



**Urban Warfare Analysis Center**

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# **Threat Analysis: Hamas and Hezbollah Sleeper Cells in the United States**

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“No aspect of collection requires greater consideration, or holds more promise, than open source information; transformation of our approach to open sources is critical to the future success of adaptive collection.”

Director of National Intelligence  
Vision 2015 Report

## Scope Note

This report outlines the history of Hamas and Hezbollah activities in the United States and analyzes the threat of Hamas and Hezbollah sleeper cell attacks on American soil. This report bases its judgments on open source research and subject matter expertise. Public testimony before the Senate Intelligence Committee and court documents related to prosecution of Hamas and Hezbollah activities in America are cornerstones of this report. The authors extend their gratitude to fellow Urban Warfare Analysis Center (UWAC) analysts James Broun and Josh Lyons, as well as individuals from the Washington Institute for Near East Policy and the Olin Institute at Harvard University.

## Executive Summary

The most likely future attack by a Hamas or Hezbollah sleeper cell within the next two years would come from a rogue group, barring an aggressive invasion of Iran or Palestine by U.S. forces that operationalize Hamas and Hezbollah groups. Rogue cells often lack the capabilities to launch a sophisticated and synchronized attack, suggesting their actions would be more spontaneous, opportunistic, and smaller in scale.

The characteristics of individual groups frame the likely triggers, tactics, and targets used in potential future sleeper cell attacks. An *infiltration cell* describes a foreign trained cell entering the United States, legally or illegally, to perform an attack when ordered by the organization's leadership. A *homegrown cell* is a collection of radicalized Americans that band together to act in the name of Hamas or Hezbollah, likely without consent from or communication with the leadership of either group. A *hybrid cell* involves a trained infiltrator entering the United States to join forces with homegrown radicals, producing the most lethal combination of outside expertise and local knowledge. An *independent cell* is a rogue group that breaks away from the strategic directive of the main organization; for example, Hezbollah members crossing the Mexican border to plan an attack contrary to the wishes of Hezbollah leaders.

Two trends are acting to intensify the threat of homegrown and hybrid cells, namely prison radicalization and Internet indoctrination. The lack of qualified imams for prison ministry allows unqualified, radical imams to mentor incarcerated criminals and steer them toward a radicalized worldview. Likewise, the Internet provides a forum for individuals to self-radicalize and connect with extremists anywhere in the world.

Hamas and Hezbollah differ from Al Qaeda in their reluctance to directly attack the United States. Nonetheless, certain "trigger events" could inspire sleeper cells or rogue groups to take action. Most likely triggers for Hamas include American intervention in Palestine, Syria, or Iran. Other triggers include a shift to a radicalized jihadist ideology, which would put Hamas strategically in line with Al Qaeda. Less likely triggers for Hamas include the imprisonment of Hamas members in the United States and the rise in influence of Hamas's aggressive military wing – the Al-Qassam Brigade.

For Hezbollah, the most likely trigger for sleeper cell attacks in the United States is an American attack on Iran or Lebanon. Increased U.S. hostility toward Iran, particularly in the wake of tension about Iranian nuclear capabilities, could trigger a preemptive strike by a Hezbollah sleeper cell. Like Hamas, a change in strategic direction toward global jihad could also lead to a more aggressive posture against the United States.

- Homegrown and independent cells lack the strategic boundaries of the more institutionalized leadership of Hamas and Hezbollah. Therefore, the actions of such groups are more unpredictable.
- Suicide attacks would be the most likely tactic by Hamas, Hezbollah, and homegrown and independent cells. Non-suicide improvised explosive device (IED) attacks and combined, coordinated attacks are less likely but possible relative to the skill sets of the sleeper cell.
- A straight-line projection of targets based on past behavior suggests Hamas and Hezbollah would likely attack Israeli and Jewish targets. Historically, Hamas has targeted civilian locations, such as supermarkets and buses. Hezbollah has emphasized attacks on Israeli military and security forces.

## I. Characteristics of Hamas and Hezbollah Cells in the United States

### *Current Hamas Activities Inside the United States Focused on Financing and Recruiting*

Hamas activities within American borders have primarily been limited to two goals: raising money to finance operations in the Middle East, and promoting causes among the Muslim community and potentially sympathetic non-Muslim groups.<sup>1</sup> In 1993, individuals connected to Hamas organized a meeting in Philadelphia to discuss Hamas's role in the United States. The participants concluded that the freedoms of the United States could be used to raise money for operations in Palestine and mobilize intellectual support at universities through student activism. During this meeting, the participants concluded that it was not in their best interest to "cause troubles in the American theater."<sup>2</sup>

- Hamas has used front charities, such as the Holy Land Foundation (HLF), to secure funds for the organization in Palestine.<sup>3</sup> Since September 2001, the U.S. government has cracked down on domestic fundraising for terrorist organizations abroad, including the HLF.

Hamas's leadership has expressed conflicting opinions on whether to open a military front against the United States. The spiritual leadership of Hamas has maintained that it has no plans to target America or Americans. Statements affirming containment of Hamas activities within Israel and Palestine, however, are often countered by statements from Hamas members promoting attacks against Americans. For example, before his assassination in 2003, Sheikh Yasin echoed Osama

Hamas Logo



Source: Wikimedia Commons

bin Laden's declaration that any Muslim should kill any American or Jew.<sup>4</sup> Al-Rantissi, Yasin's successor, promised that Hamas would strike back against Israel's "sponsor," America. Members of Hamas's military wing, the al-Qassam Brigades, have also declared America a target, but the political wing of Hamas quickly denounces such expressions.<sup>5</sup>

- In the early 1990s, some young American Hamas members attended an Islamic convention in Kansas City, Missouri. They were divided into small clusters for lessons in setting car bombs, creating improvised explosives, and throwing hand grenades. Youths were also taught specialized training, including interrogation and execution of collaborators, surveillance, and political organizing.<sup>6</sup> This training occurred before Hamas adopted suicide bombings as an operational tactic in 1993.
- There have been few reported instances of Hamas-planned attacks on American soil. In 2003, the Israeli government captured a Canadian-Palestinian named Amed Akal in Gaza. Israeli officials claimed that Akal was trained by a Hamas operative to assassinate a senior Israeli official in New York and any American and Canadian Jews that interfered. If Akal was indeed sponsored by a Hamas operative, this would likely be an incident of an independent, rogue cell operating outside of Hamas's operational parameters. Akal told Israeli authorities that he was to perform the attack in the name of Al Qaeda.<sup>7</sup> Hamas denied any involvement with Akal.<sup>8</sup>

"Of all the Palestinian groups, Hamas has the largest presence in the U.S. with a robust infrastructure, primarily focused on fundraising, propaganda for the Palestinian cause, and proselytizing. Although it would be a major strategic shift for Hamas, its U.S. network is theoretically capable of facilitating acts of terrorism in the U.S."

