# Threat Convergence

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# The Fund for Peace

## Tablighi Jamaat:
## The Premier Latent Network

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April 2008

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As the global security environment has shifted to incorporate threats emanating from broadly defined "stateless" or transnational entities as well as state-based actors, a great deal of research has focused on the decentralized, diverse networks used by today's terrorists, the most salient of these stateless actors. The linkages between individual terrorists, their resources, and their audiences exponentially increase the destructive potential of their strikes and are thus crucial to counter-terrorism efforts. Understanding terrorist networks would enable authorities to disrupt or otherwise inhibit these connections, and if not prevent terrorist attacks outright, then at least aide in diminishing their destructive potential.

Far from breaking down nefarious networks into easily comprehended components, the sudden rise in academic discourse has shown that they are often highly complex and rarely tangible. Perhaps more importantly, those that pose the greatest danger often make use of pre-existing and innocuous social, political, and economic networks. These "latent networks" often long pre-date the terrorist group itself and are overwhelmingly benign entities. Many are easily exploited by criminal actors wishing to mask dubious intentions, and the most attractive are in accordance with or otherwise circumvent states and state institutions. Not requiring any maintenance on behalf of the terrorist organization, latent networks represent a form of "terrorist outsourcing," allowing the terrorist to mitigate risk of detection by decreasing its overall operations. Examples of such networks range from simple familial or kinship relationships, to the informal *hawala* Islamic banking system, to the internet.

The paradigm, however, is arguably Tablighi Jamaat (TIJ), a secretive Islamic fundamentalist movement present in more than 100 countries and boasting an estimated 70 million adherents.[1] The TIJ resembles a revivalist movement more than a structured organization, but its secrecy and ties to Pakistan's lawless frontier have caught the attention of counter-terrorism officials around the world—as has the tendency for the TIJ to surface on the periphery of numerous terrorism investigations. Spanish authorities arrested fourteen men in the morning hours of January 19, 2008, preempting an alleged string of suicide bombings across Europe. Twelve of the men were of Pakistani origin, and a handful had ties to the TIJ. They join the ranks of other well-known Tablighi adherents, including members of the groups that orchestrated both Britain's 7/7 bombings and Madrid's 2004 transit system attacks, Jose Padilla, John Walker Lindh, and the "Lackawanna Six," in addition to millions of law abiding, peaceful Muslims around the world.

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[1] Fred Burton and Scott Stewart, "Tablighi Jamaat: An Indirect Line to Terrorism," Strategic Forecasting, Inc. (January 23, 2008) [Article Online] Available at:
http://www.stratfor.com/weekly/tablighi_jamaat_indirect_line_terrorism

Though not supportive of violence itself or recognized as a terrorist group by any Western government, the TIJ is a fundamentalist movement birthed from the same Islamic school that later spawned the Taliban and Harakat ul-Mujahideen. Other than a small cadre of religious scholars in Pakistan, the group lacks organizational structure; is extremely secretive; stresses individual adherence to a strict fundamentalist interpretation of Islam; and may possess the most active propagation imperative of any modern Islamic organization. Tablighi Jamaat is also vehemently apolitical, a facet that has traditionally exempted the movement from repression from even the most paranoid of governments, but today serves more to shield the group from accusations that it is an active supporter of terrorism. Yet, despite its innocuous demeanor, the empirical tendency for terrorist suspects to be connected to the TIJ, even if only peripherally, has generated an intense debate as to what role the movement plays in the so-called "lesser jihad." Eva Borreguero has called Tablighi Jamaat "a source of re-Islamization that provides an alternative to religious institutions."[2] Barbra Metcalf has equated the Tablighi focus on the individual and proselytism to civil society groups as mundane as Alcoholics Anonymous.[3] Yet others, such as Alex Alexiev, warn the TIJ may "represent an Islamist fifth column that aids and abets terrorism," and "has more to do with political sedition than with religion."[4]

While Alexiev's characterization could be considered overly alarmist, Tablighi Jamaat shares a more symbiotic relationship with the international jihad movement than Borreguero and Metcalf allow. As Western governments become more adept at tracking jihadists and foiling plots, they concurrently are failing to integrate Muslim immigrants, deal with the realities of globalization, or understand how U.S. foreign policy (and often, European domestic policy) is viewed by much of the Muslim world. Terrorist organizations readily exploit these deficiencies, and as counter-terrorism officials become more tactically adept, the advantages of latent Islamic networks such as Tablighi Jamaat in recruiting members, raising capital, and moving clandestinely will become ever more crucial. While intelligence officials are still struggling to penetrate the upper-echelons of al Qaeda's hierarchy (a testament to the leadership's own knowledge of networks and operational security), anecdotal evidence suggests the organization is very much aware of its tactical vulnerabilities and will increasingly look to pre-existing, legitimate networks to outsource aspects of its operations.[5]

