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Foreword

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FOREWORD

Dina Temple-Raston[†]

In the fall of 2008, a federal law enforcement official phoned me and asked, rather mysteriously, if I had been following the terrorism story unfolding in Minneapolis.

Not really, I confessed.

The missing Somalis, he said slowly, you aren't following the missing Somalis?

That call was followed by another just days later. This time, it was a source in Buffalo and he was more specific. He told me in a roundabout way that the FBI was worried about the disappearance of Somali-American students from the Minneapolis/St. Paul area. While they were still checking, it looked like dozens of these young men had left the Twin Cities to join an Islamist militia called al Shabab.

The group was rather obscure at the time. Depending on who you talked to, it had—at a minimum—gossamer ties to al Qaeda. And the thought was that if dozens of Americans had actually signed up with the group, they could become part of the biggest wave of homegrown terrorists the United States had ever seen.

The young appeared to have been recruited, my source said, in much the same way a handful of Americans were recruited back in 2000, in what became known as the Lackawanna Six case.

Suddenly, I was very interested.

The Lackawanna Six were a handful of young Yemeni-Americans who grew up just outside of Buffalo. They were twenty-somethings. Young men without many prospects in the ghost of an old steel town. Opinions differed over whether the six young men were duped into training with al Qaeda more than a year before

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the 9/11 attacks or, more ominously, were the terrorist group's first attempt to put a full-fledged sleeper cell onto American soil. (I wrote a book about the case called *The Jihad Next Door: Rough Justice in the Age of Terror*.)

As a general matter, when it comes to fighting terrorism at home, the United States has been comparatively lucky. American immigrant communities are fairly well integrated, particularly when compared with countries like the United Kingdom. British intelligence has said it has something on the order of about 2,000 people living inside the UK who have trained in terrorist camps. In the United States the most pessimistic guess puts the total at maybe a couple of dozen. The concern is that that number is growing.

The Lackawanna Six were at the forefront of that trend. And I thought understanding them would help in spotting others who decided to embrace violent jihad. To research *The Jihad Next Door*, I spent several years following in the Lackawanna Six's footsteps. I went to the Yemeni villages from which their families came. I stayed in the same jihadi hotels in Karachi, Pakistan, where recruiters stacked the Lackawanna Six and other young Muslims like cord wood as they awaited safe passage to the training camps.

I crossed into Kandahar, Afghanistan, to see what was left of the al Qaeda camp where the Lackawanna Six and thousands of others had trained. And I stood where, just a few short years earlier, the Lackawanna Six actually met and spoke with Osama bin Laden just months before the 9/11 attacks. (Bin Laden conducted their exit interviews and was, they said, rather disappointed when they said that they had no desire to become martyrs.)

This Lackawanna Six template seems to easily apply to lots of these homegrown terrorism cases. The building blocks of recruitment haven't changed much since 2001 when the Lackawanna boys left western New York for Afghanistan. The al Qaeda recruiter who convinced the Lackawanna Six to travel and train used their religion as a brickbat. He made them doubt themselves and their commitment to their faith.

The same thing happened in Minneapolis. When I spoke to friends of the young men who had left for Somalia, the same themes emerged. Invariably the young men who left were described as somewhat lost or insecure. The men who stayed seemed comfortable in their own skins and, perhaps most importantly, at ease with being Muslim in America.

This issue of the *Journal of the National Security Forum* looks at precisely these kinds of questions in an effort to find new solutions to the problems that keeps U.S. officials up at night: why people decide to become terrorists and what national security officials can do to interrupt that process.

Initially, as investigators began tracking the missing Somalis, it appeared that the dozens of young men who left Minneapolis decided to travel to Somalia out of some sort of misplaced nationalism. The Ethiopian army invaded Somalia in 2006. The Bush administration backed the action, pouring weapons and military advisors into the country. To many in the Somali community in Minneapolis, it seemed like a modern day re-enactment of the Crusades. The Ethiopian army is largely Christian. Somalia, mostly Muslim.

Intelligence officials believe it became a powerful argument in convincing young Somalis in Minneapolis that it was their duty to help their Muslim brothers back home. But when the Ethiopians withdrew from Somalia at the end of 2008 and the young men kept disappearing, it was clear something else was at work. The recruiting technique morphed. It became about faith.

The first in a series of stories about missing Somali-Americans aired on National Public Radio in January 2009. Since that time NPR has aired dozens of stories on the disappearances, the arrests, the indictments, and the evolution of an intricate but informal network of militants who help their brothers-in-arms not only travel to terrorist training camps but also return home.

The return trip home to America has focused minds in the intelligence community and will be one of the key national security issues they face this year. Several of the young men who traveled to Somalia to train with al Shabab have returned to the United States. So far, none of them appear to have had any plan or inclination to attack the United States. But what about the dozens of Somali-Americans who are still on the battlefields of Somalia? What if their inclination—and al Shabab's plans—change?

Increasingly, al Qaeda has told its followers not to risk traveling aboard for training. It attracts too much attention, the group says. Tactics have changed and there is a new front in the battle against terrorism: small bore attacks. Guns and small explosives can be just as effective—as the Mumbai attacks demonstrate.

In trying to anticipate this kind of change in tactics, law enforcement has responded in kind. This will likely be the year of the sting—undercover operations that ensnare young Muslims who are intrigued by the idea of homegrown terrorism in this country and try to act upon it.

Young men like Mohamed Osman Mohamud, the Somali-born teenager who allegedly wanted to set off a car bomb at a Christmas tree lighting in Portland, Oregon. He allegedly tried to go overseas for training but couldn't afford it. The FBI got a tip about his wanting to attack a U.S. target and introduced him to an undercover agent. The agent eventually provided explosives and a car and a cell phone that was supposed to detonate a bomb. Mohamud was arrested after he tried to ignite the dummy explosives. He has pleaded not guilty to terrorism charges.

Officials tell me that they have other, similar operations up: stings that could affect all of America's Muslim communities—not just the Yemenis and Somalis—and have them crying entrapment. National security officials are grappling for ways to battle self-radicalizing violent jihadis in this country and minimize the damage that such a fight might inflict.

**EDITORIAL CARTOON COMPETITION WINNER:
FIRST PLACE, AUSTIN HENDRY†**



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PART I: TEN QUESTIONS

The *Journal of the National Security Forum* Board of Editors posed ten questions on national security to a group of national security law experts. Contributors were free to answer as many of the ten questions as they wished.

1. How should the new DNI address decentralized terrorism?
2. How should America address the threat of homegrown terrorists going abroad?
3. Is President Obama's use of Predator strikes in Afghanistan and Pakistan consistent with international law and international standards?
4. Is *Curtiss-Wright's* characterization of executive power correct?
5. Has President Obama improved President Bush's national security policies?
6. Should Khalid Sheikh Mohammed ever be brought to trial?
7. Is the threat posed by a nuclear-armed Iran as serious as the P5+1 (United States, United Kingdom, Russia, China, France, and Germany) represent it to be?
8. What is the next thing President Obama should do to improve America cyber security?
9. Does the United States have adequate safeguards to protect classified information used in domestic courts to prosecute terrorists?
10. What is the most important issue to American national security?
