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Radicalization and Homegrown Terrorism in Western Muslim Communities: Lessons Learned for America

Alejandro J. Beutel
Minaret of Freedom Institute
Program Assistant

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Executive Summary

- EU members have pursued two different integration strategies to deal with the presence of Muslim populations within their borders. Some countries, like Great Britain and the Netherlands, have adopted a multicultural policy that attempts to promote tolerance and integration while allowing immigrants and ethnic groups the ability to keep their cultural identities and practices. In contrast to multiculturalism, countries like France employ assimilation, which expects immigrant communities to adapt to the norms of its host country, as its integration strategy.
- There are common negatives and positives in spite of the differences with different European Muslim communities. On the positive side, there is a consistent desire from Muslims to want to integrate into the societies in which they live. On a more negative note, regardless of the different national strategies, overall Muslim integration within the EU countries has been poor.
- Discontent with one's own socio-economic, political status is only a part of the equation. Radicalization is a four-step process that involves 1) cognitive opening, 2) religious seeking, 3) framing, and 4) socialization. Integration, discontent and issues of self-identity most directly impact the cognitive opening. The amount of religious knowledge, or the lack thereof, directly impacts the second and third stages. By the fourth stage, the person moves from being a student of the movement to a committed member. The ideology is internalized and reinforced by being surrounded with others who share similar views and contained within an organization that is disconnected from the rest of society. The use of the Internet can also have a significant impact on the development of this process.
- The phenomenon of the "homegrown" terrorist is not new. Domestic terrorists have identical or nearly identical ways of militarily and ideologically carrying on their fight in the absence of a centralized command structure without regard to whether the source of inspiration is domestic, foreign, or transnational.
- Strategies for radicalism prevention and terrorist attack prevention require coordination and robust cooperation between public and private sectors. In particular good relations between Muslim communities and local law enforcement and government are essential. Muslim communities need to build and expand institutions and programs that give support to Muslim youth. Law enforcement communities should take a local community policing approach to counterterrorism (CT) by fostering good relations with Muslim communities. For themselves, Muslim communities need to ensure that youth are not seduced by radical ideologies through establishing and expanding social support networks. As a long term strategy to continue Muslim Americans' successful integration, local, state and federal governments should continue and expand scholarships and fellowships for minority applicants that encourage public service and public policy career tracks. Furthermore, Muslim and non-Muslim non-governmental organizations should develop and expand strategic partnerships and have more general operating grants available.

Introduction

Since the occurrence of 9/11 almost six years ago, issues of Islam, Muslims, terrorism, and radicalization have been at the forefront of national security discourse. More specifically, the concern of "homegrown" terrorism and radicalization, particularly among American Muslim youth, has been a concern due to both successful and unsuccessful terrorist attacks in Europe.

This report will provide basic background information on the reason why some Muslims become radicalized, why some will go further and join radical organizations and others still will go further and commit criminal acts in support of, or directly committing terrorism. It is split into three sections and will begin with a general overview of the demographics as well as the political, economic and social challenges facing Muslims in the European Union. In the second section, a process of radicalization is mapped out and related back to the issue of integration. The third section analyzes the phenomenon of so-called "homegrown" terrorism by putting it comparative perspective with violent domestic extremist groups. Finally, this report will end with a series of policy recommendations to law enforcement communities, American Muslim communities, and local, state and federal governments.

Section I. – Background on European Muslims: Integration and its Challenges

According to various sources, estimates on the number of Muslims living within the European Union range from 13 to 20 million¹ and an estimated 1 million Muslims continue to emigrate to the EU every year.² Furthermore, according to one expert, European Muslims have a birthrate that is overall "three times higher than the non-Muslim one."³

In order to absorb this unique and varied demographic into its borders, EU members have pursued two different integration strategies to deal with the presence of Muslim populations within their borders:

- **Multiculturalism.** This policy attempts to promote tolerance and integration while allowing immigrants and ethnic groups the ability to keep their cultural identities and practices. Great Britain and the Netherlands have pursued this policy. Critics of multiculturalism claim that holding fast to individual foreign or communal identity has come at the expense of creating a common national identity.⁴ As a result this has created "parallel societies" where Muslim minorities are self-contained and isolated from the rest of society. Some used the 7/7 bombings and the murder of Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh, as evidence of multiculturalism's supposed failure to integrate Muslim immigrants.⁵ Supporters of multiculturalism do not believe it is to blame, arguing that it hasn't been fully implemented and significant discrimination exists, maintaining social and economic barriers to integration.⁶
- **Assimilation.** In contrast to multiculturalism, the assimilation does not give special attention to different religions or political organizations. France is the most noted supporter of this policy. Rather than the government working to accommodate the cultural differences of different groups through affirmative action programs and

making space for cultural and religious practices, immigrants are expected to adapt to the norms of the host society.⁷

Although the most liberal estimate of 20 million EU Muslims may appear to be a high number, proportionately they make up no more than 3-5% of the EU's total population of approximately 450 million people. Furthermore, European Muslim communities are far from monolithic; they are highly complex and have different ethnicities in different countries such as Turks in Germany, South Asians in Britain, North Africans in France and Spain, etc. Even within these ethnicities there are rivalries among the different religious and civic institutions claiming to represent their respective local and national communities. Nevertheless there are common negatives and positives in spite of the different ethnicities within each country and each country's different strategies taken to better integrate its Muslim populations. On the positive side, there appears to be a very consistent desire from Muslims to want to integrate into the societies in which they live.⁸ On a more negative note, regardless of the different strategies, overall Muslim integration within the EU countries has been poor. As one report notes, "EU countries have struggled to integrate their Muslim populations. A disproportionately large number of Muslims are economically disadvantaged as unemployed or poor, high numbers are imprisoned and many feel a sense of alienation and discrimination from their host country."⁹ These challenges could weaken Muslims' desire to integrate into their host country making them vulnerable to further alienation and possible extremism. This is particularly true among European Muslim youth who seem to be undergoing an identity crisis.

Section II. – Integration and the Process of Radicalization

When the 9/11 attacks took place it brought the reality of global terrorism to America's shores. As frightening as that was, for many within domestic law enforcement and national security agencies, the 7/7 London attacks were even more alarming. This is because whereas the former involved foreign nationals inside the United States for a short while, the latter two cases involved naturalized or native-born citizens who were radicalized in the country of their residence. In short, 9/11 was an "imported" threat and 7/7 was a "homegrown" threat. It is this homegrown threat that has led some to link issues of cultural and religious integration with the existence or lack of radicalism and terrorism.¹⁰ But is this a correct linkage?

While 7/7 occurred in a country with a disaffected Muslim minority almost a year later a group of 17 Canadian Muslims in Toronto were arrested for allegedly attempting to attack several targets in southern Ontario.¹¹ Unlike British Muslims, Canadian Muslims appear to be far better integrated into their society and they appear to feel that way too.¹² This incongruence led one pair of security analysts to ask, "In the reaction that produces homegrown terrorists, how many parts alienation and how many parts ideological seduction are required?"¹³

Before answering this question and attempting to find any connection to where failed and successful integration contributes to or prevents terrorism, including the homegrown variety, it is important to know the process by which young Muslims get sucked into joining radical and possibly violent ideologies. Quintan Wiktorowicz, a Rhodes College professor and an

expert on Islamism, maps out the path to religious radicalism as a four-step process (see "Appendix A" for Wiktorowicz's diagram.):

1) cognitive opening - an individual becomes receptive to the possibility of new ideas and worldviews; 2) religious seeking - the individual seeks meaning through a religious idiom; 3) frame alignment - the public representation proffered by the radical group "makes sense" to the seeker and attracts his or her initial interest; 4) socialization - the individual experiences religious lessons and activities that facilitate indoctrination, identity-construction, and value changes. The first three processes are necessary prior conditions for the fourth (socialization). In other words, if an individual is not open to new ideas, does not encounter the movement message, or rejects the movement message after initial exposure, he or she will not participate in the kinds of movement activities necessary to fully disseminate the ideology and convince an individual to join.¹⁴

Explanations such as those that emphasize integration and social, economic and political discontent among Muslim minorities with their host societies are given as direct causes for some Muslims joining radical and even violent organizations. Within Wiktorowicz's guiding framework issues of social, economic, political discontent resulting from various kinds of discrimination and victimization are variables that are broader part of a person's cognitive opening which, "...shakes certainty in previously accepted beliefs and renders an individual more receptive to the possibility of alternative views and perspectives."¹⁵ In short, a crisis of self-identity resulting from some sort of disenfranchisement can leave the person open to new and possibly extremist ideas.