Combating the advantages these networks provide international terrorists will not be easy. Those that are active and legitimate actors in civil society, including Tablighi Jamaat, not only circumvent state laws and controls; they are often protected by them. A fine line exists between countering the advantages they grant terrorists and repressing key segments of civil society. Pressing too hard on innocent groups risks validating bin Laden's claims of a Western war against Islam, and fanning the flames of what is increasingly coming to resemble a global insurgency. As counter-terrorism efforts become more sophisticated and more effective,

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[2] Quoted by Nicholas Howenstein, "Islamist Networks: The Case of Tablighi Jamaat," *USIPeace Briefing* (U.S. Institute of Peace, October 2006).

[3] Barbara Metcalf, "'Traditionalist' Islamic Activism: Deoband, Tablighis, and Talibs," *Social Science Research Council/After Sept. 11* [Article On-line, Accessed March 7, 2008] Available at: http://www.ssrc.org/sept11/essays/metcalf.htm.

[4] Alex Alexiev, "Tablighi Jamaat: Jihad's Stealthy Legions," *Middle East Quarterly* (Winter 2005).

[5] Craig Whitlock, "After a Decade at War With West, Al-Qaeda Still Impervious to Spies," *Washington Post* (March 20, 2008)

centralized and hierarchical terrorist networks will find themselves more and more vulnerable. Exploiting pre-existing networks, especially those protected by Western laws and values, will be crucial in the ever changing "War on Terror," and the role of these latent networks in international terrorism is only likely to grow.

## TABLIGHI JAMAAT: ORIGINS AND BELIEFS

The Tablighi Jamaat is an Islamic fundamentalist movement begun in India by Maulana Muhammad Ilyas. Similar to the more infamous Wahhabi sect started by Ibn Wahhab on the Arabian Peninsula more than a century before, Ilyas formed the Tablighi Jamaat to counter what he saw as the perversion of Islamic practice by a rising tide of Hindu influence. Like Wahhab, Ilyas' brand of Islamic revival evolved out of pre-existing Islamic teachings, in this case, those of the Deobandi madrassas of present day India and Pakistan. These same schools later bred such notables as the Taliban and Harkat ul-Mujahideen (HUT), and though the Tablighi Jamaat lacks the overt, violent ambitions of these organizations, the similarities in their fundamentalist message and political orientation are compelling. In the words of the preeminent American scholar on the Tablighi, Barbara Metcalf, "Deobandi movements were, in fact, alike in one crucial regard that set them apart from other well-known Islamic movements. What they shared was an overriding emphasis on encouraging a range of ritual and personal behavior practices linked to worship, dress, and everyday behavior."[6]

Though TIJ members reject the *salafi* label, and many *salafis* reject the Tablighi as innovators (as they do any group that does not follow their specific interpretation), both groups seek Islamic purity (religion devoid of cultural influence and innovation) by imitating the practices of the Prophet Muhammad and his immediate followers. For the TIJ, this has resulted in a strong emphasis on daily rituals and the equation of devotion with disciplined personal practice. Consistent with the Deobandi brand, the demonstrated devotion of the individual is preeminent, with little to no regard given for top-down imposition of Islamic norms on society. This "grassroots" focus of the Deobandi is notably absent in the Taliban, whose brutal application of *sharia* law in 1990s Afghanistan included a well-documented ethnic cleansing campaign against Shia Hazaras.[7] To Metcalf, the dissonance between Tablighi and Taliban efforts to restore Islam is not as glaring as is it initially appears, but is the product of the Deobandis' neglect of the political sphere altogether. Despite their differences in tactics, both groups view "politics is an empty 'box,' filled expediently and pragmatically depending on what seems to work best in any given situation."[8] In the case of the Taliban, pragmatism led its leader, the one-eyed Mullah Omar, to enter into countless alliances of convenience to defeat what he perceived to be the greatest threat to pure Islamic practice in Afghanistan: the unabashed lawlessness and moral deprivation of its people and its rulers.[9] For the Tablighi Jamaat, it has meant actively insulating the movement from politics all together. Politics and the outside world are seen as distractions, luring the Muslim faithful from the correct path. Tablighi leaders have repeatedly assured outsiders that members who cannot abstain from political discourse within the group are asked to

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[6] Metcalf.
[7] See Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban* (New Haven: Yale Nota Bene, 2001).
[8] Metcalf.
[9] Rashid.

leave the movement. By zealously abstaining from participation in politics as an organization, the TIJ has been able to exist openly in even the most paranoid of authoritarian states and spread unmolested throughout the Muslim world.

