Radical Atmosphere: Explaining Jihadist Radicalization in the UK

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In the months following the July 7, 2005, attack that killed 52 people and injured hundreds more, the British government was at pains to deny allegations that Britain was targeted by homegrown, al-Qaeda-affiliated terrorists because of its Middle East foreign policy. Yet the government was privately aware by May 2004 that a "particularly strong cause of disillusionment amongst Muslims … is a perceived 'double standard' in the foreign policy of western governments (and often those of Muslim governments), in particular Britain and the U.S" (FCO/HO 2005). Specific causes cited were bias towards Israel vis-à-vis Palestinians; non-action on Kashmir and Chechnya; and "active oppression" in Iraq, Afghanistan, and the wider "war on terror." Other alleged causes included social and economic deprivation, Islamophobia (particularly following 9/11), and intergenerational clashes between first, second, and third generation Muslims. But little attempt was made either before or after July 7, 2005, to examine the interaction between these domestic and foreign sources of radicalization. This paper attempts to do so by examining the rhetoric and actions of a range of young British Muslims including: examples of 48 persons convicted of, charged for, or killed by violent jihad—evidence of young Muslim opinion on extremism and causes of violent jihadi terror in Britain. The evidence from this preliminary study, though not large enough to draw reliable statistical inferences, does suggest that not only is British foreign policy a significant source of alienation among young British Muslims, but that attitudes towards British foreign policy interact with and often reinforce domestic social, cultural, and economic sources of discontent. As explained in the literature review below, examining the links between perceptions of foreign policy towards the wider Muslim Ummah and sources of domestic discontent offers a more satisfying account of British Muslim radicalization than those offered by the dominant structural (social network theories) and "aggrieved actor" interpretations.

Theories of Radicalism and Violent Islamic Jihad

The most sophisticated and thorough research on the universe of jihadist networks and suicide terrorism apply multi-dimensional theories of causation. I will concentrate on what I believe are three of the most important contributions to this literature: Robert Pape's *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism*, Ami Pedhazur's *Suicide Terrorism*, and Marc Sageman's *Understanding Terror Networks*. In addition, for its insight into the specific conditions likely to predict the type of "de-territorialized" radicalization of Muslims in Britain, I will consider Olivier Roy's *Globalised Islam: The Search for the New Ummah*.

Robert Pape has argued that radicalism producing suicide terror campaigns is determined primarily by individual and collective strategic response to national homeland occupation, especially where the religion of the occupier is different from that of the putative claimants to the homeland. Islamic jihad inspired by Salafist and Wahhabi doctrines of Islam oppose U.S. military occupation of Saudi Arabia and U.S. clientelism in Israel, Egypt, Pakistan, and others. According to Pape, over 90% of known al-Qaeda jihadist suicide perpetrators were from Middle Eastern countries experiencing either American combat presence (Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Afghanistan (post-2001), and the United Arab Emirates) or recipients of substantial financial assistance (Egypt, Pakistan (post-2001), Indonesia (E. Timor), and Morocco) (Pape 2005, 115). Pape emphasizes Islamic jihadists' strategic rationale to understand the state-level and interstate forces that affect this form of radical violence. His study also appreciates how external political, economic, and ideational forces impact individual agency (225–30).

Ami Pedhazur similarly emphasizes the combination of instrumental motives and top-down organizational facilitation to explain suicide terror in Israel/Palestine, Chechnya, and Sri Lanka. Pedhazur cites four main routes to radicalization: collective solidarity and ideological orientation caused by and within existing social networks; personal financial motivation; personal crisis; and personal or communal revenge (Pedahzur 2005; see also Margalit 2003). These experiential effects can be vicarious, at one remove from the individual. Nizar Trabelsi, a Tunisian accused of plotting an al-Qaeda bombing mission against U.S. forces stationed (with nuclear weapons) in Belgium, explained to a Belgian court that he decided to become a martyr for Bin Laden after seeing pictures of a Palestinian infant girl killed by Israeli security forces in Gaza in 2001: "I intended to go in with the picture of the little Palestinian girl and press the detonator" (BBC News 2003). Web content and literature of Islamist groups feature pictures of atrocities, often infants, to represent violence perpetrated

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by the U.S. and its allies on Arab and Islamic people. The July 21, 2005, London bombers reportedly watched a video of Iraqi victims of U.S. forces.