Robert Mueller

Director, Federal Bureau of Investigation

Testimony Before the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, 2005

### ***Hezbollah Activities Inside the United States Focused on Illegal Fundraising***

Hezbollah has engaged in sophisticated criminal operations and fund-raising measures inside the United States to purchase weapons for fighters in Lebanon. For example, Lebanese émigrés connected to Hezbollah purchased cigarettes from North Carolina, shipped them to Michigan in rental vans, and sold the cigarettes at a price

scheme, which ran from 1995 to 2000, generated over \$7 million in net profit. Groups in Charlotte and Detroit cooperated to exploit American laws, demonstrating the ingenuity and situational awareness of Hezbollah affiliates.<sup>9</sup> The Charlotte cell even recruited American drivers to haul cartons of cigarettes to Michigan, which suggests they are willing to use American citizens to advance operations.

Hezbollah Flag



Source: Wikimedia Commons

One Hezbollah affiliate, Yousef Kourani, was smuggled across the Mexican border and joined the Dearborn, Michigan, community in the early 1990s. The U.S. government convicted Kourani for organizing propaganda meetings at his home and for raising thousands of dollars that he repatriated back to Lebanon for the purchase of high technology equipment.<sup>10</sup> In addition to Kourani's fundraising, Hezbollah has been implicated in other counterfeit schemes in New York to raise money for operations, suggesting that Hezbollah has viewed the United States as a market to procure funds for war with Israel.

- Unlike Hamas, Hezbollah has demonstrated a willingness to perform terrorist acts beyond the Middle East, reportedly attacking U.S. military targets in Lebanon and Israeli targets in Argentina.<sup>11</sup> Hezbollah, however, denies planning the 1983 suicide bombing of the Marine barracks in Beirut, Lebanon.<sup>12</sup>
- Counterterrorism officials reported in 2006 that Hezbollah has made a strategic decision to refrain from attacking the United States, but may consider an attack if Iran were threatened.<sup>13</sup> Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Special Agent Thomas Fuentes, head of the FBI's International Operations, stated that Hezbollah cells in the United States were fundraising cells and not attack-planning cells.<sup>14</sup>
- In 2006, former FBI Director Robert Mueller confirmed that Hezbollah supporters have attempted to cross the Mexican border into the United States. Although the FBI caught these operatives, the operation demonstrates that Hezbollah seeks to plant operatives inside the United States.<sup>15</sup>
- In September 2007, Texas Homeland Security Director Tom McCraw claimed that additional terrorists affiliated with Hamas and Hezbollah had been captured trying to cross the Mexican border.<sup>16</sup>

"We assess Lebanese Hezbollah, which has conducted anti-U.S. attacks outside of the United States in the past, may be more likely to consider attacking the homeland over the next three years if it perceives the United States as posing a direct threat to the group or Iran."

Mike McConnell

Former Director of National Intelligence  
Written Testimony to U.S. Congress, 2007

## II. Different Kinds of Sleeper Cells

The type of sleeper cell suggests the possible parameters that frame the triggers, tactics, and targets employed. The four cell breakdowns discussed below – infiltration, homegrown, hybrid, and independent – roughly categorize the possible cell identities. Hamas and Hezbollah can incorporate aspects of all four categories.

### *Infiltration Cells*

Infiltration cells are defined as Hamas or Hezbollah operatives from abroad entering the United States as sleeper cells. For example, the September 11th hijackers were infiltration cells. Future infiltration cells could travel legally to the United States using student visas, or they could travel

illegally through the Canadian or Mexican borders. Infiltration cells would have direct contact with and instructions from Hamas and Hezbollah operatives in the Middle East. Infiltration cells represent the traditional definition of a sleeper cell, as they are activated on the orders of the group’s leadership.

- Hezbollah has successfully created an operational infrastructure in Venezuela and the tri-border region of South America, which encompasses the shared border between Brazil, Argentina, and Paraguay. Training camps in the tri-border area could produce cells ready to move north into the United States across the Mexican border. In addition, Hezbollah could cooperate with narcotics dealers to share smuggling routes into the United States, leading to easier infiltration for Hezbollah operatives from South America.<sup>17</sup>
- Hezbollah uses free email accounts for tactical planning and to send and receive information to operatives.<sup>18</sup> Internet communication gives infiltration operatives a connection to planners and leaders outside the United States.



Possible paths to the United States, including operations in South America crossing

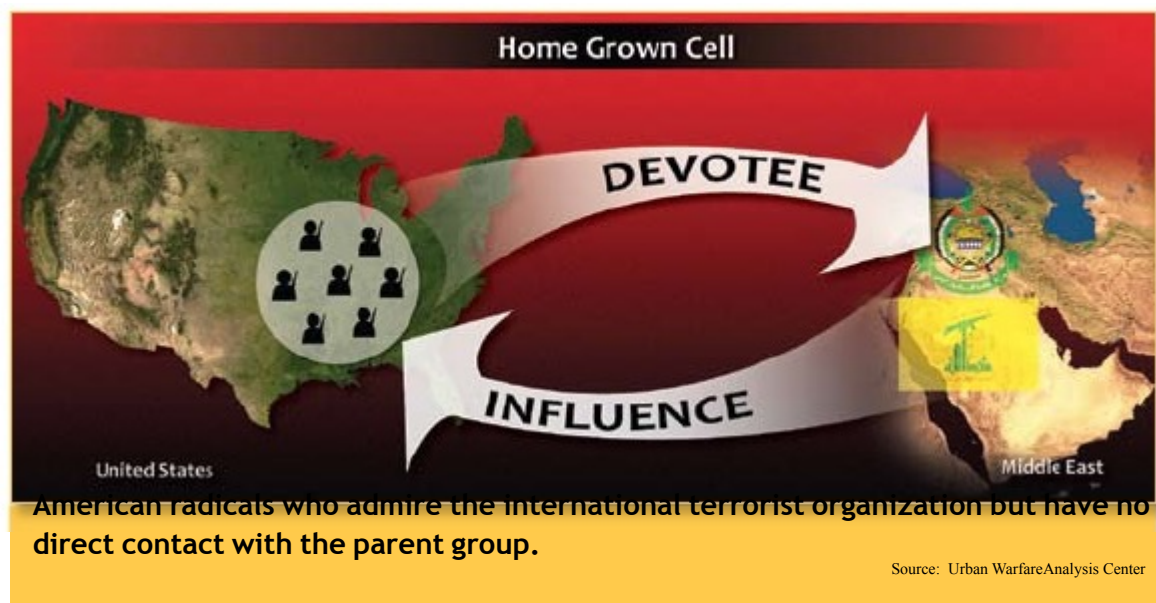
Source: Urban Warfare Analysis Center

## Homegrown Cells

Homegrown cells are composed of radicalized American Muslims that coalesce to form their own organization, possibly independent of explicit direction from Hamas or Hezbollah. These cells adopt Hamas or Hezbollah as “sponsors,” and act in their name without consideration of the larger political goals of the organizations. This is often referred to as “leaderless resistance.” These cells can be composed of radicalized first or second generation American Muslims, or radicalized converts to Islam, such as Richard Reid or Jose Padilla, both of whom converted to Islam while in prison.