This ability to spread is a characteristic of the Tablighi Jamaat for which the group is well known and acts as a driving, unifying imperative within the movement. The Tablighi emphasize face-to-face, door-to-door proselytization, shunning propagation via print media and the internet, a practice that has led some to jokingly refer to them as the "Jehovah's Witnesses of Islam."[10] Members form *jamaats* (groups) of approximately ten members, which periodically embark on missionary trips of varying durations, setting up other autonomous *jamaats* wherever they can. Shorter missions target nearby Muslim communities perceived as susceptible to the Tablighi message, while longer missions frequently involve travel to foreign countries, where members stay in Tablighi-friendly mosques for months at a time. Particular inroads have been made among college students and troubled youths, but middle-class professionals are thought to be well represented as well, and a number of politicians have public connections to the TIJ, particularly in Pakistan.[11] For the most part, individual *jamaats* operate independent of one another or any centralized leadership, but frequently come into contact at periodic gatherings orchestrated around major Tablighi centers, such as Dhaka, Bangladesh; Bhopal, Pakistan; Dewsbury, England; and New York City. The largest of these gatherings occurs every November near the movement's doctrinal hub in Raiwind, Pakistan, drawing an estimated two million followers. The central mosque is also frequented by Tablighi members who have sufficiently proven their devotion and are invited to study at the mosque for approximately four months.

It is on these trips to Pakistan that authorities allege Tablighi members are approached by extremists to train in militant camps in Pakistan's lawless frontier. Many are thought to accept, but because no membership records exist and Tablighi members can join and leave the movement as they please, reliable estimates of Tablighi participation in militant activities are non-existent.[12] Harakat ul-Mujahideen (HUM), a Kashmir based terrorist organization best-known for its hijacking of an Air India passenger jet in 1998 and murdering a bus load of French engineers in Karachi in 2002, is thought to be the exclusive creation of TIJ members with assistance of Pakistani intelligence services.[13] As the Taliban fought its way across Afghanistan in the 1990s, support from Deobandi madrassas in Pakistan was invaluable, and Tablighi students were likely among the scores the schools sent across the border to aid Mullah Omar's jihad against Afghanistan's warlords.

While this is evidence enough for scholars such as Alex Alexiev to indict Tablighi Jamaat as a propagator of terrorism, it is unclear to what extent the formation of HUM or support for the Taliban were actions sanctioned by Tablighi leadership. Very little central authority exists

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[10] Paul Lewis, "Inside the Islamic Group Accused by MI5 and FBI," *The Guardian* (August 19, 2006), 1.

[11] The membership of prominent (and in some cases infamous) Pakistani politicians, such as former dictator Zia ul-Haq, is frequently cited as evidence that despite its claims to be apolitical, TIJ has a definite and dangerous political motivation. TIJ's political neutrality applies to the organization itself, and nothing bans individual members, representing themselves, to enter into politics.

[12] Alexiev.

[13] Ibid.

Tablighi Jamaat: The Premier Latent Network

outside of a *shura* council of elders in Raiwind, and the role the council plays in radicalizing its adherents (directly or indirectly) is a mystery thanks to its strict avoidance of the public sphere. Tablighi elders' traditional quietism can be explained both as being in accordance with the declared apolitical stance of the TIJ and as an effort to avoid the jurisprudence debates that have long plagued Islam.[14]  It could also be viewed as a shrewd attempt to deflect attention and criticism from the organization.  Until recently, the difficulty in penetrating the Tablighi's diffuse and disjointed network and its apolitical front had been enough to stymie public examination of the organization behind the movement.  Today, this same secrecy is drawing the suspicion of law enforcement authorities.