Pedhazur reinforces the top-down interpretation when he argues that "active recruitment" is the most common form of formal recruitment. In the Second Intifada in Israel/Palestine, recruitment of suicide attackers was mainly a byproduct of the Hamas leadership's decision to propagandize martyrs. They took advantage of the culture of despair that had grown with the limited implementation of the Oslo Accords and the discontent with Fatah's and the PLO's secular nationalist nation- and state-building. Using examples of organizational entrepreneurship from Chechnya and Sri Lanka, Pedhazur argues that "in order to sustain a suicide campaign, every terrorist organization needs the support of the community. Raising such support depends upon the organization's success in instilling ideas among members of the society about the importance of martyrdom and glorifying these notions by religious, nationalistic or other means" (Pedahzur 2005, 163). For Pedahzur, sustained suicide terror campaigns have been successful only when existing radical jihadist organizations have been successful in "planting the culture of death" in Palestinian and Muslim societies (153).

The most prominent exponent of the social network theory is Marc Sageman, whose dissection of the global Islamic jihadist network combines sophisticated organizational theory with extensive fieldwork on the global Salafi jihad. Sageman adopts a "weak-structuralist" approach to argue that "social bonds play a more important role in the emergence of the global Salafi jihad than ideology" (2004, 178). Recruits to jihadist networks tend to become indoctrinated after joining such organizations. The "Bunch of Guys" label developed by Canadian Intelligence Services to describe the Montreal-based plot to blow up Los Angeles International Airport in December 1999, and the "Hamburg Cell" responsible for the 9/11 attacks both epitomize for Sageman how alienated and displaced individuals come together in social networks based around criminal networks, schools, universities, social clubs, and/or worship at local mosques. They then become absorbed into a jihadist node by a chance encounter with a radicalized preacher or Mujahedin from theatres such as Afghanistan, Chechnya, or Bosnia. Roughly three-quarters of the Mujahedin that Sageman studied had "pre-existing social bonds to members already involved in the global jihad or decided to join the jihad as a group with friends or relatives" (Sageman 2004, 113).

In sum, the most prominent literature on suicide terror and the global, violent, radical Islamic jihad identify two main components: first, a pool of potential recruits who are sufficiently aggrieved by personal or collective crisis to seek new solidarity bonds to replace dysfunctional or non-existent family and friendship networks; secondly, existing social networks with channels of communication and material support from sponsors of violent attacks. Pape and Pedhazur both emphasize the importance of the individual agency and collective grievance that motivate extremism. But both of their explanations are better at explaining mobilization of individuals in proximate conflict zones, where homeland occupation causes direct personal and collective trauma.

Sageman by contrast, in emphasizing the importance of social networks and their interrelations, offers an important insight into the potential for solidarity bonds among extremists to transcend proximate conflict zones. This approach is particularly useful for understanding the phenomenon of Islamic radicalization and the spread of al-Qaeda-inspired clusters in the UK and other parts of Europe. For Sageman, the rise of London as a "main European centre of Islamic jihad" is, following his network approach, a result of "tolerant laws allowing for sanctuary and its large pool of potential Mujahedin" (Sageman 2004, 144–5). But why would the UK have such a large pool of potential Mujahedin? Sageman himself admits that his network analysis does not treat macro-level factors that have likely contributed to radicalization, including: "Western policies toward Muslim countries, social policies of immigration and education in the Western world, lack of occupational opportunities in the Middle East, and state policies toward religious practices" (Sageman 2004, 175).