Compared to infiltration cells, homegrown cells are more likely to be rogue cells that emerge autonomously in various locations. Homegrown cells could have different targets, tactics, and strategic goals than infiltration cells. The homegrown cell’s motivation to act on behalf of Hezbollah or Hamas could be different from the motivation of infiltration sleeper cells, which would likely attack only by direct order. Since their core culture is American, homegrown cells often possess a keen understanding of the operational environment. On the other hand, homegrown cells that originate separately from the formal organizational structure may lack the training and support that infiltration cells possess.

- An example of a homegrown extremist cell is the Beltway sniper duo of John Allen Muhammad and Lee Boyd Malvo, who killed 10 people in the Washington, D.C. area in 2002.
- Homegrown cells acting as a “leaderless resistance” allow leaders of Hamas or Hezbollah to distance their groups from direct blame for an attack. Conversely, they can also claim credit for a successful attack.
- Monitoring the many decentralized homegrown cells stretches the resources of U.S. security services while increasing the ability of those groups to sustain prolonged underground operations.<sup>19</sup>





## The Threat of Internet Radicalization

Terrorist organizations have embraced the Internet as a tool to disseminate propaganda. The Internet blurs the national, regional, and ethnic boundaries that previously limited the reach of a group's ideology or message. Both Hamas and Hezbollah have websites that distort regional and global events to support their causes. In addition, individuals passionate about Hamas and Hezbollah have created computer-simulated virtual worlds on the Internet that dramatize the Palestinian experience, such as the "Palestinian Holocaust Memorial" in the virtual game *Second Life*.<sup>20</sup>

Internet radicalization can contribute to the creation of homegrown cells. Emotional multimedia presentations have proven to inspire individuals to act on behalf of the jihadist cause. For example, a post on the Global Islamic Front in 2003 contributed to the radicalization of the Madrid bombers, and two German jihadists in 2006 were inspired by online radicals to plant bombs on German trains in Dortmund and Koblenz.<sup>21</sup>

One of the starkest examples of the dangers of Internet radicalization is Nick Reilly, a young, English convert to Islam. Reilly, previously diagnosed with a mental illness, watched jihadist videos that exploited the suffering of Palestinians and Chechens. While online, he connected with Pakistani jihadists who persuaded him to construct a suicide belt and martyr himself for jihad. In May 2008, authorities captured him as his bomb failed to detonate in a restaurant bathroom in London.<sup>22</sup>

- Internet radicalization could potentially turn Hamas and Hezbollah into global jihadist organizations. These groups have limited control over the actions of jihadists inspired by their message or successes – real or perceived – against Israel. If enough homegrown cells become radicalized and commit successful attacks, they could wrest ideological control over the majority of group members, especially if Israel acts militarily against either group in the future.

### Hybrid Cells

Hybrid cells incorporate primarily homegrown extremists with some foreign-born and trained infiltrators, one of which is presumably the leader of the cell. Hybrid cells employ a "star" or "hub" terrorist network, meaning that the trained infiltrator acts as a central node, connecting to other nodes on foreign soil. This method compartmentalizes information about the terrorist or jihadist network, which makes penetration by U.S. security services more difficult. By employing one node to operate in a hybrid cell, the ability to plan and support an attack is easier.<sup>23</sup> Because infiltration cells lack local knowledge of the operating environment, homegrown jihadists aid infiltrator operatives with a greater understanding of American culture. Likewise, foreign-trained infiltrators present hands-on tactical expertise that homegrown cells often lack. Hybrid cells pose the greatest danger to homeland security, capturing the strengths of infiltration and homegrown cells while mitigating some of the weaknesses of each.

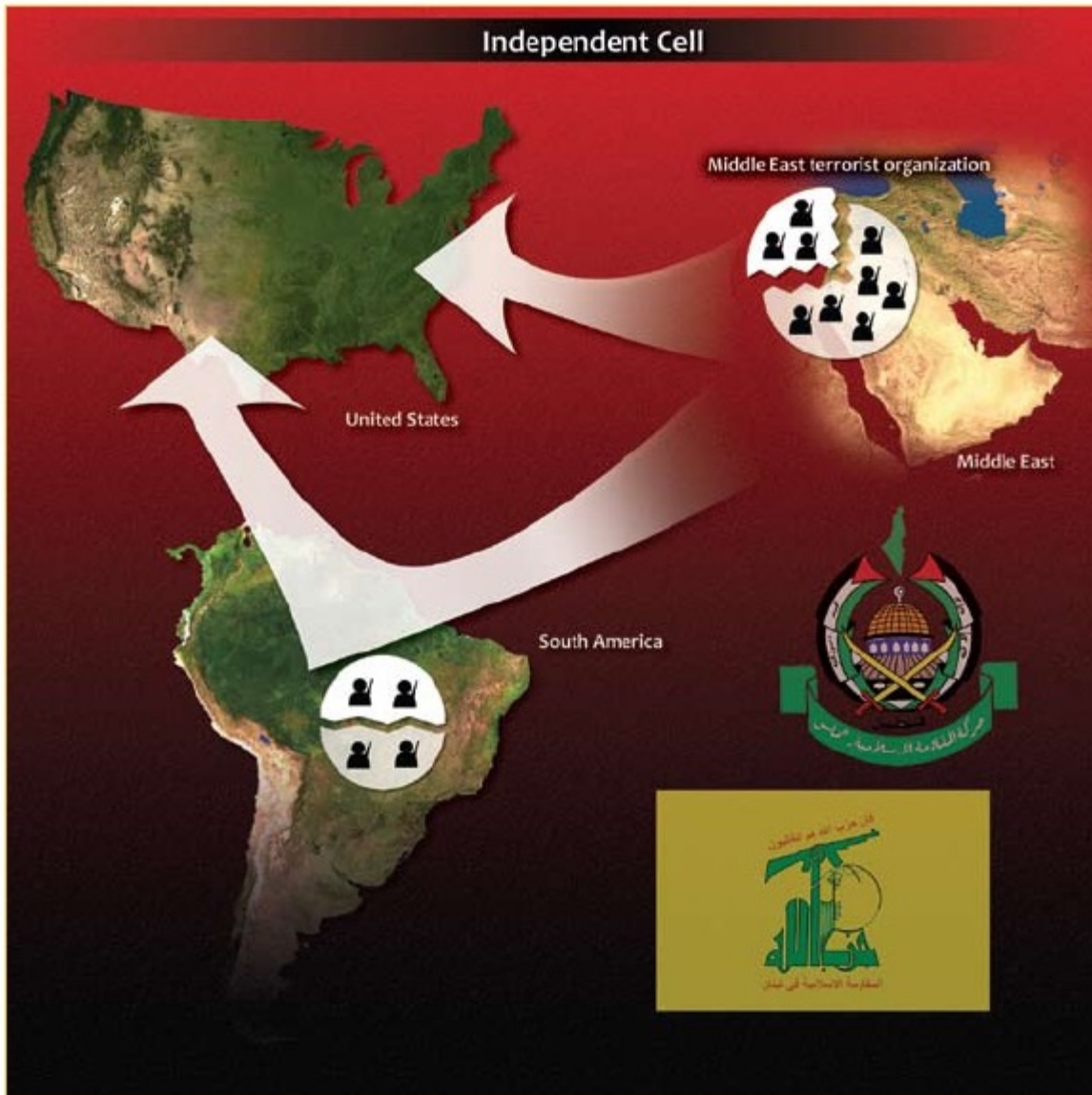
- The *Jama'at al Fuqra* (JAF) organization is an example of an expanded hybrid cell. In 1980, Pakistani cleric Sheik MubarakAli Gilani formed the American wing of the JAF in New York. Gilani professed sending members of his primarily African-American congregation to Afghanistan and Pakistan for guerilla warfare training.<sup>24</sup> Between 1980 and 1990, members of JAF have been convicted of assassinations and fire-bombings in North America, although the group has desisted from a campaign of violence since the early 1990s.<sup>2</sup>