The decentralized nature of Tablighi Jamaat means that little doctrinal uniformity exists beyond six basic principles that stress the oneness of god, piety, participation in a deterritorialized Islamic community, and individual expressions of devotion through daily practices.  At its heart, however, the Tablighi Jamaat is a fundamentalist movement, and like many fundamentalist movements it frequently finds itself criticized for the conservative, undemocratic beliefs spread by its members.  According to Roy, "They instruct their members to avoid entanglement in local politics, to promote the veiling of women, to close coeducational schools, and to ban social interaction with non-Muslims, all the while insisting on prayers and piety."[15]  Without passing normative judgment on these practices, it is easy to see how such a movement could come into conflict in Western societies, particularly in European states already struggling to incorporate growing Muslim populations.  Taken together, these practices are meant to demonstrate a member's devotion through his/her chosen identity, but critics allege groups like the TIJ encourage Muslims already disenchanted with Western society and searching for an identity to disassociate from the society in which they live in favor of a transnational, self-imagined construct readily manipulated by jihadists.  Youths, especially those with criminal pasts, and the generally disenchanted are estimated by law-enforcement and counter-terrorism officials to be the Tablighi Jamaat's prime recruitment pools, as they are for al Qaeda as well.  "They targeted young people," commented Gilles Kepel, a prolific author on Islam and Islamic fundamentalism, on the Tablighi spread in Europe, "who were lost in their identity, were involved in delinquency, drinking, petty crime, and proposed reorganizing their life."[16]

Offering such wayward youths direction should be a positive endeavor, but in the West Tablighi Jamaat has drawn criticism primarily on two fronts: first, for its rapid and visible spread, and second, for being what one French official termed an "antechamber for fundamentalism."[17]  Lacking hard numbers, only anecdotal evidence exists hinting at the pervasiveness of the TIJ in the Western world.  One FBI official characterized the group's presence in the United States to be "significant,"[18] while estimates of Muslims that have "passed through" the TIJ in France range from 50,000 to 100,000.[19]  The group's plans to build "mega-mosques" in Abbey Mills and Dewsbury, befitting of England's rapidly growing Muslim population, have repeatedly

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[14] Lewis.

[15] Oliver Roy, *Globalized Islam:  The Search for a New Ummah* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 235.

[16] Craig S. Smith, "Muslim Group in France is Fertile Soil for Militancy," *The New York Times* (April 28, 2005).

[17] Alexiev

[18] Susan Sachs, "A Muslim Group Draws New Scrutiny in U.S.," *The New York Times* (July 14, 2003).

[19] Smith.

started uproars. Orginal plans for the Dewsbury Mosque, since scaled down, would have been capable of holding 70,000 people and dwarfed the country's largest church.[20]  Of course, objections to public displays of religiosity in Europe are something altogether different from allegations that the TIJ is indoctrinating the newest generation of Islamic terrorists. While estimating the TIJ's precise numbers at any one point in time is difficult, gauging its influence in radicalizing its members is far more contentious.


## TABLIGHI JAMAAT AND INTERNATIONAL JIHAD

Tablighi members—and many Western scholars—are quick to denounce any tie between the organization and terrorism, often citing the group's focus on individual religiosity over societal transformation and vocal disdain for politics.  Those members implicated in terrorist plots, they argue, represent a miniscule percentage of TIJ adherents.  This may be true, but when viewed as the percentage of terror plots involving people somehow connected to the Tablighi, the correlation is unmistakable.  Some see this correlation as evidence Tablighi Jamaat is consciously driving the spread of jihadism across the Western world.[21]  A recent article in the *Telegraph* entitled "Army of Darkness," alleges: "No limit was placed on the potential pool of [TIJ] converts, and so, implicitly, the ultimate objective was the Tablighisation of the world. The group, for all the mystique that surrounds it, has been diligent, and, today, with a growing presence in the West, it is viewed by anxious critics as a Trojan horse of Islamic fundamentalism."[22]  Alex Alexiev is even more pointed in his assertion that "Tablighi Jamaat has long been directly involved in the sponsorship of terrorist groups," linking the group with the Harakat ul-Mujahideen of Pakistan, the Islamic Salvation Front of Algeria, and the Afghan Taliban among others.[23]  While Tablighi members have been present—and may have at various times comprised large portions of—these groups, this casual relationship does not equal direct TIJ support.  The secrecy of the TIJ and the subsequent dearth of open source material make drawing such linkages problematic and suggest they are more the product of Islamophobia than scholarship and investigation. Similarly, the lack of a terrorist designation by the United States or any European state suggests classified intelligence also does not corroborate these claims of direct involvement.  The absence of data does not mean linkages do not exist, but does suggest that the relationship between the TIJ and international terrorism is not as straightforward as Tablighi critics have thus far proposed.

