

**A study carried out by King's College London  
for the European Commission (Directorate  
General Justice, Freedom and Security).**



# Recruitment and Mobilisation for the Islamist Militant Movement in Europe

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THE INTERNATIONAL  
CENTRE FOR THE STUDY  
OF RADICALISATION AND  
POLITICAL VIOLENCE



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## Executive summary

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This report presents a comprehensive overview of the methods through which Islamist militants in Europe mobilise their supporters and find new recruits. It finds that Islamist militant recruitment efforts have largely been driven underground, with little overt propagation and recruitment now occurring at mosques. Prisons and other 'places of vulnerability' continue to be a great cause of concern. Rather than 'radical imams', who have lost some influence, the report points out that 'activists' are now the 'engines' of Islamist militant recruitment. They often draw on recruits from so-called 'gateway organisations' which prepare individuals ideologically and socialise them into the extremist 'milieu'. It also shows how Islamist militants skilfully exploit young Muslims' identity conflicts between Western society and the 'cultural' Islam of their parents. Furthermore, the report highlights the role of the Internet which has come to play an increasingly important role in Islamist militant recruitment, either in support of 'real-world' recruitment or in entirely new forms of militant activism described as 'virtual self-recruitment'.

The reports finds there to be clear differences between countries in Southern Europe, where Muslim immigration is recent, and those in which the second and third generation of European Muslims is reaching adolescence. In countries with no second or third generation of European Muslims, language is less of an issue, nor is the conflict of identity between Western society and traditional culture as pivotal. Across all countries, however, the environment in which Islamist militants seek support has changed. Especially after the attacks in Madrid and London, open recruitment has become difficult. The authorities and many Muslim communities have become more vigilant and willing to confront extremism, yet there are no indications at all that the pressure of radicalisation has ebbed away. Based on these observations, the report argues that the trend towards 'seekers' and self-starter groups will continue. It also predicts

that, given the constraints now faced by Islamist militants in the 'open' environment, the significance of the Internet as a 'virtual' recruitment place will grow, with new forms of Islamist militant activism becoming more important.

The report proposes a series of measures aimed at countering recruitment. In the short term, governments need to prevent the emergence of 'recruitment magnets' which allow 'seekers' and 'self-starters' to find 'links to the jihad' and deepen their involvement in the Islamist militant movement. Governments also need to pay urgent attention to the situation in European prisons, which are likely to become major hubs for radicalisation and recruitment. Intelligence and law enforcement strategies have to be geared towards identifying the 'activist' leaders of cells. The report challenges governments to tackle the problem posed by gateway organisations, and to be clear and consistent in doing so. It also calls for more attention to be paid to extremist activities on the Internet. In the longer term, mainstream Muslim communities need to be re-vitalised and empowered. Law enforcement agencies need to build and/or re-establish trust with Muslim communities. It is also vital for schools to address the narratives used by violent extremists as well as the ways in which they are likely to be drawn into their circles. A similar effort is required on the Internet. The report concludes by saying that even longer term measures aimed at resolving the drivers of recruitment will not bear fruit unless the causes of radicalisation are successfully addressed.

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# 1 Introduction

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This report deals with one of the least understood issues in the debate about terrorism and counter-terrorism. In recent years, much attention has focused on what people do once they have become members of a terrorist group. Equally, experts have arrived at a better understanding of the kinds of conditions and conflicts that prompt people to drift into political extremism (that is, radicalisation). Yet there continues to be little systematic insight into the mechanisms that connect the latter with the former. With notable exceptions, which can be found in the more general extremist/cult literature in social psychology, scholars have had little to say about the mechanisms through which radicalised individuals become members of a violent extremist group. There is no fully developed ‘theory of terrorist recruitment’, nor have analysts attempted to derive a full conceptual framework within which to understand the issue.

This study seeks to address this omission by exploring the methods through which violent radicals mobilise support for terrorism and, in particular, the ways and means through which they find recruits. Empirically, our study focuses on the situation in the European Union (EU), and it concentrates on groups that could be described as ‘Islamist militant’ in approach and ideology, though conscious efforts have been undertaken to situate the research within the broader framework of what is known about recruitment into violent extremism more generally as well as with reference to groups of different ideological dispositions.

The objectives of this study are threefold. The first is to establish the nature of the process through which individuals in Europe become involved in Islamist militant groups and networks. The second is to trace developments and trends that have impacted on the process of recruitment. Finally, we aim to identify a series of recommendations through which emerging trends can be countered and recruitment into violent extremism curbed. As a result, we hope to provide the most comprehensive and up to date overview of the dynamics and structures that underlie recruitment into Islamist militancy in Europe.

The structure of this report follows the research questions and aims set out above. Chapter 2 explains the changing structures of Islamist militancy in Europe. In Chapter 3, we examine the question of where recruitment into violent extremism takes place. Chapter 4 deals with the agents that are significant in the recruitment process and shows how they contribute to the process of ‘joining up’. Chapter 5 looks at the nature of the message and the (social) process through which it is disseminated. Chapter 6 highlights the role of the Internet and other kinds of new media in facilitating the process of recruitment. In Chapter 7, we summarise the findings of our study and develop a series of recommendations that may help policymakers in developing counter-strategies.

Before doing so, however, it is necessary to clarify the terminology as well as explain the theory and methods that have been used in our research.

## 1.1 Definitions

Some of the terms and expressions used in this report refer to concepts that are widely contested. In order to avoid confusion and misinterpretations – as well as in order to make it possible for the report to be read in a focused way – it is essential to be clear about how they have been understood by the authors of this report.

The key variable which this study hopes to investigate is recruitment. A popular understanding would suggest that recruitment describes the ways and methods through which organisations seek to gain members or active supporters. In the context of this study, this would mean the process by which individuals are ‘spotted... monitored... and manipulated... with the final purpose of having these people participate in the *jihad*’.<sup>1</sup> However, while this may represent one way of conceptualising recruitment into violent extremism, most analysts would agree that it is too ‘top-down’ to understand the phenomenon in its full complexity. As Marc Sageman and others have argued, ‘the process of joining the jihad... is more of a bottom-up than a top-down activity’, with individuals actively seeking out opportunities to be recruited rather than being ‘brainwashed’ or ‘manipulated’ into joining up.<sup>2</sup> Without wanting to make prior assumptions about whether the former or the latter is more accurate, we believe that the aims and objectives of this study are most likely to be met by conceiving recruitment in the broadest possible terms, that is, as *the process through which individuals join entities engaged in violent extremism*.

Furthermore, for reasons of conceptual clarity, we believe it is important to distinguish between recruitment and radicalisation. Although the two concepts are related, they denote distinct phenomena in that recruitment ‘involves practical steps towards [joining a violent group]’, whereas radicalisation describes the changes in attitude that lead towards sanctioning and, ultimately, the involvement in the use of violence for a political aim.<sup>3</sup> Simply put, recruitment is situated at the interface between radicalisation and the pursuit of violence. It represents, in the words of Michael Taarnby, ‘the bridge between personal belief and violent activism’.<sup>4</sup>

Another term frequently used in this study is extremism. Typically, this expression refers to political ideologies that are opposed to a society’s core (constitutional) values and principles. In the European context, this could be said to apply to ideologies that are supremacist in nature and disregard basic principles of democracy and human dignity.<sup>5</sup> However, the term has also been used to describe the *methods* through which political actors attempt to realise their aims, that is, by adopting means ‘which show disregard for the life, liberty, and human rights of others’.<sup>6</sup> Given this ambiguity, it makes sense to qualify the concept by adding the adjective ‘violent’, that is, *violent extremism*.

Typically, the kind of violence encountered in this study is terrorist in nature. To avoid the longstanding (and seemingly never-ending) dispute about the definition of terrorism,<sup>7</sup> we decided to follow the technical definition adopted in the EU’s *Framework Decision on Combating Terrorism*<sup>8</sup> as well as the United Nations’ (UN) *High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Changes* which, in late 2004, proposed to define terrorism as ‘any action.. that is intended to cause death or serious bodily harm to civilians or non-combatants, when the purpose of such act, by its nature and context, is to intimidate a population, or to compel a Government or an international organization to do or to abstain from doing any act’.<sup>9</sup>

The actors which this study investigates are described as Islamist militants. Based on a thorough evaluation of the literature,<sup>10</sup> we believe that Islamist militancy combines a strict, literalist practice of Islam (often referred to as *Salafi* or *Wahhabi*)<sup>11</sup> with a revolutionary political ideology (Islamism), proclaiming a global community of believers (the *ummah*) to be liberated and/or united under Islamic rule, and the belief that the most effective way of accomplishing this aim is through violence or ‘armed struggle’ (often referred to as *jihad*).<sup>12</sup> Followers of this movement typically believe themselves to be engaged in a war against a coalition of Christians and Jews (the so-called Crusader and Zionist Alliance) as well as apostate Muslim rulers in which it is the individual duty of every Muslim to defend the *ummah*.

## 1.2 Social movement theory

The study of terrorism brings together scholars from many different disciplines. This allows for cross-fertilisation, but it also means that the multitude of prisms through which to look at the phenomenon can sometimes be confusing. Many studies of terrorism – as well as much of the popular discourse – is based on what some experts call ‘strain theory’, that is, the idea that terrorist mobilisation is a response to the amount of strains and stresses encountered by a particular society: the more people feel frustrated and alienated, the more likely they are to join groups that resist the perceived sources of their frustration. As a result, many authors have focused on the so-called ‘roots and causes’ of terrorism, hoping that it will be possible to formulate effective counter-terrorism policies based on a correct appreciation of the sources of people’s grievances. Arguments range from the role of poverty, political leaning, perceptions of grievance and threat, to a search for identity, personality factors and religion, without one single factor providing a fully satisfactory answer to the question of why terrorism occurs.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>8</sup> European Union, *Council Framework Decision on Combating Terrorism*, 13 June 2002, EU Document 2002/475/JHA.

<sup>9</sup> *Report of the Secretary-General’s High Level Panel*, United Nations Document A/59/565 (2004).

<sup>10</sup> See, for example, John Esposito, *Unholy War: Terror in the Name of Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Gilles Kepel, *Jihad: Expansion et Déclin de l’Islamisme* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 2000); Guido Steinberg, *Der nahe und der ferne Feind* (Munich: CH Beck, 2005); Quintan Wiktorowicz, ‘A Genealogy of Radical Islam’, *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 28(2) (2005).

<sup>11</sup> Not all Salafis are militant Islamists. For distinctions amongst followers of the Salafi movement, see Quintan Wiktorowicz, ‘Anatomy of the Salafi Movement’, *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 29(3) (2006), pp. 207-39.

<sup>12</sup> This definition follows the typology put forward by David Kilcullen in Kilcullen, ‘Subversion’, p. 653. We are conscious that the concept of *jihad* has a variety of meanings in Islamic theology, but Islamist militants use it almost exclusively in the context of armed struggle. See Esposito, *Unholy War*, pp. 26-8.

<sup>13</sup> See Tore Bjørgo (ed.), *Root Causes of Terrorism: Myths, Realities, and Ways Forward* (New York and London: Routledge, 2005). Also Louise Richardson, *What Terrorists Want: Understanding the Terrorist Threat* (London: John Murray, 2006).

<sup>1</sup> This definition was adopted by the Dutch domestic intelligence service in its 2002 study of recruitment. See AIVD, *Recruitment for the Jihad in the Netherlands* (The Hague: AIVD, 2002), p. 7.

<sup>2</sup> See Marc Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), p. 122

<sup>3</sup> Michael Taarnby, ‘Jihad in Denmark: An Overview and Analysis of Jihadi Activity in Denmark, 1990-2006’, *Danish Institute of International Affairs Working Paper*, 2006/35, p. 62.

<sup>4</sup> Michael Taarnby, ‘Recruitment of Islamist terrorists in Europe: Trends and Perspectives’, *Research Report funded by the Danish Ministry of Justice*, 14 January 2005, p. 6.

<sup>5</sup> Fernando Reinares, quoted in David J. Kilcullen, ‘Subversion and Countersubversion in the Campaign against Terrorism in Europe’, *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 30(8) (2007), p. 652.

<sup>6</sup> Roger Scruton, *The Palgrave Macmillan Dictionary of Political Thought*, 3rd ed. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

One of the main criticisms of this approach is that, while grievances are widespread, terrorism is not. On the contrary, some of the most repressive as well as economically deprived societies have experienced little political violence, whereas many prosperous and stable countries have been the targets of many terrorist campaigns. Likewise, some of the conditions which have been identified by 'strain theorists' as the principal causes of contemporary Islamist militancy in the Arab world – the rise of modernity, the aggressive imposition of Western culture, the lack of democracy and access, as well as the gap between rich and poor – are uniform across the countries of the Middle East, yet some have seen significantly higher levels of terrorism and political upheaval than others.<sup>14</sup> Even some of the strain theorists concede that – while alienation and frustration may be useful indicators for radicalisation and 'revolutionary potential' – they are rarely sufficient in explaining why political violence *actually* occurs.<sup>15</sup>

The difference between 'revolutionary potential' and actual revolution lies in the extent to which social movements succeed in mobilising people's grievances and alienation and channel them into concrete action. Though scholars in this particular field of sociology<sup>16</sup> have, until recently, paid little attention to terrorist groups,<sup>17</sup> we believe that social movement theory provides a uniquely relevant perspective through which to understand the process of mobilisation of which recruitment forms a vital part. In particular, there are three insights and/or emphases drawn from social movement theory that have provided useful lines of inquiry which have informed, guided and structured our research.

First, social movement theory postulates that movements act (more or less) rationally in mobilising their resources. Depending on what they believe suits their purposes, they will attempt to take advantage of formal structures as well as informal networks and use all the communication channels open to them, yet they will also adapt and respond to constraints and externally imposed limitations.<sup>18</sup> We believe that this way of looking at resource mobilisation offers a useful prism through which to interpret changes in the Islamist militant recruitment environment. In particular, it suggests that the choice of locations and media through which to approach potential recruits is likely to be determined by a cost/benefit analysis, weighing the benefits in terms of mobilisation against the potential drawbacks, such as attention by law enforcement and opposition from community leaders opposed to violent extremism.

Second, social movement theorists pay much attention to the process through which messages (or 'frames') are conveyed to potential supporters: while the content of such messages matters, it is equally important, for example, to look at how 'frames' are sequenced and whether the frame 'articulator' is credible.<sup>19</sup> The aim of this process

is to achieve 'frame alignment', that is, the convergence between the movement's narrative and the views of their recruits. In our case, this requires examination of *what* violent extremists are saying but also *how* and *when* they are saying it. We will need to focus on what kinds of messages are conveyed at which stage of the recruitment process and what role is played by different types of frame 'articulator', such as charismatic leaders and 'hate preachers'.

Third, social movement theory argues that informal ties and social networks play a vitally important part in the process of mobilisation. For instance, Quintan Wiktorowicz maintains that 'frame alignment' is rarely sufficient in persuading people to engage in 'risky behaviour' (such as violence or crime), and that involvement in acts of violence tends to be preceded by a process of 'socialisation' which alters perceptions of self-interest and increases the value of group loyalties and personal ties.<sup>20</sup> The value of these dynamics to the study of terrorism was highlighted by Donatella della Porta in her research on left-wing groups in Italy and Germany,<sup>21</sup> and it heavily influenced the work of Sageman, who applied della Porta's findings to the Islamist militant movement.<sup>22</sup> Social networks are likely, therefore, to be relevant to our study, and – in addition to resource mobilisation and the 'framing process' – they will constitute a third line of inquiry that will be kept in mind when looking at the process through which violent extremists maintain support and find new recruits.

### 1.3 Methodology

Having outlined key concepts as well as the theoretical foundations of this study, it is necessary to provide a brief overview of the methods and approaches that were used in the course of the research. The research which forms the basis of this report was carried out over a period of ten months, from December 2006 to November 2007. Its approach is qualitative, with evidence based on a combination of secondary and primary sources.

We began our research by conducting an extensive review of the existing literature related to recruitment, radicalisation, and violent extremism. Reflecting the composition of the research team, our approach was inter-disciplinary, drawing on monographs, edited volumes and recent journal articles in the disciplines of sociology, social psychology, history, anthropology, political science as well as the much narrower field of 'terrorism studies'.

Empirical evidence was gleaned from a systematic reading of published policy reports by governments and independent researchers as well as other publicly available materials, such as relevant articles which have appeared in newspapers and magazines. In addition, we have carried out extensive fieldwork, including nearly forty semi-structured interviews with individuals residing in three EU counties (France, Spain, and the United Kingdom). Interviewees were selected from three categories. We interviewed law enforcement

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Della Porta, *Social Movements*, Chapter 6.

<sup>22</sup> Sageman, *Understanding Terrorist Networks*, Chapter 5.

<sup>14</sup> Roel Meijer, 'Taking the Islamist Movement Seriously: Social Movement Theory and the Islamist Movement', *IRSH*, 50 (2006), p. 280.

<sup>15</sup> See Louise Richardson, 'Introduction' in Louise Richardson (ed.), *The Roots of Terrorism* (New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 2.

<sup>16</sup> For an overview of the literature, see Sidney Tarrow, *Power in Movement*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: CUP, 1998); Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow and Charles Tilly, *Dynamics of Contention* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

<sup>17</sup> A notable exception is Donatella della Porta. See Donatella della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence and the State: A Comparative Analysis of Italy and Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

<sup>18</sup> Meijer, 'Taking the Islamist Movement', p. 280.

<sup>19</sup> See Robert D. Benford and David A. Snow, 'Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment', *Annual Review of Sociology*, 2 (2000), pp. 611-39. Also Quintan Wiktorowicz, 'Joining the Cause: Al Muhajiroun and Radical Islam', pp. 8-10; available at <http://www.yale-university.com/polisci/info/conferences/Islamic%20Radicalism/papers/wiktorowicz-paper.pdf>

and intelligence officials dealing with recruitment and radicalisation; ‘community leaders’, such as youth workers and imams, from areas in which recruitment has taken place; and ‘radicals’ as well as ‘former radicals’ who were members or close to groups or networks that approved of and/or facilitated violent extremism.

This multi-tiered approach made it possible for us to gain first-hand insights from a variety of different perspectives, depending on interviewees’ relative proximity to the recruitment process. Needless to say, the interviews do not constitute a representative sample, but they have proved useful in *complementing* as well as *substantiating* some of the findings that were gleaned from other sources. In particular, they have allowed us to ‘update’ the observations made in the academic literature, which often tends to lag several years behind. Furthermore, it needs to be stressed that all interviews were conducted in accordance with the three participating institutions’ respective codes on ethical conduct governing research involving human beings.

