



Federal Bureau of Investigation
Intelligence
ASSESSMENT

(U//FOUO) Terrorist Training and Recruitment of CONUS Subjects: Lackawanna, Portland, and Northern Virginia

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Prepared by

FBI

**Counterterrorism
Division**

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(U//FOUO) Scope Note

(U//FOUO) This assessment addresses the Terrorism (TERR) topic of the NIPF and the following FBI International Terrorism intelligence requirements: IT I.B.2-4; IT II.B.1.

(U//FOUO) This assessment addresses the central role of terrorist training in three significant post-9/11 continental United States (CONUS) terrorism investigations: Lackawanna, Portland, and Northern Virginia. This assessment does not address other individuals who may have sought training independently, nor does it address groups of individuals who sought training in regions outside of South or Central Asia.

(U//FOUO) This assessment is not a comprehensive account of terrorist training by CONUS subjects. It compares and contrasts these cases in order to illustrate the various ways CONUS subjects could be drawn into extremist circles and seek terrorist training in the United States and abroad. The information contained in this assessment is primarily derived from FBI case files and open source information and is current as of 25 October 2006.

(U) This assessment was prepared by the FBI's Threat Analysis Unit. Comments and queries may be addressed to the acting unit chief at 202-324-2292.

(U//FOUO) Key Judgments

- (U//FOUO) Assessment of groups involved in the Lackawanna, Northern Virginia, and Portland cases suggests there is no single profile of groups that become involved in terrorist training. However, analysis of FBI case files suggests two broad types: ethnically homogeneous groups composed of individuals connected through familial or community ties, and ethnically heterogeneous groups composed of individuals of various backgrounds, including converts, who are often connected through shared ideology and mosque attendance.
- (U//FOUO) Charismatic leaders, particularly those with prior violent extremist activity abroad, play a key role in the recruitment process.
- (U//FOUO) Recruiters in each case used a variety of rhetorical arguments and ideological justifications to encourage the men to undergo training. Tactics ranged from religious justifications, to criticisms of their non-Islamic lifestyles, to appeals that Muslims worldwide are under siege.
- (U//FOUO) While imams were directly or tangentially involved in all of the investigations, recruitment often took place in private off-site meetings rather than at mosques.
- (U//FOUO) Several of the groups conducted domestic paramilitary training under the tutelage of members with prior military or violent extremist experience.

(U) Introduction

(U//FOUO) The FBI has not identified one typical profile for networks of individuals who have participated in terrorist recruitment and training. However, the Lackawanna, Portland, and Northern Virginia groups share some key commonalities in terms of how and where members were recruited, where they were sent for training, and what types of training they received. Although some of these commonalities may be particular to these cases, they may assist in identifying future instances of group-based terrorist training in the United States.

(U//FOUO) Lackawanna Six	(U//FOUO) Portland Seven	(U//FOUO) Virginia Jihad Group
<p>(U//FOUO) This investigation focused on eight individuals from Lackawanna, New York, who attended a terrorist training camp in Afghanistan that was associated with Usama Bin Ladin. Six of the individuals pleaded guilty to charges for providing material support or contribution of funds and services to terrorists. All six are serving prison sentences. Of the two remaining members, one escaped detention in Yemen and continues to be at large, and the other was reportedly killed in Yemen in 2002.</p>	<p>(U//FOUO) This case involves six individuals who did not attend overseas terrorist training camps but trained in martial arts, target shooting, and other paramilitary tactics in rural areas of Oregon. A seventh member, the wife of one of these individuals, provided financial support to her husband, who attempted to enter Afghanistan along with the other five Portland members to fight against Coalition forces in October 2001. Six of the seven subjects pleaded guilty to various charges. The seventh was killed in a shoot-out with Pakistani forces.</p>	<p>(U//FOUO) This group consists of 11 individuals indicted on various weapons and material support charges in June 2003 as well as other associated members, including their spiritual leader, Ali Al-Timimi, who advocated jihad in after-hours meetings at a mosque in Falls Church, Virginia. The group attended overseas terrorist training camps as well as paramilitary paintball training in Virginia. Ten of those indicted were convicted and are serving sentencing ranging from three years to, in al-Timimi's case, a life sentence.</p>

(U) Terrorist Training Profiles

(U//FOUO) Participants in the training were fairly young, which has also been the experience overseas.