However, just because the external conditions precipitating a cognitive opening within a person exist, does not mean that one will necessarily occur. Even if one does occur, it does not automatically lead to extremism. Not everyone who may feel the same discontent may choose to join such organizations, instead opting to join more mainstream organizations or do nothing at all. After all, the overwhelming majority of Muslims are peaceful and law-abiding citizens who want to integrate better into their host countries. Even if one chose to join a group, other factors such as the ability to join radical movements affects a person's decision as well.

Once the person is plunged into an identity crisis, s/he needs to find something to fill this void. In the case of Muslims, many times this is found through their faith, or "religious seeking." At this point the individual goes through a process of trial and error, independently seeking knowledge through different means—friends and family, books, the internet and other media—or being guided by someone, possibly others from religious organizations, including radical ones. However, just because someone is "testing the waters" for different mediums and types of religious knowledge does not mean s/he will immediately and automatically join a radical cause. Instead, this trial and error phase involves, "...a process of persuasion [that] is characterized by discussion and debate, an exchange of ideas through which the movement members attempt to convince seekers that the movement ideology provides logical solutions to pressing concerns. In this sense, the potential joiner is an active agent rather than a passive object of indoctrination."¹⁶ (Emphasis mine)

Such a phase is particularly dangerous one because in addition to whatever psychological conditions within the individual have created their cognitive opening, it is made larger by the person's typically novice level of religious expertise, making them more susceptible to radical interpretations of Islam. It is during these different debates and exchanges that the movement tries to convert the individual to its ideology, or reframe his/her worldview.¹⁷ This is why issues of religious authority and intellectual authoritativeness are not only important in combating radical ideologies at ummah-wide aggregate level, as some have noted,¹⁸ but at the level of the individual Believer too.

Once the person's interest has been piqued, s/he embarks on a process of "socialization", interacting with other members of the ideology and taking part in the movement's events. It is also during this period that the individual moves from being a student of the movement, to a committed member by internalizing the group ideology and in the process having his/her identity reconstructed. The other members', as well as the organization's, disconnectedness from the rest of mainstream society reinforce this new identity.¹⁹

It should be noted that Wiktorowicz's findings are based on his face-to-face interactions with members of Al-Muhajiroun, a radical, but non-violent organization. Furthermore, his research and analysis largely presupposes the entire four-step process is based on human-to-human interaction, leaving out the role of the Internet. However, his framework is flexible enough that it can also be applied to it. A hypothetical example of radicalization solely from the Internet could be sketched out as follows:

1. Cognitive opening. An impressionable youth goes on the net and inadvertently stumbles across a radical website that shows videos and photos of Muslim civilians being killed in Kashmir, Chechnya, the Palestinian Territories, and/or Iraq. The graphic nature of the content and the way it is framed is so strong that it "shocks" the youth and induces a cognitive opening.
2. Religious seeking. A person browses the Internet searching for different website, seeking the answers that make the most sense to him/her.
3. Frame alignment. The individual begins talking in public Internet chat rooms to an anonymous person from a radical organization, and begins discussing and exchanging ideas of politics and religion.
4. Socialization. After several conversations in the public internet chat rooms, the radical and the subject individual befriend each other, the subject is at least lukewarm towards the radical's ideology and they begin discussing in private chat rooms, instant messaging or on websites that share the radical's ideology.

It is unlikely that someone could become radicalized solely from exposure to certain websites. For this process to more effective, at the very least the cognitive opening stage will still be human to human. More likely, because of terrorists' extensive use of the Internet for recruitment and planning attacks²⁰—this process will increasingly be a mix of electronic and human interactions.