Though this report claims to provide an overview of the situation in Europe, it is not a country by country account. Given available time and resources, this would not have been feasible, nor would the production of a European ‘handbook’ on recruitment be particularly insightful. Our desk-based research took into account relevant reports and publications from all over Europe, yet most of the empirical evidence – including all the fieldwork – relates to developments in France, the United Kingdom and Spain. Though precise figures are hard to come by (many EU member states do not hold records on their residents’ religious affiliation), the three countries are estimated to comprise about half of the Muslim population in the EU,<sup>23</sup> and they have all seen significant levels of Islamist militant activities in recent years. Looking at a variety of different countries has made it possible to determine similarities and differences in patterns, structures and processes. At the same time, limiting the fieldwork sample to just three countries allowed us to concentrate on identifying the key analytical variables – that is, the dynamics and processes involved in recruitment – rather than getting bogged down in sterile fact-finding exercises, producing information that is likely to be out of date by the time this report will be publicly available. Needless to say, where conditions are believed to differ significantly from the rest of Europe, this will be pointed out.

<sup>23</sup> See, for example, Jocelyne Cesari, *When Islam and Democracy Meet: Muslims in Europe and the United States* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2004), pp. 183-4. Also Ceri Peach, ‘Muslim Population of Europe: A Brief Overview of Demographic Trends and Socioeconomic Integration’ in Center for Strategic and International Studies, *Muslim Integration: Challenging Conventional Wisdom in Europe and the United States* (Washington, DC: CSIS, 2007), p. 9.

## 2 The Islamist militant movement

Having established that social movement theory is the most appropriate framework through which to look at the question of recruitment (see 1.2), we need to better understand the nature of the movement and the context in which this theory will be applied. This chapter will identify the core structures of which the Islamist movement is composed as well as the dynamics that are likely to impact on the ways in which individuals join. First, we will try to make sense of the multi-faceted nature of the Islamist movement. Based on this evaluation, we will then develop a typology of Islamist militant cell structures in Europe. This will be followed by a section that highlights the differences between European countries and how they are likely to impact recruitment. Based on our assessment – and drawing on the secondary literature in the field – we will then distil a number of key trends and dynamics, concluding that the process of joining Islamist militancy in Europe has become more diffuse, with more flexible recruitment patterns and less direction from the movement’s leadership.

### 2.1 Modelling *Al Qaeda*?

Since the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, numerous attempts have been made to explain what the Islamist militant movement – often popularly (and sometimes misleadingly) referred to as *Al Qaeda* – constitutes. In the period immediately following the 9/11 attacks, *Al Qaeda* was portrayed as a hierarchical organisation with a clear chain of command and control. *Al Qaeda*, it was argued, resembled a spider web, with Osama Bin Laden at the centre and sleeper cells around the world, ready to strike at Western targets at any moment.<sup>24</sup> Quickly, this idea gave way to the notion of *Al Qaeda* as a franchise operation. According to Olivier Roy and Peter Bergen, for example, rather than planning particular operations, the leadership merely sponsored acts of terrorism, subcontracting them to local groups who were given permission to take action on behalf of the wider movement.<sup>25</sup> Yet others believed it was wrong to understand *Al Qaeda* as a coherent organisation at all. Rather, it represented an ideology which could be claimed by anyone who identified with certain beliefs. In this view, the movement operated according to the principles of ‘leaderless resistance’ in which the leadership provided incitement and (religious) justification but left it to their supporters’ initiative to act on them.<sup>26</sup> At best, therefore, *Al Qaeda*

<sup>24</sup> See Paul L. Williams, *Al Qaeda: Brotherhood of Terror* (New York: Alpha, 2002), Chapters 7 and 8; also Rohan Gunaratna, *Inside Al Qaeda* (London: Hurst, 2002), Chapter 2.

<sup>25</sup> See Olivier Roy, ‘Netzwerk des Terrors – Markenzeichen al-Qaida’, *Le Monde Diplomatique* (German edition), 10 September 2004; Peter Bergen, *Holy War Inc.: Inside the Secret World of Osama bin Laden* (London: Phoenix, 2001), Chapter 10.

<sup>26</sup> See Jessica Stern, ‘The Protean Enemy’, *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 2003. Ironically, the idea of ‘leaderless resistance’ was formulated by American right-wing extremists. See Louis Beam, ‘Leaderless Resistance’, *The Seditiousist*, February 1992; available at <http://reactor-core.org/leaderless-resistance.html>.

represented ‘an amorphous movement held together by a loosely networked transnational constituency’.<sup>27</sup>

The three images described above are often portrayed as competing visions. In reality, they all represent accurate understandings of the contemporary Islamist militant movement. In one of the best appreciations of *Al Qaeda*, Jason Burke argued that the Islamist militant movement operated at three levels: the ‘hard core’, consisting of Bin Laden, his deputy Ayman Al Zawahiri and their lieutenants; the ‘network’, made up of *mujahideen* who took part in *jihād* or spent longer periods in training camps abroad, have returned to their home countries and are now involved in local groups; and the wider ‘movement’ of all those who identify with *Al Qaeda* ideology and are prepared to act out the ‘hard core’s’ ideas while having no direct association with its members and only loose connections to the ‘network’.<sup>28</sup> Burke emphasises that, throughout the history of the movement, the relationship between the three levels has never been static. Indeed, he argues that it is the interplay between the different levels that explains the changing dynamics of the movement.<sup>29</sup>

Burke’s observations are reflected in the writings of some of the movement’s most important strategists. Abu Musab al Suri, one of *Al Qaeda*’s leading military thinkers, anticipated the diffusion of the movement that took place in the wake of the invasion of Afghanistan, and argued that this development was highly desirable. In his view, direct relationships between the ‘hard core’ and operative units had to be discouraged, with the only link between the core and its ‘tentacles’ being ‘a common aim, a common doctrinal program and a... self-educational program’.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, he believed that the movement’s global campaign had to assume a variety of different forms, ranging from large-scale insurgencies (‘open fronts’) to local or regional campaigns (‘*tanzims*’) and small cells engaging in sporadic acts of terrorism (‘the *jihād* of individualised terrorism’). Like Burke, Al Suri argued that *Al Qaeda* was ‘a system, not an organisation’.<sup>31</sup>

## 2.2 Cell structures in Europe

There can be no doubt that – compared to ‘old’ terrorist groups such as the Irish Republican Army (IRA) or Basque Homeland and Liberty (ETA) – the multi-faceted nature of Islamist militancy makes it difficult to understand how the movement ‘ticks’. This is particularly true when trying to make sense of the Islamist militant movement in Europe. On the one hand, there are some who believe that Islamist militants in Europe continue to be organised in structured cells, which receive training and other resources from the *Al Qaeda* ‘hard core’ and rely on its leadership for strategic direction.<sup>32</sup> Others, however, contend

that the Islamist militancy in Europe has mutated into an autonomous phenomenon consisting of groups of alienated, ‘home-grown’ Muslims – often described as ‘self-starters’<sup>33</sup> – who have adopted the language of *Al Qaeda* but act on their own accord. In this view, contemporary Islamist militancy in Europe is an extreme, violent form of popular culture, which will never be eradicated as long as government continue to focus on eliminating the ‘leadership’ of the movement.<sup>34</sup> In fact, according to some observers, it is the absence of a clear leadership which makes the Islamist militant movement in Europe distinctive.<sup>35</sup>

As with the debate about *Al Qaeda*, the different ideas about the nature of the Islamist militant movement in Europe are not mutually exclusive. On the contrary, the two models can be said to represent ‘ideal types’ which are located at opposite ends of a scale. On this hypothetical scale, the degree to which cells rely on direction and resources from the ‘hard core’ (autonomy) and the way in which they were recruited (selection) determine their location between the two poles. Drawing on these distinctions, we believe that there are at least three types of cell which can be found in Europe (see Figure 1):

- The first is the ‘chain of command’ cell. This type of cell is recruited ‘top down’ with the aim of carrying out operations on behalf of the central leadership. The recruitment process is led and/or directed by a member or senior associate of the ‘hard core’ who identifies and approaches individuals (or groups of individuals) whose dedication, skills and general profile match the requirements. The cell is fully resourced by the organisation, with funding and equipment supplied by other parts of the network. Where feasible, members of the cell are sent to training camps abroad. The nature of their mission and the decision to activate the cell is determined by the movement’s leadership rather than by the recruits themselves.
- The second type can be described as ‘guided’ cell. Guided cells are largely self-recruited, often emanating from what Sageman described as ‘cliques’.<sup>36</sup> Through members’ associations or active ‘seeking out’, the cell manages to establish a ‘link to the *jihād*’, that is, a relationship to a member and/or associate of the *Al Qaeda* network, who facilitates its integration into the movement. Though it remains largely self-sufficient, having found a ‘link to the *jihād*’ allows the unit to access some resources, such as financial support, expertise, etc. Also, as a conscious part of the movement, the cell will attempt to operate within the strategic parameters set out by the ‘hard core’. In other words, while the initiative for terrorist operations lies with the group, members will try to seek guidance from the network and, where possible, submit their plans for ‘approval’.

27 Bruce Hoffman, ‘The changing face of Al Qaeda and the Global War on Terrorism’, *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 27(3) (2004).

28 See Jason Burke, *Al Qaeda: The True Story of Radical Islam* (London: IB Tauris, 2003). A nearly identical typology is put forward in the French government’s recent White Paper on terrorism. See Premier ministre de la République Française, *La France face au terrorisme: Livre blanc du Gouvernement sur la sécurité intérieure face au terrorisme* (Paris: La documentation Française, 2006), p. 26.

29 Ibid.

30 Brynjar Lia, ‘The al-Qaida Strategist Abu Mus’ab al-Suri: A Profile’, *OMS-Seminar Presentation*, Oslo, 15 March 2006, p. 17; available at [http://www.mil.no/multimedia/archiv/00076/\\_The\\_Al-Qaida\\_strate\\_76568a.pdf](http://www.mil.no/multimedia/archiv/00076/_The_Al-Qaida_strate_76568a.pdf).

31 Ibid.

32 See, for example, Robert S. Leiken, ‘Europe’s Angry Muslims’, *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 2005.

33 The term was coined by Daniel Benjamin and Steven Simon. See Dan Benjamin and Steven Simon, *The Next Attack* (New York: Henry Holt, 2005), pp. 27-31. *Livre blanc du Gouvernement sur la sécurité intérieure face au terrorisme* (Paris: La documentation Française, 2006), p. 26.

34 Aidan Kirby, ‘The London Bombers as “Self-Starters”: A Case Study in Indigenous Radicalization and the Emergence of Autonomous Cliques’, *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 30 (5) (2007), pp. 415-28.

35 The evolution of leadership in Europe’s Global Jihad Networks’, *Exclusive Analysis Report*, 21 September 2007.

36 See Sageman, *Understanding Terror*, Chapter 4.

- The third type are genuine self-starters. Frequently compared to youth and street gangs<sup>37</sup>, they are entirely self-recruited and maintain no formal link to the *Al Qaeda* network. Some members may have limited connections, but there is no access to the resources of the wider movement, so that the group remains entirely self-reliant in terms of funding, training and planning. Members may be inspired by statements of *Al Qaeda* leaders such as Bin Laden, but they define their agenda and the nature and scope of their operations independently. The 'hard core' will have no knowledge about the timing and targets of operations, nor indeed is it likely to know about the cells' existence.

The so-called Hamburg cell, which led the 9/11 attacks in the United States, clearly fits the description of the 'chain of command' cell,<sup>38</sup> whereas the recent attacks in London and Glasgow appear to have been carried out by genuine self-starters with very limited links to the wider network.<sup>39</sup> Nevertheless, even with this more sophisticated typology, it will sometimes be difficult to place a particular cell into one category or another, largely because – even in well-documented cases – the extent and significance of 'links to the jihad' remains unclear.<sup>40</sup> Initially, cells often appear to be genuine self-starters or 'amateurs'. With further investigation, however, it frequently turns out that members had links into the 'network'. The nature of the cells which carried out the 2004 attacks in Madrid, for example, continues to be disputed.<sup>41</sup> Likewise, while the so-called Hofstad Group in the Netherlands (one of whose members killed the filmmaker Theo van Gogh) is described by some as a nihilistic street gang with no structure and no formalised recruitment,<sup>42</sup> whereas others are certain it was a highly networked, ideologically conscious group with extensive international links.<sup>43</sup>

Figure 1: Cell Typology

	Autonomy	Selection
<b>Chain of command</b>	Directed	Top-down
<b>Guided</b>	Takes initiative, but seeks approval	Self-recruited, but 'link to jihad'
<b>Self-starter</b>	Autonomous	Self-selected

Notwithstanding such debates, there is broad agreement amongst experts that self-starter groups are less likely to pose a strategic threat to the government or society against which their operations are

37 See, for example, Lorenzo Vidino, 'The Hofstad Group: The New Face of Terrorist Networks in Europe', *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 30 (7) (2007), pp. 579-92. Also Yassin Musharbash, *Die neue Al-Qaida* (Cologne: Kiepenheuer und Witsch, 2006), pp. 245-51.  
38 See Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States; available at <http://www.911commission.gov/report/911Report.pdf>.  
39 See Shiraz Maher, 'Glasgow bombs: the doctor I new', *New Statesman*, 5 July 2007. Recently, however, there was some speculation that some of the attackers were linked to *Al Qaeda* in Iraq. See Raymond Bonner, Jane Perlez and Eric Schmitt, 'British Inquiry of Failed Plots Points to Iraq's Qaeda Group', *New York Times*, 14 December 2007.  
40 For examples, see Petter Nesser, 'Jihad in Europe: Recruitment for terrorist cells in Europe', *OMS-Seminar Presentation*, Oslo, 15 March 2006, p. 17; available at [http://www.mil.no/felles/ffi/start/FFI-prosjekter/Alfover/\\_TERRA/Publikasjoner/Speeches/](http://www.mil.no/felles/ffi/start/FFI-prosjekter/Alfover/_TERRA/Publikasjoner/Speeches/).  
41 See Javier Jordan, 'Mapping Jihadist Terrorism in Spain', *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 28 (2005), pp. 169-91; and Lorenzo Vidino, *Al Qaeda in Europe* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 2006), Chapter 11.  
42 See Vidino, 'The Hofstad Group'.  
43 Petter Nesser, 'Jihadism in Western Europe after the Invasion of Iraq: Tracing Motivational Influences from the Iraq War on Jihadist Terrorism in Western Europe', *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 29(4) (2006), p. 336.

directed. Because they are lacking access to the resources and strategic leadership of a network, their operations will have less impact, if they do not fail altogether. According to Sageman, for instance, it is inconceivable for a self-starter group to carry out a highly complex operation like the September 11 attacks against the United States.<sup>44</sup> At the same time, most analysts agree that self-starter groups are more difficult to detect and control than 'guided' or 'chain of command' cells. Having no links to the wider network and no known associations with terrorist suspects, the chances that they have come to the attention of the authorities is low. Also, with no clear input from the central leadership, their operations are less easy to predict and protect against.<sup>45</sup>

## 2.3 National differences

While the typology presented in the previous section helps to conceptualise the structures of Islamist militancy in Europe, it is not meant to suggest that the structures and dynamics of Islamist militancy are identical across the continent. On the contrary, though the networks of Islamist militants often cross boundaries, there are some important distinctions which result from the diverse nature of European Muslim communities. Indeed, as we will show throughout this report, these differences are highly significant when it comes to the question of how individuals are recruited from local European Muslim populations.

When dissecting the nature and the dynamics of European Muslim communities, two significant variables emerge. The first is the region from which the majority of the Muslim population in a country emigrated. While most Turks settled in Germany, the majority of North Africans went to southern European countries (initially France, more recently also Spain and Italy). Most South Asians moved to Britain.<sup>46</sup> The consequences of these different patterns of migration are manifold. They mean, for example, that the Muslim population in countries like France, Italy and Spain can access Arabic language writings and media, whereas their co-religionists in Germany and Britain cannot. They also imply that the spill-over from conflicts outside of Europe – Algeria, Kashmir, etc. – has affected European countries unevenly. In addition, and more generally, they have resulted in local Muslim populations with vastly different attitudes on a whole range of issues, such as the right to conversion, conflicts between religious and secular law, etc.<sup>47</sup>

The second variable is the history of immigration. In many European countries – Germany, France and the UK, for example – the largest wave of Muslim immigration occurred during the post-war economic boom, with the first generation settling in Europe in the 1950s and 1960s (and their families following them in the 1970s). In others – especially Spain and Italy – a significant Muslim population

44 Sageman, *Understanding Terror*, p. 160.  
45 Spanish official 1, interviewed September 2007.  
46 The Netherlands are unique in being the recipient of immigrants from all three regions. Scandinavian countries have seen significant immigration from Arab countries. For a full breakdown, see Peach, 'Muslim population of Europe', p. 12.  
47 Jytte Klausen, *The Islamic Challenge: Politics and Religion in Western Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 157, 192, 220.

only emerged in the 1990s.<sup>48</sup> As a result, the emotional and political 'centre of gravity' for many Muslims in countries like Spain and Italy still lies across the Mediterranean. In contrast, many young second or third generation European Muslims in, say, France and the UK are said to experience a conflict of identity: born and raised in Europe, they no longer identify with the country and/or culture in which their parents or grandparents were brought up, yet they also feel excluded from Western society, which still perceives them as foreigners. For them, the idea of becoming 'citizens' of the *ummah* – a virtual Islamic nation removed from territory and national culture – may be more attractive than for first generation immigrants.<sup>49</sup>

These differences between European Muslim populations are reflected in the kinds of Islamist militant structures which have emerged in European countries. In France, for example, the origins of the Islamist militant movement can be traced back to the Algerian civil war in the 1990s, when the Armed Islamic Group (GIA) first used France for logistical support and then declared the country a legitimate target. The structures set up during this period served as the basis for the extensive network established by the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC), which split from the GIA and subsequently sought closer links to *Al Qaeda*.<sup>50</sup> The GSPC's recent identification with *Al Qaeda* made it possible for existing GSPC structures to be used for channelling recruits to Chechnya and Iraq. The group's adoption of a global agenda has also attracted more young, second or third generation French Muslims, who are complementing older 'veterans' (now in their late 30s or early 40s) in 'guided cells'.<sup>51</sup>

Britain, for some time, served as a refuge for Islamist militants from across the world, including associates of the GIA. Even so, earlier than in France, much of the discourse was directed at mobilising second and third generation Muslims. Furthermore, the mostly South Asian background of the British Muslim community meant that the so-called 'Pakistan connection' – the existence of militant training camps in Pakistan and (pre-2001) Afghanistan – has been instrumental in driving the emergence of Islamist militant structures, and has on numerous occasions provided self-starters with 'links to the jihad'. In turn, the linkage to Iraq is less significant than in the case of France. While there can be no doubt that the issue radicalised many British Muslims, very few managed to reach the country, because facilities and training camps for non-Arabic speakers in Iraq are limited.<sup>52</sup>

The structures in Spain appear to be the most confusing. Originally held together by a small group of Syrians with direct links to the *Al Qaeda* leadership, the recent influx of Muslims from the Maghreb, especially Morocco, meant that the Islamist militant movement in Spain has come to be dominated by individuals associated with the Algerian GSPC and, increasingly, the Moroccan Islamic Combatant

Group (GICM). While there is no second or even third generation of Spanish Muslims to appeal to, the adoption of a global agenda by Maghrebian groups led to the structures becoming more mixed. Most Islamist militant cells in Spain tended to be ethnically homogenous with a clear focus on – and firm linkages to – the 'struggle' in members' country of origin, yet this is no longer the case. In recent years, Spanish cells have played a significant role in facilitating the supply of recruits to Iraq, and they are now closely integrated into the continental networks which span much of continental Europe.<sup>53</sup>

## 2.4 Trends and dynamics

It has become a cliché to describe the Islamist militant movement as 'flexible', 'highly adaptive' and 'constantly changing'. Rarely, however, are these statements corroborated with evidence that would make sense of the extent, direction and drivers which underlie such developments. Amongst all the authors cited in this chapter, the notion that – in the course of the past years – there has been an increase in self-starter groups whilst 'chain of command' cells have become the exception is widespread. Increasingly, therefore, Islamist militancy in Europe is believed to consist of self-selected, multi-ethnic 'local networks' that have little or no connection to the *Al Qaeda* 'hard core'. Recruits are also said to be younger, with converts playing an increasingly important role.<sup>54</sup>

If the analysts are correct, what would explain the trend away from 'chain of command' cells? Drawing on the literature as well as the theoretical framework developed in the previous chapter, it becomes possible to make two observations, which may turn out to be essential in understanding the driving forces underlying the evolution of Islamist militant mobilisation and recruitment in Europe.