The fundamental error scholars such as Alexiev make in their assessment of Tablighi Jamaat is their implicit assumption that it is a coherent organization controlled by a shadowy central authority in pursuit of a pre-determined political objective.  More accurately, Tablighi Jamaat is an ideological movement connecting a widespread international *network* of loosely connected,

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[20] Jane Perlez, "A Battle Rages in London Over a Mega-Mosque Plan," *The New York Times* (November 4, 2007).
[21] Daniel Pipes, "The London Markaz," (November 27, 2005) [Article Online] Available at:
http://www.danielpipes.org/blog/541
[22] William Langley, Roya Nikkhah, James Orr, David Bamber and Massoud Ansari, "Army of Darkness,"
*Telegraph* (August 21, 2006) Available at:
http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2006/08/20/ntablig20.xml&page=1
[23] Alexiev.

autonomous groups with varying ties to each other and the central body. While evidence of *direct* TIJ support for international terrorism is circumstantial at best, exploitation of the TIJ movement by external, illicit actors is irrefutable. This is not to absolve the TIJ organization of culpability. The amenability of TIJ's fundamentalist message—turning converts away from their surrounding societies while simultaneously failing to provide even a modicum of political guidance—combined with the decentralized and undisciplined structure of the organization are within the power of the TIJ leadership (as small and weak as it may be) to address. The nature of policies meant to counter the vulnerabilities presented by the TIJ will hinge in large part on public perceptions regarding the *movement's* tendency to radicalize its followers and the *organization's* degree of culpability in this process. It is thus imperative for the law enforcement community to increase its understanding of Tablighi Jamaat, both as a movement and as an organization, and how it relates to international terrorism.

As the popularity of Islamic fundamentalist groups grow, so too does criticism that their neutrality on political issues deemed important to their adherents leaves the most disillusioned adrift and vulnerable to radicalization. This problem is particularly acute in regards to the TIJ, which convinces inductees to identify with a transnational Islamic community and guides them in every aspect of daily life—from personal grooming to how to lie while sleeping—except how to cope with the outside world. Like many other fundamentalist movements—Islamic or otherwise—the Tablighi see secular societies as corrupting agents, poisonous to true Islamic practice and ultimately, salvation. For Islamic fundamentalist movements, the tactic of societal withdrawal has a strong historical foundation, originating with the Prophet Muhammad, who demanded his followers reject the dominant and unjust social system of 7th century Arabia. This requirement was no less radical or threatening to the dominant social order then as it is today. According to Reza Aslan, "…conversion to Muhammad's movement meant not only changing one's faith, but also cutting oneself off from the activities of the tribe; in essence, removing oneself from the tribe."[24] Withdrawal was necessary because Muhammad was fomenting a social and political revolution the likes of which would make any Western liberal proud, radically egalitarian for the prevailing social norms of the time, stressing equality and equity among *all* people (except pagans, notably).

Muhammad also went to great lengths to manage the interactions of his new community and the peoples around it; the surrounding society was anything but ignored. Especially in the context of the "Global War on Terror," this rather glaring doctrinal omission on the part of the TIJ leaves members searching for guidance—guidance Islamic radicals are more than willing to provide. Western counter-terrorism officials allege this was the case in the radicalization of former Tablighi member John Walker Lindh, the infamous "American Taliban," who became a member of the Tablighi Jamaat in 1999, shortly after converting to Islam. According to Lindh's lawyer, "John's experience of the Tablighi is that they are what the say they are. They are apolitical. And he found that an extreme position that he didn't find particularly attractive. He wanted guidance as to political and spiritual issues."[25] Lindh ended up leaving the TIJ while studying at their central mosque in Raiwind, first undergoing training with Harkat-ul-Mujahideen, and

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[24] Reza Aslan, *No God but God: The Origins, Evolution, and Future of Islam* (New York: Random House, 2006), 46.
[25] Quoted in Sachs.

eventually fighting on the side of the Taliban in 2001. Western officials fear this case is exemplary of a conscious recruitment process by militant organizations, including HUM and al Qaeda, seeking out Tablighi adherents sensitive to their political program. Pakistani intelligence claims that from 1989 to 2002 alone, 400 American Tablighi members trained in militant training camps in Pakistan.[26]

The standard Tablighi defense, that the organization is concerned with the religiosity of the individual and not with the implementation of *sharia* law or the reestablishment of the Caliphate, ignores the movement's repeated and documented role—likely unintended—in framing international politics as a dialectic struggle remarkably similar to that advanced by the salafi-jihad intelligentsia. While salafists and Tablighis tend to regard each other with equal amounts of distain, a great deal of similarity exists between them nonetheless. Oliver Roy lumps Tablighi Jamaat together with the larger salafi movement and explains: "'Salafi' no longer refers to a global political project to reform and modernize Muslim societies. The idea is to ignore the West. Salafism is now associated with a conservative program of purifying Islam from cultural influences (from traditional Muslim societies as well as from the West)."[27]

