project is 13-221.

#### **Sample/Instrumentation**

The sample was derived from a review of current peer-reviewed literature and studies concerning the radicalization process and homegrown violent extremists. The sample was obtained via electronic/internet querying, books and other open-source literature. Based on the sample, five identified terrorists (the "subjects") were selected for examination. Literature and information regarding their individual cases and personal history were gathered. If the research or literature mentioned the presence and/or effect of social strain in their lives, then that particular literature was selected for inclusion in this paper. Other literature detailing the subject's upbringing, education and socio-economic status was utilized. The matrix in Table 1 below charts the subjects and their exposure (or not) to collective social strain defined by Agnew

(2010). All subjects in the review are male, between the ages of 25-40, and are U.S. persons. A U.S. person is defined as a U.S. citizen or permanent resident alien.

### **Data Collection Analysis**

The sample was measured using qualitative analysis. Qualitative analysis is the non-numerical evaluations and interpretations of observations for the purpose of discovering underlying patterns of relationships (Babbie, 2011). Utilizing procedures for Grounded Theory research, the following steps guided this author's analysis;

-Data collection. Peer-reviewed research articles were collected utilizing Regis University's Academic Search Premier as accessed via <http://libguides.regis.edu/criminology>. Other publications on the topic of Islamist extremism comprised by the FBI, such as the *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin*, *The FBI Intelligence Bulletin*, were also examined.

- Open coding. Open coding refers to the initial classification and marking of data collected (Babbie, 2011). The data reviewed was coded into categories according to the collective strain identified in each literature.

-Selective coding. Selective coding is analysis which further develops open coding data to better formulate a theory (Babbie, 2011). During this step the specialized sample (five convicted or identified terrorists) were compared to the existence of identified collective strain. The above mentioned matrix (Table 1) was used to capture this progression.

-Analytical reporting. An analytical report is a report prepared detailing the findings of research conducted in order to prove or disprove a theory or exploration. Once the data had been collected and coded, this author comprised a report summarizing the findings.

## **Reviewed Subjects**

### **Anwar al-Awlaki**

In 1971, Anwar al-Awlaki was born in Las Cruces, New Mexico, to parents who emigrated from Yemen. As a boy, he moved back to Yemen with his parents only to return to the United States to eventually become one of Al-Qaeda's most prominent and radical champions for Islamist extremists (MacEoin, 2010).

Al-Awlaki's father held a Master's degree from New Mexico State University and a Ph.D. from the University of Nebraska. His parents were noted to be devout Muslims, but not at all considered radical or ultra-conservative. It is unclear as to the exact impressions that were made upon al-Awlaki during his various trips to Yemen. What is clear is his growing and eventual disdain against the West for their "injustices committed against Muslims".

While residing in San Diego, California, al-Awlaki served as the Imam at an Islamic Center. It was there that one of the 9/11 hijackers began attending the Center and purportedly was influenced by al-Awlaki's radical teachings (MacEoin, 2010).

After spending much of his youth and adult years in the United States, al-Awlaki returned to Yemen to act as a spiritual-leader calling for the destruction of the West and glorifying the causes and actions of Al-Qaeda and eventually became Al-Qaeda's "leader of external operations: in the Arabic Peninsula" (MacEoin, 2010). Being fluent in Arabic and English, as well as his familiarity with Western customs, afforded him the insight to create and spread hatred

and calls for violence aimed at English speaking Muslims or would-be Muslim converts. From his various hide-outs in Yemen, al-Awlaki made several videos, CD's and literature calling for terrorist attacks against the United States. In one of his better known videos, al-Awlaki called on Muslims throughout the world to kill Americans. In the video he went on to say, "Don't consult with anybody in killing Americans, fighting the devil doesn't require consultation or prayers seeking divine guidance" (Lister, 2011,pp. 1-4).

With respect to specific strains experienced by al-Awlaki, he had mentioned in various writings and videos of being "persecuted" by the United States and Israel as a result of their campaign against Muslims. One could conjecture this perceived injustice took a form of racism which resulted in resentment. In other forums he did mention the political "evils" of the West in their "war against Islam" as illustrated by the Coalition campaigns in Afghanistan and the Tribal areas of Pakistan. On September 30, 2011, al-Awlaki was killed in Yemen by a U.S. led drone strike mission.