First, since 2001, *Al Qaeda* has been confronted with a more hostile environment in which the creation of 'chain of command' cells has become costly, if not entirely impossible. Internationally, the invasion of Afghanistan has eliminated the safe haven from which the organisation could direct the global movement. Whilst some of these structures may now have resurfaced in the tribal areas of Pakistan,<sup>55</sup> the 'hard core' remains isolated and continues to find it hard to provide strategic and operational leadership. At the domestic level, more attention has been paid to Islamist militant activities by law enforcement and intelligence agencies. As a result, efforts to conduct top-down recruitment by known members of the pre-2001 *Al Qaeda* network have been prevented, and overt places of congregation for extremists have been closed down or 'cleaned up'.

Second, over the same period, moves towards more self-reliance and self-recruitment have been encouraged by necessity and opportunity.

48 See Jorgen Nielsen, *Muslims in Western Europe*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004).

49 See Olivier Roy, *Globalized Islam: The Search for a New Ummah* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), pp. 117-47. Also Jessica Stern, 'Culture' in Club de Madrid, *Addressing the Root Causes of Terrorism* (Madrid: Club de Madrid, 2005), pp. 35-6.

50 In 2006, it merged with *Al Qaeda* and now calls itself *Al Qaeda* in the Maghreb. See Kathryn Haahr, 'GSPC Joins al-Qaeda and France Becomes Top Enemy', *Jamestown Terrorism Focus*, 26 September 2006. For the significance of the GSPC network, see 'L'argumentaire islamiste contre la France', *Le Monde*, 23 December 2005; also 'Lutte antiterroriste: le projet de loi est-il adapté à la menace?', *Le Monde*, 26 October 2005.

51 Annouar Boukhars, 'Islam, Jihadism and Depoliticization in the French Banlieues', *Jamestown Terrorism Monitor*, 21 September 2006.

52 Shiv Malik, interviewed July 2007.

53 Fernando Reinares, 'What Threat Does Jihadist Terrorism Currently Pose to Spain?', *Análisis del Real Instituto*, 2 April 2007; available at <http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/analisis/imp/imp/1117imp.asp>; also Javier Jordán and Robert Wesley, 'After 3/11: The Evolution of Jihadist Networks in Spain', *Jamestown Terrorism Monitor*, 12 January 2006.

54 See Petter Nesser, 'Local Networks and Recruitment for the Jihad', paper delivered at the conference on 'Best Practices in European Counter Terrorism', Swedish National Defence College Stockholm, 1 November 2006; available at [http://www.mil.no/felles/ffi/start/FFI-prosjekter/Alfover/\\_TERRA/Publikasjoner/Speeches/](http://www.mil.no/felles/ffi/start/FFI-prosjekter/Alfover/_TERRA/Publikasjoner/Speeches/). Some analysts, however, maintain that there were attempts to revive a 'more systematic and strategic' approach in the aftermath of the Iraq war. See Leiken, 'Europe's Angry Muslims'.

55 Senior member of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), private conversation in October 2006. Also Mark Mazzetti and David Rhode, 'Signs of Qaeda resurgence', *New York Times*, 19 February 2007.

On the one hand, the demand to engage in Islamist militancy has risen significantly, with many European countries reporting a steep rise in the number of individuals who are considered to be 'potentially violent extremists'.<sup>56</sup> If we assume the number of 'links to the jihad' to have remained constant, existing structures would have been overwhelmed by the rise in demand, so that many aspiring militants had no choice but to become self-starters. Furthermore, new technologies, such as the Internet, have made it more convenient as well as less risky for potential recruits to find like-minded individuals, pursue 'frame alignment' and maintain social networks within the Islamist militant milieu.

In principle, therefore, there seem to be powerful reasons to assume that the drivers behind Islamist militant mobilisation and recruitment in Europe have changed significantly in the period since 2001. Based on our evaluation, it is reasonable to suspect that the process of joining the movement has become more diffuse, with less direction from abroad, more flexible recruitment practices and varying organisational forms and patterns. Indeed, it is this process of diffusion and its consequences which the following chapters aim to substantiate.

<sup>56</sup> See Peter R. Neumann, 'Europe's Jihadist Dilemma', *Survival*, 48(2) (2006), pp. 71-84. In Britain, for example, the number of potentially violent Islamist militants is said to have trebled in the years between 2003 and 2006. See 'The International Terrorist Threat to the UK', speech given by Dame Eliza Manningham Buller at Queen Mary's College, London, 9 November 2006; available at <https://www.mi5.gov.uk/output/Page374.html>. Similar developments are described in the French government's recent White Paper on terrorism. See Premier Minister, *La Franche face au terrorisme*.

## 3 Recruitment grounds

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The first question we hope to answer is whether there are any places or locations in which recruitment is more likely to take place than in others. Media reports often create the impression that there are specific 'recruitment grounds' in which 'spotters' lurk for their victims, and that such places simply need to be closed down or 'cleaned up' in order to eliminate the threat from violent extremism. This may, to some extent, be true for recruitment 'magnets', such as 'radical mosques', which attract 'seekers' from a wider geographical areas. Generally, though, the reality is more complex. Our research suggests that there are two kinds of physical environment in which recruitment into Islamist militancy takes place. The first are places where Muslims meet and congregate, most prominently of course mosques which will be explored in the first section of this chapter. The second are locations in which individuals are likely to be vulnerable and may thus be receptive to the appeal of violent extremists. The prime example of this second type of place are prisons, which will be examined in the second section. Other locations that have been found to play a role in recruitment tend to fall into the first or the second category. Indeed, as the third section will demonstrate, the nature of the place is often secondary to the personal relationship that is being formed.

### 3.1 Mosques

Unlike most Christian churches, mosques play an integral part in the day to day lives of Muslim communities. They are not just centres for worship and spiritual enrichment, but they host educational activities, perform welfare functions and serve as a gathering place for different generations. Though supervised by a committee and managed by an imam (who is usually the committee's employee), many mosques are open to different groups and associations who may use the facilities as a venue for their own events and activities. Given the centrality of the mosque in Muslim community life, it is logical that violent extremists have tried to exploit mosques as a place in which to find support and recruit followers. Simply put, there is no better and no more obvious place in which to meet large numbers of devout Muslims, who could be open to the religiously framed political message which Islamist militants hope to convey.

Until recently, the objective of Islamist militants was to control certain mosques and turn them into hubs of extremist activity. In its 2002 study, the Dutch domestic intelligence service asserted that extremists were trying to take over mosques as 'safe havens' from which to arrange logistics and raise funds for active mujahideen, but also in order to attract potential recruits, 'monitor [them] closely in the early stages and... offer facilities' to support the process of integrating new recruits into the structures of the Islamist militant movement.<sup>57</sup> As is well-known, some of these attempts were successful, and places

like Al Quds in Hamburg, the Islamic Cultural Centre in Milan, Finsbury Park Mosque in London and others became bywords for the propagation of violent extremism. These mosques turned into magnets for radicalised individuals, who would actively seek out these places in order to meet like-minded individuals or get involved in violent extremism. In other words, the radical mosques facilitated a process of self-recruitment whereby individuals who had already decided to join up knew 'where to go'.<sup>57</sup>

Where taking over mosques proved difficult, violent extremists undertook systematic attempts at infiltrating them. The tactics that were used varied according to circumstances. At times, they would present themselves as distinguished scholars of Islam and offer to lead prayer. On other occasions, they set up study groups in which they could propagate their message, hiding their motives and identities until personal relationships amongst members had been cemented.<sup>58</sup> Where none of this was possible, they would simply 'sit in the corner, wait for the prayer to end, and then approach individuals', or engage in conversation with groups of individuals who had attracted their attention.<sup>60</sup> Much of this activity was obvious to the rest of the congregation. As one of our interviewees, a Muslim community worker from East London, explained:

*Occasionally, they would get into an argument with you, or you could overhear them talking. We knew who they were. People who'd fallen for their message could be recognised. They were moving away from the mainstream. They no longer attended study circles. And when they did, they started asking questions that were provocative. They became argumentative.*<sup>61</sup>

Frequently, long-standing battles over the control of mosques ensued. In some cases, the mosque committee took a robust stance, expelling those who were considered radicals. Often, however, this merely prompted the extremists to shift their activities from inside the mosque to the outside, with radicals distributing leaflets after prayers.<sup>62</sup>

In addition to systematic recruitment efforts, there have been many instances where mosques simply provided the setting for the formation of 'cliques', which would then (collectively) embark on a path into violent extremism. As one of the radicals whom we interviewed reminded us, mosques are the natural place for Muslims to meet in order to debate fundamental questions about religion and society:

*The community cannot be dissociated from the mosque as it is the geometrical centre of our lives... Within our mosque, we don't talk about political affairs as such... But... the political and the religious are inseparable in Islam. So, whilst we don't talk about politics, the imam asks us in his sermons and appeals to take a stand against the political aggressions and the calling into question of Muslims in general and Islam in particular.*<sup>63</sup>

<sup>57</sup> AIVD, Recruitment for the Jihad, p. 13.

<sup>58</sup> During Abu Hamza's reign, for example, Finsbury Park mosque attracted an audience of hundreds of Muslims from all over the United Kingdom, with many keen to sign up to violent jihad as soon as they had found their way to the building. Sean O'Neill and Daniel McGrory, *The Suicide Factory: Abu Hamza and the Finsbury Park Mosque* (London: Harper, 2006), pp. 115-16.

<sup>59</sup> Wiktorowicz, 'Joining the Cause', p. 8.

<sup>60</sup> British community leader 1, interviewed August 2007.

<sup>61</sup> British community leader 2, interviewed July 2007.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid; confirmed by British radical 6, interviewed November 2007.

A former French radical expressed similar views:

*How can one be a good Muslim? Must one go to Iraq to defend one's religious brothers? Must they be avenged there? Or wouldn't it be better to spread the true Islam among our 'lost brothers' influenced by the media which broadcast a false image of Islam? The mosque is the cohabitation of a series of questions.*<sup>64</sup>

For a former British radical, the mosque was the natural place at which to seek clarification about the confusion caused by the events of 11 September 2001:

*When 9/11 happened, I had already started going to the mosque more regularly. I was rediscovering my faith. I remember thinking: 'This changes everything'. But I admit, I was confused about it. I didn't know what Islam made of it. Nobody was offering me direction. I had heard about Hizb-ut Tahrir, so I talked to one of their guys at Leeds Grand Mosque. He was in charge of the area, and he took me back to his house.*<sup>65</sup>

It may be no accident, therefore, that mosques – being the centres of Muslim community life – would provide the setting for recruitment activities. This, however, is far from saying that mosques are 'breeding grounds' for terrorists.

A good case study of how mosques can have little more significance than being the setting for the activities of violent extremists is an Islamist militant network based in the 19th arrondissement of Paris, which initially met at the Iqra mosque in the suburb of Levallois-Perret. As it turned out, the group became one of the principal hubs through which young French Muslims could join the insurgency in Iraq. When several French citizens who were linked to the group were killed and some detained by American forces in Iraq in early 2004,<sup>66</sup> the French authorities decided to move against the mosque, assuming that it was similar to Finsbury Park in London or Al Quds in Hamburg. In reality, though, the closure of the mosque in June 2004 made little difference to the group, which simply moved on to another prayer hall.<sup>67</sup> Instead of Levallois-Perret, the network convened at the larger Adda'wa mosque in the 19th arrondissement, where most of the members had come from. A spiritual leader emerged who attracted further followers and gained the group a reputation in radical circles beyond its immediate vicinity. When the French authorities made further arrests in early 2005, Adda'wa came under close public scrutiny. As it turned out, the Islamist militant group had been below the mosque committee's radar screen. When interviewed by *Le Monde*, one of the mosque officials stated: 'On Fridays, 3,000 people come here to pray. The rector [of the mosque] is a moderate man by nature. But he can't control everything'.<sup>68</sup>

<sup>63</sup> Spanish radical 3, interviewed April 2007.

<sup>64</sup> French radical 2, interviewed 2 March 2007.

<sup>65</sup> British radical 6, interviewed November 2007.

<sup>66</sup> See 'Irak: trios Français présumés islamistes détenus par les Etats-Unis', *Le Monde*, 4 February 2005.

<sup>67</sup> Vidino, 'Al Qaeda', pp. 271-4.

<sup>68</sup> 'A la mosque Adda'wa, à Paris: "On ne prêche pas le djihad ici", *Le Monde*, 9 February 2005.

There are good reasons to believe that, in recent years, the role played by mosques in extremists' recruitment efforts has changed. First, many of the so-called 'radical mosques', which were cited in the literature as 'centres of gravity' for the Islamist militant movement, no longer exist. They were either shut down or taken back by more moderate leaders. Second, following the discovery of terrorist plots in most European countries, many mosque committees have stopped turning a blind eye to the activities of extremists, adopting 'zero tolerance' policies towards recruitment and the activities of Islamist militants more generally. This – together with the widespread perception that most mosques are now being 'watched' by the police and the intelligence agencies – appears to have deterred many violent extremists from engaging in overt recruitment activities.

This does not mean that mosques no longer play *any* role in the recruitment of violent extremists. Rather, it seems as if extremists continue to take advantage of mosques for 'talent-spotting' and as points of first contact, but – as soon as such contacts have been established – try to move away from the mosque and pursue the radicalisation and recruitment of individuals in closed locations, such as private flats and makeshift prayer halls. Members of Islamist militant groups still mix with worshippers, but – rather than stirring up trouble with the rest of the congregation – they will operate quietly, making themselves available to associates and befriending people whom they judge to be of interest. According to one of the community leaders we interviewed:

*They aren't picking arguments anymore. They will withdraw... They will not be as vocal and vociferous as they used to be, because they know that there is a lot of attention being paid to extremism. By people at the mosque but also by the authorities.*

This pattern is consistent across the countries in which we conducted fieldwork. For instance, prior to the March 2004 train bombings, the M30 mosque in Madrid had served not just as a 'recruitment ground' but effectively as operational headquarters for the cell which plotted the attacks, with daily meetings taking place on the terrace of the building.<sup>69</sup> Since the bombings, however, violent extremists in Spain have assumed a lower profile. As in Britain, mosques continue to be used in order to identify and approach potential recruits, but recruiters will do their utmost not to attract any attention. According to a senior member of the Spanish intelligence service, the aim is to change the setting as quickly as possible, typically by persuading recruits to attend study sessions in private flats.<sup>70</sup> In a similar vein, critics of the extensive mosque monitoring programme in France have pointed out that the authorities increasingly fail to capture the 'semi-hidden places of worship' which have sprung up and operate 'below the radar of the state surveillance system'.<sup>71</sup> Regarding mosques, therefore, one may conclude that a higher degree of vigilance by the authorities and the mosques themselves has driven extremist recruitment 'underground'.

69 Juzgado Central de Instrucción Número 6, *Audiencia Nacional*, Sumario No. 20/2004, 10 April 2006, p. 1219. .

70 Spanish official 1, interviewed September 2007.

71 See Pascale Combelles Siegel, 'An Inside Look at France's Mosque Surveillance Program', *Jamestown Terrorism Monitor*, 16 August 2007.

### 3.2 Prisons

While the role of mosques in Islamist militant recruitment seems to have decreased, the opposite is true for prisons. At first, the statement sounds paradoxical: whereas mosques might well be the least controllable public environment, prisons are – by definition – confined spaces in which access and movement are tightly restricted. Yet, as the growing body of literature on Islam in European prisons suggests, prisons are also a highly – some would say, uniquely – conducive environment for radicalisation and recruitment.<sup>72</sup> We believe that this situation is likely to continue, if not deteriorate.

Some of the basic points emerging from the literature on Islam and European prisons are worth reiterating. First, prisons are unsettling environments in which individuals are confronted with existential questions in particularly intensive ways. This explains why the rate of religious conversions in prison is higher than among the general population: religion provides a sense of certainty and security, and it also offers the chance for a break with the past. Second, conversions towards Islam by non-practicing Muslims (becoming 'born-again Muslims')<sup>73</sup> or by individuals from other religious backgrounds far outnumber conversions towards other faiths. This was illustrated by one of our interviewees:

*So, they are in prison, they are coming into prison... some as Muslims, some as Church of England, some with no religion, some as Roman Catholic. And once they are in there, they are changing into Islam. We are not getting anybody changing to Church of England, we aren't getting anybody going to Christian, but everybody is becoming Islamic and there has be a reason behind that. And I know that it is a growth religion, the only growth religion that is going, but somebody is convincing these people who have lived by no laws whatsoever, who have not had any reasons to go to church in their lives, who couldn't care less about anything, couldn't care less about religion. Inside weeks, they are raving about Islam. So what has the power of Islam got?<sup>74</sup>*

Some of the experts believe that the popularity of Islam among prisoners can be explained by its simplicity and the relative ease with which one can declare oneself to be a Muslim.<sup>75</sup> Others contend that Islam has become a symbol of anti-systemic defiance, and that converting to Islam constitutes an act of rebellion. In the words of Farhad Khosrokhavar, 'Islam is becoming in Europe, especially France, the religion of the repressed, what Marxism was in Europe at one time'.<sup>76</sup>

Against this background, many prisons across Europe have seen the formation of radical Islamic groups, which adhere to the rhetoric and strict behavioural codes of the Islamist militant movement. Arguably, these groups are successful because they manage to exploit the

72 See, for example, James A. Beckford, Daniele Joly and Farhad Khosrokhavar, *Muslims in Prison: Challenges and Change in Britain and France* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2005); Jean-Luc Marret (ed.), *Les fabriques du jihad* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2005).