- (U//FOUO) All of the identified subjects are males between the ages of 18 and 37. The average ages of the subjects in the Lackawanna, Virginia, and Portland cases at the time of their training activity were 27, 27, and 29, respectively.
- (U) An investigative report conducted by NBC News similarly found that the average age of British terrorist was in the early to mid-20s.¹

(U//FOUO) None of the cases revealed a typical ethnicity or nationality, but all of the cases fall into two broad categories: ethnically homogeneous networks and ethnically heterogeneous networks.

- (U//FOUO) The Lackawanna group represents an ethnically homogeneous network, in which all members share the same background. The Lackawanna case involved Yemeni-Americans; some were born in the United States and some were born in Yemen, but all were US citizens.
- (U//FOUO) The Northern Virginia and Portland cases involved ethnically heterogeneous networks composed of individuals from a variety of nationalities and/or ethnic groups. The individuals in these cases were a mixture of US citizens, legal residents, naturalized citizens, and noncitizens with Pakistani, Jordanian, and Palestinian backgrounds, as well as white, Asian, and African-American converts.

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(U) Lackawanna Six

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(U) Members of the Northern Virginia network

(U//FOUO) Homogeneous Networks

(U//FOUO) Homogeneous networks are often considered difficult for intelligence agencies or law enforcement to penetrate because outsiders are viewed with distrust, and only those with shared ethnicity and familial ties are trusted. However, the Lackawanna case demonstrates that personal and ideological fractures often exist within these communities, and these fractures are exploitable. The Lackawanna subjects first came to the FBI's attention after a letter was sent to the Buffalo field office from an anonymous source (later identified as a member of the local Yemeni community) in June 2001 identifying eight individuals who attended a terrorist training camp in Afghanistan. The FBI was later able to insert other sources into the Lackawanna investigation.

(U//FOUO) Heterogeneous Networks

(U//FOUO) The Northern Virginia group was extremely diverse in composition. The men who took part in terrorist training were all between 25 and 30 years of age but, in terms of background, included white, African-American, and Asian converts as well as US citizens or legal residents with Middle Eastern or South Asian backgrounds. If the challenge of a homogeneous network is penetrating a tight-knit community, the challenge of penetrating heterogeneous networks is understanding the connections between such a seemingly diverse number of individuals. In the Northern Virginia case, two crucial links were the domestic paintball training meetings and the influence of al-Timimi.

(U//FOUO) These differences may reflect historical immigration patterns and local mosque attendance. Lackawanna has a close-knit Yemeni community; Portland and Northern Virginia regions are heterogeneous in terms of their Muslim populations, and this heterogeneity is reflected in the composition of the terrorist training subjects, many of whom came in contact with one another by attending the same mosque rather than through familial connections. Since the Muslim community in the United States varies from city to city and region to region, potential violent extremist networks will likely reflect their local community rather than any single nationwide profile.

(U) The Recruitment Process

(U//FOUO) Analysis of these cases does not reveal any single recruitment process. Charismatic leaders, however, played a key role in the recruitment process, particularly those with prior experience with violent extremist activity abroad. Such prior experience confers on these individuals a degree of legitimacy and respect that facilitates the recruitment process.