Section III. – Analyzing "Homegrown" Terrorism: Louis Beam Redux

As the title of this section suggests, important parallels can be drawn from the experience of US law enforcement agencies fighting domestic extremists like Neo-Nazi and Klu Klux Klan groups and so-called homegrown extremists. In fact, it is the opinion of this author that the "homegrown" terrorist is not a new phenomenon. In speech in late June 2006, FBI Director Robert Mueller described homegrown terrorists as:

"[They] are self-recruited, self-trained, and self-executing. They may not have any connection to Al Qaeda or to other terrorist groups. They share ideas and information in the shadows of the Internet. They gain inspiration from radical websites that call for violence."²¹

Director Mueller's statements are entirely correct. In January 2005, terrorist theoretician Abu Mus'ab Al-Suri wrote a 1,600-page treatise called "The Call to Global Islamic Resistance". In his massive work, he argued that due to the hostile operating environment (in which he found himself at the time), a hierarchical organization with a centralized command structure is too vulnerable. Instead he called for continuing both the military and ideological struggle through independently motivated and independently operating clandestine cellular structures. These cells would continue the, "spread of culture of preparation and training... by all methods, especially the internet."²²

While Al-Suri's theories are adaptive to his changed operating conditions, the ideas he put forth were not new. In 1992, Louis Beam, a white supremacist and anti-government extremist, developed concepts almost identical to Al-Suri's in an essay called, "Leaderless Resistance." In it, he viewed the "orthodox pyramid scheme of organization" as, "not only useless, but extremely dangerous for the participants when it is utilized in a resistance movement against state tyranny." He too called for the continuing the military and ideological struggle through independent "phantom cells." These phantom cells are to utilize all:

Organs of information distribution such as newspapers, leaflets, computers, etc., which are widely available to all, keep each person informed of events, allowing for a planned response that will take many variations. No one need issue an order to anyone.²³

The parallels are hard to overlook. The difference between "homegrown" and domestic terrorism seems to be a matter of semantics. Both homegrown Muslim terrorists and domestic white supremacist terrorists are citizens or long-term residents who clandestinely plot to attack their host country using the same types of military and propaganda tactics. That white supremacists favor a nationalist rather than internationalist ideology is irrelevant since the ideology of white racial superiority is something shared just not among a small minority of white Americans in this country, but among a small minority in other countries that have white people too.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Successful integration is an important part of the fight against terrorism by ensuring that radicals do not have the political and moral ammunition to spread their ideologies. That said, the Muslim Public Affairs Council's (MPAC) report on American Muslim Youth (AMY) is correct to point two things: 1) the potential role Islamophobia can play in causing an identity crisis among AMY and 2) that European models of integration have largely failed.²⁴ American pluralism is the best middle ground, between both extremes by demanding that its citizens and legal residents respect certain civic norms, while at the same time respecting cultural and religious diversity of its citizens. It has also been far better at providing economic and educational opportunities to its nation than Europe has.

Beyond this observation, this report offers following recommendations to various communities with vested interests in Muslims' integration into American society:

To American Muslim Communities:

- Develop support networks for Muslim youth. Mosques and religious community leaders can not only take a proactive role in spiritually enriching youth's lives, but also ensuring they do not fall prey to extremism and possible criminal activities. Radicalism is a four-step process that involves the breaking down and reconstruction of one's identity, but the proper kind of social and religious counseling can reverse this process, particular while someone is experiencing a cognitive opening and religious seeking. Various support networks and means of information outreach, especially information outreach to youth need to be created and expanded. MPAC has put forth two excellent grassroots frameworks.²⁵ In addition mosques should institute English-language programming, which includes hosting discussions on relevant topics like drug use and pre-marital sex and having English spoken in Friday prayer sermons. As the experience of Britain's Muslim communities show, the lack of linguistic and cultural outreach to the needs of the youth can lead to youth gravitating toward radical groups that do meet these needs.²⁶ These plans of action should also be expanded to include outreach through the Internet.
- Invest in long-term institutional development. Central to ensuring the longevity of the American Muslim community and its integration into America is sound institutional development. Reactive civil rights organizations such as the Council on American-Islamic Relations are one part of the equation. However, the current climate of fear toward Muslims demands a much more proactive institutional response. Public policy and public service activism organizations such as the Institute for Social Policy and Understanding, American Muslims Intent on Learning and Activism and the Council on Islamic Education (and, setting aside false modesty, the Minaret of Freedom Institute) make valuable contributions here. Muslim institutions should also actively seek strategic partnerships with other civil society organizations that share similar views on policy and activism.
- Invest in Muslim youth leadership training. As the future of communities, the responsibility of representing of American Muslim interests must also be delegated to the youth. Currently there is a dearth of organizations that provide the solid institutional frameworks that develop the next generation of American Muslim