73 Olivier Roy, 'Terrorism and Deculturation' in Richardson, *Roots of Terrorism*, p. 162

74 British official 2, interviewed September 2007.

75 Beckford, cited in 'Islamic radicalization in Europe's jails?', *MSNBC.com*, 8 July 2006.

76 Khosrokhavar, cited in Craig S. Smith, 'French Prisons – Radicalizing large Muslim populations', *New York Times*, 20 December 2004.

unsettling conditions imposed by the prison environment. Joining an Islamic group satisfies individuals' urgent need for a social network in a situation in which – at least initially – they are completely on their own: it allows them to avoid isolation, and it prevents them from being picked on by other groups. Moreover, and more importantly perhaps, the Islamic identity of these groups provides members with a unique sense of strength and superiority. They can boast of being on a mission, having abandoned their (often wretched) past in return for a higher duty. However, far from being compliant, their newfound identity appears to make them even *more* vociferous in their defiance of the system. Indeed, it is their quiet aggression combined with the use of *jihadist* rhetoric that makes them feared and respected by prisoners and prison staff alike.<sup>77</sup>

The extent to which Muslim 'prison gangs' should be regarded as fully-fledged members of the Islamist militant movement is difficult to determine. Some have no links to any specific group or network, which means that individual members are left to 'seek out' Islamist militant groups after their release. Others, however, contain active 'links to the jihad' which ease their recruitment into existing networks and structures.

It is our contention that the two principal methods in which such 'links to the jihad' can be established are likely to remain a cause of concern. The first way of forming a 'link to the jihad' inside prison, which is frequently highlighted in media reporting,<sup>78</sup> is through so-called 'radical imams' (see Chapter 4.2) who gain access to the prison environment because they claim to provide religious instruction. In practice, however, they pursue the radicalisation of prisoners and facilitate their recruitment into extremist networks. The problem has been recognised by most governments, yet remedies are difficult to come by. Schemes under which only 'certified imams' are granted access to prisons take many years to implement, mainly because Islam is a congregational faith which requires no formal qualifications for spiritual leadership. In the words of a senior Spanish police adviser, 'Many of these people are completely unknown, and we don't have the resources or ability to find out who they are'.<sup>79</sup> Hence, imposing certification without making sure that an adequate supply of certified imams is available would amount to cutting off religious instruction from the vast majority of the Muslim prison population.

In France, having appointed a national Muslim prison chaplain, a certification scheme is now in place. Even so, French policymakers have long struggled with the question of whether it was appropriate for the state to get involved in the provision of religious services to Muslim prisoners in the first place. Opponents cited the principle of *laïcité*, but conveniently ignored that this had not prevented the appointment of nearly 800 clerics responsible for the welfare of Christian prisoners. With more than fifty per cent of the French prison population estimated to be Muslim and fewer than 100 imams

currently in place, it will take several years until the demand is met.<sup>80</sup> On the other hand, where no certification schemes are in place, the ability to monitor Islamic religious instruction in prisons remains limited. As several of our interviewees pointed out, prison staff are not always sufficiently trained to spot radicalisation or recruitment, and will – for good reasons – be reluctant to interfere with religious instruction, especially when it is provided in languages which they do not understand.<sup>81</sup>

The second way in which to establish 'links to the jihad' is through Islamist militant inmates. Not only can they facilitate connections into existing networks, being (alleged or convicted) terrorists, their reputation and credibility is likely to surpass that of any radical preacher. Referring to one of the members of the Hofstad Group, a Dutch prison guard reported that other prisoners 'adore [him] like a prophet, they literally kiss his feet'.<sup>82</sup> One of our interviewees, a Special Branch officer from the North of England, confirmed this impression, noting that Islamist militants enter prison 'with a certain amount of notoriety. They come in there as heroes'.<sup>83</sup>

With growing numbers, the problem is likely to get more acute. Other than France, no European Union country had an Islamist militant prisoner population of any significance prior to 11 September 2001. Within just a few years, the numbers rose to triple-digit figures in countries like Spain and Britain,<sup>84</sup> and – with no sudden change in the overall situation – they will increase further. As several of our interviewees stressed, while much of the resources are currently devoted to monitoring the most notorious inmates, the prison systems have no capacity to control the activities of those convicted for lesser offences, some of whom are certain to engage in radicalisation and recruitment amongst the general prison population. Yet, in our view, it is precisely this second category of prisoners – those who will be released within a relatively short period of time, that is, two or three years – that would merit the greatest attention. In the short term, the solution may well be to concentrate Islamist militants in specific prisons and isolate them from the rest of the prison population, though even advocates of this approach (known as 'concentrate and isolate') concede that, in the longer term, creating 'jihadist' prisons will be counter-productive and provide Islamist militants with a focus for their efforts to portray European governments as 'anti-Muslim'.<sup>85</sup>

### 3.3 Other locations

Recruitment into Islamist militant structures occurs not just in prisons and mosques. As mentioned, recruitment can take place anywhere, though – in addition to so-called recruitment 'magnets' which are sought out by radicalised individuals who are actively looking for

<sup>77</sup> British official 1, interviewed August 2007; British official 2, interviewed September 2007.

<sup>78</sup> For example, in the wake of the 9/11 attacks, a number of prison imams were suspended for 'unprofessional behaviour' in the

UK after it emerged that they had been spreading the message of the radical cleric Abu Hamza. This included the prison imams

at Feltham Young Offenders' Institution, where Richard Reid – the so-called 'shoe bomber' had been radicalised. See Alan Travis

and Audrey Gillan, 'Bomb suspect "became a militant" in prison', *The Guardian*, 28 July 2005.

<sup>79</sup> Spanish official 1, interviewed September 2007.

<sup>80</sup> Dominique Gaulme, 'Islam en prison: missions d'urgence pour aumôniers musulmans', *Le Figaro*, 12 January 2007.

<sup>81</sup> Spanish official 3, interviewed September 2007; British official 4, interviewed July 2007.

<sup>82</sup> Cited in Vidino, 'The Hofstad Group', p. 588.

<sup>83</sup> British official 2, interviewed September 2007.

<sup>84</sup> For a snapshot of the situation in Spain, see '139 islamistas en las cárceles', *El País*, 28 October 2007. For a summary of an internal report of the Spanish Director General of Prisons, see 'Prisiones estima que el 50% de los musulanes...', *El Confidencial*, 30 June 2005.

<sup>85</sup> Fernando Reinares, 'Prisons and Radicalisation'; paper delivered at 'Youth Radicalisation' workshop organised by the *Global Institute for Counterterrorism*, Rome, 11 July 2007.

opportunities to ‘join up’ – most of the places that have been found to play a role in Islamist militant recruitment in Europe can be placed into one of two broad categories (see Figure 2).

On the one hand, Islamist militants take advantage of places in which individuals are likely to be vulnerable, lack orientation or experience personal crises (‘places of vulnerability’) – all factors which are widely believed to make people more receptive to the appeal of militant Islam. This is true for prisons, but it may also apply to locations such as asylum seekers reception centres and residences, which the Dutch domestic intelligence service believed to be a prominent ‘recruitment ground’,<sup>86</sup> and Muslim welfare agencies, which were thought to have played a role in the formation of the cell responsible for the recent attempted attacks in London and Glasgow.<sup>87</sup>

A similar picture emerges when we look at educational institutions and, especially, universities. Much has been made of the prominence of students in recent Islamist militant plots and the alleged existence of terrorist cells at universities across Europe.<sup>88</sup> And indeed, there can be no doubt that universities have always been ‘hotbeds’ for radical thought, and that – like prisons and asylum reception centres – they are places in which individuals are prone to experience feelings of isolation and vulnerability. In fact, the pattern is very similar to what happens in mosques and prisons. According to Baber Siddiqi, who represents the Luqmann Institute:

*When young Muslims go to university, they often feel a sense of insecurity and so the radical groups provide a social forum and then develop personal relationships. They invite you to lectures and sermons and... follow these up with indoctrination in your own homes and communities.<sup>89</sup>*

Based on the literature cited above, it seems as if most of the groups currently active on university campuses are ‘gateway organisations’ (see Chapter 4) rather than violent extremists per se. This may be no less problematic in terms of radicalisation, but it suggests that – with notable exceptions – direct recruitment into violence has been quite rare.

Figure 2: Typology of ‘Recruitment Grounds’

	Places of congregation	Places of vulnerability	Recruitment ‘magnets’
<b>Significance/function</b>	No particular significance other than Muslims meeting	Taking advantage of individuals’ crises or lack of orientation	Attracting ‘seekers’ from a wider area
<b>Examples</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mosques</li> <li>• Internet cafes</li> <li>• Cafeterias</li> <li>• Gyms</li> <li>• Summer camps</li> <li>• Etc.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prisons</li> <li>• Refugee centres</li> <li>• Welfare agencies</li> <li>• Universities?</li> <li>• Etc.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ‘Radical mosques’</li> <li>• ‘Radical bookshops’</li> </ul>

<sup>86</sup> AIVD, *Recruitment*, p. 14

<sup>87</sup> Serge F. Kovaleski and Alan Cowell, ‘British Identify Two “Principal” Suspects’, *New York Times*, 8 July 2007.

<sup>88</sup> See, for example, Anthony Glees and Chris Pope, *When Students Turn to Terror* (London: The Social Affairs Unit, 2005); Fidel Sendagorta, ‘Jihad in Europe: The Wider Context’, *Survival*, 47(3) (2005), p. 67; Michael Whine, ‘Islamist Recruitment and Antisemitism on British Campuses’, RUSI Workshop on Education and Extremism, 23 January 2006; paper available at <http://www.thecst.org.uk/docs/RUSI%20Homeland%20Security.doc>.

<sup>89</sup> Baber Siddiqi interviewed on *BBC Radio 4*; quoted in Glees, *When Students*, p. 25.

Even so, like mosques, many other locations to which violent extremists have turned in order to conduct recruitment have no particular significance other than being places where Muslims meet and congregate (places of congregation). This applies to Internet cafes, cafeterias and fitness centres in Muslim areas of big European cities as well as to summer camps organised by Muslim youth organisations. The only possible exception are some Islamic bookshops, which can be argued to perform a similar role to that of the ‘radical mosques’, albeit on a smaller scale. Like the radical mosques, Islamic bookshops which have gained a reputation for stocking extremist literature and periodicals, ‘jihadist’ videos and recordings from radical preachers may develop into ‘magnets’ for Islamist militants from a wider geographical area, who will visit the bookshop not just in order to obtain a particular piece of literature but also with the aim of meeting like-minded individuals. As in the case of the radical mosques, such bookshops provide an opportunity for radicalised individuals with no ties into extremist structures to ‘seek out’ a ‘link to the jihad’, thus facilitating their integration into violent extremism.

Overall, one may conclude that the significance of particular locations can easily be overrated. Needless to say, governments need to prevent violent extremists from establishing fixed physical centres, such as radical mosques or bookshops, which serve as magnets and attract ‘seekers’ with no prior links into extremist structures. Other than that, recruitment into Islamist militancy can occur wherever Muslims congregate, or where feelings of isolation and vulnerability can be exploited in order to socialise individuals into violent extremism. What seems to matter as much as – if not more than – particular locations are the individuals involved in the process. So, who are the recruiters, and what do they do?

## 4 The recruiters

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In the popular imagination, the recruiter is critical to the growth and success of a terrorist organisation. He represents the link between the 'underground' and the rest of the world. He spots and selects among a pool of applicants. Most importantly, he seduces and 'brainwashes' unsuspecting youth into wanting to become terrorists. Sageman – drawing on Della Porta's earlier research – put an end to such misleading oversimplifications. He argued against ideas like top-down recruitment and brainwashing, noting that 'joining the jihad is more akin to the process of applying to a highly selective college', with recruiters playing the role of gate-keepers rather than 'lurking in mosques, ready to subvert naïve and passive worshippers'.<sup>90</sup> As this chapter will show, Sageman is right in exposing the myth of the 'recruiter', yet his research may have overplayed the notion of self-recruitment. Our research indicates that there are a number of individuals and institutions which ease the process of integrating people into the structures of Islamist militancy, in particular gateway organisations, 'radical imams', and activists. Of these, we believe that it is activists who will continue to 'drive' the process of recruitment into Islamist militancy in Europe. First, though, we believe it is necessary to situate these actors and their functions within the wider communities from which they operate.

### 4.1 The role of communities

The relationship between terrorist groups and the communities from which they emerge is complex. Andrew Silke argues that, no matter how successful a terrorist group appears to be, even the larger and more popular groups represent a minority within their communities. At the same time, though the number of individuals actively involved in violence may be low, in some communities, violent extremists are positively tolerated.<sup>91</sup> In Muslim communities in Europe, none of these observations can be fully validated.

The key structural driver in countries with large second and third generation European Muslim communities appears to be a widening gulf between the younger generation and the generation which initially settled in Europe. This can be seen most clearly in Britain. In addition to facing exclusion from the majority community, much of the infrastructure in these communities continues to be geared towards the needs of the older generation. There is, in the words of one of our British interviewees, a lack of opportunities for young Muslims:

*What you find is that a lot of mosques are culturally led. They are more interested in keeping ties of kinship and traditional values. This excludes the youth who follow in their footsteps. Many young Muslims in this*

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<sup>90</sup> Sageman, *Understanding Terror*, p. 122.

<sup>91</sup> Andrew Silke, 'The role of the organisation in suicide terrorism', *International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction*, 4 (2006); available at <http://www.ijma-journal.com/issues.php>.

country have a dual identity. They are Muslims, but they are also British, with the British identity being more predominant. Their issues are not being addressed by most of the mosques.<sup>92</sup>

The grounding of many mosques in the national cultures of the first generation's countries of origin, combined with the search for identity among second and third generation European Muslims, can increase the likelihood of membership in an extremist organisation. This process of rejecting parental beliefs, which are viewed as culturally grounded, and accepting a more universal (and sometimes extreme) identity or belief system was illustrated in Jessica Jacobson's study with young, second-generation British Muslims of Pakistani descent.<sup>93</sup>

The result is that the variety of social glues that used to provide individuals with a sense of identity, purpose and meaning through the provision and use of formal (institutional) and informal (family/friends) social structures has come unstuck.<sup>94</sup> This places individuals in a position where they risk becoming more susceptible to extremist messages or getting involved with extremist groups, who offer to fill the identity void by providing the purpose and the role within their group. Also, this has the potential to place an individual within an environment where the social and ideological forces highlighted in Chapter 5 are both introduced and reinforced.

As we pointed out in the context of prisons (see Chapter 3), holding extremist views and being involved in extremist groups can generate 'street credibility' amongst peers, which serves to strengthen the ability of Islamist militant groups to attract members:

*If someone gets caught overseas because of their faith, they get so much credibility and kudos... it's incredible. They really are seen to have suffered for their faith... It gives them so much credibility.*<sup>95</sup>

This is not true for the wider Muslim community, who would regard such statements with suspicion. Indeed, among many mainstream Muslim communities, there is a growing awareness of the problem of radicalisation and recruitment. When asked how conscious members of such communities were, one of our interviewees said:

*Very! There is a lot of internal policing going on in the Muslim community. An awful lot. And, of course, they are more aware of the subtleties and nuances than we are. And there really is a battle going on in the local communities here for how Islam is defined and where it is going, and the role of political Islam and the whole question of identity. Are you British, are you Muslim, and can you be both?*<sup>96</sup>

However, these efforts do not always succeed in decreasing the attraction of extremist groups:

*You are dealing with very tight-knit communities, who obviously wish to preserve the good name of the community. And this causes some problems. This brings about internal policing... They might say, for example, Mr. X, we don't like what you are saying and we want you to leave. This is good in some ways, but it really only moves the problem on [to another place]... On the other hand, I can understand why they don't want to ring us because they are scared of the 'foreign state'. [This] comes up all the time.*<sup>97</sup>

The erosion of the social structures in many European Muslim communities can also lead to a sense of helplessness, which means that people no longer believe that the community can solve the problem. Rather than confronting the threat, communities may then become passive when faced with the rise of extremist groups. It seems obvious, therefore, that counter-recruitment and counter-radicalisation measures should be aimed at (re-)empowering these communities in order to build social capital and (re-)establish a positive relationship with the state and its agencies.

## 4.2 Gateway organisations

The expression 'gateway organisations' is used by journalists and scholars in order to denote entities which – though not directly involved in the pursuit of violence – facilitate individuals' path into violent extremism. Gateway organisations – so the argument goes – form part of a 'conveyor belt' through which people are primed for their later involvement in terrorism.<sup>98</sup> The case against such entities rests on three claims:

- *Indoctrination:* Gateway organisations convey religious and political ideas which are similar, if not identical, to those of violent extremists. Though they do not themselves act on them, they provide individuals with the ideological framework – the mindset – which leads to involvement in violence.
- *Socialisation:* Gateway organisations introduce individuals into the radical 'milieu' in which it becomes easy to establish social networks with violent extremists and find 'links to the jihad'.
- *Subversion:* Gateway organisations embrace values which are incompatible with democracy and the full integration of Muslims into European societies. As a consequence, they perpetuate the conditions that breed violent extremism.

In the following, we will briefly examine three entities which have come under public scrutiny as gateway organisations. As we will demonstrate, the boundaries between 'mere' subversion, incitement and active recruitment into violence can be difficult to define.

Our first example is the *Jama'at al-Tabligh (Tabligh)*, which emerged in India in 1926 and has since spread across the world. In France, it represented the principal 'fundamentalist' movement in the 1970s and 1980s and generated a relatively broad following, especially

<sup>92</sup> British community leader 3, interviewed August 2007.

<sup>93</sup> See Jessica Jacobson, 'Religion and ethnicity: dual and alternative sources of identity among young British Pakistanis', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 20(2) (1997), pp. 238-250.

<sup>94</sup> Bill Durodie, 'Fear and terror in a post-political age', *Government and Opposition*, 42(3) (2007), pp. 427-50.

<sup>95</sup> British official 2, interviewed September 2007.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Zeyno Baran, 'Fighting the War of Ideas', *Foreign Affairs*, November/December 2005, pp. 68-78.

through its success in ‘reforming’ drug addicts and criminals.<sup>99</sup> In both South Asia and Europe, a number of Islamist militants are known to have had previous associations with the *Tabligh*, for example three of the leading members of the network which carried out the Madrid bombings in March 2004,<sup>100</sup> and some of the individuals who are alleged to be involved in the plot to blow up several transatlantic flights in August 2006.<sup>101</sup> The *Tabligh* is a religious group whose core mission is to ‘propagate’ the faith, in particular among non-practicing Muslims. In doing so, it advocates a highly rigid interpretation of the Quran in which followers are asked to separate ‘their daily life from the “impious society” that surround[s] them’.<sup>102</sup> While, theologically, the *Tabligh* can be described as fundamentalist,<sup>103</sup> its spokesmen emphasise that the organisation has no political stance. Indeed, when Omar Nasiri, a Belgian-Moroccan who ended up in *Al Qaeda*, turned to the *Tabligh* in his search for violent ‘*jihad*’, he was immediately told, ‘This is the wrong way. The only true jihad is the [non-violent] jihad of the *Tabligh*’.<sup>104</sup> Nevertheless, it seems clear that the *Tabligh* offers a form of instruction that is fully compatible with the religious doctrine of Islamist militancy, thus providing violent extremists with a ‘religious opening’ (see Chapter 5) to be exploited *precisely because* individuals’ political views are left completely undefined. Arguably, then, although there may be no direct link, the *Tabligh* presents the Islamist militant movement with a potentially receptive audience amongst which to recruit supporters.