One of the works Sageman cites on background factors is Olivier Roy's *Globalised Islam* (2004), which explains the rise of de-territorialized "neo-fundamentalism"—including violent jihadist movements and nonviolent reformist movements—as attempts by Westernized Muslims to assert their identity in a non-Muslim context. Displacement caused by urbanization or immigration and competition between Western secularism and traditional religious beliefs leads to intergenerational strains that leave young Muslims in Britain and other Western countries caught between the beliefs and networks of their parents and the host-society that limits their acceptance on the basis of race, ethnicity, and faith. The dominant reaction to this predicament is a nonviolent, nonpolitical, neo-fundamentalist faith and activism that emphasizes personal action and social activism in search of "a new Ummah." For Roy, only a small fringe pursue the path of violent Islamic jihad, indoctrinated by contact with the "second wave" of violent Islamic jihadists such as the Arab fighters bloodied in Afghanistan, Kashmir, and Bosnia. Instead, al-Qaeda and its Western offshoots have "little ideological formation or few ideological concerns. Al-Qaeda is heir to the ultra leftist and third worldist movements of the 1970s … Many of the young people in these [deprived] neighbourhoods find in radical Islam a way to recast and rationalise their sense of exclusion and uprootedness" (Roy 2004, 313, 324).

Like Sageman, Roy emphasizes top-down indoctrination and entrepreneurship leading to mobilization towards violent jihad. Debilitating the network through police intelligence, prosecution for incitement, the regulation of Imams, etc. should be sufficient to preempt violent radicalism in this scenario because the alleged subjects are so thinly committed to a wider ideological struggle. Yet at least two problems present themselves when we consider the evidence from the UK. First, the argument that al-Qaeda's strategic failure has led to the elimination of its own safe-haven (Afghanistan), while true, ignores its present survival in Pakistan's Northwest Frontier, the return of the Taliban in Afghanistan, and al-Qaeda's reorganization in Iraq. In a sense, the base has moved closer to social networks connecting Afghani and Pakistani Mujahedin with Britain's Pakistan immigrant population, who make approximately 40,000 visits per year to relatives in Pakistan. Relatedly, al-Qaeda can point to initial strategic successes in Iraq and at least politically in Spain and, to a lesser extent, the UK. The Iraq war, its flimsy weapons of mass destruction justification, the disastrous post-invasion security and state-building failures, the abuse of prisoners in detention centers such as Abu Ghraib, had sufficiently negative political implications for Prime Minister Tony Blair to reinforce the belief among violent jihadists of the efficacy of their tactics in the UK. Secondly, none of the theories presented above can account for the apparent escalation of violent jihadist conspiracies in the UK since 9/11. The House of Commons' Intelligence and Security Committee reported that the Security Services (MI5 and MI6) were investigating 250 primary "international terrorist" subjects in 2001 compared to around 800 by July 2005. While we must treat these figures cautiously given the supply-side incentives by the government and its agencies to exaggerate the threat of terror, it is difficult to account for this increase using social network theory. Potential ring-leaders face obstacles to new migration that are caused by increased international intelligence co-operation and tightened immigration

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policies. Equally, the actor-oriented theories cannot plausibly attribute the increase in mobilization to substantially new forms of individual or collective crisis compared, for example, to Palestine following the Second Intifada, or post-invasion Iraq.

The evidence presented below suggests that a more plausible explanation for the rise of homegrown UK violent jihad is based on interactions between perceptions of justice at the local, national, and international levels. In our sample, both radical and non-radical Muslims have clear negative views about the double standards in British and U.S. foreign policy towards the Middle East and South Asia, as exemplified in the following quote from Osama Derby, a young Muslim interviewed by the BBC in April 2004:

> Going back before I decided to convert to Islam, my life wasn't any sort of life. I was drinking alcohol, lack of work, lack of family around me, didn't have no family. Now I've got one billion point (sic), so many brothers around me. I couldn't ask for a bigger family in my life now. You've got all these governments doing wars and doing things and like, they're actually saying, like, they're fighting, like, Bin Laden and that saying he's a terrorist. But I look at it as Tony Blair and Bush being terrorists.