### **John Walker Lindh**

In 1981, John Walker Lindh was born in Washington D.C. into a Catholic family. For much of his childhood he suffered from an intestinal disorder. Throughout his childhood Lindh's parents had marital problems. His parents' marriage ended in divorce in 1999, when his father, a practicing attorney, revealed he was homosexual. After attending various middle-schools, his parents decided the best fit for him was to be home-schooled. After re-locating to California, Lindh eventually dropped out of high school although he eventually earned a high school equivalency certificate. He rarely left the house and spent hours on the computer engaging in on-line chat-rooms. He regularly used fake names when associating with others and sometimes



pretended to be African-American. As a teenager he watched the Spike Lee movie, “Malcolm X” which made a profound impact on him. Soon after, he converted to Islam and changed his name to Abdul Hamid. He began attending mosques in Northern California and eventually moved to Yemen and Pakistan to study Arabic. In Pakistan, Lindh began training under the control and direction of the Taliban. Lindh referred to Pakistan as “the only government to practice pure Islamic law” (Brayton, 2006). A short time later he re-located to Afghanistan to assist the Taliban in their fight against Coalition forces. In December, 2001, Lindh was captured by American forces. He was later indicted by a U.S. court for supporting a terrorist organization. Lindh plead guilty to charges of supporting the Taliban and is currently serving a 20 year term in a United States Penitentiary. (Olsson, 2013).

### **Nadal Hasan**

U.S. Army psychiatrist, Major Nidal Hasan, is accused of shooting and killing 13 people and injuring 33 at the Fort Hood Army Base in Texas in 2009. Hasan was wounded and captured by military security forces at the time of the attack. It should be noted that at the time of this writing, Hasan’s trial is ongoing. His case is included in this study due to its similarities to other home-grown Islamist extremists.

In 1970 Nadal Hasan was born in Arlington, Virginia, to parents who emigrated from Pakistan. His parents owned a restaurant-bar and grocery store in Roanoke, Virginia. He is a devout Muslim who initially showed no signs of discord with being a Muslim and his duties with the U.S. Army (Olsson, 2013).

Hasan began to express to military colleagues his disapproval of American lead military actions in Muslim countries. He would occasionally try to convert some of his patients to Islam.

During this time Hasan was reportedly subject to some verbal harassment by military colleagues calling him a “camel jockey”. In 2007, Hasan gave a lecture at Walter Reed Medical Center titled, “The Koranic View as it Relates to Muslims in the U.S. Military.” During this presentation Hasan expressed personal contradictions he was struggling with concerning the balance of his Islamic beliefs and his duties as a Major in the U.S. Army (Blumenfeld, 2013).

Prior to the attack in which Hasan is currently charged, he corresponded via email with Anwar al-Awlaki, the Yemen based radical cleric. Hasan viewed al-Awlaki as a mentor and father-figure who was worthy of devotion and praise. In one of his emails to al-Awlaki Hasan states, “Here in the U.S. you have a very huge following, but even among those, there seems to be a large majority that are paralyzed by fear of losing some aspect of dunya (the material world). They would prefer to keep their admiration for you in their hearts.” In another email he declared, “Allah lifted the veil from my eyes about 8-9 years ago, and I have been striving for *jannat firdaus* (the highest level of paradise, reserved for religious martyrs) ever since. I hope Inshallah, my endeavor will be realized” (Blumenfeld, 2013).

### **Faisal Shazad**

On May 1, 2010, Faisal Shazad, a 31 year old naturalized U.S. citizen born in Pakistan, attempted to detonate an improvised car bomb in New York’s Time Square. In 1998, Shazad received a student visa to attend school in the United States. He enrolled in a computer science degree at the University of Bridgeport, Connecticut. He eventually obtained an MBA and worked in the financial sector in Stamford, Connecticut. He married a U.S. citizen and bought a home in a middle class neighborhood. Soon after this time-period the couple began having financial difficulties. They fell behind on their mortgage and eventually lost their home to

foreclosure. The couple and their two children moved to a working class neighborhood and mostly kept to themselves. Shazad travelled to Pakistan thirteen times in seven years including visit to the northern Tribal areas where the most visible impact of American lead Coalition forces can be seen. Faisal was subject to intermittent discrimination while attending college and at his workplace due to his heritage and Islamic beliefs. In 2009 Shazad returned to Pakistan with his family to live. It was during this time that he attended training under the direction of the Taliban and received limited training on bomb-making (Seale, 2010).