## Independent Cells

Independent sleeper cells can be variants of infiltration or hybrid cells since they are separate from the parent organization. Independent cells could include former members of Hamas or Hezbollah who break from the operational command of the organization to plan an attack on the United States. They may already be in the United States, impatient and eager to attack without consent from the sponsor. Like homegrown cells, the independent cell is a rogue entity that operates outside the parameters of the strategic goals of the organization. What may trigger an independent cell to attack could be different from what may trigger an infiltration cell. Likewise, the capabilities of the independent cell may be different from an infiltration cell, as the latter would have organizational momentum supporting the attack.

- Hamas has a history of suicide bombing cells operating independently of political directives by the organization. For example, a Hamas suicide cell broke an Israeli-Hamas ceasefire in August 2003. The political wing of Hamas denied the attack, while the al-Qassam military wing released a martyrdom video of the attacker.<sup>26</sup>
- An independent cell may wish to provoke an American retaliation in the Middle East in order to rally the Islamic world behind the fight against the United States.



Rogue groups break away from the parent organization to conduct unsanctioned attacks.

Source: Urban WarfareAnalysis Center

### Prison Radicalization

A review of open source information suggests that Islamic radicalism is growing in the United States. “Radicalization” refers to the process in which people adopt extreme views, including beliefs that violent measures must be taken for political or religious purposes.<sup>27</sup> Radical Islamist leaders and groups who promote attacking the West are winning the hearts and minds of “homegrown” Americans to conduct violent attacks on U.S. soil.

Along with mosques, U.S. prisons are the primary environment where Islamic radicalization is spreading. The FBI dubbed prisons a “fertile ground for extremists” in 2005 because of the relative ease in exploiting a prisoner’s conversion to Islam and his or her socio-economic status

Continued on next page.

and placement in the community upon release.<sup>28</sup> Two groups of concern involved in prison radicalization include inmates and those who enter correctional facilities with the intent to radicalize and recruit.<sup>29</sup>

A shortage of Muslim religious leaders to serve the demands of U.S. inmates has likely led to increased radicalization in prisons.<sup>30</sup> Federal law requires prisons to provide worship services to Muslim inmates, who comprise roughly 6 percent of the federal prison population, or 12,000 inmates.<sup>31</sup> The Federal Bureau of Prisons currently employs only 10 Muslim chaplains. This shortage allows unqualified, radical imams who incite violence to spread their jihadist views to inmates – some of whom have been identified as Al Qaeda chaplains seeking recruits.<sup>32</sup> Radical imams or groups are also able to supply inmates with pro-jihad Islamic literature that promote attacking Western governments. The jihadist message is passed on to other inmates, those in other prisons if the Muslim convert is transferred, and back into free society upon the prisoner's release.<sup>33</sup>

- Designated a sponsor of terrorism by the Treasury Department in 2004, the al-Haramain Islamic Foundation distributed an estimated 8,000 to 10,000 *Noble Qu'ran* books to inmates in U.S. prisons. The *Noble Qu'ran* advances a radical interpretation of the Quran and uses footnotes to highlight the importance of jihad. Another pro-jihadist book supplied by the same group and distributed to approximately 1,000 inmates exhorted Muslims to “teach your children the love of justice and revenge from the unjust, like the Jews and the tyrants.”<sup>34</sup>

Radical Islamists who successfully infiltrate the U.S. prison system target men who are convicted of violent crimes and who likely have little or no loyalty to the United States. These Muslim teachers and mentors practice a radicalized form of Islam divergent from the orthodox doctrines of Wahhabism and Salafism, commonly called “prison Islam.” Most converts, however, are not cognizant of the denomination they are practicing.<sup>35</sup>

- Eighty percent of those who seek faith in U.S. prisons convert to Islam.<sup>36</sup>
- Examples of Islamist terrorists who have been recruited in Western prisons include Richard Reid, also known as the “Shoe Bomber,” and Jose Padilla, better known as the “Dirty Bomber.”

### III. Key Differences Between Al Qaeda and Hamas, Hezbollah

Hamas and Hezbollah have differed from Al Qaeda by not explicitly endorsing or sponsoring terrorist attacks on American soil. Al Qaeda's end goal is to reinstate the Caliphate across the traditional Islamic world in the manner of the early followers of Muhammad. Al Qaeda's strategy is to force the United States to withdraw from the Middle East, which would weaken Israel and the nationalistic Arab states that have parceled out the former Caliphate. The September 11th attacks were intended to advertise Al Qaeda's capabilities to the Muslim world, punish the American economy, and provoke the United States into a war with Islam, so that the Arab-Islamic world would unite to rally against all Western influence and aggression. Hamas

and Hezbollah, in contrast, pursue political objectives that counter the creation of a global Islamic government for all Muslims. Both Hamas and Hezbollah have invested considerable resources in becoming successful political entities in Palestine and Lebanon, respectively. Provoking an American military response does not advance their current political ambitions. Simply put, Hamas and Hezbollah are at war with Israel; Al Qaeda is at war with the United States.