Opinion poll evidence also suggests that a substantial minority of British Muslims sympathize openly with al-Qaeda's war against America. An ICM poll in March 2004 indicated that 13% of British Muslims believed that further terrorist attacks on the U.S. would be justified (FCO/HO 2005, 3).

Contextualizing Individual Autonomy and Action

Both the structural social network and aggrieved actor approaches lack sufficient contextualization for the individual as a politically conscious social actor. In doing so they fail to explain why the images inherent in their radical Islamic identities—ethno-national, religious, cultural, etc.—seem to be subject to popular resonance. Of particular importance for our study is the role of "de-territorialized" altruism: British-born Muslims committed suicide attacks in the name of a global jihad, citing their grievances as Western occupation of the holy land in the Middle East and the killing of Muslims from Bosnia to Baghdad. Mohammad Sidique Khan, leader of the 7/7 cell that killed 53 on the London underground, exemplified this altruistic claim: "Your democratically elected governments continuously perpetuate atrocities against my people all over the world. And your support of them makes you directly responsible, just as I am directly responsible for protecting and avenging my Muslim brothers and sisters." Participation in social movements is generally accepted as being broadly motivated by three key factors (Klandermans 1997; Githens-Mazer 2006). The first of is a sense of injustice about the way that the authorities are treating a problem that affects the collective. The second factor is a sense of collective identity, where injustice is informed by shared senses of what actually constitutes injustice. The third factor is agency: a belief that the individual can, in so far as they participate in sustained collective action, alter conditions and politics through the mechanisms, institutions, and actions of the social movement (Klandermans 1997, 17–9).

The ideological leap from opposition to the citizens' own secular state to anti-U.S. and anti-British imperialism is often made by citing Western support and interdependence between corrupt regimes in states such as Saudi Arabia, as well as specific inheritances from British colonialism. In the case of Egypt, one civil liberties lawyer, Ahmed Seif, told journalist Owen Bowcott that the emergency legislation bequeathed by the departing colonial power (Britain) was still used as the basis of policing against Islamic radicalism: "Police officers don't know how to work in a normal way. They only know how to treat people under torture. [Islamists] use this violence to mobilise their membership: torture for them is a sign the regime has lost its legitimacy" (Bowcott 2003). The connections between historical and contemporary perceptions of state illegitimacy were brought home to me in May 2007 on my way to an interview for this research when I witnessed several young Asians in East London berating a Muslim police officer, accusing him of doing the "dirty work" for the infidel state and turning his back on his Muslim brothers by becoming a "corrupt swine."

In the case of radicalized British Muslims, these myths, memories, and symbols relate to the broader perceptions of the Islamic world, in terms of Palestine, Iraq, Indonesia, etc., and they view and relate these broader international cases to their own personal and communal experiences. The perceived lack of a coherent British or international (U.S.) response to the Second Intifada, the second war in Iraq, along with a myriad of other perceived political, religious, and cultural crises, help to radicalize perceptions of identity, injustice, and agency among young British Muslims who feel ignored, and that their concerns are undervalued in contemporary Britain (National Youth Agency 2007). After strenuous initial denials, the British government's independent study of the causes of the 7/7 bombings admitted that there are clear links between foreign policy in the Middle East and the cultivation of terror cells (Townsend 2006).[1] The situations in Iraq and Palestine have become focal points because they translate broader cultural, political, and religious fears into contemporary times through mythic suffering and struggle that become tangible in contemporary events. When perceptions of injustice at national and international levels mirror local and personal experience, or when local discrimination is consonant with perceptions of liberal imperialist foreign policies, a larger pool of recruits becomes available for potential indoctrination. Therefore, my working hypothesis is that vertically-integrated (or consonant) grievances from status slights are likely to produce a supporting environment for extremism.