leaders. In this regard, the Muslim Public Service Network and the Inner-City Muslim Action Network are on the cutting edge by filling in this crucial generational and institutional gap. They provide AMY with the spiritual and professional skills needed to develop the next generation of ethically and professionally skilled leaders. All of these organizations, in addition to those not mentioned in this report, need their financial and programming capacities to be expanded through the assistance of general operating grants from philanthropic organizations.²⁷ Muslims should also seek to establish a national waqf (religious endowment) organization that will provide financial support to institutions.

- Invest in long-term homegrown religious leadership education and development. We are beginning to witness the emergence of generational gaps, particularly between first-generation American Muslims and their immigrant parents. As such, the spiritual needs of this new generation are shaped by a different set of social drivers than those of their parents, requiring different modes of religious thinking and spiritual outreach.²⁸ Muslim communities should encourage their students to attend colleges such as Hartford Seminary that offer Islamic chaplaincy courses. There is also a lack of effective indigenous Muslim religious institutions.²⁹ Muslim communities must support GSISS, the American Islamic College and Zaytuna Institute seminary with the necessary financial and human resources to ensure their continuity and expand their educational outreach, as well as establish new institutions.
- Overcome institutional and social barriers that prevent stronger relations between indigenous African-American and immigrant and Sunni and Shi'a communities. Although the Islamic faith upholds the tenet of racial equality and diversity of opinion, the actions and attitudes of its adherents have been less than ideal.³⁰ While significant positive steps have been made,³¹ they are not enough and more must be done. Sectarian and racial bigotry cannot be tolerated, not only because it is against the Islamic ethos, but also because it saps our communities of the ethical, intellectual and spiritual capital needed to confront challenges of religious and racial discrimination commonly faced by diverse Muslim communities as well as other segments of the larger American society. A preliminary means of instituting better intra-Islamic unity is by ensuring that local shura boards are as inclusive of different mosques as possible, while also instituting a "no sectarianism" policy.

To Law Enforcement Communities:

- Put greater emphasis on collection and analysis of open source intelligence (OSINT).^{*} OSINT is important to law enforcement and intelligence communities because it provides useful information that can shape analysts' and agents' understanding of closed sources of information by contextualizing it.³² It can lead to better analysis of information and therefore better and more targeted

* This report defines OSINT as acquiring and analyzing information from publicly available sources such as media, reports, transcripts, and other statements from government officials and institutions, professional and academic conferences and literature, and observation capabilities from private individuals and companies (such as a personal cellular phone camera or Google Earth).

countermeasures to prevent terrorism. (One analyst even goes so far as to say that it is often better than classified information.)³³ Since it is publicly available information, it is also an excellent way of obtaining critical knowledge while reducing the need to use intrusive and sometimes ineffective and counterproductive tools. Analysts have also noted that terrorists have used the Internet for various propaganda and strategic and tactical analytical purposes. As one report observes, the terrorists have, “put their team’s playbooks online. By mining these texts for their tactical and strategic insights, the United States will be able to craft effective tactics, techniques and procedures to defeat followers of the movement.”³⁴ One analysis of OSINT found strong evidence points to the 2004 Madrid bombings being guided by a document publicly posted online,³⁵ while another was able to deduce Al-Qaeda’s targeting preferences based on documents and discussions posted in online militant forums.³⁶