This imperative to insulate Islam from outside influence is a byproduct of a growing disillusionment with the former preeminent "ism," Islamism, a "brand of modern political Islamic fundamentalism that claims to re-create a true Islamic society, not simply by imposing *sharia*, but by establishing first an Islamic state through political action."[28] As scholars such as Roy, Kepel, and Scheuer have so definitively pointed out, the Islamist experiment has repeatedly and very publicly failed. Far from proving that Islam is inseparable from (or, more aptly put, superior to) politics, Khomeini's Iran, Turabi's Sudan, and Omar's Afghanistan all seemed to prove that politics instead trumps religion. None of the movements represented by these men realized their international aspirations or lived up to their idealized self-conceptions. On the heels of their success in expelling the Red Army from Afghanistan, for example, the Arab and Afghan mujahideen promptly turned on one another, brutally destroying the moral façade that had united them against the Soviet occupation. As Abdel Wahab al-Effendi later lamented, "their disagreements had nothing to do with religious matters but were concerned with glory and power! …. And what are we to say when they lead to the ruin of a country and the perdition of the faithful, turning people away from religion by disfiguring the image of Islam and of the men that profess it!"[29]

Coinciding with the stark failure of the Islamists has been a dismal record of states and political elites attempting to co-opt influential ulema. This is especially true of Arab authoritarian regimes (Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Egypt) and more recently the United States. Saudi Sheihk bin Baz rubber stamping Kind Fahd's decision to allow U.S. troops on Saudi soil during the 1991 Gulf War is a prime example of the former, while a recent *New York Times* article detailing U.S.

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[26] David Kaplan, "Made in the U.S.A." *U.S. News & World Report* (June 2, 2002).
[27] Roy, 233.
[28] Ibid. 58.
[29] Abdel Wahhab al Effendi, "Al tajriba al sudaniyya wa azmat al haraka al islamiyya al haditha: durus wa dalalat," *Al-Quds al Arabi* (December 29, 1999) Translated and quoted in Gilles Kepel, *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002), 362.

support for "moderate" clerics evidences the later.[30]  Together, these developments have contributed to discrediting both the Islamists and much of the traditional Islamic leadership that, until recently, served to focus and guide the masses, usually for the sake of stability.  A new form of fundamentalism, led by groups such as Tablighi Jamaat, has filled this void, spreading an austere interpretation of Islam that focuses on the religiosity of the individual and ignores issues of the state altogether. These "neo-fundamentalists" still see "religion as a code of life" and their interpretation as the only true Islam, but differ from fundamentalist movements of the past by delinking their Islamic community from any earthly territory.[31]  Their ummah is entirely imagined, and to remain unadulterated must be insulated from all cultural influences, Western and non-Western alike.  Many U.S. and European security officials see this as the first step toward developing a dialectic "us versus them" or "good versus evil" worldview, and a gateway to the militancy espoused by bin Laden and his cohorts.[32]  In fact, this protectionist attitude dovetails nicely with al Qaeda's view of the world, and according to the former head of the CIA's bin Laden unit, Michael Scheuer, lends itself to bin Laden's claims that this ummah, imagined or otherwise, is under attack.

> The words of the main Islamist leaders have been a rhetoric of insularity directed at America and the West; they amount to an argument that you have your civilizations and lands, stay in yours, stay out of ours, and leave us alone…. [The] West's rhetoric of imposing elections, parliaments, and women's rights is perceived as a universal and immense threat to Islamic insularity, and as such it is an oral recruiting poster for al-Qaeda.[33]

The disillusionment with traditional Islamic authorities, in Scheuer's view, has led to the great Islamic reformation pundits and commentators in the West have long sought, but instead of moderating and secularizing Islam, this reformation seems to be mimicking that which afflicted Christianity centuries ago.  Empowered by groups such as Tablighi Jamaat, individual Muslims are seizing the reins of jurisprudence and interpreting Islam, the Koran, the Hadith, and the Sunnah for themselves.  This narrative is remarkably similar to that posited by Michael Oren in describing mid-eighteenth century Christian fundamentalists in America:  "Old Calvinist notions of predestination were cast off and replaced by a more indigenously American confidence in the individual's ability to save him or herself through vigorous devotional actions.  Yet Christians were to seek not only their own redemption but also that of others, by guiding them to spiritual rebirth."[34]  Bin Laden has seized upon and reinforced this trend, criticizing clerics deemed to be in league with authoritarian rulers and dismissing them as illegitimate arms of the state.  To al Qaeda's theologians, discrediting this traditional class of moderating voices allows not only for individual ownership of Islam, but of jihad as well.  According to Dr. Madawi al-Rashid, "With bin Laden, Islam has become an individual project beyond the restrictions of the jurisprudence scholars or of political authority….  This privatization and individualization [of Islam] has

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[30] Eric Schmitt and Thom Shanker, "U.S. Adapts Cold War Idea to Fight Terrorists," *The New York Times* (March 18, 2008).