Methodologies and Samples

This pilot project uses four main sources of information: data on the 48 persons charged or convicted for violent jihadist acts or conspiracies in the UK since 2001; official reports on the July 7 bombings (H.C.-I.S.C. 2006a); data from a questionnaire developed by an undergraduate student, Shah Miah at Queen Mary, University of London, under my supervision, distributed to 50 young Muslims in Tower Hamlets, East London in early 2006 (Miah 2006); and open-ended interviews I conducted with 31 young people from different parts of London (12 non-affiliated Muslims, six members of the non-radical Young Muslim Organisation UK (YMOUK), two members of the non-radical Muslim Political Action Committee (M-PAC), three members of Hizbut al-Tahrir (HT), and eight non-Muslims used as a control). Interviews took place between September 2005 and July 2007.

The main reason for the diversity of sources is that the subject is extremely sensitive socially, politically, and legally. Standard, large-n survey techniques are of limited value when investigating contentious subjects like violent jihad because potential subjects are likely to be reluctant to disclose extreme views for fear of personal stigma, social exclusion, or legal prosecution. For example, as a non-Muslim academic it has been difficult to gain access to radical Islamic organizations and movements because subjects fear or are suspicious of my motives. My student, Shah Miah, was able to gain much better access with extremist groups and has kindly granted permission to cite relevant findings from

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his undergraduate research project. Unfortunately, the small number of respondents and the limited access have produced a sample at this stage of the project that does not allow for reliable statistical inferences. The reliability deficit has been offset to some degree in the second sample by the use of an open-ended interview agenda that allows respondents to reveal personal opinions without being guided by discreet, close-ended, or categorical (including Likert-scale) questions.

Profiles of Known Violent Jihadists in Britain

The profile of those convicted, charged, or suicided in Britain since 2001 is broadly consistent with Sageman's dominant organizational theories and Pedhazur and Pape's core motivational explanations. All known perpetrators or conspirators were males between the age of 18 and 43, with the majority being in their early 20s. The majority of perpetrators, 32 of 48 (66.6%), are second-generation Muslims of Pakistani origins, the largest proportion of Muslims in Britain, followed by Bangladeshi. The remainder were three Muslims of Indian origin; one Indian of Hindu origin who converted (a key figure linked with al-Qaeda, Dhiren Barot); two British-born Muslim converts of Jamaican or mixed parentage (Richard Reid and Germaine Lindsey); two Jordanians of Palestinian origin; two Somalians; and one each from Ethiopia, Eritrea, Morocco, United Arab Emirates, Yemen, and Iraq.

The sample of active jihadists conforms to a familiar pattern with its mixture of highly educated and skilled cadres, mixed with a set of lesser-achievers. A majority were from deprived areas with Muslim concentrations (27, 56%, were from Greater London, the remainder were from the Leeds/Bradford area of West Yorkshire, Birmingham in the West Midlands, mostly of working class origins but a large minority achieved relatively a high education, tending towards engineering and science degrees—including medicine in the case of the failed July 2007 London and Glasgow attacks).

Preliminary indications of cell formation are also consistent with the social network theory. Take the case of the July 7, 2005, London tube bombers. The apparent ring-leader, Mohammed Sidique Khan, was older than the rest at 30, while the other three in the cell were between 20 and 23. Khan was well-known as a teaching assistant in a local school and as a youth worker attached to a local mosque in Beeston, a suburb of Leeds. He had apparently experienced the type of second-generation culture clash with his parents over his marriage to a Muslim woman of Indian origin. Khan appears to have been organizing the type of team-building physical training activities of violent jihadist groups, including outdoor adventure and gym-training.

Alleged al-Qaeda lieutenant Dhiren Barot played a higher-level role than Khan, employing sophisticated counter-surveillance procedures and assembling a cell of specialists in IT (including encryption), architecture, document forgery, and bomb-making to plot a multi-event attack intending to use dirty bombs (radiation) and gas-filled limousines against U.S. financial targets in New York, Newark, and Washington, as well as targets in the UK in 2005.