- Focus CT efforts locally. Since homegrown terrorism operates on a decentralized model, CT policies must respond at the same level. It is recommended to have a community-policing model that simultaneously emphasizes good relations with Muslim communities while incorporating CT priorities.³⁷ Such a strategy allows for better information sharing and lets law enforcement officials conduct proactive and targeted investigations directed at criminal individuals instead of entire innocent communities. After all, proactive, targeted law enforcement responses have proven to be the best response to capturing and de-legitimizing terrorism.³⁸ Racial and religious profiling, which is immoral and ineffective,³⁹ in addition to ruining the important co-dependent relationship between Muslim and law enforcement communities, occurs most often at local and state levels.⁴⁰ (Behavioral profiling is a more ethical and effective alternative to racial/religious profiling for efforts that seek to guard critical infrastructure and other locations.)⁴¹ Local community policing actions are much better alternative to racial profiling, as well as the NSA domestic spying, and FBI national security letters that target innocent people and overwhelm analysts with useless information while missing real threats.⁴² Furthermore, serious legal gaps on dealing with prosecution of terrorism remain at the state level.⁴³ Civil society organizations like the National Conference of State Legislatures are highly encouraged to coordinate these state-level legal initiatives.⁴⁴ Finally, in order to coordinate local efforts with regional and national law enforcement organizations, better management of Joint Terrorism Task Forces is absolutely imperative.⁴⁵
- Expand the number of Muslim prison chaplains. Another area where extremism can fester is in prisons where convicts, particularly those who convert to Islam, are engaged in a constant cognitive opening by virtue past and present deeds, experiences, and social environments. Such persons, who typically have low levels of education, are seeking a personal path to reform, or even simply a means of survival within the prison and therefore gravitate much more easily toward any kind religious guidance.⁴⁶ This compounded by what the Bureau of Prisons (BOP) calls “a critical shortage” of qualified Muslim chaplains.⁴⁷ The BOP is recommended to continue to seek chaplains from organizations such as the Muslim Chaplains Association, affiliated with the Islamic Chaplaincy program at Hartford Seminary.⁴⁸ In spite of the continue shortage, other potential endorsing Muslim organizations such as the Graduate School of Islamic and Social Sciences (GSISS) and the Islamic Society of