The second example is *Hizb ut-Tahrir* (HT), which portrays itself as a global political party whose principal aim is to unite the Muslim world under Islamic rule, that is, to create a new caliphate.<sup>105</sup> HT’s political message and aspirations are similar, if not identical, to those of the Islamist militant movement. Where it differs from *Al Qaeda* is over means. HT’s objective is to gain recruits among the political, military and professional elites, who – once a critical mass has been reached – are expected to overthrow their governments and establish Islamic states.<sup>106</sup> Violence may be necessary at some point, but not at this stage. Although members of HT and Islamist militants disagree over strategy, they are part of the same ‘scene’. As the journalist Shiv Malik explains: ‘These people hang out with each other, they meet each other. They have arguments, no doubt, sometimes very strong and vicious arguments, but they regard each other as brothers’.<sup>107</sup> Most significantly, they try to recruit each other’s members. Several of our interviewees told us that HT meetings are often attended by Islamist militants, who will attempt to take advantage of members’ exasperation with political discourse and capitalise on their ‘desire for action’. Members will be approached by Islamist militants with the question: ‘Aren’t you tired of the talking?’<sup>108</sup> Hence, far from being ‘noisy but essentially harmless young people’,<sup>109</sup> HT fulfils all three

99 Gilles Kepel, *The War for Muslim Minds: Islam and the West* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), pp. 261-2.

100 Javier Jordán, ‘The Madrid Attacks: Results of Investigations Two Years Later’, *Jamestown Terrorism Monitor*, 9 March 2006.

101 See Shane Drennan and Andrew Black, ‘Jihad Online – The Changing Role of the Internet’, *Jane’s Intelligence Review*, 19 July 2007.

102 Kepel, *The War for Muslim*, p. 261.

103 Klausen, *The Islamic Challenge*, p. 44.

104 Quoted in Omar Nasiri, *Mein Leben bei al-Qaida* (Munich: DVA, 2006), p. 162.

105 For an overview of HT ideology, see Jean-Francois Mayer, ‘Hizb-ut Tahrir – The Next Al-Qaida, Really?’, *PSIO Occasional Paper*, 4/2004. Also Ed Hussain, *The Islamist* (London: Penguin, 2007), esp. Chapters 6 and 7.

106 Mayer, ‘Hizb-ut Tahrir’, pp. 16-17.

107 Shiv Malik, interviewed July 2007. Also Shiv Malik, ‘The new terror’, *New Statesman*, 5 July 2007.

108 British official 3, interviewed July 2007; British radical 5, interviewed November 2007.

of the criteria mentioned above: it indoctrinates, it subverts, and it socialises members into the milieu from which they are recruited into the Islamist militant movement.

Our third example is *Al Muhajiroun*, which emerged as a splinter group from HT in 1996, and was led by the self-styled cleric Omar Bakri Mohammed. Initially, the ideology of *Al Muhajiroun* was based on that of HT, yet the group quickly moved towards a more aggressive approach, which publicly sanctioned attacks against Western soldiers involved in Afghanistan and ‘glorified’ the September 11 attacks against the United States.<sup>110</sup> An experienced and skilful organiser, Bakri managed to expand the organisation’s reach, setting up offices in countries as diverse as Denmark<sup>111</sup> and Pakistan. Rhetorically, it refrained from involvement in violence. However, in contrast to HT, *Al Muhajiroun* actively promoted and facilitated members’ desire to engage in violent extremism. Bakri himself represented a ‘link to the jihad’, who claimed he could provide individuals with references for stays in terrorist training camps in Asia and the Middle East. Indeed, Hassan Butt, who ran *Al Muhajiroun*’s office in Pakistan effectively channelled British members towards the front line after the Western invasion of Afghanistan.<sup>112</sup> In this case, then, the question is no longer if *Al Muhajiroun* qualifies as a gateway organisation, but whether it should be regarded as a terrorist group in its own right.

For governments, dealing with gateway organisations represents one of the greatest challenges in the fight against violent extremism. Some countries argue that all such entities must be shunned, whereas others view some of them (such as the non-political *Tabligh* and the ‘soft’ Islamists of the Muslim Brotherhood) as natural allies.<sup>113</sup> It would be a mistake for the authors of this study to take sides in this wide-ranging and ongoing debate. From a recruitment point of view, however, it is difficult to see how groups like HT and *Al Muhajiroun* could ever play a positive role in combating violent extremism.

### 4.3 Radical imams

The media coverage of the Islamist militant movement in Europe has been dominated by stories about ‘radical imams’ whose colourful rhetoric has attracted tabloid journalists as much as young Muslims. Mainstream Muslim leaders often respond angrily to such coverage, saying that the radical imams are misrepresenting the decent, law-abiding majority. They are right, of course, yet it is hard to deny that figures such as Abu Hamza in London and Mohamed el Maghrebi in Paris have played a pivotal role in the radicalisation and recruitment of the minority of European Muslims who have become part of the Islamist militant movement.

Based on our extensive review of their activities, radical imams can be said to perform four main functions:

109 Nielsen, *Muslims in Western Europe*, p. 168.

110 Michael Whine, ‘Will the ban on the Al Muhajiroun successor groups work?’, paper published by the *International Institute for Counter-terrorism*, 8 August 2006; available at <http://www.ict.org.il/index.php?sid=119&lang=en&act=page&id=6598&str=michael%20whine>.

111 Taarnby, *Jihad in Denmark*, p. 55.

112 Whine, ‘Will the ban’.

113 See Zeyno Baran, ‘Countering Ideological Support for Terrorism in Europe: Muslim Brotherhood and Hizb ut-Tahrir – Allies or Enemies?’, *Connections*, 5(3) (2006), pp. 19-34; also Sendagorta, ‘Jihad in Europe’, p. 67-9.

- They serve as *chief propagandists*, who make the basic narrative of Islamist militancy relevant to the life conditions of a second and third generation European Muslim audience.
- They are seen as *religious authorities*, who provide rulings (fatwas) and justifications for violent jihad – even when they lack formal scholarly credentials.
- They are *recruitment magnets*, who attract followers from a diversity of backgrounds and integrate them into a coherent network.
- They generate *networks of networks* by forging national and international links between different groups and networks, thus providing the glue that holds the Islamist militant movement together.

A recent study of leadership in Europe's Islamist militant movement underlines our findings about the crucial role of radical imams in the recruitment and networking of violent extremists. It demonstrated that 'radical preachers' tend to appear as 'central nodal points' in the formation of terrorist networks, but 'do not... feature as prominently or as decisively [at the] training or tactical planning' stage.<sup>114</sup>

An excellent case study of the different functions performed by radical imams is Abdul Jabbar van de Ven, a thirty year old Dutchman who converted to Islam aged fourteen. Having spent a year in Saudi Arabia, he returned to Holland instructing teenagers, mostly of Moroccan origin, on what it meant to be a Muslim. His aim was to engage in *darwa*, that is, to spread the word, and indeed he quickly managed to build up a considerable following.<sup>115</sup> After the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, Jabbar achieved national notoriety when he publicly declared his solidarity with Bin Laden. This was followed by a series of television interviews in which he welcomed the killing of the filmmaker Theo van Gogh and expressed his desire to see a member of the Dutch Parliament dead. Capitalising on his public profile, he frequently toured the country, extending his own network as well as forging connections with radical groups in other parts of the Netherlands. Although he had no permanent physical base, Jabbar's association with the radical *Al Furqaan* mosque in Eindhoven enabled him to 'hook up' to several international networks, which were mostly led by North African recruiters.<sup>116</sup> Also, and despite his lack of formal religious training, his views on what was *haram* (forbidden) and what *halal* (permitted) proved highly influential. In fact, the computer of one of the members of the Hofstad Group, Jason Walters, was found to contain several chat conversations in which Walters boasted that Jabbar had given him a *fatwa* sanctioning the decapitation of the Dutch prime minister.<sup>117</sup> Arguably, then, Jabbar not only served as a propagandist and recruiter, but seems to have been directly involved in the incitement of violent extremism.

One of the most interesting findings of our research is that, while radical imams have come to play an influential role in Northern European countries (especially Britain, Scandinavia, Benelux, and

114 Exclusive Analysis, *Leadership in Europe's*, p. 13.

115 'Abdul-Jabbar van de Ven: Jongerenimam', *De Telegraaf*, 24 November 2004.

116 See AIVD, *Violent Jihad in the Netherlands: Current Trends in the Islamist Terrorist Threat* (AIVD: The Hague, 2006), p. 26.

117 The transcripts are available at <http://dutchreport.blogspot.com/2005/01/chattin-with-terrorists.html>.

Germany), they are less successful in the South. All of our Spanish interviewees, for instance, told us that the phenomenon of radical imams was either 'negligible' or 'virtually unheard of' in their country.<sup>118</sup> In our view, an explanation for this North/South divide lies in the different patterns of Muslim immigration. Radical imams mainly appeal to second and third generation European Muslims, who – despite their acute sense of alienation and exclusion – are firmly rooted in the West. They articulate their followers' cultural anxieties and provide them with an ideological template that allows them to rebel against their parents and Western society at the same time.<sup>119</sup> For some time, they were also amongst the very few religious figures to be able to preach to their second or third generation audience in the one language in which they were fully fluent, that is, Dutch, French or English rather than Arabic or Urdu.<sup>120</sup> In countries like Spain or Italy, where the vast majority of the Muslim population has arrived in the last fifteen years, none of these factors are relevant. Most Muslims here are fully fluent in Arabic, and they are unlikely to be impressed with the scriptural knowledge of self-taught clerics like Abdul Jabbar. Nor can radical imams tap into any widespread conflict of identity, which may take another generation (or two) to materialise. This does not mean that radical imams are completely without appeal in the South, but it has prevented them from becoming a mass phenomenon.

Is the 'age of the radical imam' coming to a close? Some have been jailed or deported; mosques are less willing to provide them with a platform (see Chapter 3); there are fewer 'radical bookshops' that sell their tapes; and new laws against the glorification of terrorism are believed to have made radical imams think twice before inciting their followers to engage in *jihad*.<sup>121</sup> France in particular has executed an aggressive policy to deal with radical clerics. Since 2001, dozens have been deported to North Africa. In doing so, the threshold for what constitutes unacceptable behaviour in the eyes of the authorities seems to be relatively low. Whereas in Britain, only the incitement to violence would attract the attention of the authorities, in France it is sufficient to be considered as an 'ideological point of reference' for Islamist militants. Critics have pointed out that this has included 'fundamentalist' Salafis whose views on social matters are often incompatible with European norms but whose involvement in, and propagation of, Islamist militancy is less clear.<sup>122</sup> Indeed, some of the so-called 'scientific Salafists' whose obligations include 'loyalty to the Prince' now feel increasingly squeezed between the 'jihadist Salafists', who condemn their quietist stance, and the state authorities, who suspects them of being 'radical'. As one French community leader pointed out: 'The armed Salafist group [in Algeria] has nothing to do with [our] movement. It's completely different. I read books by theologians from Saudi Arabia like El Albani. These people understand religion better, this is scientific Salafism'.<sup>123</sup>

118 Spanish official 2, interviewed September 2007; Spanish official 3, interviewed September 2007; Spanish community leader 1, interviewed August 2007.

119 Roy, 'Terrorism and Deculturation', p. 160.

120 British community leader 1, interviewed August 2007; French community leader 3, interviewed May 2007.

121 British official 3, interviewed July 2007; also Shiv Malik, interviewed July 2007.

122 'Red Ameuroud a été expulsé vers l'Algérie', *Associated Press*, 30 July 2005; for the controversial case of Abdelkader Bouziane, see Craig S. Smith, 'France Struggles to Curb Extremist Muslim Clerics', *New York Times*, 30 April 2004; also Keppel, *The War for Muslim*, pp. 258-60.

123 French community leader 3, interviewed May 2007.

Even in France, however, the government concedes that some genuinely radical imams, who propagate and incite to violence, continue to be active.<sup>124</sup> Also, some of those who have left Europe stay in touch with their followers in Europe via web sites and online chat communities (such as *PalTalk*) on which they post sermons and respond to requests for *fatwas* (see Chapter 6). Overall, therefore, one may conclude that the space for radical imams has been significantly reduced, but that it is too early to conclude that they have gone away completely.

#### 4.4 Activists

The third type of actor involved in recruitment is often described as ‘activist’ or ‘entrepreneur’. According to Petter Nesser, the activist is the member of a terrorist cell that ‘makes things happen’:

*He is typically senior to the other operatives, and central to the recruitment, radicalization and training of the other cell members. The entrepreneur has an ‘activist mindset’, being driven by ideas rather than personal grievances. He is interested in and committed to social issues and politics. He demands respect from his surroundings and he has a strong sense of justice... He has an “entrepreneurial spirit” and wants to build something for himself and those he considers “his people”... In the end he takes on a “project” for the holy warriors. He has high aspirations, and sometimes he has a record of failed ambitions.*<sup>125</sup>

This description applies to individuals like Mohammed Bouyeri of the Hofstad Group, Mohammed Siddique Khan, the leader of the 7/7 cell in Britain, or Sarhane Faket, who was involved in the network responsible for the Madrid bombings.<sup>126</sup> In Nesser’s view, activists such as the ones mentioned here are self-motivated, intelligent (often possessing formal qualifications) and articulate, and they use their skills and invest time and energy in order to persuade others to join the cause. The people they recruit, on the other hand, are often less capable and driven, and may – in some cases – have a record of criminal activity prior to becoming involved with Islamist militancy.<sup>127</sup> Indeed, in his sociology of Islamist militant cell members, Nesser differentiates between the leaders, the ‘entrepreneur’ and his (younger) ‘protégé’, and the followers, the ‘drifters’ and ‘misfits’ which they have recruited into the cell.<sup>128</sup>

Nesser’s analysis, in combination with other reports such as *Exclusive Analysis*’ recent study of ‘jihadist’ leadership in Europe<sup>129</sup> as well as the observations gleaned from our own research, makes it possible to derive three main functions performed by ‘the activist’, which underline his significance in recruiting terrorist cells and maintaining its members’ support:

- Internally, the activist provides *leadership and cohesion*. He is (typically) the one with whom the cell has originated, and he is the person responsible for holding it together – more often through personality, charisma and commitment to the cause than through religious authority (which he lacks).
- The activist leads the process of cell *expansion*. Not only is he the most persuasive and most ideologically driven member of the group, he is also the one who is most likely to have a network of (local) friends and associates through whom to ‘spot’ and select new recruits.
- The activist manages the group’s ‘*external relations*’.<sup>130</sup> He will lead the effort of seeking a ‘link to the jihad’ and – if successful – negotiate and supervise the cell’s integration into the networks of Islamist militancy, which may transform a purely home-grown cell of self-starters into a ‘guided cell’ with access to the strategic leadership and resources of the wider movement (see Chapter 2).

It is activists, then, who are most likely to fit the popular idea of the ‘recruiter’. In fact, based on our observations of how individuals join the Islamist militant movement in Europe, we would argue that Sageman’s work overplays the notion of a ‘bunch of guys’ who find each other more or less randomly and turn into a terrorist cell only when having encountered a ‘link to the jihad’. The idea that the relationships between members are based on ties of kinship and friendship, and that these precede people’s attraction to violent extremism, may well be true, but – in contrast to Sageman – we have found little evidence to support the contention that it takes a ‘link to the jihad’ for such groups to ‘tip over’ into embracing Islamist militant ideology.

On the contrary, in most of the examples cited above, ‘links to the jihad’ were sought out by the activist when the radicalisation had already taken place, and it was the activist who then led conscious efforts to recruit new members into the cell, such as by ‘spotting’ and ‘befriending’ people at mosques (see Chapter 3) or by attending the meetings of gateway organisations at which potential recruits could be found. Sageman is right in pointing out that recruitment is less strategic and less professional than commonly imagined, but several of our interviewees – especially the community leaders – could cite instances in which low-level ‘spotting’ by activists was unfolding before their eyes (see also 3.1).<sup>131</sup>

In this context, an excellent case study, which brings together the role of the activist and other themes highlighted in this report, is that of a self-starter group in Ceuta, which was disrupted by the Spanish police in December 2006. The group had eleven members and was led by Karin Abdelselam Mohamed, who had become radicalised in prison whilst serving a sentence for involvement in petty crime. Upon his release, Karin befriended a group of youths in the neighbourhood of Principe Alfonso, a poor area of Ceuta with a large Muslim population. The group’s meetings took place in a mosque, though they were held outside praying hours and there exists little

<sup>124</sup> French official 1, interviewed September 2007. Also Jon Henley, ‘Muslims are not cockroaches’, *The Guardian*, 11 August 2005.

<sup>125</sup> Petter Nesser, ‘Structures of Jihadist Terrorist Cells in the UK and Europe’, paper given at the joint FFI/King’s College London conference on *The Changing Faces of Jihadism*, London, 28 April 2006. Available at [http://www.mil.no/felles/ffi/start/FFI-prosjekter/Alfover/\\_TERRA/Publikasjoner/Speeches/](http://www.mil.no/felles/ffi/start/FFI-prosjekter/Alfover/_TERRA/Publikasjoner/Speeches/).

<sup>126</sup> For profiles of the three individuals mentioned here, see Vidino, ‘The Hofstad Group’; Shiv Malik, ‘My brother the bomber’, *Prospect Magazine*, June 2007; Juzgado Central de Instrucción Número 6, *Audiencia Nacional*, Sumario No. 20/2004, 10 April 2006, pp. 1212-13.

<sup>127</sup> *Exclusive Analysis, Leadership in Europe’s*, p. 8.

<sup>128</sup> Nesser, ‘Structures of Jihadist’.