Al Qaeda also differs from Hamas and Hezbollah according to organizational outlook. Al Qaeda embraces the “franchise” approach to operations. Al Qaeda does not come to the jihadist; the jihadist comes to Al Qaeda. Radicalized individuals approach Al Qaeda with attack plans, and Al Qaeda decides to sponsor and support plans as it chooses. For example, Osama bin Laden and Ayman Zawahiri did not plan the September 11th attacks; Khalid Sheikh Mohammad devised the plan and presented it to Al Qaeda leadership. Thus, Al Qaeda has historically supported the schemes of homegrown cells and independent jihadists. Hamas and Hezbollah, however, are “top-down” in their approach to recruitment and planning, likely due to the geographic restrictions and recruiting pool of the organizations. Hamas has a cadre of leaders in Syria that devise the strategy of the organization, while Hezbollah is led by a religious jurist wing and a military wing.

- If Hamas or Hezbollah were to attack the United States, the attacks would likely result from a fundamental ideological shift toward Al Qaeda-like jihad or from the relinquishing of operational control to smaller organizations affiliated with – but independent from – the greater party structure.

## IV. Deterrents and Triggers for Sleeper Cell Attacks in the United States

In the past, open confrontation against the United States did not advance the strategic goals of either Hamas or Hezbollah. Fear of an American military response against Lebanon or Iran – the primary supporter of Hamas and Hezbollah – has been the primary deterrent against attacks on American soil. Unlike Al Qaeda, Hezbollah and Hamas have regional ambitions based on securing political control in the Middle East. Both have sought to marginalize Israel on the world stage. Despite rising anti-American sentiment across the globe, terror attacks within U.S. borders would likely forfeit the effect of influence operations by both groups aimed at marginalizing Israel. Hamas and Hezbollah would alienate themselves and mitigate sympathy in the Middle East conflict. Nonetheless, sleeper cell attacks within the United States are possible. The subsequent sections analyze the possible triggers, tactics, and targets of Hamas, Hezbollah, homegrown, and independent sleeper cells within the United States.

### A. Triggers for Hamas to Attack the United States

#### *American Military Intervention in the Middle East*

A U.S. invasion of Gaza or Iran would be the most likely stimulus to a Hamas response within the United States. A U.S. attack against Iran, which indirectly funds Hamas through Hezbollah, could provoke Iran to utilize Hamas’s presence on U.S. soil to threaten retaliation. Additionally,

a U.S. attack on Syria threatens the security of the Hamas leadership secluded in Syria, which could instigate retaliatory attacks by Hamas supporters.

- Overt American materiel support for an Israeli incursion of Gaza or strike against Iran could also inspire sleeper cells to attack. Likewise, sharply increased American support for Fatah in Palestine that jeopardizes the continuing existence of Hamas would be another trigger.

### ***Change in Strategic Ideology for the Hamas Leadership***

A game-changing trigger for Hamas sleeper cells could be a shift from emphasizing regional jihad in the Middle East to global jihad in the mold of Al Qaeda. Hamas has focused on defeating Israel by attacking Israel. Al Qaeda's approach has been to weaken Israel by forcing the United States to withdraw from the Middle East. If Hamas adopted a similar outlook, sleeper cell attacks could become more likely.

Other factors that could change Hamas's strategy would be the increased number and relative influence of fatwas by radicalized imams promoting the destruction of the United States. Over the past 15 years, Hamas has used schools, mosques, and the media to indoctrinate Palestinian children with a hatred of Israel, Jews, and the United States. The first generation of this indoctrination is now leaving school or entering higher education, especially religious training. Some of those exposed to this propaganda effort will lead mosques and thus possess the religious authority to inspire followers to action. This generation of imams radicalized as children could pass fatwas that encourage striking against the United States, which could provoke sleeper cell attacks.

- Although Hamas is a unified organization in which the military wing is ostensibly inseparable from the political and social service wings, individuals within the al-Qassam Brigades have promoted attacks against the United States despite disavowals by political leaders. If the al-Qassam Brigade wrests control of the overall Hamas strategy, Hamas could become more willing to attack the American homeland.

### ***Crackdown on Fundraising in America***

A deterrent to a Hamas terror attack in the United States has been the lucrative funds Hamas has generated from its operations within America. If Hamas is unable to exploit the American economy to finance its activities in the Middle East, a deterrent to sleeper cell attacks would be removed. In November 2008, for example, Hamas officials affiliated with the HLF were convicted of funneling over 12 million dollars to Hamas.<sup>37</sup> Since these individuals from the HLF are related to Hamas officials abroad, their imprisonment could inspire a rogue element to retaliate against the United States.

## ***B. Triggers for Hezbollah to Attack the United States***

### ***Triggers for Hezbollah Are Similar to Hamas***

The most likely triggers to incite Hezbollah sleeper cell attacks would be an American attack on Lebanon, Iran, or Syria. Threat of an American attack against these targets could also lead to a preemptive strike by sleeper cells. If an attack, or imminent threat of an attack, is perceived by

Iran, it could use Hezbollah operatives on U.S. soil to conduct attacks on America at little cost to Iran. Thus, using infiltration cells to attack the United States would play to Iran's advantage, attempting to keep U.S. security personnel preoccupied with attacks away from Iranian soil.

### ***Change in Global Strategy***

Hezbollah's potential transformation toward global jihad is different from Hamas. Because Hezbollah is a Shiite organization, it can be influenced by the dictates of the imams, sheikhs, and jurists that guide the Shiite faithful. Sheikh Fadlallah has had a strong influence on the religious justification of Hezbollah battle tactics, such as suicide bombings. If there is a change toward more radical religious leadership – for example, Shiite imams that believe a global conflagration would bring the divine rule of the Mahdi over mankind – that change could influence the strategic direction of Hezbollah.

- Another influence would be Iranian pressure to attack the United States from within in the case of hostilities between the United States and Iran.