In October, 2010, Shazad pled guilty for his role in detonating the car bomb in Times Square. He was sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole. During his sentencing he declared, “ I am a Muslim soldier who would sacrifice a thousand lives for Allah...war with Muslim has just begun...the defeat of the U.S. is imminent God willing” (Seale, 2010). Shazad further cited the U.S. drone attacks in Pakistan, the war in Afghanistan, and the war in Iraq as justification for his actions (Seale, 2010).

### **Jose Padilla**

Jose Padilla is an American born Muslim convert who was convicted in U.S Federal court for his role in aiding terrorist organizations. In May, 2002, Padilla was arrested in Chicago, Illinois for plotting to detonate a radiological bomb there. Padilla has since cited his believed atrocities by the United States upon Muslim countries as a motivation for his radicalization (Olsson, 2013).

Padilla was born in 1970, in New York City into a Roman Catholic family. He spent his early years in Puerto Rico before relocating to Chicago. His adolescent years were marked with delinquency, crime and economic struggles. He joined a street gang and spent time in a juvenile facility for various crimes. Later in Florida, he spent time in a prison for a shooting. He then

converted to Islam and changed his name to Ibrahim. Padilla then left his family and traveled to Egypt to participate in radical Islamist teachings. He later traveled to Pakistan, and under the direction of Al-Qaeda, received instruction on how to construct a radiological bomb. Significant to Padilla's background with respect to this study is his troubled upbringing which included several arrests and prison terms where he sought identity among other Muslims (Olsson, 2013).

## Chapter 4

### Results

The results of the data analysis are compiled in the matrix (Table 1), denoting the five subjects and their exposure to certain strain as illustrated in the literature review. The strains identified in Table 1 are; (1) *Discrimination*, (2) *War*, (3) *Economic*, and (4) *Resentment*. For purposes of this paper, “*Discrimination*” is defined as the real or perceived bias experienced by the subject because of his race or religion. “*War*” is defined as the ongoing military conflict occurring on the home-country of the subject or the country in which the subject has espoused allegiance to as a result of his radicalization. “*Economic*” is defined as sustained economic hardship experienced regardless of location. Finally, “*Resentment*” is defined as anger and bitterness the subject feels towards the West due to real or perceived threats against Muslims. Analyses focused on the existence of the identified strain and its stated or purported influence on extremist behavior.

Table 1. *Five Convicted or Identified Terrorists and their Exposure to Collective Strain.*

Strain	Discrimination	War	Economic	Resentment
<b>Anwar al-Awlaki</b>	No	Yes	No	Yes
<b>John Walker Lindh</b>	No	Yes	No	Yes
<b>Nadal Hasan</b>	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
<b>Faisal Shazad</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>Jose Padilla</b>	No	Yes	Yes	Yes

Although the matrix charted certain strains identified as significant by this author, without an interview of the subject, the degree to which the strain affected the subject's decision to become radicalized is largely speculative. The level of strain and its impact is limited to what is stated in the literature. However, certain commonalities did emerge. All five subjects studied appeared to have had a profound impact from the strains *War* and *Resentment*, while the strains *Discrimination* and *Economics* appeared to have a lesser impact.

For the strain categories of *War* and *Resentment*, all subjects experienced these dynamics with some variation. From the reviewed literature, it is known that Anwar al-Awlaki, John Walker Lindh and Faisal Shazad all had first-hand experience in the destruction and hardship that war had upon their home-country. From self-described statements they also blamed the West for the destruction. Nadal Hasan states that he conducted his attack in order to prevent U.S. military personnel from being deployed to Afghanistan to fight against Afghan insurgents. As of this writing Hasan's trial is beginning as he continues to cite the actions of the U.S. military in Afghanistan as an unjustified attack on Muslims and the primary reason for his attack. According to the literature Nadal Hasan experienced bias and discrimination by non-Muslim soldiers especially as he became more extreme in his ideology.