<sup>129</sup> ‘The evolution of leadership in Europe’s Global Jihad Networks’, *Exclusive Analysis Report*, 21 September 2007.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>131</sup> British community leader 2, interviewed July 2007; French community leader 3, interviewed May 2007.

evidence that the mosque leadership knew or sanctioned, the activities of the group. During these meetings, Karin utilised Islamist militant videos and songs to further the process of radicalisation. After some time, the group collectively embarked on a series of actions, which included the spreading of rumours about an impending attack as well as the spraying of 'jihadist' graffiti. The first act of low-level violence was the destruction of a tomb, which was widely condemned by the community and prompted the police to take action against the group. As it later turned out, the group had already discussed ideas for a high-casualty attack at a later stage of their 'campaign'. Possible targets included a shopping mall, a fuel depot and a fairground. For this purpose, Karin had sought to re-establish contact with a 'link to the jihad' which he had met in prison and who had been convicted for his role in facilitating the recruitment of insurgents in Iraq. Had Karin succeeded in making the link, a group of hapless self-starters could have been transformed into a 'guided cell' with significant potential to carry out a substantial attack.<sup>132</sup>

However, the dynamics, which prompt activists to increase recruitment and/or seek out 'links to the jihad', appear to be influenced by broader developments as much as they are shaped by local factors. There can be no doubt, for example, that – in all the countries surveyed – the invasion of Iraq triggered efforts to reconstruct more coherent structures for the Islamist militant movement in Europe, and that this was matched by activist pressure from below.<sup>133</sup> In Spain and France, several of our interviewees told us that developments in countries like Algeria and Morocco are likely to influence activists' propensity to network and increase efforts at propagation (which, in turn, may lead to recruitment).<sup>134</sup> By contrast, in Britain, many of the structures which the current generation of activists resort to seem to be 'holdovers' from the period following the invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, when many attempted to go to Pakistan to join the 'jihad' against the Western Coalition.<sup>135</sup>

Figure 3: Functions of recruitment agents

Gateway organisations	Radical imams	Activists
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Indoctrination</li> <li>• Socialisation</li> <li>• Subversion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Propaganda</li> <li>• Religious justification</li> <li>• 'Recruitment magnets'</li> <li>• Networking</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leadership and cohesion</li> <li>• Cell expansion</li> <li>• 'External relations'</li> </ul>

Regardless of such dynamics, it seems clear that activists have been the 'engine' of Islamist militant recruitment in Europe for some time, and that their significance will increase, not least because other actors (such as radical imams) have somewhat declined in importance (for a summary of their function, see Figure 3). It is activists, therefore, against whom the main thrust of governments' counter-recruitment efforts should be directed. In doing so, however, it will be important not only to know who they are but also to understand through what kinds of messages they manage to attract support for Islamist militancy.

<sup>132</sup> See Javier Jordán, 'The Threat of Grassroots Jihadi Networks', *Jamestown Terrorism Monitor*, 15 February 2007.

<sup>133</sup> Leiken, 'Europe's Angry'; also Neumann, 'Europe's Jihadist', pp. 74-8.

<sup>134</sup> Spanish official 1, interviewed September 2007; French official 2, interviewed May 2007.

<sup>135</sup> See Jamie Doward and Andrew Wander, 'The Network', *The Observer*, 6 May 2007.

## 5 The message

Much has been written about the ideology of the Islamist militant movement. It would be foolish to attempt to replicate some of the work done by other scholars,<sup>136</sup> nor would it be appropriate given the focus of this study. This study deals with the process of disseminating the Islamist militant message as much as it is concerned its content. In fact, if anything, it is the interplay between the former and the latter that is of particular interest to us. Based on the existing literature (as well as common sense), it seems obvious that there are four elements which are critical to the process of 'persuasion' during the recruitment period: identity, social forces (group dynamics), politics and religion. In the following, we will explore how these different components are deployed at critical stages of this process. Our argument is that the justification of violence is the culmination of a gradual transformation of attitudes which begins with the exploitation of a crisis (or 'tipping point'), continues with the formation of a tightly-knit group, and is accompanied by a period of learning during which 'frame alignment' is achieved.

### 5.1 Cognitive openings

Most scholars agree that people's decision to engage in violent extremism is nearly always preceded by a so-called 'tipping point' event or 'crisis' which prompts a reassessment of their status in society, political and religious attitudes, and even their sense of self. For example, Andrew Silke points out that 'catalyst events' are critical in facilitating the transition from being a member of a disaffected group to being a violent extremist.<sup>137</sup> Likewise, Harvey Kushner found that potential suicide bombers have always had at least one friend or relative killed, maimed or abused by the perceived enemy, and that it was this event which – in most cases – triggered the realisation that 'something' needed to be done.<sup>138</sup> Drawing on these insights, Quintan Wiktorowicz postulates – more broadly – that personal crises can produce 'cognitive openings' which 'shake certainty in previously accepted beliefs and render an individual more receptive to the possibility of alternative views and perspectives'.<sup>139</sup> Such crises, Wiktorowicz believes, need not always be political, but they can be cultural, economic, or indeed purely personal.<sup>140</sup>

In our research, we have found numerous examples of how Islamist militants have skilfully exploited 'crises' in order to produce cognitive openings. One of the most powerful triggers in the European context are experiences of exclusion and discrimination in Western society. European Muslims, especially the second and third generation, often

<sup>136</sup> Wiktorowicz, 'A Genealogy of'. For various excellent reports on Islamist militant ideology issued by the *Combating Terrorism Centre* at West Point, see <http://ctc.usma.edu/publications/publications.asp>.

<sup>137</sup> Silke, 'The role of'.

<sup>138</sup> Harvey W. Kushner, 'Suicide bombers: business as usual', *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 19 (2006), pp. 329-37.

<sup>139</sup> Wiktorowicz, 'Joining the Cause', p. 7.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

feel that – despite governments’ inclusive rhetoric – Western societies have not offered them the full respect and equality they believe they deserve. As one of the French radical interviewed in the course of our research told us:

*I am a French Muslim... a republican who doesn't see any contradiction with the principles of my religion... [Yet still] I am regarded with suspicion... On a day to day level, this is what it often comes down to... The fact that, in their eyes, you are a foreigner...*<sup>141</sup>

Clearly, this sense of exclusion – often perceived as outright hatred – breeds a type of reverse loathing. As another French radical explained:

The type of person who despises you [hogra] is inferior to me regarding his level, be it moral, academic and even material. He’s a dead loss, less than nothing. If this person who despised me were better than me, I would understand. Then, I would say that there was good reason. But, in reality, some of these people have feelings of unmotivated hatred that seem to be part of their very essence.

*Do you have to deal with this kind of annoyance at work?*

*I deal with it in the street, in public transport, when dealing with local government, everywhere.*<sup>142</sup>

Violent extremists have long realised that this sense of alienation and social frustration can be capitalised upon in order to attract recruits. According to Omar Bakri, the leader of *Al Muhajiroun*:

*If there is no racism in the West, there is no conflict of identity. People, when they suffer in the West, it makes them think. If there is no discrimination or racism, I think it would be very difficult for us.*<sup>143</sup>

It could be argued, then, that extremist movements succeed in offering potential recruits ‘identities of empowerment’, which allow them to reconstruct their sense of self and gain new confidence.<sup>144</sup> And indeed, Bakri would tell recruits: ‘Come on Abu Jafar. Your are not Bobby. You belong to a very great nation [Islam]. You belong to the history of civilisation, 1300 years of a ruling [Islamic] system’.<sup>145</sup>

As pointed out in the previous chapter, young Muslims’ alienation from Western society is often mirrored by an equally strong conflict with their parents’ culture, especially in countries with a second and/or third generation of European Muslims. When significant numbers of Muslims settled in many Western European countries during the post-war economic boom, they imported the customs from their countries of origins, which were assumed to be ‘Islamic’, though often they were based on ‘rural-based oral traditions’.<sup>146</sup> In the Western context, many of these tribal traditions became difficult to maintain – partly because they no longer made any sense, but also because the younger

generation (having received their education in Western Europe) proactively challenged them. This clearly happened in the case of the ‘London bombers’. According to the journalist Shiv Malik, who spent several months in the hometown of Mohammed Siddique Khan:

*[Khan] felt that drugs use should be acknowledged by the community, that women should have access to university education, and that forced marriages were wrong. He also made a stance against corruption and the anti-meritocratic attitude within his community... Later on, people would say that he had been thrown out of the mosque because he was a radical, but really it was because he was challenging the status quo.*<sup>147</sup>

Khan, like many others, responded to this conflict by embracing the purist (and seemingly far more rational) interpretations of Islam offered by the *Wahhabi* and *Salafi* traditions, which enabled him to expose traditional institutions like forced marriage as un-Islamic. In fact, against this background, it is easy to understand why the idea of a global community of believers – the *ummah* – appears to be so attractive: it articulates opposition to Western culture, yet it also allows followers to escape from the narrowness of their parents’ cultural Islam. According to Malik, gateway organisations such as *Hizb ut-Tahrir* and other extremist groups are well-aware of conflicts such as the ones experienced by Khan, and much of their literature and propagation is geared at providing the religious arguments with which to resolve them in their favour.<sup>148</sup>

Frequently, of course, rather than capitalising on existing conflicts or crises, extremist groups are hoping to induce them. This is the principal purpose of the gruesome ‘*jihad*’ videos from places like Chechnya, Bosnia, Palestine, Afghanistan and Iraq, which are freely available on the internet but continue to be shown also at events in mosques, community centres, universities and for invited guests at private homes.<sup>149</sup> These films perform three important functions. First, they are certain to provoke moral outrage and produce a sense of what Farhad Khosrokhavar described as ‘humiliation by proxy’.<sup>150</sup> Second, they convey the need for urgent action in standing up for other Muslims, who seem to be faced with suffering and systematic injustices, if not extermination. Third, they appear to substantiate the ‘grand narrative’ according to which the West has embarked on a ‘war against Islam’ and – by extension – a ‘war against all Muslims’.

In fact, it is worth pointing out that some of the ‘*jihad*’ videos have recently begun to appeal directly to second and third generation Muslims in Europe by combining the narrative of ‘the Muslim world under attack’ with specifically European issues and experiences.<sup>151</sup> One can see how – for young Western Muslims – this kind of video may become a powerful sense-making device: it suggests that their own sense of alienation and personal crisis can be attributed to the same forces that are causing the suffering of Muslims everywhere else, and that – indeed – they are all part of one and the same struggle.

<sup>141</sup> French radical 4, interviewed March 2007.

<sup>142</sup> French radical 3, interviewed May 2007. *Centre* at West Point, see <http://ctc.usma.edu/publications/publications.asp>.

<sup>143</sup> Bakri, interviewed in June 2002; quoted in Wiktorowicz, p. 16

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

<sup>145</sup> Bakri, quoted *ibid*.

<sup>146</sup> Nielsen, *Muslims in Western Europe*, p. 118.

<sup>147</sup> Shiv Malik, interviewed July 2007.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

<sup>149</sup> For an example of the latter, see Juzgado Central de Instrucción Número 6, *Audiencia Nacional*, Sumario No. 20/2004, 10 April 2006, pp. 1216-17.

<sup>150</sup> Khosrokhavar, *Les Nouveaux*, p. 152.

<sup>151</sup> French official 3, interviewed July 2007; British official1, interviewed August 2007.

## 5.2 Group dynamics

Based on our research, it seems clear that, in the vast majority of cases, the transition to violence takes place within the confines of tightly-knit groups, and that the social forces which unfold here have a strong influence on their judgement and behaviour.

Henry Tajfel and John Turner's Social Identity Theory (SIT) explains how individuals create a positive identity by defining themselves in terms of their group membership.<sup>152</sup> This, in turn, enables the individual to assign value and emotional significance to his group membership and group goals. It also brings with it a tendency to see one's own group as better than others, and to rally to its defence in response to perceived threats.<sup>153</sup> The latter may be an important way in which social identity links to violent extremism: when a valued social identity is perceived to be under threat from another group (for example, when Islam is perceived to be under threat from 'the West'), then those who identify strongly will tend to derogate and hold negative views towards the group posing the threat. Because the social identity becomes a part of the self-concept, then a threat to the group is a threat to self.<sup>154</sup>

How do such groups form? Research suggests that membership in a terrorist group fulfils the material and immaterial longings of an individual, while providing the necessary training and outlet for the emotions caused by 'concrete grievances'.<sup>155</sup> For example, the group might address an individual's welfare needs, as noted by a Spanish respondent:

*There is a small part of the Muslim population in Spain who is very marginalised, and they are targeted by radical elements. They approach them and try to attract them to their movements not just by sending religious messages, but also by providing welfare and – more generally – making them feel part of the community. It is in small, closed environments that they are invited to form part of jihadist groups'.<sup>156</sup>*

Likewise, group membership may provide an individual with self-esteem, as noted by a French Muslim community leader who described the way in which a new recruit could find like-minded individuals. He said:

*He has a group of people that listen to him. So it makes him feel very important and very opinionated at the same time, and therefore he has some kind of influence amongst a group of people.<sup>157</sup>*

In fact, belonging to such a group might be the first time that a recruit feels accepted or important.

Furthermore, in the context of group formation, the significance of pre-existing friendships and kinship relations cannot be ignored. This is supported by Della Porta's conclusion that 'the decision to join an underground organisation was rarely an individual one. For most of the militants, it involved cliques of friends'.<sup>158</sup> Her findings formed the basis for Sageman's research, and it was also reflected in Edwin Bakker's recent study of 242 Islamist militants in Europe in which Bakker found that friendship and kinship were highly significant in driving the process of group formation:

*If we look at the circumstances in which these individuals became involved in jihadi terrorist activities, a picture emerges of networks including friends or relatives... that radicalise with little outside interference; and that do so in the country in which they live, often together with family members or friends.<sup>159</sup>*

A well-researched case study of this phenomenon are the Madrid bombings in March 2004 that were carried out by a relatively large, mixed network with members belonging to different nationalities. Still, kinship seemed to be a significant factor, as exemplified by the involvement of several groups of brothers, such as Rachid and Mohammed Oulad, both killed in the collective suicide in Leganés several weeks after the attacks. Further siblings included Moutaz Almallah Dabbas and Mohannad Almallah, as well as Abdelgani Chedadi and Said Chedadi. The latter were arrested before the attacks, whereas the former were captured in their aftermath. In fact, the Chedadi brothers ran a shop just a few meters away from several of the regular meeting places of the networks, the *Restaurante Alhambra* and a public phone booth. A further group of siblings were Abdelkhalak Chergi and his brother Abdelhak, who were arrested and interrogated under the suspicion of being involved in the preparation and financing of the attacks. In addition, the kinship connections in the Madrid network also extended to cousins, such as Hamid Ahmidan – charged with 'membership of a terrorist organisation' in April 2006 – and Jamal Ahmidan, one of the seven terrorists killed in Leganés in April 2004.<sup>160</sup>

As previously pointed out, numerous authors have highlighted the similarities between recruitment into violent extremism and religious cults.<sup>161</sup> As in the case of cults, the radical group comes to serve a socialising function akin to that of the family.<sup>162</sup> In the words of one of our interviewees:

*People underestimate – or rather, people haven't come to appreciate – what it means to find a family again. Many of the jihadists broke with their parents, and they were cut off from everything. They don't want to*

<sup>158</sup> Della Porta, *Social Movements*, p. 167.

<sup>159</sup> Edwin Bakker, 'Jihadi terrorists in Europe', *Clingendael Security Paper* No. 2, Netherlands Institute of International Relations, December 2006, p. 56.

<sup>160</sup> Rogelio Alonso, 'Radicalisation in Spain', unpublished paper, September 2007.

<sup>161</sup> See, for example, Della Porta, *Social Movements*, p. 167; Farhad Khosrokhavar, *Les Nouveaux Martyrs d'Allah* (Paris: Flammarion, 2002), pp. 156, 167; Sageman, *Understanding Terror*, pp. 126-30; Wiktorowicz, 'Joining', p. 8.

<sup>162</sup> Della Porta, *Social Movements*, p. 170.

<sup>152</sup> See Henry Tajfel and John C. Turner, 'An Integrative Theory of Intergroup Conflict' in William Austin and Stephen Worchel (eds.), *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations* (Monterey, CA: Brooks Cole, 1979).

<sup>153</sup> Nyla R. Branscombe et al., 'The context and content of social identity threat' in Naomi Ellemers et al. (eds.), *Social Identity: Context, Commitment, Content* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), pp. 35-58. See also Lawrence Kuznar and James Lutz, 'Risk Sensitivity and Terrorism', *Political Studies*, 55(2) (2007), pp. 341-61.

<sup>154</sup> Brooke M. Rogers et al., 'The Role of Religious Fundamentalism in Terrorist Violence: A Social Psychological Analysis', *The International Review of Psychiatry*, 19(3) (2007), p. 257.

<sup>155</sup> Jerrold M. Post, 'Terrorist psycho-logic: Terrorist behaviour as a product of psychological forces' in Walter Reich (ed.), *Origins of Terrorism: Psychologies, Ideologies, Theologies, States of Mind* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), pp. 25-40.

<sup>156</sup> Spanish official 2, interviewed September 2007.

<sup>157</sup> French community leader 3, interviewed May 2007.

*leave the group because they don't want to be pariahs again. So the fatherly element is very important... They hang out with each other, and they all become brothers.*<sup>163</sup>

In this context, then, the purpose of so-called training camps, whitewater rafting trips and even paint-balling exercises, which were found to play an important role in the process of Islamist militant group formation across Europe, is precisely to strengthen group identity and inter-personal bonds rather than to convey any skills which may (or may not) be important in 'fighting the *jihad*'.<sup>164</sup>

Within isolated groups, the perception of external danger serves to magnify group cohesion, which may – in turn – reduce internal disagreements as the group tries to create a united front against an external threat. Occasionally, this perceived threat can be the only social glue holding the group together.<sup>165</sup> Additionally, perceived urgency, danger and mistrust of outsiders can together lead to 'groupthink'<sup>166</sup> whereby decision-making becomes irrational and members of the group fearful of appearing not to hold the majority view. Membership in any group, then, comes with benefits and pressure, which impact on the attitudes and behaviours of the individuals who make up the group. In violent extremist groups, these forces are often found to put pressure on an individual to conform.

### 5.3 Frame alignment

The process of group formation is accompanied by a period of learning in which the recruit's mindset is reconstructed in accordance with a new set of beliefs. These new ideas are framed in religious terms, and this – we believe – has important implications for the process and the methods through which they are being conveyed. First, they are portrayed as absolute and all-embracing, and they require the recruits' total submission to a new system of rules. Some of the radicals we interviewed emphasised not only that Islam knows no distinction between religion and the state (see 3.1), but also that there is no boundary between the public and the private. As a Spanish radical put it: 'There is no Muslim who doesn't have any relation or at least a certain personal vision that would emerge from his/her own [...] personality independent of the religion in a general sense in the Koran'.<sup>167</sup> Becoming a 'good Muslim', in the radical understanding, calls for an absolute commitment, and it allows for no questioning once the religious validity of an idea or a practice has been established.

Second, the nature of the religious ideology and practices that are being embraced forces recruits to cut their ties with friends and family as well as to isolate themselves from the society in which they live. With practically everyone else regarded as *kuffar* (infidel),

close interaction with society at large not only makes no sense, it is negative and potentially dangerous. Arguably, then, the intense in-group dynamics which Sageman describes as the *precursor* to religious commitment could equally be seen as their *consequence*.