The evidence left to understand their motivation is limited to martyr videos by Mohammed Sidique Khan and his accomplice Shehzad Tanweer; trial transcripts of failed or apprehended perpetrators; and the results of police investigations reported to the Commons Intelligence and Security Committee. After explaining the Islamic justification for his actions, Khan focused on the "atrocities" the British government committed against "my people all over the world" and the British public's complicity in their government's actions: "And your support of them makes you directly responsible, just as I am directly responsible for protecting and avenging my Muslim brothers and sisters" (H.C.-I.S.C. 2006b). Similarly, Yassin Omar and Adel Yahya, members of the failed July 21, 2005, attacks also made explicit references to British foreign policy, particularly British subservience to the U.S. in the war against the Taliban in Afghanistan, the occupation of Iraq, and the treatment of Palestine. Another accomplice, Hussein Osman, told Italian authorities, "We made some false, fake explosives to frighten people, to stop them, because of the [Iraq] war basically … What happened on 7 July is happening in Iraq every day. I do not see any difference" (BBC 2007).

The initial information conforms to the broad patterns seen in the globalized violent jihad: experienced and charismatic ring-leaders recruit alienated, troubled younger accomplices, who are then trained and indoctrinated with ideas and images of a bipolar struggle between Islam and the West—particularly the U.S. but also its coalition partner, the UK. But are these conspiracies supply- or demand-led? It is too early to tell if the large number of suspected and actual conspiracies compared to other European countries is a result of the top-down facilitation of a mature network of inspirational and skilled ring-leaders (as the social network theory would predict) or as a result of bottom-up demand on the part of aggrieved Muslims (as the aggrieved actor theories would predict). Not enough is known about the recent conspirators to draw firm inferences on the relative strength of social networks. In either case, both the social network theory and aggrieved actor theories recognize that an alienated recruitment pool is a necessary pre-condition for sustained mobilization. The following section examines the socioeconomic condition of British Muslims to try to gain a greater understanding of violent jihad's potential pool of recruits.

Muslims and the Labor Market in Britain

A report published by the Open Society Institute's EU Monitoring and Advocacy Program found that Muslims in Britain (who represent 3% of the population) are the most disadvantaged faith group (Open Society Institute 2004). They are three times more likely to be unemployed than the Christian majority, have the lowest employment rate of any group (38%), and the highest level of economic inactivity (52%). They tend to live in the most disadvantaged wards and their employment tends to be in low-paid manual and self-employed sectors. Pakistani and Bangladeshi Muslims in London have the highest proportion of children in workless households (30–40%). Pakistani and Bangladeshi men suffer the greatest "ethnic penalty" with key factors such as age, education, timing of migration, economic environment, and family structure explaining only £21 of the £150 wage gap between them and non-Muslims (Berthoud 2000, quoted in Open Society Institute 2004, 30–3). Reports on the severe rioting in 2000–2001 in the northern cities of Bradford, Oldham, and Burnley cited non-engagement in education, training, and employment as central causes of disaffection among young Muslims in those areas (Open Society Institute 2004, 9, 23).

A comparison of Pakistani immigrants to the U.S. and UK suggests important structural causes of attitudes towards the host country (Dickerman and MacFarquhar 2006). The majority of Pakistani immigrants to the U.S. arrived in the 1960s and entered employment at higher status levels, predominantly in academia, medicine, and engineering. By contrast, a surge of Pakistani immigration to the UK occurred in the immediate post-partition era and most of these immigrants worked in lower status factory jobs. Many of these immigrants were also fleeing ethnic violence in Kashmir and the Punjab following partition. As we will see below, the legacy of the interaction between economic deprivation and political grievances associated with previous imperial rule appears to resonate with a substantial portion of second-generation Pakistanis.