- (U//FOUO) Kamal Derwish, the primary recruiter in the Lackawanna investigation, was born in the United States but moved to Saudi Arabia as a child. He fought in Bosnia and was later arrested in Saudi Arabia for extremist activities before returning to the United States in 1998. In the latter stages of the recruitment process, Derwish introduced potential recruits to former Indiana imam and current Guantanamo Bay detainee Juma al-Dosari, another veteran of the Bosnian conflict. According to one of the Lackawanna subjects, al-Dosari was brought by Derwish to “close the deal” in their recruitment.²
- (U//FOUO) According to a joint assessment conducted by the Department of Homeland Security and the FBI, titled *The International Children’s Game* (23 July 2004), Randall “Ismail” Royer, a convert to Islam and member of the Northern Virginia group, was another veteran of the Bosnian conflict. Royer used contacts developed in Bosnia to arrange for training at Lashkar-e-Tayyiba (LT) camps in Pakistan.³
- (U//FOUO) FBI information indicated that Habis al-Saoub, a member of the Portland group, was a veteran of the Soviet-Afghan conflict. Al-Saoub’s stories of the Soviet-Afghan conflict influenced other group members’ decisions to enter Afghanistan for the purpose of fighting Coalition forces.

(U//FOUO) Extremist imams were directly or tangentially involved in all of the investigations. However, recruitment and incitement to participate in violent extremist activities often took place in private off-site locations, such as apartments, where operational security could be maintained, rather than at regular mosque services.

- (U//FOUO) Derwish conducted evening lectures at the apartment of one of the Lackawanna subjects, according to FBI information.
- (U//FOUO) Al-Timimi, the spiritual leader of the Northern Virginia group, was outspoken in his views on jihad during lectures at the mosque. However, he actually discussed establishing a jihad organization during late-night private, small group sessions on Fridays.⁴
- (U//FOUO) According to FBI information, Sheikh Mohamed Abdirahman Kariye, imam of the Islamic Center of Portland, reportedly helped fund the travel of the Portland group. According to a member of the group, Kariye supported their actions but was very careful in what he said at the mosque.

(U//FOUO) Recruiters in each case used a variety of rhetorical arguments and ideological justifications to encourage the men to undergo training. These varied from religious justifications, to criticisms of their non-Islamic lifestyles, to appeals that Muslims worldwide are under siege. The contention that Muslims worldwide are under attack, particularly in Bosnia, Chechnya, and Palestine, was common to all of the cases.

- (U//FOUO) According to debriefings of the Lackawanna subjects, Derwish's contention that the young men were not leading a proper Islamic lifestyle and that attending a four-month training program could overcome these deficiencies strongly influenced their decision to attend the training camp.⁵
- (U) In small private meetings with members of the Virginia group, al-Timimi claimed jihad is an obligation for all Muslims and preparation for jihad is obligatory. Following the 11 September attacks, al-Timimi told members it was their religious duty to defend Afghanistan from US attack and they should seek training in Pakistan, according to court testimony.⁶
- (U//FOUO) Al-Dosari stated that training for jihad was a form of worship and a Muslim's duty, according to debriefings of the Lackawanna subjects.⁶
- (U//FOUO) Subjects in the Northern Virginia, Portland, and Lackawanna investigations were influenced by discussions of martyrdom and the glories/benefits that awaited martyrs in the afterlife, according to a variety of debriefings.

(U) Terrorist Training

(U//FOUO) A comparison of the investigations reveals many commonalities in where the subjects trained and what kind of training they conducted. For example, three of the groups conducted paramilitary training inside the United States. This training was led by members with prior military and/or overseas jihad experience.

- (U//FOUO) The Portland group trained in martial arts, target shooting, and paramilitary tactics at a variety of rural areas in Oregon. Habis al-Saoub, a member of the Portland group and a veteran of the Soviet-Afghan conflict, and Jeffery Leon Battle, a former reservist in the US Army, helped organize the training.
- (U//FOUO) The Northern Virginia group used paramilitary paintball training on private land near Fredericksburg, Virginia, to train in offensive and defensive military tactics, land navigation, fire and maneuver, and basic weapons handling. This training was led by Donald Thomas Surratt (ex-Marine), Saifullah Chapman (ex-Marine), Hammad Abdur-Raheem (ex-Army), and Royer (Bosnia veteran).