What distinguishes Islamist militants from other fundamentalist groups is their emphasis on armed struggle to liberate and/or unite Muslim lands under Islamic rule. It is this urgent need for '*jihad*' which runs like a thread through the period of learning and indoctrination to which recruits are subjected. *Jihad*, despite its varied and more peaceful connotations in mainstream scholarship,<sup>168</sup> is presented in almost exclusively military terms, and recruits are left in no doubt that it constitutes a religious duty which every able-bodied male should pursue. One of the key points emphasised is that – as long as the Muslim world is under attack – most forms of violent *jihad* qualify as 'defensive' action. Indeed, most of the taped sermons and videos that are shown during the learning period are designed to illustrate and sustain this argument. Amongst the possessions of members of the Madrid cell, for example, the police found numerous tapes of radical preachers, such as the Jordanian born cleric Abu Qatada, who fiercely extolled the virtues of '*jihad*' and criticised those who failed to respond to the call. In such materials, '*jihad*' was consistently portrayed not just as a defensive action and religious duty to be discharged by every 'good Muslim', but as something that will bring great rewards. In Qatada's words: 'Those who fall in the name of God and their nation do not die, because they remain alive with God'.<sup>169</sup>

Ultimately, however, the success in achieving frame alignment depends on the reputation and credibility of the 'frame articulator'.<sup>170</sup> In this regard, many radical imams' lack of scholarly qualifications matters less than one would expect. Islamist militants are distrustful of 'official scholarship', which they regard as corrupt and little more than a tool in the hands of the authoritarian rulers of the Middle East.<sup>171</sup> There has been a long tradition, therefore, of self-taught and/or renegade clerics within the Islamist militant movement. Furthermore, converts, second and third generation Muslims of South Asian descent or those from North African ancestry whose Arabic has lapsed, often tend to equate even the most rudimentary knowledge of the Arabic language with great scholarship. As the Chairman of Brixton Mosque in London told us:

*[The radical imams] could speak English, they knew the lingo, the slang... But they could also delve into the Quran and read the Arabic. Reading the Quran in Arabic is like music to Muslims' ears, especially to British converts who are unable to understand the context and who are likely to be impressed by people who pretend to be Islamic scholars and who speak Arabic.*<sup>172</sup>

The Dutch radical imam, Abdul Jabbar van de Ven (see 4.2), who described himself as a 'student' of Islam but frequently issued fatwas

<sup>163</sup> Shiv Malik, interviewed July 2007.

<sup>164</sup> British official 3, interviewed July 2007. Also French official 3, interviewed September 2007.

<sup>165</sup> Post, 'Terrorist psycho-logic', pp. 28-30.

<sup>166</sup> Irving Janis, *Groupthink: Psychological Studies of Policy Decisions and Fiascos*, 2nd ed. (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1982); also Rogers, 'The role of', p. 258.

<sup>167</sup> Spanish radical 1, interviewed October 2007.

<sup>168</sup> See, for example, Esposito, *Unholy War*, pp. 64-70.

<sup>169</sup> Qatada, quoted in Juzgado Central de Instrucción Número 6, *Audiencia Nacional*, Sumario No. 20/2004, 10 April 2006, p. 1217.

<sup>170</sup> Wiktorowicz, 'Joining the Cause', p. 5.

<sup>171</sup> Steinberg, *Der nahe und*, Chapter 2.

<sup>172</sup> British community leader 1, interviewed August 2007.

and was clearly regarded as a religious authority by his followers, made no secret of his relative lack of scriptural knowledge. He told a journalist: 'In the land of the blind, the one-eyed is king'.<sup>173</sup>

## 5.4 Justifying violence

The justification of terrorism is the logical end product of the frames acquired in the period of learning. It is underpinned by recruits' full identification as citizens of the *ummah* which will have superseded their loyalties or attachments to any other frame of identity. As a French radical told us, the idea of the *ummah* 'transcends the individual... [it] exists all over the world and its troubles are felt the same way everywhere'.<sup>174</sup> As a result, recruits believe to have a stake in the conflicts between Muslims and non-Muslims regardless of their geographical location, and there is no question with whom to side. As the same French radical explained:

*Every Muslim is angry when the ummah is being undermined. I am going to give you the example of the demonstrations against the Vatican in Arab countries where French and Danish flags were burned. Western politicians became upset about this... [But,] how can you ask me not to get angry when the ummah is being tarnished? How can they be proud of their nations and not understand that we are proud of ours?*<sup>175</sup>

Indeed, one may argue that – in the minds of Islamist militants – the concept of the *ummah* not only trumps all other forms of identity, its religious subtext means that the enemies of the *ummah* are, in effect, enemies of God.

Moreover, Islamist militants will have been taught that they have an obligation to respond to the 'troubles' of the *ummah*, and that the religiously correct response to physical assaults against the *ummah* is '*jihad*'. When Muslim lands are occupied or attacked, Islamist militant doctrine dictates that the resistance against such attacks qualifies as a form of 'defensive *jihad*' in which every individual Muslim (rather than the collective) has an individual duty to participate regardless of what traditional scholars say.<sup>176</sup> In the words of another French radical:

*The defensive jihad doesn't need the fatwa as it is a personal duty for every individual. It is a method of protecting against injustices... If an ordinary mortal commits an aggression against you without reason, in that case you are in self-defence... Why did the French resist German occupation? Resistance is a legitimate right. Every people agrees with this logic. Religion, the laws, international law, they all guarantee this. It is an acquired right which doesn't need a legal frame.*<sup>177</sup>

Hence, based on Islamist militants' frame of reasoning, there is a strong and strictly logical case for responding to attacks against their 'nation' by force, and it is equally clear that, in cases of 'self-defence', no formal and/or external authorisation is required.

Despite agreement on the legitimacy of 'defensive *jihad*' in principle, Islamist militants differ over when exactly it applies and what means are permitted in pursuing the *ummah*'s defence. For some, the idea of 'defensive *jihad*' implies that certain 'laws of war' need to be respected. One of the British radicals we interviewed, for example, explained to us that there is a clear distinction between '*jihad*' and terrorism:

*I understand the acts of resistance in Afghanistan. They are freedom fighters. They didn't go to the United States to carry out acts of terrorism. I sympathise with the people who fight in Afghanistan, in Iraq, in Palestine, in Sudan. I don't agree with the ones who commit acts in an underground, a train, a plane. The true Mujahideen are those who fight against American terrorism and the Zionists... What some are doing in Muslim countries and what others are doing in Europe, it's not the same thing. The Taliban retaliate against an external enemy... In Islam, it is all very clear: one does not kill the elderly, women, and boys.*<sup>178</sup>

Others, however, choose to disregard such prohibitions in favour of holding to account all those who are believed to be responsible for the plight of the *ummah*. The idea of '*Jihad*' thus becomes a way of punishing the 'enemies of Islam', which – pursued to its natural conclusion – may include the civilian populations of democratic nations whose governments are thought to be part of the 'Crusader and Zionist Coalition'. In the words of one of the French radicals whom we interviewed:

*Every individual has his share of responsibility in what is currently going on in the world. Who elected the president of the United States? The American people. Why did they vote for Bush? They elected him for a political programme, and they were aware of his policy. You can't tell me the American people are innocent! If the American state invaded Iraq, then the people bear the entire responsibility because they chose this programme.*<sup>179</sup>

This argument, which uses democracy as an excuse for killing civilians in Western European countries, is a constant theme among Western Islamist militant. In his suicide video, Khan's protégé, Shehzad Tanweer, applied the same logic, when he stated that 'you [the British people] are those who have voted in your government who in turn have and still to this day continues to oppress our mothers and children'.<sup>180</sup> Khan put it more bluntly even: 'Until you stop the bombing, gassing, imprisonment and torture of my people [sic] we will not stop this fight... Now you too will taste the reality of this situation'.<sup>181</sup>

<sup>173</sup> Jabbar, quoted in 'Abdul-Jabbar van de Ven: Jongerenimam', *De Telegraaf*, 24 November 2004.

<sup>174</sup> French radical 6, interviewed April 2007.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid.

<sup>176</sup> Needless to say, what we are referring to are *jihadist* doctrines, which – in most conventional scholars' view – completely contradict the Quran's stipulations about the laws of war and peace. See, for example, Shaheen Sardar Ali and Javaid Rehman, 'The Concept of Jihad in Islamic International Law', *Journal of Conflict and Security Law*, 1 (2006), pp. 1-23.

<sup>177</sup> French radical 2, interviewed March 2007.

<sup>178</sup> British radical 1, interviewed September 2007.

<sup>179</sup> French radical 1, interviewed May 2007.

<sup>180</sup> 'Video of 7 July bomber released', BBC News, 6 July 2006; available at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/5154714.stm>.

<sup>181</sup> 'London bomber: text in full', BBC News, 1 September 2005; available at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/4206800.stm>.

Figure 4: The process of message dissemination

Cognitive openings	Group dynamics	Frame alignment	Justification of violence
Based on...	Based on...	Based on...	Based on...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Alienation from Western society</li> <li>• Alienation from 'cultural Islam'</li> <li>• 'Humiliation by proxy'</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Material and immaterial needs</li> <li>• Friendships and bonding</li> <li>• Group pressure and conformity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Religious commitment</li> <li>• Separation from society</li> <li>• Imperative of 'jihad'</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Ummah</i> as the new identity</li> <li>• Legitimacy of violent 'jihad'</li> <li>• 'Liberal' interpretation of 'jihad'</li> </ul>

When dealing with less thoughtful members of the movement, however, it quickly becomes obvious how concepts like *kuffar* and the militant Islamist idea of 'jihad' serve as tools through which young Muslims can legitimise and sanctify their frustrations and their hatred of the societies in which they live. In fact, not only do these ideas provide an intellectual platform, they also prescribe a course of action, which may result in acts of terrorism. This clearly seems to have been the case with the Hofstad Group in the Netherlands, which tended to come up with gruesome ideas for how to kill various public figures and – only then – looked for ways in which this could be justified in ideological and/or religious terms.<sup>182</sup> The same was true for a group of young British Muslims, who were found guilty in April 2007 as part of the so-called Operation Crevice. During their trial, the prosecution played secretly taped conversations between the members of the cell. One of the defendants told his comrades that attacks against civilians were justified because 'when we kill the *kuffar*, this is because we know Allah hates the *kuffar*'.<sup>183</sup> Discussing the idea of blowing up London's biggest nightclub, another member said: 'No one can put their hands up and say they are innocent – those slags dancing around'.<sup>184</sup>

This chapter tried to explain how violent extremists capitalise on cognitive openings. It also showed how recruits' identity and outlook are transformed through their integration into tightly-knit groups, and how this process is accompanied by the transmission of a set of religious frames which – if credibly conveyed – can lead not only to their isolation from society but be used as intellectual tools with which to justify, and incite them to engage in, acts of violence (the process is summed up in Figure 4). We emphasised the use of 'jihadist' video tapes, but it seems obvious that the relevance of new media and information technologies in extremist radicalisation and recruitment goes far beyond the distribution of 'jihadist' videos. Indeed, we believe the role of the Internet merits a short chapter in its own right.

<sup>182</sup> See Vidino, 'The Hofstad Group'.

<sup>183</sup> Quoted in Rosie Cowan, 'British suspects considered blowing up London club, court told', *The Guardian*, 23 March 2006.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*

## 6 The internet

The 'information revolution', which resulted in the unprecedented rise of the Internet since the mid-1990s, has been of enormous benefit in bringing people together, revitalising grassroots democracy, and facilitating new forms of business. Arguably, though, the very same features that have made global exchange and engagement possible have also allowed violent extremists to exploit the new technology for their own – less benign – reasons. After all, the Internet is the world's most extensive network of communication; it is low cost; it is global; it is difficult to regulate; and it allows users to remain (more or less) anonymous.

Terrorists can use the Internet for a wide range of purposes, which include attack planning, reconnaissance, fundraising, and even psychological warfare.<sup>185</sup> What we hope to explore in the context of this study are not such operational uses of the Internet but mostly its communicative functions, that is, as a tool with which to spread information, facilitate communication and – ultimately – mobilise potential supporters.<sup>186</sup> We believe that it is in these areas that the Internet is of particular relevance to Islamist militant recruitment. Indeed, leading *Al Qaeda* strategists have long identified the importance of the Internet as the principal method through which to create a 'jihadist' community and break the monopoly of the 'establishment' media. As Bin Laden's deputy, Ayman Al Zawahiri, wrote in 2001: 'We must... get our message across to the masses... and break the media siege imposed on the jihad movement... This can be achieved through the use of the Internet'.<sup>187</sup>

Before exploring what, based on our research, we believe to be the core functions of the Internet in Islamist militant recruitment in Europe – 'Internet-supported recruitment' and 'virtual self-recruitment' – it is necessary to explain briefly how 'jihadism online' works.

All the actors involved in Islamist militancy are also represented in the Internet. This includes the hard core of *Al Qaeda*, Islamist militant clerics, the 'strategic thinkers', and – of course – the 'grassroots jihadist movement'. Their roles are varied and constantly changing, and it would therefore be mistaken to view the first three categories as the (active) providers of information and the latter as the (passive) consumers. In fact, one of the main difficulties in combating 'jihadism online' is that the grassroots movement plays an important role in producing and distributing information, and that it is key to maintaining the decentralised structure of 'jihadism online' more generally.<sup>188</sup>

<sup>185</sup> Timothy L. Thomas, 'Al Qaeda and the Internet: The Danger of Cyberplanning', *Parameters*, 33(2) (2003), pp. 112-23. Also Gabriel Weimann, *Terror on the Internet: The New Arena, the New Challenges* (Washington, DC: US Institute of Peace, 2006). A review of 'jihadism' on the Internet was recently published by the Dutch National Coordinator Counterterrorism. See *National Coordinator for Counterterrorism, Jihadis and the Internet* (NCTb: The Hague, 2007); available at [http://english.nctb.nl/Images/Jihadis%20and%20the%20Internet\\_tcm127-139397.pdf](http://english.nctb.nl/Images/Jihadis%20and%20the%20Internet_tcm127-139397.pdf).

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>187</sup> See Ayman Al Zawahiri, *Knights Under the Prophet's Banner: Contemplations on the Jihad Movement* (London: Al Sharq Al Awsat, 2001).

<sup>188</sup> Hanna Rogan, 'Jihadism Online: A study of al-Qaida and radical Islamist groups use the Internet for terrorist purposes', *FFI Report*, 2006/0915, p. 15.

Despite the impression of anarchy, the ‘architecture’ of the Islamist militant Internet presence is relatively straightforward.<sup>189</sup> First, there are the official web sites, representing clerics, strategists, or Islamist militant organisations. They are very unstable, but they are often well run and may contain downloadable videos, communiqués, discussion papers and religious rulings, and frequently also provide opportunities for interaction with leading personalities.<sup>190</sup> Second, there are the web forums which are mostly administered and populated by grassroots supporters. The web forums are the soap boxes of the Islamist militant movement, where key debates about the latest news take place, networks are formed, and a real sense of community emerges. Often password-protected, they are also used to exchange videos, training material, and links to other web sites.<sup>191</sup> The third element of the Islamist militant Internet architecture are so-called distributor sites, which include ‘*jihadist*’ web directories, ‘tribute’ sites, and the web pages of so-called ‘media groups’. These sites sustain the infrastructure of the Islamist militant web presence, as they distribute ‘*jihadist*’ material and provide updated links on where to locate official sites and web forums. Web forums can also perform the function of distributor site.<sup>192</sup>

## 6.1 Internet-supported recruitment

None of the radicals or former radicals we have interviewed were radicalised or recruited solely on the Internet. Nor did any of the community leaders or law enforcement or intelligence officials we have spoken to believe that the Internet is likely ever to fully replace person interaction. A university imam summed it up as follows: ‘Human contact is important because [recruitment] is all about who knows who. One guy knows a friend who knows a friend, and so on’.<sup>193</sup> Real-world social relationships continue to be pivotal in recruitment, therefore, but that does not exclude some role for the Internet altogether. On the contrary, whilst pointing out that the Internet is not the one dominant factor, nearly all our interviewees emphasised that it was important in supporting the process of recruitment.

There are three main functions of Internet-supported recruitment which we have identified in our research. First, the Internet is used to *illustrate* and *reinforce* the ideological message which recruits are likely to receive in private study sessions. In the words of a senior British police officer, ‘In the process of recruitment, the recruiter will be able to point out Internet sites that illustrate the narrative, and which explain what he was talking about in the abstract’.<sup>194</sup> A senior Spanish intelligence made a similar observation:

*After the first meeting, when they are gradually introduced to a more private and select environment, the Internet and other media are being used to hammer home religious and political messages to increase*

189 Ibid; Brynjar Lia, ‘Al-Qaeda online: understanding jihadist internet infrastructure’, *Jane’s Intelligence Review*, 1 January 2006.

190 Rogan, ‘Jihadism Online’, pp. 17-20.

191 Ibid., pp. 20-4.

192 Lia, ‘Al-Qaeda online’.

193 British community leader 3, interviewed August 2007.

194 British official 1, interviewed August 2007.

*commitment and dedication. The internet gives them religious and practical instructions [and] ideological guidance, but also friends and support.*<sup>195</sup>

Arguably, the very act of participating in ‘*jihadist*’ web forums makes individuals experience being part of a global movement. In itself, therefore, the Internet represents – and powerfully communicates – the sense of *ummah* which is the underlying principle of much Islamist militant ideology.<sup>196</sup> In the case of the Dutch Hofstad group, for example, most experts agree that the group would not have moved along the path of Islamist militancy as quickly and as decisively as it had without the Internet from which members gained most of their inspiration and ideological support.<sup>197</sup>

Second, the Internet allows recruits to *network* amongst like-minded individuals. It enables them to reach beyond their core group of friends and/or conspirators, and helps them facilitate links with other cells. Indeed, it makes it possible for self-starter cells to find ‘links to the jihad’ and gain access to the resources of the wider movement. The so-called Glostrup network from Denmark, for instance, had failed to hook up with a ‘link to the jihad’ in their home country for several months, but quickly managed to find more experienced militants in other European countries via the Internet.<sup>198</sup> More generally, then, the Internet needs to be understood as a ‘recruitment magnet’, which allows ‘seekers’ with no prior involvement to find access to the movement. In our view, it performs the same function as radical mosques or radical bookshops, except – of course – that it constitutes a ‘virtual’ rather than an actual place.

Finally, the Internet can form an environment in which individuals’ commitment to the ‘cause’ and their concept of what means are justified in defending the *ummah* are *exaggerated*. As the senior Spanish intelligence officer told us: ‘People egg each other on. They compare themselves to other activists. They realise that a lot more people are doing this than what it first seemed. Sometimes, there seems to be a competition for who can be the most radical’.<sup>199</sup> Though much of this is theatre – with the majority of participants in web forums being ‘armchair jihadists’ at best<sup>200</sup> – the effect for some can be one of hyper-radicalisation in which – not unlike the phenomenon of ‘group think’<sup>201</sup> – the most extreme ideas and solutions receive the most encouragement and support.