### ***C. Triggers for Homegrown and Independent Cells***

Triggers for homegrown and independent cells would be less predictable and more diverse. Independent cells are not bound by the strategic vision and mandates of the parent organization. These cells can be led solely by the personal motives of individual leaders, such as the rewards of martyrdom and the ideals of global jihad. Whereas Hamas and Hezbollah proper may be confined by the deterrents and strategic goals listed above, independent cells are not confined by such parameters. The rogue element, whether independent cells or homegrown extremists, is a dangerous threat that makes predictive analysis difficult.<sup>38</sup>

A potential trigger for radicalized individuals to perform suicide attacks could be a steep downturn in the American economy. Suicide terror martyrdom may offer debt-riddled and recently unemployed individuals a “noble” escape from suffering. Similar to the National Socialists in depression-era Germany, jihadists blame “Zionists” and Jews as scapegoats for global downturns in the economy that lead to individual debt and misery. A suicide bombing of a synagogue or a bank on American soil could channel economic hopelessness into hope for eternal life.

## **V. Most Likely Sleeper Cell Tactics**

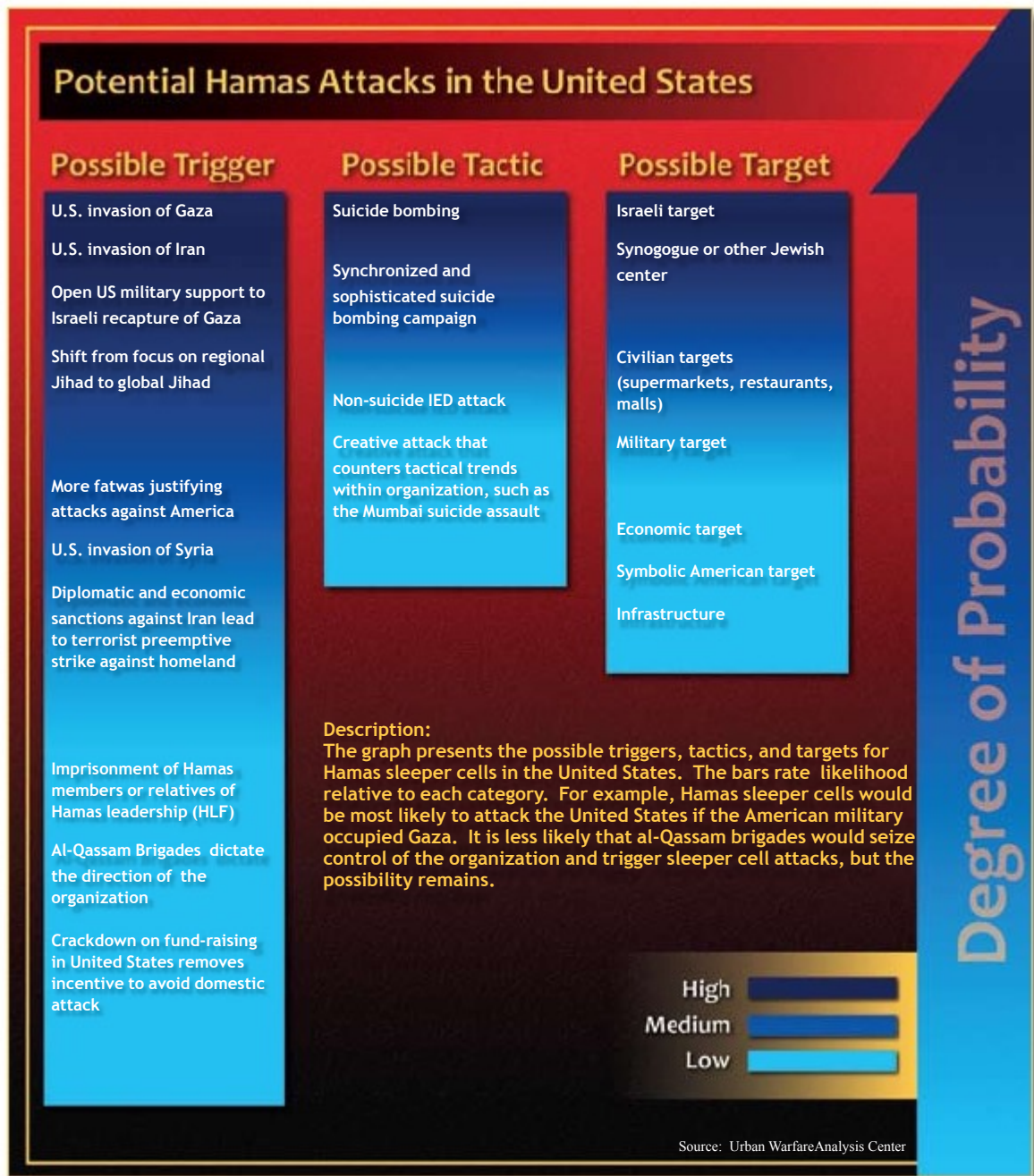
### ***Suicide Bombings Most Likely***

A series of suicide bombing attacks by cells dispersed across the homeland would be the most likely tactic used by sleeper cells, based on a review of past Hamas and Hezbollah tactics. Suicide bombs are inexpensive “smart bombs” that conceal the involvement of the sponsoring organization. The average Palestinian suicide bomb costs approximately \$200, and suicide bombers can usually detonate the bomb close to the intended target.<sup>39</sup> The death of the perpetrator protects the organization, as authorities are unable to interrogate the bomber to reveal the support network. A suicide attack would achieve the objective of destroying the desired target, yet allowing the organization to publicly disavow the attack in order to protect its image

or mitigate justification for counterattacks. For example, U.S. intelligence analysts believe with strong certainty that Hezbollah was responsible for the bombing of the American embassy and Marine barracks in Beirut in 1983, yet Hezbollah has denied both attacks.<sup>40</sup>

### Hamas Suicide Attacks

Hezbollah trained Hamas in the use of suicide bombings in 1992, after Israel expelled the Hamas leadership to Lebanon.<sup>41</sup> Since 1993, Hamas has performed 57 suicide attacks, the majority of which occurred after the second Intifada began in October 2000. In addition, Hamas popularized the cult of martyrdom, as suicide bombers became celebrities in Palestinian culture.