With respect to *Economic Hardship*, according to the literature, Faisal Shazad and Jose Padilla experienced financial hardship to a point in which it manifested sustained adversity. Anwar al-Awlaki, Johan Walker Lindh and Nadal Hasan were raised in educated, middle-class households and did not appear to endure economic adversity.

The presence of *Discrimination* may have played a significant role for two of the subjects. Both Nadal Hasan and Faisal Shazad were subject to discrimination. Both were viewed as

“misfits” by their colleagues and were either ridiculed or excluded from mainstream social interaction. In Nadal Hasan’s case he was ostracized by fellow soldiers as a result of his increased volatile rhetoric concerning his disapproval of a U.S. presence in Afghanistan.

In summary, the results indicate that *War* and *Resentment* are compelling strain, present in each of the five subjects. All subjects possessed a hatred of the United States and its foreign policy as a result of U.S. military action in Muslim countries. This hatred manifested into concentrated resentment and anger towards the responsible entities as viewed by the subjects.

## Chapter 5

### Discussion

As previously discussed, the research questions in this paper explored the relationship (if any) between the presence of social strain an individual's decision to become radicalized and recruited into violent extremist behavior. As a result of the analysis of collected data, it appears that social strain may indeed have had significant influence on the studied subject's decision to become radicalized and recruited. The presence of certain social strain also appears to have acted as a catalyst between the real or perceived injustices experienced by the subjects and their resolve to become radicalized and recruited. This is consistent with Agnew's findings that the experience of "collective strain" by members of a group, usually a political/religious, class/territorial group, increased the likelihood of involvement in terrorism (Agnew, 2010).

As outlined in the previous chapters, the degree of strain experienced varied between subjects, but the strains *War* and *Resentment* were present for each subject. The exposure to this strain can further lead to the theory that revenge is compulsory. Under the strict edict of Sharia law adopted by Jihadists revenge must be imposed by spilling the blood of infidels. This lends support for increased research in these areas further refining the impact war and resentment have on the psyche of a would-be radicalized terrorist.

The ultimate end goal of Al-Qaeda and other Jihadist organizations is the restoration of the Caliphate (the form of Islamic government that legitimized the decree of successive dynasties beginning with the Prophet Muhammad), and to govern an international order under the laws of an Islamist state (Salama, 2009). Al-Qaeda and other extremist groups view this mission as a divine calling and have mapped out a long-term strategy for its success. It is because of this



level of resolve why the exploration of the root causes of Islamic radicalization is so important and must be continued.

Strain theorists have agreed that social strain may have an impact on one's decision to offend. Strain theorists also conclude that the more strain one experiences, the more negative feelings one adopts (Bartol, 2011). Agnew (1985) stated that strain can cause many negative feelings such as despair, fear and anger. With respect to would-be terrorists or extremists, their level of offending is compounded in comparison to "average" offenders. It is clear that the subjects reviewed for this paper all experienced varied levels of collective strain.

Everyone experiences strain, but not everyone resorts to offending because of it. The impact of collective strain upon would-be extremists is in need of further study. Further study could benefit in identifying particular strain, specifically strains associated with war and its resulting resentment, which could promote policy implementation to help better adapt to the strain.

In the United States, it is not illegal to harbor extremist views or ideologies. It is when extreme ideologies manifest into violence that there is reason for legal intervention. Radicalization and recruitment historically have been a law enforcement concern. However, the existence of strain, and an individual's reaction to it, can be witnessed by many in the community. Preventive measures can be adopted in the disciplines of education, health, social services, and religious entities in addition to law enforcement. Islamic radicalization is a multifaceted and complex emerging threat. Exploring the root cause of Islamic radicalization can reveal a host of foundations including the social strain discussed in this paper. It is important further research examine the root-causes of Islamic radicalization in hopes of discovering a means in which to mitigate its occurrence.

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