[31] Roy, 244.

[32] Sachs.

[33] Michael Scheuer, *Marching Toward Hell: America and Islam After Iraq* (New York: Free Press, 2008), 148-149.

[34] Michael B. Oren, *Power, Faith, and Fantasy: America in the Middle East: 1776 to the Present* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2007), 85.

broken the shackles of the local identities, be they sectarian, tribal, or regional."[35]  No longer needing respected clerics to interpret the message of Mohammed, Al Qaeda theologians argue individual Muslims also do not need clerics to validate what is played out before their eyes every night on al-Jazeera:  Islam is under attack by the West and it is their duty to defend their religion and their brethren.  "Do not let yourselves be deceived," proclaims al-Qaeda's emir in Afghanistan, "by the fraudulent claim that no jihad is permitted without the sanction of an imam."[36]  Whereas bin Laden once carefully couched the actions of his organization as being within the limits prescribed by well-respected clerics, he and his lieutenants see such justification as largely unnecessary today.

Hindered in their ability to operate training camps in ungoverned spaces or conduct coordinated complex attacks by the U.S.-led War on Terror, transforming the jihad from an al Qaeda-led enterprise into a mass movement is crucial to jihadists.  Even before the loss of the Afghan training camps, jihadi strategist Abu Mus'ab al-Suri had agitated for such a revolution.  In his expansive treatise posted on jihadi web forums in January 2005, al-Suri pragmatically scrutinized the jihadi effort and condemned the centralized, hierarchical elements of modern terrorist groups such as al Qaeda.  The ideal structure of the jihad, in al-Suri's view, was to have no structure at all.  Instead, the jihad should take the form of a mass movement, galvanizing the entire ummah with as little guidance from centralized leadership (such as al Qaeda) as possible.  The first Palestinian *intifada*, in which Palestinian youths pelted Israeli soldiers with rocks and grabbed the attention of the world without the prompting of Arafat or the PLO, was al-Suri's ideal model for such a popular uprising.  In al-Suri's international *intifada*, centralized leadership would provide only general strategic guidance to focus the efforts of the masses, and aide autonomous jihadi cells with training via the internet.  Though al-Suri has openly criticized bin Laden's leadership in the past and there would seem to be little love lost between the two men, faced with ever increasing operational hurdles, al Qaeda seems to have adopted al-Suri's doctrine.

The potential role of movements like Tablighi Jamaat in this paradigm is rather obvious.  Like al-Suri's idealized conceptualization of jihad, the TIJ is composed of small, autonomous cells spread throughout the Islamic world.  These cells may have little interaction with each other, and the central leadership is as irrelevant to their day-to-day operations as it is secretive.  The *shura* council and its regional representatives may not incite their followers to take up arms against non-believers but neither do they condemn those who exploit Tablighi doctrine, organizational structure, or its neutral relationships with state authorities.  According to the F.B.I.'s deputy chief of its international terrorism section, evidence already shows that "Al Qaeda used [the TIJ] for recruiting, now and in the past."[37]  Members of the "Lackawanna Six" pretended to be TIJ members in an  unsuccessful attempt to travel to jihadi training camps in Pakistan and Afghanistan without drawing the scrutiny of law enforcement officials, a tactic allegedly

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[35] Dr. Madawi al-Rashi, "Islam Today: From the Jurisprudence Scholars to the Men of the Cave," *Al-Quds Al-Arabi* (February 6, 2006), Translated and quoted in Michael Scheuer, *Marching Toward Hell: America and Islam After Iraq* (New York: Free Press, 2008), 162.

[36] Mustafa Ahmad Abu al-Yazid, quoted by Abdul Hameed Bakier in "Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan Urges Professionals to Join Mujahideen," *Terrorism Focus* 5 No. 11 (March 18, 2008), 2.