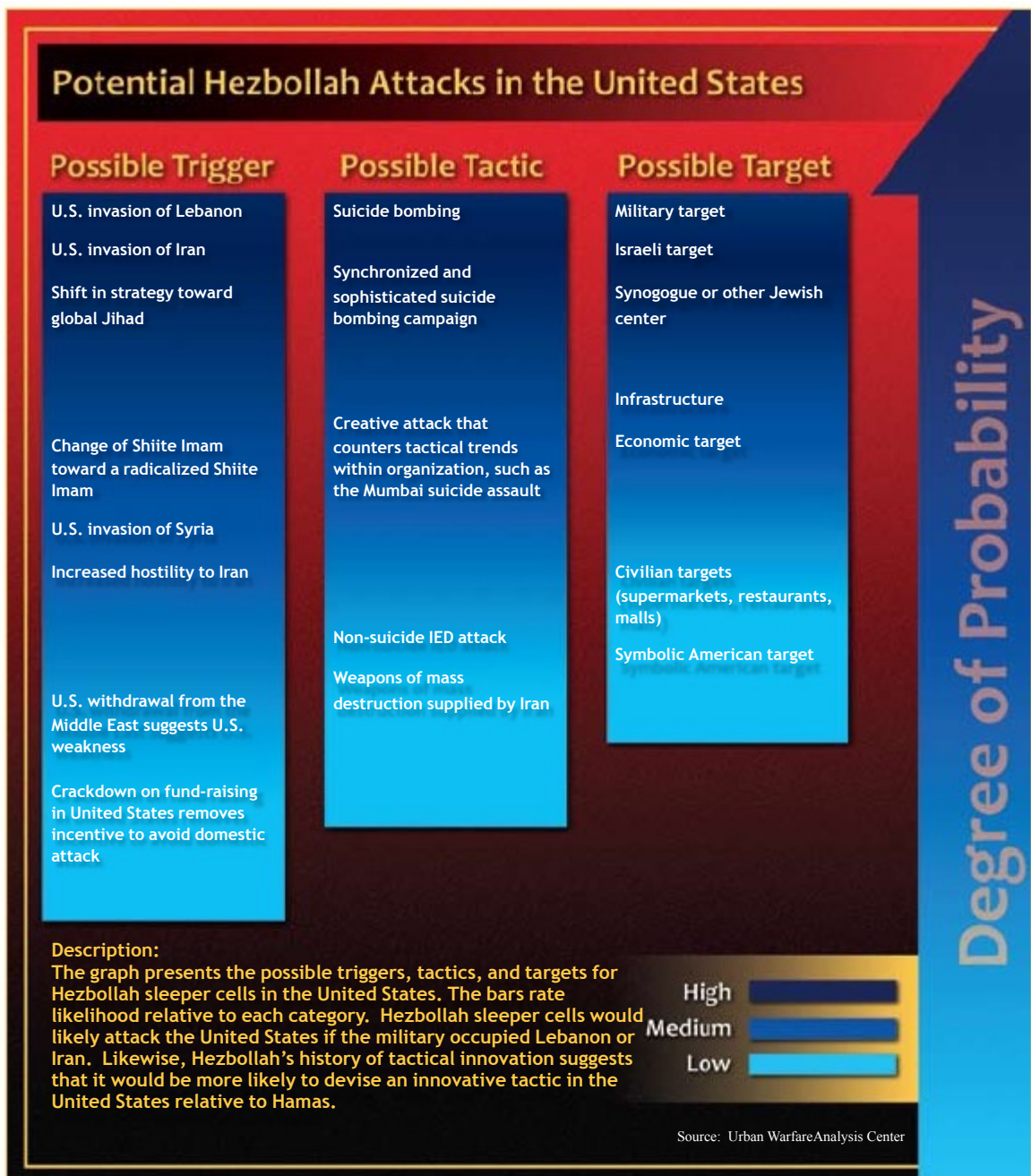




## Hezbollah Suicide Attacks

Hezbollah originated the tactic of suicide bombing in its current form in 1982, but it has not participated in such an attack since the bombing of the Khobar Towers housing complex in Saudi Arabia in 1996. This was also the last time a Shiite organization sponsored an attack. Hezbollah’s spiritual leader, Sheikh Fadlallah, limited the religious sanction of suicide attacks to the goal of national liberation from Israel. Fadlallah explicitly condemned attacks against buildings and infrastructure. He also condemned the September 11th attacks by Al Qaeda. Hezbollah suicide attacks within the Lebanese conflict have targeted Israeli and coalition military forces.

- Barring a change in strategy or approach, a Hezbollah suicide attack on American soil would require a provocative trigger and would likely target the American military.



## Suicide Attacks by Homegrown and Independent Cells

Homegrown jihadists may view suicide attacks as a way to vindicate their status as a *mujahideen*, or “one who partakes in jihad.” Psychologically, some Muslims believe a new convert must overcompensate for his past life as a non-devout Muslim through extreme measures. Additionally, some converts may feel that they are socially unaccepted by followers of Islam for not being “pure” enough. Thus, they resort to suicide bombing as the ultimate declaration of their faith. Many of the prominent suicide attacks of the past decade – the September 11th attacks, the Madrid bombs, and the London tunnel bombing – were executed by individuals who were raised as secularized Muslims or Christians. If homegrown cells are composed of American converts or Muslims radicalized in America, those cells could act similarly to the ones that have executed attacks in the past.



## ***Likelihood of Other Non-Suicide Attacks***

Non-suicide IED attacks lack the inherent advantages of suicide attacks, including deniability, low cost, and the small number of people required. In addition, the capture and prosecution of those responsible for domestic non-suicide car bombings, such as the World Trade Center attack in 1993 and the Oklahoma City bombing in 1995, aid in deterring non-suicide IED attacks. Non-suicide IEDs and car bombs, however, could still be factors if deniability is not a deterrent. Homegrown operatives may use vehicle-borne IED bombings outside government buildings or against civilian targets in order to advertise their respective causes as “American Hamas” or “American Hezbollah.” Otherwise, an infiltration or hybrid sleeper cell IED attack would require sophisticated planning to protect the identity of those involved.

## ***The Threat of Innovative Attacks***

An innovative attack is one that deviates from an organization’s past behavior. Hezbollah has established itself as a creative, innovative force in modern terrorism and irregular warfare. If Hezbollah was to attack the U.S. homeland, it is likely it would act based on a well-conceived plan that meets its strategic goals. It is unlikely that Hezbollah would perform an attack in America without a strong probability of success; a surprise attack fits that agenda.

- Likewise, Hezbollah poses the threat of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) because of its Iranian connection. Hamas is also linked to Iran, but that relationship is not as deeply rooted as Hezbollah-Iran ties. Iran would likely trust Hezbollah to perform a WMD attack over Hamas.

# **VI. Most Likely Sleeper Cell Targets**

## ***Infiltration and Hybrid Cells Seek Strategic Influence***

Infiltration and hybrid cells formed by Hamas or Hezbollah would be an investment by the sponsoring organization. It is likely that Hamas and Hezbollah would expect a significant “return on investment” from the attack, whether the target is a military base, a financial institution, or a symbolic landmark. On the other hand, homegrown cells that act in the name of Hamas or Hezbollah could be more reckless and attack small-scale targets without apparent justification. The homegrown cells or rogue elements may “think globally” but attack in simplistic ways, like using suicide vests at restaurants. It is unlikely that Hamas or Hezbollah would plan such an attack under current circumstances.

