

True Identity of Islamic Terrorists

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Abstract: The Trump administration is enforcing a travel ban on eight countries. However, actual assailants in past cases of Islamic terrorism were not necessarily from those countries. This paper presents a close examination of the backgrounds of past assailants to classify who they are and what motivated their actions, in an effort to prevent future tragedies as a result of terrorism.

Keywords: terrorism, terrorist, suicide bomber, jihad, background, cause, travel ban.

1. INTRODUCTION

When it comes to terrorist attacks today, it might appear deep down as if there is an intensifying battle between the Western and Islamic worlds [1]. There have been attacks in Paris, London, Manchester, Orlando, and on and on. What is really happening? Who are the attackers? What can we do about it?

2. DISCUSSION

A. Attackers as Mass Murderers

In general, a terrorist, and especially a suicide bomber, is considered to represent a type of mass murderer [2]. Mass murderers tend to be those who have grown up to be hollow-hearted due to their upbringing in a neglectful home environment. They may have experienced neglect, rigid child-rearing, overprotection, or mind control (i.e. intentional manipulation of the child to live to satisfy the parent[s]' needs) [3]. In such an environment, the individual lacks genuine human interaction/communication, which is necessary for establishing one's identity and living as a social being. In due time, the individual seeks to fill the inner void with something rigid, other than human love, such as an obsession with guns, warfare, religious extremism, or radical philosophy. Furthermore, certain stressors, such as the loss of a job or love, cause them to lose what little ties they have to the society in which they live. Then they snap, which can manifest as murder-suicide to exact revenge on the people and society that excluded them or that they perceive as unjust and corrupt [4]. Terrorists fill this void with false comradeship, such as with ISIS, which allows them to feel as though they are not alone in their fight against the world. Belonging to something larger than themselves, such as ISIS, gives them leverage and makes it easier for them to overcome the final hurdle of acting out the anger that they have been harbouring.

B. A Common Developmental Pattern

As analysts often point out, Islamic terrorists in the West follow a similar developmental pattern. They are usually born to, and raised by, first-generation Muslim immigrant parents in Western countries (e.g. the U.S., the UK, and the EU). Many of them commit petty crimes and use drugs during adolescence. Then they abruptly fixate on Sunni-Islamic fundamentalism [5], [6]. How can we explain this commonality in their developmental patterns?

C. Nowhere to Live

First-generation immigrant parents are generally known to be more repressive than other parents. This is partly because they fear their children will grow up wild in the Western culture and partly because they pressure them to be successful in the new country [7]. Unable to find a restful space at home, they seek refuge in the outside world. Further, owing to the stresses they experienced at home, they feel less hesitation to turn to petty crime and drugs in the outside world. However, to them, this is not a perfect place either; it is unfair, oppressive, and discriminatory towards youth born to Muslim

immigrant parents, given the post-colonial dynamics [8]. However, groups like ISIS promise both the opportunity to take vengeance for all their past injuries and a post-racial utopia. Since they cannot be fully relaxed to be themselves at home and the society at large is fraught with double standards, groups like ISIS offer the only alternative to the dead end in which they find themselves trapped in the Western country [9]. In other words, behind their willingness to die for the cause that terror groups champion, there are aggravating factors at home and in society that make groups like ISIS attractive. Consequently, they come to romanticize death by fighting for justice. This is also likely the reason why many terrorist youth never really show their anger until they are fully radicalized [10]. Their background inhibits the development of the solid ego they need to express their true selves and feelings. Their experience of rigid child-rearing or mind control prevents them from living as they truly are [3], as they face immense pressure to be the ideal boy in the new country.

D. Insiders Experiencing an Identity Crisis

As of 2018, the Trump administration is enforcing a travel ban on Iran, Libya, Somalia, Syria, Yemen, Sudan, Chad, and North Korea [11]. We cannot completely deny the possibility of terrorists coming to the United States from these countries. However, those who have carried out actual attacks in the past were second-generation Westerners, whose parents were from countries such as Afghanistan and Morocco. They experienced an identity crisis due to past and present policies of Western countries towards Islamic countries [5], [9]. In other words, the attackers were not *outsiders* but *insiders*.