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Surveys of Muslims in London

Economic views: Results from the second small sample described above indicate strong negative attitudes towards local government in terms of housing and employment training and placement schemes. Both HT members and five of the eight moderate affiliates (three YMOUK and two M-Pac) held "strongly-negative" views on housing compared to 33% of our non-Muslim control group. One second-generation Pakistani YMOUK member asserted that Muslim youth in his area (Brixton) were being disadvantaged at the expense of "Christians from Eastern Europe and Africa." Economic competition among immigrants in London was a common theme among the respondents. More surprising was the degree to which even moderate respondents drew explicit connections between the lack of upward mobility and London's financial industries, whose gleaming towers are visible from the deprived areas of Tower Hamlets. Two moderate respondents attributed their own perceptions of limited upward mobility with "Zionist-controlled banking" and the "Zionist power elite." Thus, they made connections (however spurious) between local perceptions of blocked mobility and national and international conspiracies.

Political views: Political attitudes in both London samples also showed strong connections between local, national, and international forces. A public indication of the localization of international politics came during the British general election of 2005. Dissident Labour MP George Galloway contested the safe Labour seat of Bethnal Green and Bow (East London) on the single issue of the Iraq war and won the election by a narrow margin over Oona King, one of Labour's poster-child candidates for multi-cultural urban constituencies. London respondents in my sample mentioned this electoral contest repeatedly as an indication of their disaffection with not only British foreign policy but what they perceived as a "democratic deficit." Others cited the futility of normal politics, or at least their disappointment with politics, following the massive anti-war demonstrations in 2003, and in the aftermath of government's failed attempt to justify the war based on the threat of weapons of mass destruction. In Miah's study, 100% of HT members and 60% of YMOUK members thought the Iraq war and occupation increased the likelihood of terrorism in the UK (Miah 2006).

Like the interpretations of economic disadvantage and welfare entitlement, political views tend to link domestic policy in terms of the contemporary "crusader alliance" and historically in terms of settler-colonialism and imperial partition strategies in Palestine, India, and Pakistan. Respondents to Miah's study (London sample 1) cited "divide and rule" strategies and Western-supported "genocide" against Palestinians when asked to comment on contemporary conflicts in Palestine, Kashmir, and Chechnya. Respondents in the second sample (London sample 2) were most consistent in drawing unsolicited parallels between contemporary British policies toward Palestine and Iraq and historical patterns of empire expansion and contraction (e.g., partition). Typical comments focused on the Balfour Declaration (1918) as a prelude to the Arab-Israeli conflict. The support for the "Zionist project" in Palestine was described by one moderate respondent as being driven by British interests in the same Iraqi oilfields in 1918 and 2003.

This evidence, though clearly limited in terms of reliability given the small sample size, does demonstrate tentative support for vertical frame-alignment between perceptions of local injustice and wider national and international policies and events. A substantial number of respondents emphasized how the failure of the war in Iraq, and especially the non-revelation of weapons of mass destruction, were proof that the war was a pretext for the U.S. and the UK to pursue what many Muslims perceive to be the two governments' wider, pro-Zionist agenda. One radical respondent emphasized that the British and American publics should expect to bear the responsibility for reelecting "proven war criminals." Another said, "And what is Blair's reward for this fiasco? A nice job in Palestine. It's like sending Balfour or Lloyd George to advise the Palestinians! Who do they think they are treating Muslim brothers with such contempt?"

These extreme oversimplifications are, of course, only representative of a minority of British Muslim opinion. But the evidence presented above and acknowledged by the government is that the size of the minority holding similarly extreme views is substantial, between 7 and 13 % of the British Muslim population (Home Office 2004).[2] This means that the potential pool of recruits for violent jihad networks in Britain is between 112,000 to 208,000.