## ***Common Hamas, Hezbollah Threat to Jewish and Israeli Targets***

Since both Hamas and Hezbollah are engaged in a bitter struggle against Israel, and past behavior suggests they would seek Israeli and Jewish targets in the United States. Attacking Jewish and Israeli targets would attempt to link American support for Israel with punishment and retaliation. For example, sleeper agent Akal was planning to assassinate an Israeli official in New York in 2003 when he was arrested by Israeli security personnel.<sup>42</sup>

- The target would be influenced by the trigger. If either organization undergoes a strategic change that leads to global jihad, American infrastructure and population centers would also become viable targets.

## ***Threat to Civilian and Military Targets***

Hamas has an extensive history of suicide attacks and gunfire assaults on Israeli civilians. It has rationalized the slaughter of Israeli civilians by implying that Israel's democracy, mandatory military commitment, and tax policies implicate all Israeli citizens in violence against Palestinians. Hamas can transfer the rationales for attacking Israeli civilians to attacking American civilians, using its skill at planning suicide attacks in Israel for attacks on American civilian targets.

Hezbollah, in contrast, has primarily limited its operations to military targets. Barring unforeseen triggers that would cause Hezbollah to deviate from past practices, it would likely target military bases within the United States. Although attacks on civilian targets are possible, they are less likely relative to other targets.

Independent cells and homegrown cells would likely be less strategic in their target selection, probably choosing easy targets relative to individual group abilities. Allegiance to Hamas or Hezbollah may be superficial, and these cells could act as "lone wolves" independent of the parent organizations. This makes their behavior even more unpredictable. Homegrown cells composed of radicalized Americans would be more likely to perform a suicide attack against civilians in otherwise ordinary locations, such as supermarkets or restaurants. For example, the English man mentioned above planned to detonate a suicide bomb in a restaurant.

- Civilians would be the most likely target of homegrown extremists because of their vulnerability and the possible psychological motivation for the attacks; many extremists harbor hatred for other members of their societies. Striking out against fellow American citizens could meet a psychological impulse that radicalization merely reinforced.

## **VII. Implications for Homeland Security**

Under current conditions, the chances of a sanctioned attack by Hamas and Hezbollah sleeper cells in the United States are slim.<sup>43</sup> Several factors combine to reduce the strategic benefit of such attacks and deter Hamas and Hezbollah leaders from expending scarce resources to prepare for such an event. Those factors include:

- Threat of American military retaliation
- Loss of support among moderate Arab governments and global sympathizers
- Little perceived gain for primary war against Israel
- Threat of continued or increased crackdown on domestic activities, especially fundraising

Nonetheless, a number of possible circumstances could shift the threat posture. Each of these factors has implications for homeland security, contingent on the ability of the U.S. Government to exert influence or control over the situation. For example:

- ***Aradicalized independent or hybrid cell that separates from the control of the parent organization.*** Because both cells involve foreign trained operatives entering the United States, immigration controls play an important role in monitoring and tracking potential operatives within American borders.

- ***An anonymous, well-executed attack unattributed to Hamas or Hezbollah that encourages copycat attacks.*** Hamas and Hezbollah can mitigate the threat of an American military response by blaming or accusing a third party for sponsoring the attack. Also, a high-profile event with plentiful media attention could inspire others to follow suit.
- ***A strategic shift toward global jihad by extremist elements within Hezbollah or Hamas.*** Political control of terror or insurgent groups, similar to political movements, can shift dramatically given external factors. Sharply increased aggression against Muslims elsewhere or other global event could bolster those who favor global jihad over the more narrow agenda of opposing Israel.
- ***A U.S. attack on Iran perceived as an existential struggle against Islam.*** If open hostilities erupt between Iran and the United States over Iran's nuclear program, Iran could seek to activate Hezbollah sleeper cells in the United States in a "final war" for the survival of Shia Islam.

### ***Most Likely Threat Is From Independent, Homegrown Groups***

Rogue independent cells and homegrown extremists nominally acting on behalf of the parent organization present the most viable current threat to the homeland. The list of deterrents for the parent organization does not apply to rogue cells. Likewise, threat indicators, such as the strategic posture of Hamas or Hezbollah, do not apply to rogue groups. The motives and triggers for independent and homegrown cells may correlate with triggers for infiltration cells, but the triggers may also be varied and personal. Attacks from homegrown cells probably would be small-scale and local, given the likely lack of access to external expertise and resources. In contrast, independent cells have greater potential to conduct more sophisticated, synchronized operations.

- The behavior of homegrown cells is the hardest to predict given their legal status to live in America, diverse agendas, dependence on the personalities of team leaders, and potential for individuals to act alone.
- The threat from homegrown cells can probably never be eliminated completely, but the destructive power of such groups tends to be less than for those with outside expertise, funding, and resources. This presents hard choices on resource allocation for U.S. security personnel when even small, amateur cells can destroy entire building complexes.
- Most independent cells would require the infiltration of trained operatives, providing U.S. security personnel opportunities to identify and track terrorists as they cross state borders. Nonetheless, such intelligence work requires close coordination among multiple federal agencies to be most effective.

### ***Less Likely but Most Potent Threat from Hybrid Cells***

Hybrid cells that combine local knowledge of U.S. targets with tactical expertise and resources from Hamas or Hezbollah yield the "low probability, high impact" scenario. Hybrid cells have the potential to combine high-level expertise and international combat experience with local knowledge and diverse cultural backgrounds to implement innovative terrorist attacks. The

Mumbai attacks in November 2008 by *Lashkar-e-Taiba* were not innovative in tactics, but deviated from the recent trend of jihadist attacks. A hybrid cell that fuses organizational training with fresh converts to jihad may stimulate an attack that is difficult to predict.

- Analysts should resist the temptation to look for a replication of Mumbai-type tactics in the United States when an experienced hybrid cell probably would attack in ways unique to local circumstances.
- The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) could play a coordinating role in monitoring this type of threat. There are multiple facets to the threat of hybrid cells, such as illegal immigration, domestic law enforcement, and infrastructure threat awareness. DHS could leverage its strengths in these areas to coordinate intelligence among the many other intelligence and law enforcement agencies.
- Responding to possible hybrid cell attacks in the future probably would require the involvement of the Department of Defense's Northern Command. A network of hybrid cells spread across the country has the potential to perform synchronized and sophisticated attacks not easily suppressed by local law enforcement personnel.

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