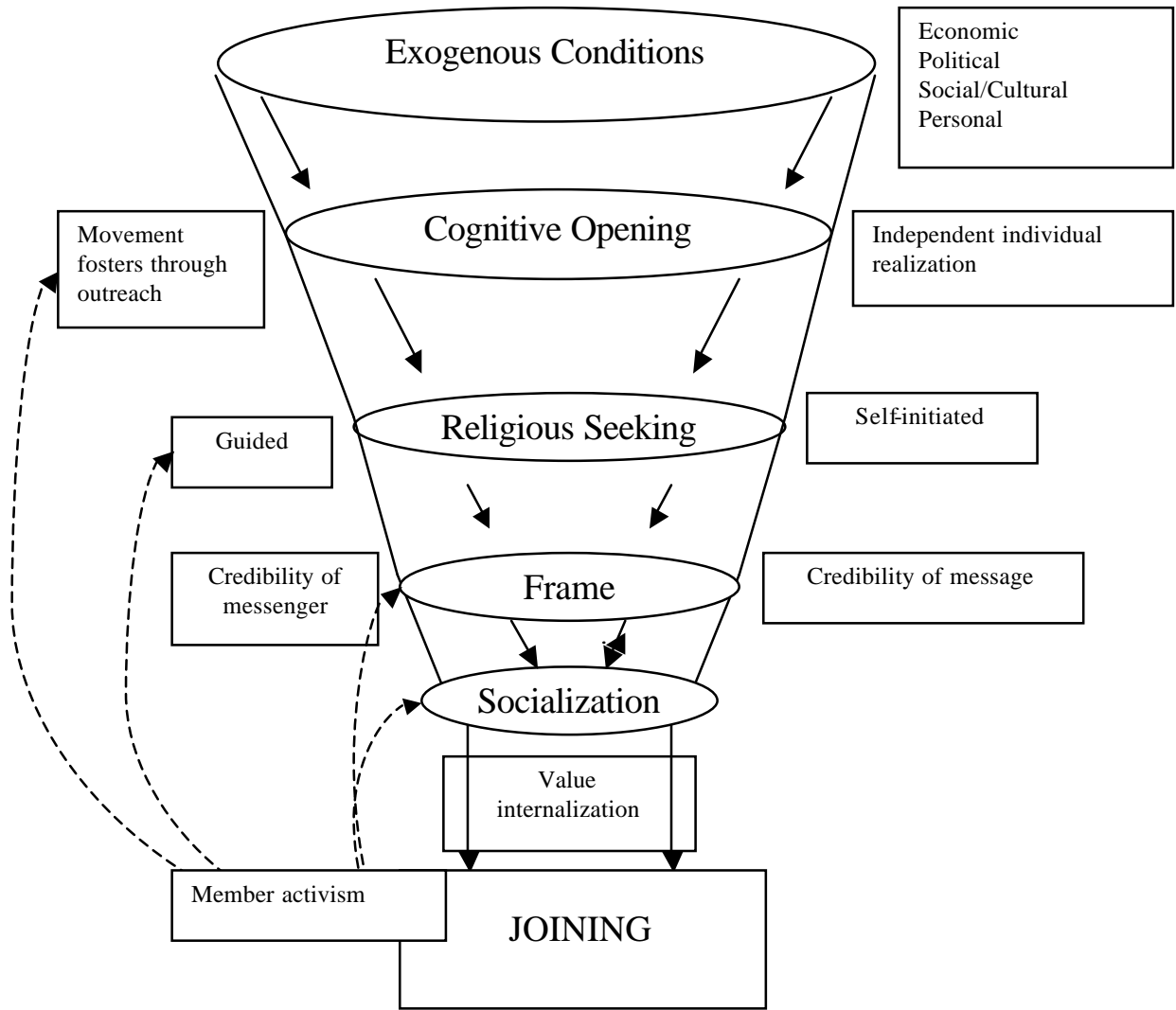
North America (ISNA) have been barred from providing endorsements to the BOP due to investigations (even after being cleared of wrongdoing by the US Senate)⁴⁹ and informal labeling of alleged connections to terrorism.⁵⁰ It is recommended that either United States government formally charge these organizations and put them on trial, or immediately cease investigations. If the organizations are found guilty of a crime directly relating to extremism, then they should not be dealt with, but if they are innocent, it is suggested that the BOP actively seek ISNA and GSISS' help in recruiting more Muslim chaplains. Regardless of the status of ISNA and GSISS, the BOP should continue to seek alternate endorsing Muslim organizations such as Mosque Cares Ministry, affiliated with African-American leader Warith D. Mohammed.

- Highlight American Muslim contributions to local and national security. Unfortunately much of the national discourse surrounding American Muslims is shrouded in fear rather than facts. This is especially true regarding terrorism. Unfounded charges of extremism and terrorism have the potential to undermine relations between Muslims and their neighbors, leading to alienation and self-segregation, which may gravitate some toward extremism, thereby creating a vicious cycle and possibly a self-fulfilling prophecy. Law enforcement officials must be extremely proactive in this regard by publicly emphasizing American Muslims' assistance and cooperation in preventing extremism and terrorism.

To local, state and federal governments:

- Pass legislation effectively banning racial and religious profiling. It is not only unethical, but it undermines the ability of law enforcement agencies to conduct effective policing and has the destructive potential to alienate entire communities. Currently there are many states lacking adequate legal safeguards against this form of abuse.⁵¹ In 2003 the Department of Justice issued a memorandum to Federal law enforcement agencies that gave guidelines on avoiding racial profiling while conducting investigations and patrols.⁵² However the document was merely "guidance" and therefore not legally binding.
- Actively seek Muslim Americans to work inside government agencies. Muslim Americans have a lot of intellectual capital that has yet to be tapped into by the government. It should encourage Muslim entry into the public workforce through diversity recruitment at job fairs as well as continuing to offer financial incentives such as scholarships, fellowships and tuition reduction for recent college graduation. This particularly applies to law enforcement and national security agencies, which experience a severe shortage of cultural, political and linguistic experts in critical areas directly affecting national security.

Appendix A: Wiktorowicz's Diagram for joining a radical religious group¹



¹ Available at: <http://yale.edu/polisci/info/conferences/Islamic%20Radicalism/papers/wiktorowicz-DiagramOne.pdf>

Endnotes

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