Ethnic and European Comparisons

Two final comparisons can help specify the effects of vertical frame alignment. Of the 48 persons charged, convicted, or suicided in the UK since 2001, 18 (39%) were of Pakistani descent. This proportion roughly corresponds to the proportion of British Muslims of Pakistani origin (43% according to the 2001 Census). Bangladeshis represent the second highest proportion of British Muslims (16%), yet there have been no persons of Bangladeshi origin among the 48 suspected British-based jihadists. British Muslims of Bangladeshi origin suffer from levels of deprivation comparable to Muslims of Pakistani origin. They also figured prominently in the support of Respect candidate George Galloway in the 2005 British General Election (discussed above). Why have there been few or no violent jihadis among this population? Several factors seem relevant: first, the form of (Sunni) Islam practiced in Bangladesh has been influenced by Sufism, which places more emphasis on inward personal spirituality rather than the outward ritualistic forms emphasized by Salafist doctrine. As a result, Bangladeshi Muslims may be less predisposed to violent jihadist ideology. Secondly, the origins and political history of Bangladesh did not create the type of grievances associated with partition as for those of Pakistani origin. While both were partitioned by the British from India in 1947, the creation of Pakistan created much higher levels of violence and left a residual conflict over Kashmir, as demonstrated by the views of some members of the London sample (2). It is difficult at this stage of the research to determine whether the religious or historical factors are more important in explaining the different levels of violent jihadi activism among these two British Muslim groups.

A final, European comparison does lend tentative support to the vertical alignment hypothesis. Both of the countries (the UK in July 2005 and Spain in March 2004) that combine a history of imperial conquest of Muslim lands and contemporary support for the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq have suffered substantial violent jihadist attacks since the 2003 invasion. An attack foiled in Germany in July 2006 was alleged to target the U.S. army base at Ramstein and the Frankfurt airport (Ulrich 2007). Arrests made in Denmark in October 2005 were alleged to have foiled an attack in Bosnia. France, whose Muslim population is estimated at around 6% (with Algerians and Moroccans being the largest groups), has suffered surprisingly fewer violent jihadist attacks (since the wave of attacks in 1995) given the comparable sources of anti-Imperial grievances among its Muslims of Algerian and Moroccan origin. Three Moroccans arrested in July 2007 in a sophisticated training cell were preparing for attacks in Italy, another member of the Iraq war coalition.

The comparative evidence does, therefore, lend tentative support to the hypothesis that the vertical integration of grievances at the local, national, and international levels does create a more conducive atmosphere to violent jihadi mobilization.

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Conclusions

The British government's strategy to combat Islamic radicalization applies classic counter-insurgency policies that aim to divide extremists from the moderate majority Muslim community. The government does this by engaging with moderate Muslim groups through sponsoring international cultural relations; consultations with and closer regulation of local Muslim leaders and Imams; and greater contact with Muslim representatives to address Muslim concerns over the use of counter-terrorism methods like "stop and search" (FCO/HO 2005, 15–7). The government is also rightly concerned with addressing structural sources of inequality through educational and employment policies geared towards the disadvantaged areas where Muslims predominantly live. The government also recognizes, despite its public denials, the importance of foreign policy concerns and proposes to commit to "extensive engagement and outreach."

However, there is more emphasis thus far on presenting the government's case and little evidence of serious reconsideration of actual foreign policies. Instead, the aim appears to be to convince the moderate Muslim majority of the veracity and legitimacy of existing policies. Given the evidence presented above, especially the degree of overt sympathy for al-Qaeda's terror campaign and the probability that false moderates underplay their degree of radicalism, much more needs to be done to understand the interactions between foreign policy, the wider Ummah, and local and national sources of grievance.

Notes

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1. Townsend's report of the leaked document differs from the official report (Report of the Official Account of the Bombings in London on 7th July 2005, HC 1087, London HMSO), which does not specifically link Britain's foreign policy or Iraq occupation as likely causes of disaffection among the July 7 bombers.

2. These figures are based on responses to questions as to whether the September 11, 2001, attacks were justified, as conducted by Eastern Eye Mori in November 2001, BBC ICM in November 2001, and Telegraph YouGov in December 2002.

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