(U//FOUO) When overseas training occurred, the majority of overseas training was conducted at LT camps in Pakistan. Only the Lackawanna subjects attended an al-Qa'ida training camp. This is partly explained by the fact that several of these individuals, particularly in the Northern Virginia group, attended training after the al-Qa'ida camps in Afghanistan were destroyed during Operation Enduring Freedom. However, it also demonstrates the important role that LT has played in terrorist training.

- (U//FOUO) At least seven members of the Northern Virginia group trained at LT camps in Pakistan, according to a variety of reporting. Three trained prior to Operation Enduring Freedom, while the remaining four attended camps following the onset of the war.

(U//FOUO) Several individuals quit training early due to sickness, injury, or change of heart.

- (U//FOUO) A member of the Lackawanna group faked an ankle injury and left camp early, according to debriefings of the Lackawanna subjects.⁷

(U//FOUO) Other individuals, however, became further radicalized during training and later pursued violent extremist activities.

- (U//FOUO) Lackawanna subjects Derwish and Jaber Elbaneh continued their involvement in violent extremist activities. Derwish was killed in Yemen, while Elbaneh escaped Yemeni custody along with the main plotters of the USS Cole attack.
- (U//FOUO) Members of the Portland group traveled to China, but their plan to fight Coalition troops in Afghanistan was blocked when Pakistani authorities prevented them from crossing the China/Pakistan border. Al-Saoub successfully entered Pakistan at a later date and was killed by Pakistani troops.
- (U//FOUO) Members of the Northern Virginia group returned to the United States and recruited more individuals for LT camps following their training. At least one member of the Northern Virginia group also unsuccessfully attempted to enter Afghanistan.

(U//FOUO) Terrorist Training Still Central Despite Disruptions

(U//FOUO) Despite the high-profile arrests and convictions of individuals associated with the Portland, Northern Virginia, and Lackawanna investigations, terrorist training continues to be an important component of violent Islamic extremist activity in the United States. The Internet has also emerged as a virtual training ground that transcends geographic and ethnic boundaries.

- (U//FOUO) During a March 2006 interview, Syed Haris Ahmed, a resident of Atlanta and student at the Georgia Institute of Technology, was arrested for describing paintball training in which he and two other individuals participated in Georgia to prepare for jihad.

- (U//FOUO) During the same March 2006 interview, Ahmed stated that he and several of his associates discussed attending a terrorist training camp in Pakistan. Ahmed later traveled to Pakistan with another individual in the summer of 2005 with the intent to train at a terrorist camp.

(U) Intelligence Gaps

- (U//FOUO) How representative are these individuals of CONUS-based subjects who seek terrorist training?
- (U//FOUO) How does the recruitment and training process differ for self-selecting individuals?

(U) Endnotes

¹ (U) "The Town That Grew the Suicide Bombers," *NBC News*, available at www.msnbc.com/id/13720432/page/2.

² (U) FBI IIR 4 201 1813 05 (UNCLASSIFIED).

³ (U) DHS-FBI Joint Assessment, *The International Children's Game*, 23 July 2004 (UNCLASSIFIED).

⁴ (U) FBI IIR 4 201 1813 05 (UNCLASSIFIED).

⁵ (U) FBI IIR 4 201 1813 05 (UNCLASSIFIED).

⁶ (U) "Teacher Guilty of Aiding Terror Group," *USA Today*, available at <http://17.1.201.50/Newspaper/dynamic/article.asp?ID=357>.

⁶ (U) FBI IIR 4 201 1813 05 (UNCLASSIFIED).

⁷ (U) FBI IIR 4 201 1813 05 (UNCLASSIFIED).

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Comments