[37] Sachs.

encouraged by their al Qaeda handler.[38]  Other groups, such as al-Salafiyah al-Jihadiyah in Morocco, have also sought to exploit the TIJ's secrecy, freedom of movement, and lack of public self-defense by suggesting their members "hide their identity on the one hand and influence these groups and their policies on the other."[39]

Yet, of even greater importance to al Qaeda is the TIJ's ability to frame the world in a dialectic; Islamic and un-Islamic; good and bad; us and them; worldview as an unfettered, legitimate and protected part of Western civil society.  Sachs references Khaled Abou El Fadl, a professor of Islamic law at U.C.L.A, in warning that "You teach people to exclude themselves, that they don't fit in, that the modern world is an aberration, an offense, some form of blasphemy….  By preparing people in this fashion, you are preparing them to be in a state of warfare against this world."[40]  Not all Tablighi members will gravitate towards terrorism and violence, but this foundation ensures its members will represent a pool of recruits far more susceptible to radicalization than their cohorts.  The refusal of what Tablighi leadership that does exist to pass judgment on the actions of its members or the exploitation of its movement compounds this reality, and while some may contend that this unfairly implies intent on the part of the leadership, by refusing to condemn (or even acknowledge, in many cases) the terrorist acts of its members the TIJ acquires a level of agency in the process.  The presence of terrorists and terrorist recruiters within the TIJ ranks is not solely due to the decentralized nature of the TIJ as an organization, it is also a product of the organization's unwillingness to affect discipline within its ranks, a fault that lies squarely on the shoulders of the Tablighi leadership in Raiwind and its emirs abroad.  In the context of the "War on Terror," and when an organization is repeatedly exploited to conduct terrorist attacks, a legitimate case can be made that political neutrality is a misnomer and a political act in itself.

Finally, the potency of the TIJ as a latent network, already substantial thanks to its potential for radicalization and its ability to connect pockets of violent extremism in Southeast Asia to much of the rest of the world, is all the more acute because state efforts to combat the vulnerabilities presented by the network, if too abrasive, run the risk of becoming radicalizing agents in themselves.  In the absence of evidence implicating the TIJ in acts of terrorism as an organization, Western states are particularly hamstrung in their ability to counter the advantages such networks provide terrorists.  No doubt, the potential dangers embodied by the TIJ have led many to view the movement as a whole as a nefarious ideology bent on instigating and propagating terrorism.  However, equating Tablighi Jamaat to such socially derisive movements as *wahhabism* or *takfir w'al-hijra* glosses over the true nature of the movement, and misses the legitimate role it plays in many societies.  Potential for complicity in terrorism does not equal intent, and as long as the evidence against TIJ remains circumstantial, it will rightfully continue to enjoy the protections offered to legitimate actors in liberal Western civil societies.  What measures can and cannot be adopted to counter the TIJ's role in international terrorism are thus largely dependent on the level of culpability the organization bears for the actions of its members and state authorities comprehension of the innate characteristics of both the movement and the

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[38] Daniel Friedman, "Tablighi Jamaat Dossier," *Center for Policing Terrorism* (May 12, 2005) available at: http://www.cpt-mi.org/pdf/TablighiJamaatDossier.pdf

[39] Moroccan authorities, quoted in *Ashraq al-Aswat* (March 25, 2003).

[40] Sachs.

organization that benefit terrorists and hinder the responses of the state. Determining culpability would be a highly controversial and drawn out process only likely to occur at the state level. In the mean time, only an understanding of latent networks and Islamic fundamentalism that is simultaneously broad and deep will offer avenues to combat their advantages to terrorists.

## CONCLUSION

As counter-terrorism efforts become more refined, the role of latent networks in terrorist operations is only likely to increase. The legitimacy—and in the case of those acting as a part of civil society, the protection—enjoyed by these networks means they cannot be attacked the same way a purely illicit network could. Latent networks allow terrorist organizations to outsource key aspects of their operations, allowing the group to utilize the network only when needed and without having to exert time and resources to maintain it, or participating in an activity likely to increase the risk of its detection.

Due to the number of ways it can potentially aide international terrorists and the protection it enjoys in liberal societies, Tablighi Jamaat is particularly problematic in this regard. Lacking any evidence tying the TIJ to willful participation in terrorist activities, the debate over its culpability essentially surrounds the extent to which organizations and movements are responsible to prohibit their exploitation by nefarious actors to threaten civilian life. Lacking evidence of direct involvement in terrorism, the Tablighi network can no more be "attacked" or disrupted by law enforcement authorities than can the internet. What differentiates the TIJ from the internet, however, is that a level of agency exists on behalf of the Tablighi leadership, as small at it may be, that cannot exist in inanimate networks. Effectively engaging this leadership will be crucial to undermining terrorist efforts, though the threat is unlikely ever to evaporate completely. If the works of jihadi theologians such as al-Suri are a proper indication of what is to come, the use of latent networks is the wave of future, and learning the subtle nuances of each will make or break future counter-terrorism efforts.