Arabian Knightz: The Ever-Evolving Al-Qaeda Threat

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September 11, 2001: AQ Core
March 11, 2004: AQ Inspired
December 25, 2009 and May 1, 2010: AQ Allies and Affiliates
The Al-Qaeda Threat

Al-Qaeda Core

Al-Qaeda Affiliates and Allies

Al-Qaeda Inspired

RADICALIZED IN THE WEST
AQ Plots v. the West 1993-2009

- Bin Laden fatwa vs. West 1998
- 9/11
- 3/11
- Homegrown plots dominate after 2004

Plots

- AQ Core
- AQ Affiliated
- AQ Inspired
Radicalization in the United States 2008-2010

• More than 50 Americans radicalized to AQ inspired acts of violence and/or conspiracies during the last 24 months
  – Bryant Neal Vinas
  – Riverdale Plotters
  – Raleigh 7
  – Najibullah Zazi
  – Betim Kaziu
  – David Headley
  – Major Nidal Hasan
  – Tarek Mehanna
  – Minneapolis Somalis
  – Jihad Jane
  – Faisal Shahzad
  – Arabian Knightz

• Phenomena has now materialized with greater frequency in the United States
Al Qaeda in English

• Internet is important venue for radicalization

• Provides religious justification for violent political extremism

• “44 Constants of Jihad”

• Military jihad a religious obligation for all Muslims

• “The hatred of kuffar [non-Muslims] is a central element of our military creed”
Travel to Af/Pak

2007

2008/2009

2009

2008/2009
Travel to Yemen

2004

2007-2009

2005/2009
Travel/Attempted Travel to Somalia

2006

2007/2008

2007/2008

2010
Radicalization and Recruitment
“We’ll start doing killing here if I can’t do it over there”
Mohammed Alessa,
Pre-Radicalization: Mohammed Alessa

- Born in the US of Palestinian descent
- Mother from West Bank; father from Jordan
  - Convenience store owners
- Parents moderately religious
Pre-Radicalization: Carlos Almonte

• Born in the Dominican Republic
• Naturalized US citizen
• Middle-class, suburban upbringing
  – Father school bus driver
  – Brother-in-law a Wayne, NJ cop
• Oldest son in a Catholic family
• Graduated from high school in 2005
  – “Normal, outgoing” kid, according to classmates
Self Identification: Mohammed Alessa

• Born Muslim

• Drifted from family and longtime friends as he grew older

• As a teenager, argued frequently with parents
  – Ran away several times
Self Identification: Carlos Almonte

- Converted to Islam after high school, against father’s wishes
- Encountered preacher at local mall
- Changed name to “Omar”
- Began visiting mosques in Paterson and Union City, NJ
- Learns some aspects of Islam from Alessa’s nieces
Self Identification: “Arabian Knightz”

• Subjects met in local mall circa 2005
• Form crew calling themselves “The Arabian Knightz”
• Muslim-born/non-Muslim youths
• Age range 16-22
• Active in Jersey City, NJ area
Ideological Commitment: Alessa

• Alessa argued with mother because she didn’t cover herself
  – Father reached out to local imams to counsel son

• Extreme rhetoric
Ideological Commitment: Almonte

- Dropped non-Muslim friends
- Started aggressively preaching a militant form of Islam
- Proselytized at place of work
- Assaulted brother for refusing to adopt Islam
- Whole passages on Facebook profile attributed to Abu Qatada
Attracted to the Extremist Scene

Carlos Almonte, December 2008
Attracted to the Extremist Scene

Mohammed Alessa, May 1, 2010

Alessa and Almonte, Israel Day Parade 2010
Jihadization: Almonte and Alessa

• Begins in November 2009

• Almonte/Alessa transition from talk to action

• Begin preparations for war fighting/acquire: camouflage portable hydration system, tactical pants, binoculars, camouflage folding knife, combat boots, tactical brand flashlight

• Join gym -- intense, extensive physical training
  – Daily visits to gym, mountain hiking in snow and mud at Garrett Mountain, NJ
  – “Stronger muscles means bigger muscles which means killing more kuffar”
Jihadization: Almonte and Alessa

• January 2010 – Somalia chosen as location for jihad
  – “But Shabaab is the main one, yanni. The main thing.”
• Mental preparation for jihad
  – Watching violent videos
  – Computer combat simulation games
  – Visiting jihadist websites
Jihadization: Almonte and Alessa

- March 20, 2010 – Almonte purchases airline tickets
- April 2010 – Airline reservations made for Alessa

**Almonte:** Soon there will be US troops in Somalia; this is good because it wouldn’t be fun to kill only Africans

- More Anwar al Awlaqi and Omar Hammami videos watched
- May 23, 2010 – Almonte goes to book store to get Somali language phrase book
June 5, 2010: The Takedown
Jihadization: Almonte and Alessa

• Overt acts:
  – Purchase flight tickets
  – Purchase items to bring to Somalia
    • Flashlights
    • Binoculars
    • Camelbak water hydration systems
    • Military-style clothing and gear
  – Transfer of 6K to withdraw in Egypt
Conclusions

• U.S. authorities have uncovered a number radicalized individuals intent on committing violent jihad in the U.S.
  – These arrests confirm that radicalization is occurring in the U.S.

• Travel to “Zones of Conflict” (Pakistan, Somalia, Yemen) accelerates the radicalization to violence

• New York City remains a top target

• Law enforcement has a limited time frame to detect and disrupt terrorist plots, especially when terrorists have trained overseas
The Al-Qaeda Threat

Al-Qaeda Core

Al-Qaeda Affiliates and Allies

RADICALIZED IN THE WEST

Al-Qaeda Inspired