Thus, to focus on having close blood ties to U.S. citizens as the only criterion for having a true love for the United States, and using this to judge whether an individual should be able to enter the country, is not practical. Indeed, this is not a 'War on Terror'. Like the drug-addicted daughter of a politician who was a fervent supporter of the *War on Drugs* [12], those who become suicide bombers are 'our children' who could not find a space in their repressive homes or in the discriminatory society. They are driven to react to our seemingly unfair actions towards Islamic countries, which represent the last piece of an identity that they can claim.

E. Altering Home and Society

To prevent further tragedies, it is our homes and societies that must change. Home should be a place where children can communicate about both about positive and negative things, and parents must listen and pay due respect to what they have to say. Moreover, the larger society must function in accordance with truly fair and inclusive policies that foster genuine respect for cultural differences. It must never narrow-mindedly force Western values, backed by capitalistic interests, on anyone. At the same time, we should establish a social system to provide counselling for youths who feel marginalized, especially those with Islamic (and immigrant) backgrounds, who face more hurdles to integrate into the society. Policies such as the War on Terror are rather counterproductive for those who already feel ostracized, since such a stance towards groups like ISIS overlaps with their own social exclusion and isolation. It further fuels their anger against the society and pushes them even closer to identifying with the ideology of ISIS [13].

F. No Negative Actions, No Negative Reactions

Of course, once a member of our society has become a killer, we must take the appropriate action. However, if we truly do not want to see the same tragedies recurring, the most effective approach is to remove the aggravating factors. Without these factors doing the pushing, the pulling factors cannot be as effective. In physics, if there is no action, there is no reaction.

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APPENDIX: PROFILES OF ASSAILANTS

Paris Attack

1. Abdelhamid Abaaoud (Born: Belgium / Descent: Moroccan) [14]

His parents were enormously proud of him, and put him in Catholic school. He turned to criminal activities and drugs in his teens. Suddenly, he became very religious. He became further radicalized in prison. After the attack, his father called him a 'psychopath' and 'devil', and said that he was praying for his son to die. He had no girlfriend, and he recruited his brother to join him.

2. Salah Abdeslam (Born: Belgium / Descent: Moroccan) [15]

He was a clean-shaven, always-smiling, and joking youth, who liked motorbikes and football. He started hanging out at his brother's bar and smoking marijuana. He was jailed with Abaaoud for armed robbery in 2010. He carried out the Paris attack with his older brother. He had never shown any sign of hatred. His younger brother, being a good boy, stands on the family's side.

3. Ismael Omar Mostefai (Born: Algeria / Raised: Paris) [16]

He was a hipster in his teens, with a goofy smile and long hair, who liked racing cars. Had a strong family infrastructure and was timid and had a gentle character. He later turned to petty crime, and was arrested eight times.

Manchester Attack

- Salman Abedi (Born: Manchester, UK / Descent: Libyan) [17]

He was a jokey, friendly young man, but very short-tempered. He had very bad relationship with his father, and had difficulties adjusting to a European lifestyle. Later, he cut ties with former classmates, and turned to marijuana and alcohol. At 17, he started to become increasingly religious. He trained with terrorists while visiting relatives in Libya. He showed a face of hate after a cleric's speech criticizing terrorism. He wanted revenge for the United States' bombing of children in Syria.

London Attack

- Khalid Masood (52) (Born: UK / Descent: African) [18]

He was a black child born out of wedlock in the 1960s to a white teenage mother. Everyone got on well with him at school, but he lost touch with classmates at 16 and turned to petty crime and heavy cocaine use, with repeated violent episodes involving knives. He was groomed for extremism in prison. He has been described as a body-building enthusiast with a chip on his shoulder.

Orland Attack

- Omar Mateen (Born: New York, U.S. / Descent: Afghan) [19]

He was raised by a commanding, repressive father. He exhibited behaviour problems early, and turned to marijuana and steroids. He was bullied at school for his Afghan heritage. Reportedly, he said that real Muslims would never accept the filthy ways of the West.