Based on our analysis, we believe that the phenomenon of Internet-supported recruitment will grow in significance. Though it started to play an increasingly important role in Europe in the late 1990s, the breakthrough for ‘*jihadism* online’ occurred at the time of the Iraq war,<sup>202</sup> when massive grassroots mobilisation coincided with the closing down of real-world ‘recruitment magnets’ (radical mosques, radical bookshops, etc.) and the near-universal availability of high-

195 Spanish official 1, interviewed September 2007. Similar findings were made as early as 2002 by the Dutch domestic intelligence service; see AIVD, *Recruitment*, p. 16.

196 See Sageman, ‘Understanding Terror’, p. 161.

197 Vidino, ‘The Hofstad Group’, p. 585.

198 Taarnby, ‘Jihad in Denmark’, pp. 44-7.

199 Spanish official 1, interviewed September 2007.

200 Rogan, ‘Jihadism Online’, p. 20.

201 See Janis, *Groupthink*.

202 See Hanna Rogan, ‘Abu Reuter and the E-Jihad’, *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs*, Summer 2007, pp. 89-96.

speed internet connections. From an Islamist militant perspective, the logical response to this new set of opportunities and constraints was to 'go virtual', and indeed, there has been a steep rise in the number of web forums and web sites available in modern European languages,<sup>203</sup> reaching out to converts as well as second and third generations European Muslims.

## 6.2 Virtual self-recruitment

As noted above, the consensus amongst experts is that recruitment is a 'group thing', and that real-world social relationships continue to be decisive (see Chapter 5). The Internet – so the argument goes – can support radicalisation and recruitment, but it will never be able to completely replace direct human contact and the ties of friendship and kinship through which loyalties form. This chimes with Wiktorowicz's observation that 'risky' behaviours, such as violence, necessitate social networks in order for the perceived cost/benefit calculation to tip in favour of taking 'risk' (see Chapter 1). And it corresponds with the thrust of Sageman's argument, who contends that, '[f]or the type of allegiance that the jihad demands, there is no evidence that the Internet is persuasive enough by itself'.<sup>204</sup> Indeed, straightforward recruitment on the Internet continues to be the exception, with only sporadic evidence of systematic recruitment drives.<sup>205</sup> Even so, we would argue that the idea of the Internet as nothing more than a support mechanism for small-group recruitment is no longer fully valid either. In recent years, new and 'virtual' forms of Islamist militant activism have evolved, which challenge, and impact upon, traditional patterns of recruitment.

Two case studies may serve to illustrate our point. The first is that of Younis Tsouli, better known as 'irhabi007' ('terrorist007'), who emerged as the undisputed 'superstar' of 'jihadism online' in early 2004. Having joined a number of popular web forums, Tsouli managed to create a (virtual) relationship with Abu Musab Al Zarqawi's spokesman through which he gained credibility with other online 'jihadists'. Tsouli also had considerable expertise in 'hacking' computer systems, which made him a trusted source of information for how to circumvent internet security. (He even published 'Seminars on Hacking Websites' in some of the forums).<sup>206</sup> Within a matter of months, Tsouli thus became one of the most important hubs for the 'jihadists' online community. He was in touch with several Islamist militant groups across Europe, North America and the Middle East, and is said to have brokered 'links to the jihad' for several leaderless militant groups.<sup>207</sup> Moreover, as a result of his involvement and prominence within the online movement, he seems to have concluded at some point in early 2005 that he wanted to participate in a suicide

attack. According to the British authorities, who arrested the 22-year old in a flat in West London, he had made plans to blow himself up in London during the Christmas period in 2005<sup>208</sup>. In little more than a year, then, he had gone from a 'nobody' to become a potential suicide bomber as well as one of the Islamist militant movement's most prominent figures. Even more remarkably, his radicalisation and recruitment had taken place entirely virtually, with Tsouli acting as his own recruiter. According to the journalist Yassin Musharbash: 'The case of "irhabi007" proves that the boundaries between virtual and actual terrorism – between Internet jihad and real attacks – have become porous'.<sup>209</sup>

Our second example is that of Irfan Raja, a 19 year old student from Ilford in England, who was convicted of downloading and sharing extremist materials in September 2007 along with four other British Muslims of Pakistani descent. Raja had not been part of the Islamist militant 'scene' in Ilford, nor was he known by his friends or parents to have radical tendencies. His entire radicalisation occurred online, with hours spent online downloading extremist videos, posting messages and chatting to other radicals. When Raja declared his intention to participate in 'jihad', an extremist based in the United States put him in touch with the four others, who were based in Bradford, around 350 kilometres away from Raja's home town. Never having met each other, the five decided to go to Pakistan in order to attend a training camp and fight in Afghanistan. On one of the various web forums of which they had been members, they managed to find a more experienced 'jihadist', who was able to provide precise instructions on how to make their way to Pakistan's North West Frontier Province. The plan was thwarted, however, because Raja's parents discovered a note, which he had written before setting off for Bradford and Pakistan. It said: 'If not in this [world], we will meet in the [highest reaches of heaven]'.<sup>210</sup> Raja's parents immediately called the police, who arrested all five members of the cell.

The examples of Tsouli and Raja prove that the Internet can be the dominant, if not the sole, factor that facilitates radicalisation and recruitment. Some may therefore be tempted to argue that a completely new era of recruitment has arisen in which neither human contact nor physical proximity are necessary for individuals to join the 'jihad'. In our view, such a conclusion would be misleading. It is important to emphasise that cases like Tsouli and Raja continue to represent a small minority compared to the many occasions on which the Internet is used in order to support 'real-world' recruitment. Conversely, though, 'virtual self-recruitment' can no longer be ignored simply because it does not fit with experts' long-held assumptions about the salience of direct human contact and group dynamics. As we demonstrated, there clearly seem to be instances in which the sense of virtual community fostered by the Internet has been 'persuasive enough by itself' to engage in 'risky behaviour' (see above), and this development needs to be taken seriously by analysts and policymakers. In general, the Internet is likely to become one of

203 Lia, 'Al Qaeda Online'.

204 Sageman, 'Understanding Terror', p. 163.

205 Weimann cites the SITE Institute, which believes that Al Qaeda conducted a 'high-tech recruitment drive' in 2003 to attract fighters to fight the U.S.-led Coalition in Iraq. See Weimann, 'Terror on the', pp. 119-20.

206 Site Institute, 'Irhabi 007 Unveiled: A Portrait of a Cyber-Terrorist', Site Report, 2006; available at <http://www.siteinstitute.org>.

207 Yassin Musharbash, '37.000 Kreditkarten für "Terrorist 007"', *Spiegel Online*, 26 July 2007; available at <http://www.spiegel.de/politik/ausland/0,1518,495468,00.html>.

208 Yassin Musharbash, *Die neue Al-Qaida*, p. 155.

209 *Ibid.*

210 Dominic Casciani, 'Students who descended into extremism', *BBC News*, 3 September 2007; available at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/6916554.stm>.

the key 'battlegrounds' for European policymakers in countering the growth of Islamist militant recruitment. As the next chapter shows, it is also one of the most difficult to tackle.

## 7 Summary & recommendations

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In this report, we have presented a comprehensive overview of the methods through which Islamist militants in Europe mobilise their supporters and find new recruits. We have examined and analysed the structures and dynamics of the movement as it currently operates. In doing so, we have come to the following conclusions:

Islamist militant recruitment efforts have largely been driven underground, with little overt propagation and recruitment now occurring at mosques. Prisons and other places of vulnerability in which individuals are likely to feel lost or experience tensions continue to be a great cause of concern, which urgently needs to be addressed.

A variety of actors continue to be involved in propagation and recruitment, though radical imams have lost some influence. Activists are the 'engines' of Islamist militant recruitment. They often draw on recruits from so-called 'gateway organisations' which prepare individuals ideologically and socialise them into the extremist 'milieu'.

Islamist militants skilfully exploit young Muslims' conflicts of identity, especially when feeling torn between Western society and the 'cultural' Islam of their parents. Based on such cognitive openings, they facilitate the formation of in-groups in which frame alignment is achieved.

The Internet has come to play an increasingly important role. The main function is to support 'real-world' recruitment (by reinforcing religious and political themes; by facilitating networking; and by creating a climate of exaggeration). In recent years, however, new forms of Islamist militant online activism have emerged, which rely less on human contact and can be described as 'virtual self-recruitment'.

Even so, these developments are not uniform. We found there to be clear differences between countries in Southern Europe, where Muslim immigration is recent, and those in which the second and third generation of European Muslims is reaching adolescence. In countries where no second or third generation of European Muslims has yet emerged, language is less of an issue, nor is the conflict of identity between Western society and traditional culture as pivotal as in countries like Britain and France. As a consequence, Islamist militants in countries like Spain are less likely to attract converts, and extremist cells of mixed ethnic backgrounds are rare (though there are some indications that this might be changing).<sup>211</sup> In our view, this also explains why the phenomenon of the 'radical imam', which tends to appeal more to converts and second or third generation European Muslims, has been less pronounced in Southern countries.

Across Europe, the environment in which Islamist militants operate has changed. Especially after the attacks in Madrid and London in 2004 and 2005 respectively, open recruitment has become more difficult. The authorities and many Muslim communities have become more vigilant and willing to confront extremism, yet there are no indications at all that the pressure of radicalisation has ebbed

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<sup>211</sup> Spanish official 3, interviewed September 2007.

away. Based on these observations, we believe that the trend towards 'seekers' and 'home-grown' self-starter groups will continue, especially in countries with a large second and third generation European Muslim population. We also predict that, given the constraints now faced by Islamist militants in the 'open' environment, the significance of the Internet as a 'virtual' recruitment place will grow, with some of the new forms of Islamist militant activism described above becoming more frequent.

What can be done? In outlining our policy recommendations, it is useful to differentiate between short term measures aimed at curbing recruitment, and long term measures directed at addressing the 'strains' which may provide the breeding ground of grievances in which mobilisation can become effective.

Short term measures, therefore, are policies that have a disruptive effect on recruitment efforts but are unlikely to affect the underlying dynamics and structures that drive recruitment. Among these, we consider the following to be the most important:

Of vital importance is to prevent the emergence of 'recruitment magnets' which allow 'seekers' and 'self-starter cells' to find 'links to the jihad' and deepen their involvement in the Islamist militant movement. 'Recruitment magnets' can be fixed physical locations, such as 'radical mosques' or 'radical bookshops', but the term also refers to 'radical imams' who travel around the country. Where 'recruitment magnets' cannot be dealt with without incurring the risk of turning the radicals into 'martyrs', access should be made difficult. In extreme cases, such as Finsbury Park Mosque prior to 2004, the short-term drawbacks of decisive action may well be cancelled out by long-term benefits. Indeed, a 'zero tolerance' policy will not only curb recruitment, but also send a strong and consistent message that racism and incitement to violence will not be tolerated in European democracies. When accompanied by a communication strategy that clearly distinguishes between extremists and the vast majority of moderates, it may even be welcomed by mainstream Muslim communities.

Governments need to pay urgent attention to the situation in European prisons, which are likely to become major hubs for the radicalisation and recruitment efforts into Islamist militancy. Some of the difficulties in addressing the challenge have been outlined in Chapter 3. A system of 'certified imams' is difficult to implement, but a viable solution may well be identified in collaboration with mainstream Muslim faith leaders.<sup>212</sup> More fundamentally even, there needs to be heavy investment in training and staff, so that radicalisation and recruitment can be recognised.

Intelligence and law enforcement strategies need to be geared towards identifying the 'activist' leaders of cells rather than their followers. Activists are the ones 'who makes things happen', and it is they who pursue the expansion of cells, be it through their charisma and leadership or as a result of systematic low-level recruitment. Activists, however, are also vulnerable, because they are likely to be the most vocal members of their cells, who take part in the life of the

wider community and are known by outsiders. In that sense, they represent the 'weakest link' of grassroots *jihadism* against which counter-recruitment efforts are most likely to pay off.

Governments need to tackle the challenge posed by gateway organisations, and they need to be clear and consistent in doing so. Organisations which approve of, incite or justify violence – whether at home or abroad – should never be seen as allies in counter-recruitment. Purely religious organisations, such as the *Tabligh* or some non-violent *Salafi* groups, may be helpful in facilitating grassroots counter-radicalisation programmes and providing the religious arguments through which to counter the extremists' interpretations of *jihad*. Even so, governments should resist the temptation of turning them into 'official spokespeople' for the Muslim community. In no European countries do they represent mainstream Muslims, nor should European governments be seen to promote rigid faith practices which may prevent Muslims from becoming full and active citizens of Western democracies.

More attention needs to be paid to extremist activities on the Internet. Governments need to become as Internet savvy as the extremists they are meant to counter, which requires investment in staff and technical capacity. Initiatives aimed at monitoring extremist activities on the net are important and welcome, but governments should not shy away from taking disruptive action where necessary. It has become a cliché to say that no extremist site can be taken down for long<sup>213</sup>, but de-stabilising the extremist Internet 'architecture' – in particular distributor sites and large web forums – may produce valuable short-term gains. Also, the Internet may be difficult to regulate, but the successes in curbing the distribution of other 'undesirable' materials, such as child pornography, may hold valuable lessons for the fight against '*jihadism* online'.

The long-term measures proposed in the following are meant to address the dynamics that underlie the recruitment and mobilisation processes which we have observed. They are aimed at tackling some of the 'strains' which produce grievances that are exploited by Islamist militants in their efforts at mobilisation. As a result, they will take more time to effect, but they are crucial in undermining the successful activation of support for the Islamist militant movement:

Mainstream Muslim communities, especially in places where there is a second or third generation of European Muslims need to be re-vitalised and empowered. Islamist militants exploit the generational conflicts in Muslims communities, and they capitalise on their apparent lack of social capital. Mainstream community leaders need to be supported – politically and through economic incentives – in building social capital, for instance by providing more effective mechanisms for local democracy and accountability, as well as leisure activities and educational opportunities for young people.

Law enforcement agencies need to build and/or re-establish trust with Muslim communities. All too often, the police and other agents of the state are viewed as repressive instruments even by mainstream Muslim communities, who worry that all Muslims are being targeted

<sup>212</sup> In this respect, positive lessons may be learned from Middle Eastern countries in which programmes aimed at 'reforming' radical inmates seem to have been successful.

<sup>213</sup> See, for example, Johnny Ryan, *Countering Militant Islamist Radicalisation on the Internet: A User Driven Strategy to Recover the Web* (Dublin: Institute of European Affairs, 2007), Chapter 2.

as potential terrorists. Government agencies need to make it clear that they are on the side of the decent, law-abiding majority. This requires concerted efforts to communicate and explain seemingly ‘repressive’ actions to moderate community leaders. It also calls for the creation of long-term, local ‘engagement’ strategies through which relationships based on personal trust can be cultivated. Most importantly, it means that law enforcement agencies should always consider ‘community impact’ in the planning and implementation of operations.

Schools need to play a more prominent role in countering the violent extremists’ efforts to gain support and find recruits. With the average age of recruits falling, it is vital for schools to take a leading role in educating their students about the narratives used by violent extremists as well as the ways in which they are likely to be drawn into their circles. In doing so, schools should provide platforms in which issues likely to be raised by violent extremists are discussed openly, questions and contradictions are highlighted, and alternative courses of action are pointed out.

A similar effort is required on the Internet. Johnny Ryan’s idea of building ‘cultural intelligence’ that can be used to confront extremist narratives on Islamist militant web sites may not be feasible even in the medium to long term,<sup>214</sup> but there is no question that ‘taking down’ extremist sites represents no viable solution in the long run either. Young European Muslims need to be able to engage with appealing European language web content that addresses their issues and conflicts, provides a prism through which to examine extremist narratives critically, and – more generally – gives them a clear sense of collective direction without being patronising. None of this can be imposed through government initiatives alone, but governments can offer incentives and encouragement for such initiatives.

Naturally, there are potential tensions between the short and long term measures presented here. Short term measures can be important in preventing immediate danger, but only long term measures will address the structural factors that underlie the problem. Furthermore, in the case of Islamist militancy, even longer term measures aimed at resolving the drivers of recruitment will not bear fruit unless the causes of radicalisation are successfully addressed.

214 Ibid., Chapter 3.

## Interviewees

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In line with the guidelines issued by the King’s College London Research Ethics Committee, all interviewees received assurances that their identity would not be revealed. However, we were given permission to include the following information in this report.

It needs to be pointed out that – when dealing with radicals and/or former radicals – we had no means of verifying the information given. In some cases, interviewees refused to reveal information about their occupational status.

### Radicals and/or former radicals

Format: age; stated residence; occupation (at time of interview); period of activity

#### *France*

- 1) 24; Paris (suburbs); student; ongoing
- 2) 27; Paris (suburbs); student; ongoing
- 3) 26; Paris (suburbs); administrator; ongoing
- 4) 32; Paris; not known; ongoing
- 5) 24; Paris (suburbs); student; ongoing
- 6) 30; Paris; unemployed; ongoing

#### *Spain*

- 1) 30; Madrid (suburbs); shopkeeper; ongoing
- 2) 32; Madrid (suburbs); labourer; ongoing
- 3) 37; Madrid (suburbs); unemployed; early 2000s
- 4) 22; Madrid (suburbs); student; ongoing
- 5) 24; Madrid (suburbs); not known; 2002-2004
- 6) 23; Madrid (suburbs); not known; early 2000s

#### *United Kingdom*

- 1) 28; Outer London; not known; 2000-2005
- 2) 33; Outer London; community worker; 1998-2002
- 3) 19; Outer London; apprentice; 2005-2007
- 4) 20; Outer London; unemployed; 2005- 2007
- 5) 31; Bradford; journalist; early 2000s
- 6) 32; Leeds; journalist; 2001-2005

### Community leaders

#### *France*

- 1) Official, La Grand Mosquée de Paris
- 2) Regional leader (Ile de France), Union des Organisations Islamique de France
- 3) Community worker, Seine-Saint-Denis

### Spain

- 1) Committee member, Centro Cultural Islamico, Madrid
- 2) Prayer leader, Centro Cultural Islamico, Madrid

### United Kingdom

- 1) Chairman of Brixton Mosque, London
- 2) Community worker, Ilford
- 3) University imam, London Metropolitan University

## Officials

### France

- 1) Special advisor to the Ministry of Interior
- 2) Former Director, Directoire de la Surveillance du Territoire
- 3) Counter-terrorism official, Directoire de la Surveillance du Territoire

### Spain

- 1) Former deputy Director of the Spanish foreign intelligence service
- 2) Special advisor to the Guardia Civil
- 3) Special advisor to the Spanish Ministry of the Interior

### United Kingdom

- 1) Head of the Muslim Contact Unit, London Metropolitan Police
- 2) Counter-terrorism officer, West Yorkshire Police
- 3) Senior official, Office for Security and Counter-terrorism, Home Office
- 4) Senior official, Intelligence, London Metropolitan Police

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